

Business and Community Manager AGM Report

The year 2024 marked a significant milestone for The Shed, as we celebrated a decade of dedicated service to our community. This achievement is particularly noteworthy for a small charity navigating challenging financial circumstances and limited external funding. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to our partners who have journeyed alongside us over the past year, offering not only financial support but also aligning their vision with ours to foster growth, development, and sustainability in our work.

What made 2024 a truly remarkable year for The Shed Project was the unwavering passion and dedication of our staff. Their commitment to achieving the best outcomes for those we serve is inspiring, and they never lose sight of the greater purpose—acknowledging that it is His work, His Kingdom, and that every success is for His glory. We are deeply thankful for our Shed Management Team, who work tirelessly behind the scenes, providing strategic guidance, advocating for us, and bolstering the foundation of all that we do. Moreover, our amazing volunteers transform vision into action, offering their time, skills, and support as we serve our community together.

Throughout 2024, The Well remained a place of steady attendance, supported by our Well Support Worker and Recovery and Development Coordinator. We introduced the Well Being Web this year, a valuable tool for assessing the needs of attendees and providing opportunities for them to seek help in a safe and supportive environment. This has been instrumental in fostering meaningful engagement. The Well continues to be a welcoming space where camaraderie thrives, offering individuals a sense of belonging. In a noteworthy departure from routine, our Well Support Worker and a service user travelled to Glasgow to participate in the Scottish Recovery Consortium's Recovery Walk, celebrating recovery and proudly representing The Shed Project. We concluded the year with a heartwarming Christmas Meal at the County. Looking ahead, we're excited to embark on a variety of activities, including trips, movie nights, and tournaments in pool and frustration, along with much more.

2024 was a dynamic and impactful year for The Ark, with a variety of projects keeping the group engaged and inspiring guest speakers leaving a lasting impression on both the collective and individual members. Two mothers joined the group, bringing the regular weekly attendance to 17.

Throughout the year, members participated in diverse activities, including a clothes exchange and learning to crochet. The group also welcomed guest speaker Charlie Nicolson, who shared about the work in Moldova—a message that profoundly moved the ladies. As a result, The Ark contributed 25 boxes to the shoebox appeal and crocheted essential items such as blankets for those in need.

Rochelle and Jo from Safe Families Western Isles visited The Ark, presenting information about available support and creating an opportunity for one of the women to connect with support from Safe Families.

Originally, The Ark had planned to join the Recovery Walk in Glasgow, but due to an unexpected date change by the organizers, they adapted by holding their own Recovery Walk. This event honored recovery and paid tribute to those lost to addiction, with members taking a meaningful walk to Sober Island.

Sadly, towards the end of 2024, The Ark lost one of its long-standing attendees, who is deeply missed. However, the year concluded on a heartfelt and positive note with a Christmas meal at the Caladh Inn, bringing members together in a spirit of reflection and celebration.

The Shed Café truly came into its own in 2024, having launched in December 2023. Remarkably, it even made a small profit, which was reinvested into The Shed Café's work. Its success is largely thanks to the volunteers who have wholeheartedly taken ownership of its development, each contributing their own recovery experiences and a strong desire to give back. Customer feedback highlights a friendly atmosphere, reasonable prices, and delicious food. One review on Facebook said “for friendly service, good food and low cost. Jacket potato and a can of Irn Bru for under a fiver! Thank you to the shiny, happy people, you made my day better!” Looking ahead to 2025, we are particularly excited about relocating to The Barn, which will offer not only a larger space but also greater opportunities and potential for growth.

Safe Families Western Isles made significant strides in 2024, handling 43 referrals and supporting 22 families, including both parents and children. Over the course of the year, we recruited 32 volunteers. Recognizing the importance of reaching families across the Western Isles—not just in Lewis—Safe Families Western Isles took to the road. We held two successful events in Balivanich, Benbecula: one aimed at potential referrers to showcase how Safe Families supports isolated and vulnerable families, and another for community members. A follow-up visit in October included church engagement, resulting in additional volunteer recruitment (resulting in four Uist-based volunteers), and meaningful connections with local agencies such as Sgoil Lionacleit, social work, and Cothrom.

Our referrals underscore the vital role our service plays, as many families face challenges related to mental and physical health. The need for volunteers remains constant, and we are deeply grateful for those who dedicate their time and energy. The true impact of this support is immeasurable—having someone to walk alongside a family during difficult times can make all the difference that leads families from isolation to belonging.

In May, we joined our colleagues from Safe Families UK at the annual conference in Nottingham, where we celebrated the merger between Safe Families UK and Home for Good, a Christian charity that supports families through fostering and adoption. This merger has expanded the range of support available, from volunteering an hour a week assisting a family, to offering a home and family as a safe haven for a child or young person. In 2024, we hosted our second Fun Day, which welcomed over 290 families. The sanctuary was transformed into a soft play and bouncy castle area, providing the community with a free family event. Towards the end of the year, Anne Campbell joined us as Referral and Administrative Coordinator to cover Jo MacLeod's maternity leave. After shadowing Jo for valuable insights into the role, Anne has become a valued member of our team. While we miss Jo and look forward to her return, we are grateful for Anne's contributions. In the future, we are planning our first Fun Day in Uist, in collaboration with Cothrom.

2024 also saw the creation of a new initiative, Catch Up @ The Shed. This idea emerged from a gap analysis led by our Shed Volunteer Alison and Recovery and Development Coordinator Iain, involving discussions with local organizations and agencies. Hosted at The Shed Café, it has evolved into monthly meetings where agencies and organizations come together to share information and discuss community needs for everyone's benefit. After a recent review, feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, with strong support for its continuation.

In 2024, Little Stars continued to offer a highly valued and much-needed service to young families in Stornoway and beyond. The group maintains an average weekly attendance of 28 adults and 30 children per session, though it's not uncommon for numbers to reach 38 adults and 40 children. A parent survey conducted in early 2024 highlighted the crucial role Little Stars plays in supporting families, particularly in addressing loneliness and other mental health challenges.

Volunteer engagement with caregivers has increased, fostering greater confidence in sharing concerns and experiences. This has been especially evident in the Tuesday group, where discussions around parenting have created a supportive and open environment.

A surge in newborns in late spring led to an expansion of the baby area to accommodate 15 new arrivals. Meanwhile, ongoing improvements to the creative and messy play spaces have enriched children's sensory experiences, encouraging interaction with both their peers and volunteers. Each session, children gather at tables to enjoy nutritious snacks, reinforcing a sense of routine and community.

Volunteers are the heart of Little Stars, making it possible to sustain the service and support local families. While we deeply appreciate our dedicated volunteers, we are also mindful of the age and health considerations of some members. As a result, there is an ongoing need for additional support. Having enough volunteers would allow us to establish a rota system, ensuring a smoother and more manageable structure for everyone involved.

True to form, The Shed Project seized every opportunity to further its mission of serving the community. A significant milestone was the creation of a Lived Experience Panel, "Been There Worn T-Shirt," aimed at influencing local recovery initiatives and policies. Comprising nine members, the panel has met twice this year, fostering a sense of positivity and offering a powerful platform for lived and ongoing experiences to shape the community's approach to recovery.

Earlier in 2024, several staff and volunteers received training in Community Reinforcement and Family Training (CRAFT), a method that supports individuals assisting loved ones dealing with addiction by promoting positive communication strategies. Inspired by this training, we launched "Empower with Love," a support group for families in similar situations. Although still in its early stages, we are actively recruiting more participants to undertake CRAFT training and are enthusiastically promoting the initiative within the local community.

As much as 2024 was a bustling year, we look ahead to 2025 with prayerful hope and anticipation for all that God has in store for The Shed Project. With the potential offered by The Barn, the coming year is brimming with exciting opportunities for growth and development in our work.