

Skye and Lochalsh Mental Health Association

Leasachadh Slainte Inntinn An Eilean Sgiathanich' Loch Ailse



Annual Report

2023/24

END OF YEAR REPORT
FOR YEAR APRIL 2023 - MARCH 2024

Background

The Skye and Lochalsh Mental Health Association was set up in 1993 to meet a need for those suffering from severe and enduring mental illness and brain injury to have somewhere to go to get practical and emotional support, advice and guidance and above all friendship and socialisation. From beginning with a handful of members quickly the membership grew as preparations were made for the Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2005, which resulted in many patients being discharged from long stay hospital settings to the community, thus making the services of SLMHA an essential part of care planning.

SLMHA began life in a very small building aptly named “The Cabin”, then in 2003 we moved to Am Fasgadh, the building we still occupy today. We are now delivering our services 7 days a week 365 days a year. We now have 135 regular members in contact with our service and many more who have used the service and moved on either to another area or have found recovery and no longer require our services, though the knowledge that we are there as a safety net is sometimes just enough.

The Association is a registered Scottish charity and a company limited by guarantee. It is governed by a Board of Directors whose members are both the directors of the company and trustees of the charity.

The Association runs a Furniture recycling project where we pick up unwanted furniture and pass it on to those in need. This project is a chance for our members to contribute to and feel part of the local community as well as helping to reduce waste and help those who are in financial hardship.

Our Values are

Service. We will do everything we can to support our members with their health, social, practical and emotional needs.

Ownership. The organisation belongs to its members and theirs will be the most important voice in all discussion and decision making.

Equality. We work with people who are often subject to stigma, discrimination and ridicule. We will create an atmosphere in which everyone is accepted as they are without question or criticism.

Activism. We will never accept “that’s the way it is” as a reason for our members not getting the help they need. We will always ask “would I accept this situation for myself or a member of my family?”

Partnership. We will build and maintain working relationships with all relevant statutory and voluntary agencies to improve both our service and theirs.

Advocacy. We will use the Association’s voice and influence to promote our members best interests. We will use membership of local bodies and forums to influence policy and service development.

Informality. Administration is supposed to work for people. We will never allow this to get the wrong way round.

Chairs review of the year 2023/24

The need for mental health support services is indisputable and Skye & Lochalsh Mental Health Association has proven that it is able to meet much of that need in very practical and accessible ways. After our 30 year celebration last June when we reflected on how much had been achieved, our focus now is on the future, how the Association might expand and develop our service. In addition we need to ensure our future resilience at a time when statutory services are under immense pressure.

The Association's profile has increased thanks in part to community fundraising events including our 30 year celebrations, Skye Events Half Marathon, our pop up cafe and active use of social media in promoting the Furniture Project resulting in approximately £18,000 in donations in this financial year. We now have 5 regular young adult members, a group that we have been able to reach out to with the help of a grant from the Highland Cares fund.

It has been a busy year with attendances up 12% on last year including 30 new service users; this is a year on year increase which we anticipate will continue. We have been able to continue weekend opening thanks to a grant from the Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund. Members regularly voice their appreciation that Am Fasgadh is open every day and we know that weekends are a particularly critical time.

This has also been a busy year with activities for members as detailed in their report. We are most grateful to our staff who give their time generously to allow overnight trips and other adventures which the members greatly enjoy and appreciate.

The completion of the kitchen upgrade has been a great boost to catering and has allowed us to run a monthly pop-up cafe open to the public with real benefit to members who feel a sense of pride and ownership.

A substantial award from the Highland Council Regeneration Fund has allowed us to employ a project worker who will primarily focus on developing our service in South Skye & Lochalsh, a much needed development we have been aiming for over the last few years. In addition, HCRF is also supporting our Furniture Project with a grant to build a workshop to allow upcycling of donated items, something we want members to have the opportunity to be fully involved with. We are grateful to have Jane Issacson on our team to help with the fundraising and development of the service.

We have said goodbye to two project workers and welcomed 3 new staff in recent months and are delighted that we have been able to recruit people with valuable skills and experience to complement our other strong team members; as a Board, we feel optimistic about the Association's future despite the huge financial challenges for health and social services generally. We are committed to ensuring our staff feel valued and have access to training and professional development, not easy when money is tight but essential for the future of our organisation.

Attracting and retaining funding is a perennial challenge and we are grateful to NHS Highland for their continuing financial support which meets over 60% of our core costs without which we could not operate. Likewise our service is invaluable in supporting people with severe and enduring mental illness, helping them to remain well, live in their own homes and feel part of their community.

Manager's review of the year 2023/24

2023 was a pretty special year for SLMHA, 30 years of supporting those with severe and enduring mental illness in our community. The service is busier than ever and the funding has not increased. The statutory services are busier than ever too and more and more of our members no longer have regular contact with a Community Psychiatric Nurse, making the day to day support they receive at Am Fasgadh more important than ever.

During the year in review we sadly said goodbye to Dafne and Orsie two of our excellent project workers, Dafne to the childcare crisis in Skye and Lochalsh and Orsie to the Dolphins, she has gone to volunteer with the Dolphin Centre at Spey bay. We recruited Robert in December of 2023 and just after the year end we recruited Elisa and Eloise who are settling in nicely.

We were very fortunate to receive a large amount of money from donations in the year under review. The donors we'd like to thank include Skye live, Highlands and Islands Cottages, Skye events, Caroline Forsyth (for running the Skye Half Marathon), Skye branch of AA, Isle of Skye Highland Games and over £2000 from collections at local funerals. But thank you also to all who have donated money on our Just Giving pages, in our donation boxes, attended our pop up cafes, donated chocolates at Christmas and supported us in any way.

We have been delighted again this year to receive the Co-op foodshare and it's all put to very good use and saves a lot of money. When we get surplus we happily share this with the "Kindness Cabin" in Uig and Home farm care home, nothing is wasted.

The furniture project has gone from strength to strength since Robert joined the team, he has taken his experience in logistics and put it to great use. He has quite the following on Facebook and is thinking of starting a Tic Toc account - something for us all to look forward to. You can see more on www.slmha.co.uk or our Am Fasgadh Furniture Project Facebook page. Thanks go to all who contribute to this project either by donating or by receiving furniture. More of our members are now helping out with the furniture project which is great and they get a great buzz out of helping others in our community.

We have managed to secure funding from the Highland Council Community Regeneration Fund to try to expand the South Skye and Lochalsh project and to do some research with the community in that area to see what the needs are and how we can best meet them. Also included in that funding is money to replace the dilapidated shed so that we can have an upcycling element to the furniture project. This will be a space for members to learn to upcycle furniture items that maybe would end up in landfill so that we can sell them on.

We also received funding from the Mental Health and Wellbeing fund for a "Making Memories" project. This is a project that enables us to plan really lovely trips and experiences so that our members are able to enjoy life in ways that people without mental health problems in the community do.

In the last year we have been involved with 11 members during a time of crisis, we managed to prevent hospital admission for 5 of those and actually helped 4 members get taken into hospital for physical health issues that they hadn't got seen to due to their mental health problems.. We were instrumental in supporting 4 members to return from hospital earlier than they might have due to being able to support them to attend the drop in and get meals etc.

We supported 17 members to regularly attend their GP/CPN or Psychiatric appointments. We also supported members to attend 9 further appointments off the island in either

Fortwilliam or Inverness, they would not have been able to attend these appointments without our support due to their mental health difficulties.

12 of our members received our help with their benefits in order that they received the correct benefits and were able to access the universal credit system through using our internet and laptops.

Members review of 2023-24

It doesn't feel like a minute since we had our 30th Anniversary Celebrations! We had a lot of fun getting everything organised for that event, looking over old photos of Am Fasgadh, trying to jog our minds to all the names of people that had been through the doors over the years, we knitted bunting to decorate the hall and we did some art, painting and writing and loads of photos! We had the Skye Gathering Hall for the day, and we had a dance to end our celebrations.

Sadly we have had a few deaths in the year that has passed, Big John Ferguson, Kenny MacKenzie, Harry MacDonald and Caroline Dueck, we all have fond memories of them, also sadly Sandra's sister Seonag died, some of us will remember Seonag when she worked here at Am Fasgadh.

We have enjoyed a few days out over the year, including:- A trip to the Ben Nevis Range where we went up the cable cars (some enjoyed that more than others), lunch and shopping after. A trip away to Stornoway where we visited the standing stones in Callanish, we also went to Luskentyre beach, which was beautiful, we toured around a lot of the islands as we had a late boat home, arriving back in Portree about midnight. An overnighter to Inverness to the Panto, we saw Sleeping Beauty, a great laugh, Christmas shopping the next day so much so that we nearly needed a trailer to bring stuff home. We stopped off on our way home to see the minister's footsteps at Glenmoriston. A day trip to Eilean Donan Castle and we had a guided tour which was very interesting. We visited the chocolate shop and also some random Llamas on our way home and stopped at the Collie MacKenzie monument at Sligachan on our way home. Our thanks must go to the staff who make these trips possible.

We had our annual members Christmas meal all together, not forgetting the raffle that nearly took as long as the meal to get through, we enjoyed a wee ceilidh with live music too. In the lead up to Christmas some of us helped to decorate the house, we had afternoons films with hot chocolate and nibbles, we also made some decorations ourselves. Christmas day was a bit different this year but we were grateful to Caroline and Sandra from the board for coming to help over that period, We had pies pies pies at New Year, we are so thankful that Am Fasgadh is open all year round, it's so nice to know that someone is there for us every day.

January had us having a late night opening for a Burns supper, much fun was had and the best haggis we have ever tasted.

We are looking forward to more trips away this year and if anyone wants to join in we are off to Chitty Chitty Bang Bang in September.

We love the new kitchen and we are now back in doing our own teas and coffees, and have been helping to make things for the pop up cafes. We also have a new stove in the sitting room. It heats the place up and it's great in the colder weather although some people would have it on all year long!!

We are seeing a lot of new faces coming through the doors and we mean members not just staff, it's nice to welcome new people into the fold. Speaking of staff, we said a fond farewell to Fiona, Dafne and Orsi. Fiona works at McGregors so we still see her now and again, Dafne

left to be at home with her children and Orsi left to work with the dolphins and whales!! We welcomed Robert here at the end of December then Eli and El have just recently joined us too.

There is always something going on at Am Fasgadh, , scrabble almost daily and we have been having a pop up Café now and again to raise awareness and to make some dosh for ourselves, we have home baking for sale and jam, Bingo gets played when members feel like a game and some of us have been developing green fingers with the plants outside and we have a wee plot up at the community garden where we have planted some potatoes. We feel involved in the decisions of Am Fasgadh , we have monthly members meetings and we have the suggestions box down the corridor where we can pop suggestions in anonymously

The furniture has had an overhaul and if you are bored have a look at Roberts reels...!!

Many thanks go to James (Cryer) for cooking for the past year, he makes a great variety of food for us and gives us a good laugh too with his great sense of humour.

In a recent survey 90% said that they felt that Am Fasgadh was meeting their mental health needs. They also made the following comments about getting out on trips

"It's nice to go somewhere with all my friends & it gives me a sense of wellbeing."

"Makes me feel normal and independent and strong enough to do it with support"

"That I've achieved something positive & it's nice to do something different & I feel safe & secure that I'm with the staff at Am Fasgadh."

"I love them - they make me feel part of the community"

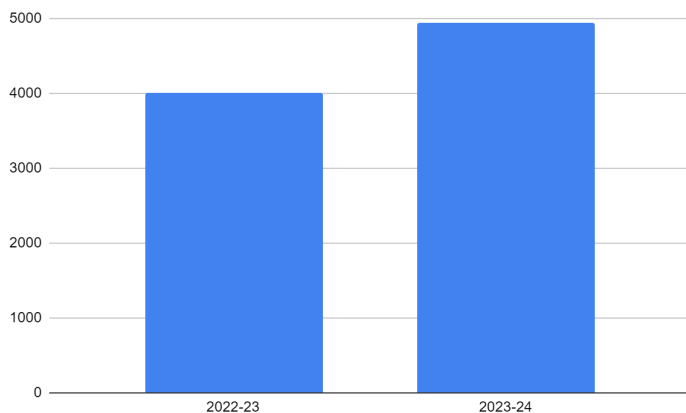
Other comments from that recent survey about Am Fasgadh

"I feel that Am Fasgadh is my safe haven & I don't feel alone as I have them help me day to day. It takes a lot off my mind knowing I have them."

"Is a good place to come, people are so friendly, if we wouldn't have am fasgadh, where will we go?"

Here are some statistics for the year under review

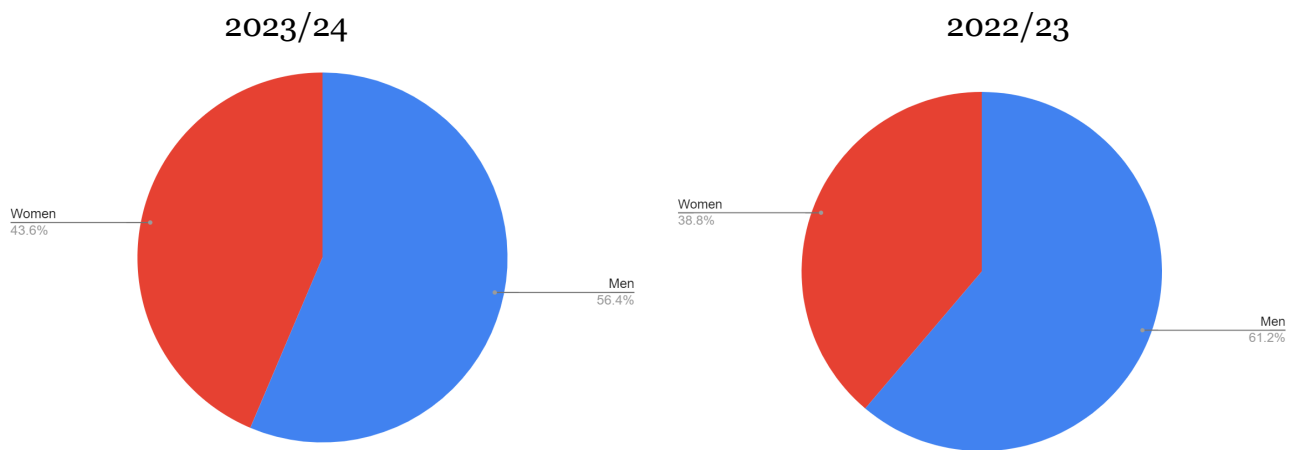
Sign-ins have increased by 12%



We now have an average of 15 people attending Am Fasgadh each day.

Of those who took part 30% report feeling better when they leave than when they came in.

The percentage of women attending has risen slightly over the last 12 months increasing by just almost 5%



Where we get our funding and what we do with it

