

The Women's Centre Programme, Thematic Summary: Issue 4 | October 2019

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DEVELOPING A COMMUNITY-LED WOMEN'S SPACE: A PERSON-CENTRED APPROACH

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is the fourth in a series of short thematic summaries in which we share what we have heard and learnt from the people that have taken part in our research into [The Robertson Trust's Women's Centre Programme](#). This thematic summary reports on the development of the women's space within the pre-existing community-led organisation, 'Lochaber Hope', in Fort William. It provides an overview of the context to and operation of Lochaber Hope, and elaborates their ethos, vision and approach to delivery. Thereafter it explores the dynamics and effects of participation in Lochaber Hope, before outlining the origins, development and evolution of the women's space therein.

HEADLINE FINDINGS

- Lochaber Hope is premised on and practices a person-centred and community empowerment philosophy, which defines its approach to service delivery;
- The concept of a women's space in Lochaber Hope is less about providing a definitive, gender-specific space than promoting the empowerment of women within a person-centred organisation;
- Lochaber Hope aims to be an inclusive space for everyone, eschewing reference to labels and criteria-informed categories. In so doing, it offers diverse opportunities, mechanisms of support, and pathways for progression, shaped by the preferences and needs of those involved, at all levels;
- Lochaber Hope both builds a sense of community within it and a sense of connection to the community outwith it;
- There is a mutually beneficial and reciprocal relationship between Lochaber Hope and the local community, engendering a sense of ownership and buy in from the community;
- Participation in Lochaber Hope has generated a range of positive outcomes for those involved, including the re/discovery of a sense of voice and control, enhanced personal development and a sense of both progression and empowerment, the development of mutually respectful and trusting relationships, and reduced social isolation;
- Like other women's and community spaces, sustainability is a core concern in terms of staff retention, volunteer progression and economic viability.

INTRODUCTION

The Women's Centre Programme has been developed by The Robertson Trust to demonstrate how a gender specific, community-led, multi-agency approach can support women to achieve positive outcomes at a community, individual and agency level.

This involves establishing a physical centre as a base for activity and adopting a whole community approach which draws on the existing assets and strengths within the community to support all women, but especially those who are at risk of negative outcomes as a result of the specific social or structural issues they face.

The Robertson Trust's interest in improving well-being for women and in supporting the development of two Women's Centres was borne out of their involvement in the criminal justice sector. In particular, their interest was prompted by the [2012 Commission on Women Offenders](#).

The Commission recognised that there were a range of interrelated factors which have a specific impact on women involved in the criminal justice system and recommended women's centres were established *'for women offenders to enable them to access a consistent range of services to reduce reoffending and bring about behavioural change'*.

The Robertson Trust then conducted research into existing women's centres in England, Northern Ireland and Wales. They found that, whilst a joined-up model of delivery could support women in the criminal justice system, there was a risk of further stigmatising them within their communities by adopting an approach that focussed on their offending. It was suggested that a more holistic approach, which provided support to women experiencing tough times within a wider community setting could provide better results.

From the research, it was proposed that The Robertson Trust support the development of two physical "women's spaces", one in a rural location, and one in an urban location, which would generate learning and provide evidence of the experiences, impacts and effects of community-led, co-productive approaches to engaging and supporting women and girls. The Robertson Trust also provided support to one existing person-centred organisation to develop a women's space. You can find out more about the Women's Centre Programme in our first thematic summary, ['Introducing the Women's Centre Programme'](#) which includes details of who is involved, the intended outcomes of the programme, and the critical factors that increase the likelihood of success. Two further thematic summaries were published in 2018; our second thematic summary explored the learning from the [design and development of Kairos, a women's space in Johnstone](#), and our third thematic summary reflected on both [processes of delivery and dynamics of participation in Heart and Soul](#), Cumnock.

Lochaber Hope and 'Women's Opportunities'

Lochaber Hope was created in 2005 following the recognition of the need for a whole community service, where people could access support regardless of a specific criteria or threshold. The main supports initially provided included: counselling, mentoring, training and employability support. As Lochaber Hope has developed, and with the provision of increased funding, they now also facilitate training and courses and undertake employability support via Government contracts. In 2015 The Robertson Trust supported Lochaber Hope to develop a women's space, and the funding was used to employ a Development Worker. Women from the local community were consulted about what they wished a 'women's space' to be at a Conversation Café hosted by Lochaber Hope, and as such the women's space developed as a number of interest/activity groups. Over time, these groups became less focused on maintaining 'spaces' for women and opened up to all members of the community. The focus on women is presently characterised as 'women's opportunities' with Lochaber Hope promoting, supporting and enabling women to engage in personal development, counselling, mentoring, employability and social enterprise, interest groups and peer support.

As such, the notion of opportunities or spaces for women exclusively is fluid within Lochaber Hope, as the funding has supported less of a definitive space or output for women, but rather built capacity to promote the empowerment of women within a person-centred organisation. For participants the embedment of a pre-existing ethos and vision, a person centred, community empowerment design and delivery of Lochaber Hope, the findings in relation to the design and delivery of a 'women's space' are closely related and almost indistinguishable for both staff, volunteers and participants ('clients') from the core business and everyday support offered through Lochaber Hope. Rather, much of the learning emerging from Lochaber Hope is in relation to how a community space can be created and maintained in such a way where it facilitates a space for support and promoting opportunities for all, including women.

Key Findings

Vision, ethos and delivery

The vision for the work of Lochaber Hope is to provide a space in which any and every person in the Fort William area can access a space wherein they can encounter and experience person-centred support. It was identified that while other organisations and agencies design and deliver services and supports to specific groups, usually identified in reference to key criteria, there was a need for a space for those who were *"stuck in a rut, or were lonely, or were isolated or scared"*.

By viewing all people as individuals who may at various points in their lives need help and support, as well acknowledging that they have strengths to build on and to share, and aspirations to fulfil and opportunities to realise them, Lochaber Hope aims to be a space for everyone, and in so doing, they deliberately eschew reference to commonly used labels or categories (i.e. homelessness, addiction, mental health). When we asked who Lochaber Hope is for, while participants were able to identify particular groups, people were clear that it was a space for everyone. Participants described Lochaber Hope as a place *'where people can just be'*.

Person-centred approaches are often referred to by different terms, reflecting the different organisational contexts within which both the theory and practice have developedⁱ. What these

different terms share in common is an understanding that person-centred services seek to locate the people who use services at the centre of those servicesⁱⁱ. While, in keeping with this philosophy of practice, Lochaber Hope was described by participants as *'being what you need it to be'*, the person-centred approach adopted in and by Lochaber Hope perhaps goes further than other organisations to realise this approach, by eschewing the kinds of labels which may define and determine who the organisation is for, and thus circumscribe the approach taken. People can choose to engage in a number of services and supports, which both fulfil different needs and involve varying levels of commitment including counselling and mentoring, peer support groups, or interest activities, or simply drop-in, use and relax in the space; become involved in opportunities to volunteer or lead groups; and choose when, whether and how they make use of the space, supports and resources available, in accordance with their own preferences or needs. A central tenet of the approach taken is about *'meeting people where they are at'* and at Lochaber Hope this means being able to offer support or opportunities for all. The diversity of supports and opportunities available through Lochaber Hope, in terms of both its approach and activities, was what was seen, by the people we spoke to, to set Lochaber Hope apart from other services.

Following on from this, the ethos of Lochaber Hope was identified by both staff, volunteers and clients as the expression, embodiment and embedment of a *'culture of acceptance'*. This included being non-judgemental and creating an inclusive and safe space where confidentiality and respect is observed at all times. The supportive and inclusive culture was felt to allow people to feel free, be open and truly themselves. Trust and relationships were identified as being fundamental to achieving this, however it was acknowledged that realising this takes time and effort.

The person-centred ethos of Lochaber Hope may have led to a greater degree of fluidity between roles than would perhaps be recognisable in more traditionally structured organisations. There were numerous examples of individuals charting their journey through the organisation in different capacities: initially coming for support, often during a period of personal crisis; then taking up training or opportunities to become volunteers, facilitators of groups, mentors or councillors; or moving into posts as staff or director roles. However, it was also acknowledged that for some, Lochaber Hope supports people in their time of need so that they can move on without accessing its services, and that many return in some capacity (either for further support or to 'give back' or take up opportunities) when the time is right for them. In a somewhat less formal sense, there was an underlying acceptance or expectation that irrespective of one's role or responsibility within the organisation, support and opportunities were available and accessible to all.

"It's not just person-centred for the person coming in the door, but everybody-whether it's colleagues or a person on the phone"

"I think we are all customers & clients...we are all developing all the time and building our confidence"

The ethos is that everyone, including volunteers and staff, must leave Lochaber Hope feeling better and this ethos is fundamental to how people in Lochaber Hope work together and interact. There was a belief that working in this way had the potential to lead to *'a culture of acceptance'* and non-judgmentalism more broadly, becoming *'a way of being'*. Participants explained that volunteers and staff meet together as equals and the same is expected of volunteers as it is of staff in terms of presenting and promoting person centred standards and professionalism. By promoting acceptance

through the manner of relating in which staff and volunteers interact with each other, as well as clients, it was hoped to have a contagious effect, with the potential to influence norms of interaction within and between families and communities more broadly - raising the community.

Modelling positive, person-centred and inclusive relationships was seen by participants to define the ethos of Lochaber Hope.

“If we can’t accept each other...how can we accept other people, the people who walk through the door”

“To work here you have to find it in yourself to accept and get along with everyone”.

Participants were clear that this approach required effort and an awareness of unconscious bias, accepting that it was natural to judge and that it was somewhat expected of people from within the area to have some knowledge of the backgrounds of others within their community. It was identified that developing a therapeutic environment requires an ability to listen to others, develop empathy for others, and build trust. Honesty was also seen as a principle and practice which underpinned the person-centred, accepting approach which was also modelled in relationship with clients. Staff and volunteers identified that being honest with clients when they did not have the answers or were not able to provide the right support demonstrated that, *‘we don’t have all the answers and it’s ok for you not to either’*. Similarly, developing empathy and being able to share experiences were considered to demonstrate that *‘it’s ok not to be ok’*. Participants noted that the leadership of the organisation embodied the strengths-based, person-centred approach; staff were described as positive, encouraging and believing in people.

The desire to be person-centred as a vision but also as a practice, is demonstrated through the diversity of delivery of the support and services that Lochaber Hope provides. Key to being person-centred is the notion that the organisation has to *‘meet people where they are at’* and therefore there are different entry points into Lochaber Hope, including those in crisis and/or in need of support (counselling, mentoring, employability, peer support groups); those who are interested in developing or sharing skills and interests (personal development, activity groups, peer support groups); and those who simply are in need of a space/ place to be. For example, trust and relationships are built with individuals who engage with Lochaber Hope for 1:1 support, which can facilitate other types of engagement in activity or peer support groups. Lochaber Hope also make a considerable effort to reach out and engage with other services and community organisations.

Participants expressed a sense that Lochaber Hope fulfils a gap in provision that other community support organisations such as social services or religious groups have traditionally played in terms of caring for the community, and developing a space where people can be socially active, make connections, and access support if and when required. The approach taken by Lochaber Hope was seen as a more effective and responsive alternative to other services as participation and engagement is not restricted by eligibility criteria, thresholds or target groups or waiting lists due to the person-centred ethos and approach.

“I’m actually working in a person-centred environment...and it’s taken me a wee while to get used to it because there’s no restraints on that. There’s

nobody turning round and saying to me, well we can't actually help them or, no you can't go and sit and talk to that person...I'm used to [working] in environments where the ethos is as such the same but because of rules and regulations you are constrained"

This approach enables Lochaber Hope to be a place where people can both get and give support, facilitated by different pathways of engagement and participation. Subsequently, the feeling of and impetus to *'giving something back'* in terms of volunteering or getting involved was important for both clients and facilitators. Many people shared their experiences of initially engaging with Lochaber Hope for support, to meet new people or to recover from trauma but were now sharing their skills or experiences with others, and, in so doing, experiencing enhanced confidence, reduced social isolation and a renewed sense of purpose.

Participation also builds a sense of connection to the wider community, who through their contribution equally feel embedded and part of Lochaber Hope as they recognise their contribution in the organisation. Participants feel a keen sense of ownership and commitment to and from the community, creating a reciprocal relationship between Lochaber Hope and the community, which Lochaber Hope encourages and promotes. Within Lochaber Hope, individuals are encouraged to take on opportunities and develop skills by running classes or facilitating groups. These groups are then encouraged to develop their own independence and autonomy, for example 'Crafternoon' sell some of the products they make in order to buy new craft materials. A Tai Chi class which ran successfully at Lochaber Hope was encouraged to move outside *"so it's not just about in here"*, blurring the boundaries of Lochaber Hope as a physical space and reinventing more traditional notions of organisations existing within premises. There was a sense that *'it's not a centre'* in reference to traditional conceptualisations of such a space, but was also something more to people: a relational web, a philosophy, a manner of relating and a way of being in the world. Lochaber Hope also let space to other community organisations, both to generate income and promote the work they do, but also to further build the sense of community. Participants identified that Lochaber Hope also contributes to capacity-building within the community in a number of ways, including upskilling individuals through training, sourcing and supporting fundraising efforts or providing a space for other community interests and opportunities to develop. There was a feeling that communities don't want *'agency run stuff'* and that peer and community-led initiatives made decisions in line with the best interest of the community as a whole.

Poor mental health, isolation and suicide were identified by Lochaber Hope as significant issues affecting people in the local area associated with a decline in industry, the rural geographical space, and, often related, issues with drugs and alcohol. Lochaber Hope identified the significance of these issues, both through their work and a high number of local suicide deaths. Following the success of their peer support group 'Light at the end of the tunnel' they have helped to facilitate peer support groups, developed by the community to address these issues. Lochaber Hope facilitated community meetings on the issue of mental health and suicide, connecting with other organisations from the local community and further afield. Facilitators were identified and trained by Lochaber Hope to lead mental health support groups based in the community. Lochaber Hope sought funding to support these groups and they now run independent of, but closely supported by, Lochaber Hope.



These examples illustrate the ability of Lochaber Hope to both support and enable individuals to take up opportunities and to support initiatives to develop; but more importantly their commitment to personal and community empowerment to encourage them to embed and flourish outwith Lochaber Hope, is evidence of their commitment to person-centred and community-led principles and practices.

Buy in and support from the community has of course developed and deepened over time, and this has in part been encouraged by Lochaber Hope reaching out to the community to help or to provide items to furnish the premises, which has had the effect of engendering a sense of ownership in and by the community. This encourages people to get involved and the community to support their work more broadly. For example, a number of schools and work places have engaged in fund-raising and have made donations to support the work of Lochaber Hope. Another key approach has been to work closely with other support and community organisations in the area. The notion of the community supporting the work of the Lochaber Hope community, building solidarity within the area and promoting interdependence mirrors the ethos of the approach taken internally within Lochaber Hope.

Participation in Lochaber Hope and its benefit

Lochaber Hope comprises of different strands of activity including counselling, mentoring, employability support, personal development training, volunteering and mentoring opportunities, activity and peer support groups (including crafting, sewing, creative writing, walking groups, anxiety and mental health peer support groups). These strands provide opportunities for individuals to access support but also, using a strengths-based approach, encourage people to take advantage of and create new opportunities. Facilitators are trained to identify those who may need support as well as those ready to take up opportunities. There are no assumptions about who can access or participate in what, and engagement develops naturally and at a pace that suits individuals. This was often framed in a strengths-based way noting that those attending interest groups may also benefit from peer support, mentoring or counselling; and similarly those referred for intervention, often in a crisis situation could also engage and contribute to the wider activities undertaken in the space. As such, levels of participation in different opportunities, activities and groups varied depending on the needs and desires of individuals.

Amongst participants there was a strong feeling that Lochaber Hope was a place for everybody, that everyone has the opportunity to both gain from and contribute, in some way, to Lochaber Hope,

reflecting their vision and ethos more broadly. A range of differently situated people were identified as participating in Lochaber Hope through a range of activities, including those with additional needs (learning disabilities, homelessness, addictions, mental health issues); and those without. Mothers were noted as attending both with and without their children. Staff welcomed and provided activities for children, however it was also seen to be a place where they could be without their children and have some 'down time'. Evening sessions (Chat and Chill) are held to provide opportunities for those who cannot attend during the day due to, for example, work or care commitments. Additionally, Lochaber Hope provide support to schools through employability services and counselling and also support children and young people on an individual basis. The rapport between Lochaber Hope and schools can be evidenced through a significant amount of fundraising schools and pupils choose to undertake to support the organisation - holding musical performances, coffee mornings, and taking part in competitions. Lochaber Hope appears to invest time in developing intergenerational working and creating a space accessible to both young and old; and in consequence receives reciprocal benefits.

Both the person-centred approach and culture of acceptance meant that the motivations for engaging with Lochaber Hope were varied: some people may be accessing support, attending a group or even going along to undertake holistic therapies such as massage. As well as attracting a range of people, the multifaceted nature of Lochaber Hope breaks down the potential stigma or barriers of initially accessing support as there are various reasons why someone might attend.

“Not a place for ‘them’, it’s not about being a mum or an addict or your job - just you”

Fun, generalised and community-facing kind of activities, e.g. Tai Chi, Creative Writing and Pantomime are intended to broaden Lochaber Hope’s reach to those who would perhaps not identify as needing or seeking out support.

There are a number of ways in which people heard about and came to attend Lochaber Hope. While they utilise a number of strategies to engage people and offer a range of support and activities to appeal to diverse and differently situated people, people tend to engage because they have heard about Lochaber Hope from someone else. The Lochaber Hope catchment zone covers a vast rural geographical locale comprised of a number of smaller communities. There was a sense that there was a strong notion of community within the surrounding areas, which could be both positive and negative: positively this meant support could be offered by neighbours and acquaintances but also these communities could become judgemental and hostile. Family was also noted as playing a large part in the lives of many within these communities, which again could be positive, however if this was to breakdown through for example bereavement or separation, it could further increase isolation and potentially stigma. Lochaber Hope benefited from this as people would make 'positive recommendations' about attending and the help, support and benefits it could offer and people tend to bring friends, family, neighbours and acquaintances along. For some volunteers and staff, while communities and families could be judgemental and isolating in effect, Lochaber Hope practiced and provided an example of how to be inclusive and non-judgemental.

Other engagement strategies include having an active presence on social media and utilising traditional advertising media such as posters. A further way in which people become involved with Lochaber Hope was through efforts to build relationships with other agencies, professionals, services and supports. Examples included working closely with other community groups, for example Men’s Sheds; receiving

GP referrals for people in need of mental health support or those facing social isolation; and care workers bringing clients to interest groups and activities such as 'Crafternoon'.

While Lochaber Hope encourages and actively promotes engagement it was noted as being "*quietly out there in the community*", visible and open yet respectful and mindful of the local context and community, and the needs and preferences of those already engaged. This balance was seen as '*comfortable*' for both the wider community and those involved.

The majority of those who took part in the research were able to explore and reflect on the impact that Lochaber Hope had on their personal development or the perceived impact it had had on the lives of others. For most, the route into, or the support received from, Lochaber Hope supported their mental health and the majority of people described Lochaber Hope as '*a sanctuary*'. Whether a referral or drop-in arose from crisis or was received through routine or peer support, many people spoke of Lochaber Hope as being a '*life saver*'.

Activity and interest groups, which are attended by predominantly, but not exclusively, women, were experienced as more than just activities, but also as safe spaces which allow people to share problems, skills and stories. Over time people develop confidence, trust, skills, and friendships.

"I'm just so excited about doing it and I thought, it probably doesn't matter that I'm not very good because I know in such a positive environment they are all going to clap anyway (LAUGHTER) even if it's rubbish...but I felt really empowered just being there and listening to them...and I thought, yeah, I can do that and it just really gave me confidence to be a brain surgeon or anything I wanted to be..."

Participants identified feeling '*listened to and heard*'; '*empowered*'; '*love and belonging*'; and '*confident*'. Many of the women spoke about feeling able to share, to support, and to promote positive personal development with other women.

"People want to be asked to help. They want to achieve. Women do. We all do. We want to achieve"

"It really changed my life to be honest with you because it made me believe in myself...and the whole ethos of this place is exactly that. It's encouraging women to go out and be who you can be"

Importantly, the ethos and delivery of Lochaber Hope meant that participants felt it was a place where people can be themselves, and experience self-appreciation and engage in self-discovery.

"We all have a sense of the person we are, maybe we've brought up children, whatever, it doesn't matter what we've been through, you come here with other women...you can just be exactly who you are and then get to accept that I'm ok. I'm actually brilliant the way I am."

“[being here allows] themselves back. Their own selves. Space for them to be the person that they always are, getting that back.”

These experiences culminated in people feeling a greater sense of belonging, and a renewed confidence and empowerment. Being part of Lochaber Hope increased people’s social networks, reduced feelings of isolation and facilitated peer support which often extended beyond Lochaber Hope (e.g. people meeting for coffee outside of groups). The opportunity to invest time in yourself, whether through access support or interest groups; develop, learn or share skills; or benefit or provide peer support increased people’s sense of achievement: *“it broadens your horizons”; “you don’t limit yourself anymore”*.

Development of a women and community space

The development and evolution of Lochaber Hope was noted as being continually driven by the passion and ambition of the individuals involved, both in terms of the support provided to clients through mentoring and counselling but also by clients and the communities’ desire to lead, shape and give back to Lochaber Hope too.

“It’s the needs and the skills of the clients that are coming that helps it evolve into what it’s going to be next”.

“When I’m here and people say ‘oh I can teach this, or I can teach that, then I wonder if that would be something that people would want. It’s opportunity we identify.”

The women’s space ‘phase’ of Lochaber Hope involved setting up groups which have had ebbs and flows in activity; some initiatives have not worked and ceased, while others have flourished and continue to develop and evolve under new women. Lochaber Hope in this sense demonstrate their ease with accepting and promoting community and client led initiatives and activities.

For example, while The Robertson Trust funding was to develop a ‘women’s space’, what evolved were the development of smaller groups rather than a physical centre or area within Lochaber Hope. The women, through training and voluntary opportunities, have been able to facilitate and coordinate these groups, and these prospects are now seen as a programme of ‘women’s opportunities’. Due to the person-centred ethos of Lochaber Hope, the emphasis on women’s space has manifested as ensuring there are opportunities for women to develop in a nurturing and therapeutic environment and groups or activities are often opened up to the whole community, rather than being exclusively for women.

Promoting opportunities for staff and volunteers by developing skills and capacities also means that Lochaber Hope can be a victim of its own success as women move on and take up opportunities with other organisations, in paid employment, or in other lines of work.

“People grow in confidence and think, well you know I could be better going on there or I’d be better off doing that. And that’s wonderful cos that’s what we want people to do but we’re left sort of picking up the pieces”

Sustainability is therefore an ongoing concern, and availability of funding is seen to impact on staffing and capacity within the organisation to meet all demands and opportunities. While fundraising initiatives have been considered such as a café, car wash and charity shop, a social enterprise comprising of 'The Workshop' is felt to be the most feasible potential future development. Culturally the social enterprise fits with the local area and has the potential to, beyond sustainability, engage individuals (of both genders) reduce social isolation and develop individual's skills and confidence through the delivery of woodworking workshops and producing bespoke quality items of furniture.

There was also consideration of how the space within the Lochaber Hope premises can facilitate or limit the developments which arise. Participants discussed having to work with the space they had, and expressed concern that, potentially, opportunities could become limited as the desires and demands of staff and client groups grow beyond what the physical space could provide. Opportunities may arise, however, to purchase space above the current premises, with the potential to utilise the space outside, for example with the building of 'pods'.

"I can see that that's a part of the growth that will hopefully happen...centred around our needs rather than making do with the space that's there"

Summary of Key Learning

- **Person-centred, community engagement and empowerment:** Lochaber Hope has a clearly defined ethos and vision identifying what the organisation is trying to achieve and the way in which the service should be delivered. This is largely shared by those who participate in the organisation, regardless of role, and is 'lived out' through everyday interactions and the services, support and activities undertaken. It is experienced as being a non-judgemental, accepting and positive environment.
- **Effective delivery is both practical and relational:** The realisation of the vision and ethos is very much dependant on the delivery of the service, both in practical and relational terms. Eligibility criteria and thresholds for support act as barriers to meaningful participation and can lead to stigma and judgement. Starting out as 'a place for everyone' is important in combatting both barriers to engagement. Multiple entry points to access support and a diverse range of services (both providing support and opportunities) encourage a diverse range of participants and methods of engagement - meaning it can be what people need it to be, when they need it.
- **Person-centred community support and opportunities has a positive effect both on those providing and receiving support:** developing and delivering services (opportunities) and support in this way creates the potential to experience both, regardless of role. Participants reported feeling accepted, supported and encouraged; less isolated and more confident. Practically it presents opportunities to build on the strengths of those accessing support; and give support to those who require it, regardless of 'identified need'.
- **Developing, supporting and sustaining community:** developing person-centred services and supports can lead to sense of unity within that community. While Lochaber Hope seek opportunities to develop their own community, they also actively contribute to the wider

community and support capacity building outwith their organisation. This requires ongoing engagement with the wider community (both asking for help and giving offers of support) and a desire and openness to being led and shaped by the community.

- **Sustainability** is a persistent issue for women's and community spaces, particularly when taking into consideration the challenges of staff retention and volunteer progression, and the suitability of premises as the wants and needs of clients increases, as well as sustainability in terms of funding.

Find out more about the programme on The Robertson Trust's [website](#), or follow The Trust on Twitter [@RobertsonTrust](#) for updates. You can also follow Lochaber Hope [@LochaberHope](#)

Appendix: A note on methods

The evaluation takes a participatory action-research approach, using mixed methods. This thematic summary was informed by the following methods:

- Observational study visits to observe and develop a greater understanding of the activities undertaken, interactions and dynamics between staff, volunteers and clients at Lochaber Hope. Observations were undertaken over 3 visits, by both members of the research team.
- Two Focus Groups were undertaken with key actors in Lochaber Hope including staff and volunteers (8); and clients (7).

ⁱ Dowling, S., Cowley, S. and Manthorpe, J. (2006) Person-centred planning in social care: a scoping review. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation. <https://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/default/files/jrf/migrated/files/9781859354803.pdf>

ⁱⁱ de Silva, D. (2014) *Helping measure person-centred care: A review of evidence about commonly used approaches and tools used to help measure person-centred care*. London: the Health Foundation.