

STAFFING / DEVELOPMENT

STAFFING

There are three new staff members at the project since the last newsletter. Karen Grant has come on board as a full-time support worker, Whilst Lyndsey Morrison and Catherine MacRitchie are new relief support workers. We are thankful for each of them and what they bring to the team.

Our Board of Directors also has a new member. Debbie Miller has joined up with our existing board members and brings a wealth of experience into the role.



KAREN GRANT



LYNDEY MORRISON



CATHERINE MACRITCHIE



DEBBIE MILLER

DEVELOPMENT

It has been a long-time ambition at the project, to have therapeutic spaces available on site for the benefit of all our residents. A Polycrub and an arts/crafts workshop were spoken about since 2018 and in August 2022 the first of these was built, adjacent to the houses in Coll. The 10m x 4m Polycrub has already delivered a great crop of winter potatoes and salad. We look forward to what appears from the ground in 2023.

We are hoping that a second space, the arts and crafts workshop might be added by summer/autumn 23. Watch this space.....



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www.hebridesalphaproject.org

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HEBRIDES ALPHA PROJECT

SUPPORTED ACCOMMODATION

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“For I, the Lord your God, hold your right hand; it is I who say to you, “Fear not, I am the one who helps you.” Isaiah 41:13

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

END OF AN ERA-HEBRIDES ALPHA TRADING 2007-2022
EXPRESSION OF THANKS/STAFFING/DEVELOPMENT...

DAVID GRAHAM - MANAGER

EXPRESSION OF THANKS



We are very grateful indeed to every funding body, individual, family member or group who have encouraged us and financed us during this year. Special thanks need to go to the WIHB Alcohol and Drug Partnership, the Point and Sandwick Windfarm Trust, The Hope Trust, the Corra Foundation, SSEN, CNES and every person who has given us a regular Gift Aid contribution or been involved in a community fundraising event. We appreciate this help very much indeed.

We would like to continue to thank all who are giving to the Project through regular monthly payments and one off donations. Without this support, the project would struggle to continue. Thank you. There have also been donations of food, gifts and toiletries from people and Churches which our residents are deeply thankful for, too many people to name individually but you know who you are, and we offer humble thanks.

Our Board of Directors (Mrs Finella Morrison, Mrs Deborah Miller, Mr Alex MacDonald, and Rev Tommy MacNeil) join us in thanking all of you and our external advisors Mr Calum MacDonald (CIB Services) and Ms Claire MacLeod (Orbit Agency) for their services.

A special thanks this year goes to Robert Sinclair and the staff who have been part of Hebrides Alpha Trading over the course of 15 years. “The Yard” offered hope, structure and employment to many people over these years and has helped to change many lives for the better. This service is missed by many in the community.

We are very grateful to the Road to Recovery groups, The Shed Project, the Ark meeting, AA, and its members and to all the churches who supported us this year. The Hebridean Housing Partnership, CNES Homeless Service and Benefits Service plus the Job Centre staff have all been exceptionally helpful this year. Thanks also go to the CNES Faire Service, the Food Bank, and the Fareshare scheme through Tesco Stornoway.

All the above contribute essentially to the supported accommodation service and to the recovery of our residents. Thank you very much indeed.

END OF AN ERA - HEBRIDES ALPHA TRADING 2007-2022



Hebrides Alpha Trading, the trading subsidiary of Hebrides Alpha Project, closed at the end of December 2022, after over 15 years of activity. The vision for this social enterprise came from Shona Macleod, back in 2006 when she had a desire to see a supported accommodation project and a therapeutic employment project established on the island, with the main aim of sharing the love of Jesus with individuals with an addiction to alcohol and other drugs. Shona recruited several people to be Directors of both Boards, to assist her with this mammoth task.

Robert Sinclair was recruited as the Project Manager, and he started employment (initially in a cupboard in what is now the Bethesda Shop on Bayhead) in August 2007. Along with various staff over the years, they took it from being an idea to a fully functioning, highly regarded and profitable trading company. In the early days they did a car wash at the Council car park on a Saturday, they hired out bouncy castles and other inflatables for fun days and birthday parties and they provided a recycling service to households in Point, Tong to Tolsta and the North Lochs area, until the Council expanded their recycling services across the island. Their principal areas of work were window cleaning, power washing and gutter cleaning - they had over 350 regular window cleaning customers.

In 2011 they started providing a cardboard recycling service to local businesses and in 2014 they started washing the Tesco Dot Com vans (inside and out) every Monday morning. In 2011, working in partnership with Bethesda they purchased 20 textile banks which were located around the island and were emptied every week, taking more than 60 tonnes of clothes every year. In 2016 we were approached by Stornoway Port Authority to undertake 2 hours of litter picking every week between Cuddy Point and Lower Sandwick. In 2021 they were approached by Breedons to do regular maintenance for them, and this was followed up by a 15-month contract, assisting with a coastal erosion project at Stornoway Airport. They also had a cherry picker which could work up to 40 feet. As well as being used for working at height on gutters and assisting builders working on chimneys, it was also used every year to put up the bunting around the town. The other piece of work which the team were asked to do on a regular basis, was house clearances for local solicitors, when a house had been sold and they required the contents to be disposed of. And they power washed the slipway at Cuddy Point 3 times a year to keep it safe for all users.

All the above were services delivered. The only product that Hebrides Alpha made were Harris Tweed clocks. They were sold all over the world with the most famous recipient being Her Royal Majesty the Queen, who we received a lovely letter of thanks from. Service users also had the opportunity to take part in a range of certificated training courses including First Aid, cherry picker, forklift, CSCS card and manual handling.

Due to a lack of service users, the trading company took the difficult decision to close at the end of 2022. The whole reason for the project, was to act as a steppingstone from years of inactivity and not working, to getting into a routine and be ready to take on a part-time or full-time job. Unfortunately, due to the current benefit system, most people who would have engaged with the project, are better off on benefits than they would be if they were working, so they have no desire to come to us either.

Many of our customers (business and residential) got in touch to say how sorry they were that we were closing - some of them were actually in tears. Many people have also told us that they are missing seeing the Heb Alpha vans around the town, as they always knew that the folk in the vans were getting help and Hebrides Alpha Trading were an integral part of the community. We had a core staff of 3 full time staff and a part-time Admin Worker. One of the FT staff went self-employed in September 2022 after just 4 months with us, which left the remaining staff to be made redundant - Ewan (who has bought one of the vans and window cleaning equipment) at the end of October, Margaret at the end of November and Robert at the end of December.

Over 130 men and women have participated in Hebrides Alpha Trading and many of them have turned their lives around and are doing very well. Sadly, several of them have died prematurely. One of our female service users was affectionately called the Cardboard Queen. She had been with us for 11 years and she knows everything about the cardboard baler. When asked if she was ready to do the collections, she would always answer 'I was born ready.' She wore her Hi-Viz bomber jacket wherever she went, even though we bought a nice purple one for her a few years ago. We often used her as an example of how we are called to be a bright light in a dark world. When she came to us at first, she was staying in a small bed sit and had a lot of debt in housing arrears. As a result of being involved with us, she was able to pay off her debts and she now has a lovely house which she is immensely proud of. And when we sold the cardboard side of the business, the new owner was delighted in being able to take her on as a volunteer. Several previous service users told us that they would not be alive today if it was not for getting involved with us at the yard, how it gave them a real sense of purpose and dignity and it helped their mental health and it gave them a routine.

We started EVERY working day with a short Bible reading, followed by a short talk and prayer and many of the service users expressed how helpful they found these each day. Praise God for the way in which He helped the trading company over the past 15 years and for the legacy it leaves behind.

