

Annual Review 2023-24



Introduction

Well that was quite a year! Not only have the number of runs increased, but we have had organisational development, success with continuation of funding (plus some new funding!) and have been awarded the King's Award for Volunteering!! So, all in all, a fantastic year built on the continued work of our great volunteers acting as telephonists and drivers.

SWRCCS as an organisation is now a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (or SCIO). We have a new constitution and legal status, but the work remains the same. What it does mean is that our membership structure is much clearer, and not only volunteers but local users and people who support SWRCCS can now become members and have a greater input into the future direction of the organisation, with the right to vote at our Annual General Meeting. If you are interested in getting involved and having your say through becoming a member, then do contact me at the office.

As our 3 year funding with the Highland Council was coming to an end, we needed to apply for another grant to cover the costs from April 2024 to March 2027, and I am pleased to say we were successful in securing our core costs for another 3 years. Our thanks to all at the Community Transport Grants team in the Highland Council for their support. What's more we are receiving funding for two new pilot projects. One to run a dedicated wheelchair accessible vehicle to get people to where they need to be and the other to run a grant scheme for larger groups to access funding to hire larger vehicles such as coaches or minibuses. This will allow groups to attend events and activities that they otherwise may not have been able to get to – benefitting the group members in ways in which the car scheme was unable to do previously. So, a fantastic result all round and more information will be appearing about the two pilot projects as they develop. The funding will also enable us to employ an Administrator for 6 hours a week to support the work.

And to cap it all, we were awarded the King's Award for Volunteering – the equivalent of an MBE for voluntary organisations. It is a marvellous recognition of all the hard work that goes into the activities of our volunteers, be it answering the telephones, arranging transport, driving people to hospital or doctors' appointments, getting people to access public transport or delivering much needed prescriptions. We are being presented with the King's Award at our AGM on October 29th at Loch Torridon Community Centre, so do save the date!



The King's Award
for Voluntary Service

Our records show that SWRCCS drivers have travelled a huge 35,715 miles during this year of which 25,893 miles were travelled with a passenger in the car getting them to wherever they needed to be. This is a 37% increase on last year. 1,480 deliveries have been made to doorsteps, including prescriptions and lunches throughout our area. A massive achievement.

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Volunteers

Our volunteer drivers continue to go way beyond their brief in order to deliver prescriptions, lunches, and people to where they need to be. In response to requests from our drivers over 80, they are continuing to make delivery runs and welcome the chance to get out into the community still to take prescriptions to people who need them. Due to this move we have not had to say goodbye to any of our drivers and still retain 45 drivers in all.

However, with increasing demands on our services more volunteers are always needed and welcome so do consider the role if you are not already. Spread the word... it's a great way to be involved in the local community doing something very tangible to help.

The telephonists continue to clock on at 09:30 taking calls and arranging runs until their duty ends at about 14:00. It's a chance to talk to users about what they need and where they need to be, and to catch up with drivers to see if they are available for a specific run. Most telephonists do about 2 or 3 duties per month, and their commitment and dedication is always great to see in the creative ways they deal with issues that arise and find solutions! If you have a couple of days per month to spare then do consider the role for you too!

All in all, the volunteers often get out as much as they put in – a great balance.

In response to the announcement of the Kings Award for volunteering some community members said:

“Hugely deserved. Well done every single one of you. You do a fantastic and much needed job.”

“Well done! A brilliant service to our community!”

“Such a well deserved award for the great community service you provide in South West Ross. Congratulations to all of you.”

Users

Living in such a remote and beautiful part of the country is often a pleasure, but if you are elderly or living alone, it can also be isolating, and getting to appointments that are further and further away, to access the medical support you need can be a challenge. So, it is with great appreciation that users of the car scheme take up the lifts that are given to them by SWRCCS and its volunteers. They often tell us about how they can rest easy knowing they will be able to get to an appointment, that the volunteers are helpful and kind and that without the car scheme providing the service, they may not have been able to access the treatment they need to continue to live in the area independently. As a passenger from Lochcarron recently commented about SWRCCS :-

“I haven't used it for years and I'd forgotten how good it was!!”

Car Runs

SWRCCS drivers have continued to deliver prescriptions and get people to medical appointments at local medical practices, hospitals, opticians, dentists, audiologists and the list goes on. Although some are relatively local (about a 15 mile round trip), many involve journeys of 120 plus miles to get to hospital appointments and to access other services. This year we have also resumed social runs and increasingly runs to access connections to public transport as people feel more comfortable getting together and being within larger groups.

The car runs table shows that our volunteers have delivered 823 journeys and our telephonists have organised 906 – an average of nearly 76 every month and an increase of 22.6% over the year.

2023/24										
	Organised Regular	Organised Hospital	Exceptional Runs	Delivery Runs	Total	No of deliveries	No driver available	Cancelled by passenger	Completed journeys	%age increase organised runs
April	24	14	3	26	67	115	3	1	62	26.4%
May	24	13	0	33	70	115	1	3	66	22.8%
Jun	17	10	7	35	69	179	6	4	59	7.8%
July	17	15	6	35	73	77	3	6	63	28.1%
August	30	20	7	36	93	136	3	3	86	45.3%
September	17	14	7	35	73	125	1	5	66	17.7%
October	30	13	3	34	77	84	1	9	66	24.2%
November	19	23	8	35	85	123	2	4	78	19.7%
December	18	12	4	27	62	147	1	3	56	6.9%
January	19	20	4	26	69	102	0	8	59	16.9%
February	24	17	12	30	83	138	1	4	79	38.3%
March	27	17	7	34	85	139	0	2	83	18.1%
Year to date	266	188	68	386	906	1480	22	52	823	22.6%

Coordinator

As in any busy year I, as Coordinator, have had quite a bit to do! But I am pleased to say that with the support of the volunteers and the Board, this has been well managed and the results can be seen for themselves. SWRCCS is developing all the time – in response to the national climate, in response to the local demands, and in response to the needs expressed by local communities and users. I look forward to getting out and about into the community to listen to what you need and to what is happening, how we can improve and how we can help.

Excitingly, the new funding allows us to get some administrative support to ensure that SWRCCS can run smoothly so watch this space.

Governance

The Board and members have been busy developing a new constitution which has enabled SWRCCS to become a SCIO (Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation). This is a simplified structure which means we now only have to report to OSCR rather than OSCR and Companies House. The new constitution also clarifies and strengthens our membership structure and so now, as well as volunteers, users and other members of the community can become members of SWRCCS. Get involved and have your say at our meetings etc, just contact us for details.

The Board are now busy reviewing our policies to make sure they remain relevant and up to date.

If you are interested in becoming a Trustee we are always on the lookout for new people with new skills and ideas that could contribute. Again, do get in touch.

Funding

We are very pleased to say we have secured 3 year funding from the Community Transport Grants team at the Highland Council for our core work as well as two pilot projects. These pilots are assessing the viability of having our own dedicated wheelchair accessible vehicle as well as establishing a grant programme for larger groups to access money to pay for transport for their group to get to educational, cultural or sports activities. Keep an eye on the website and local media for further information.

We have been blown away by the generosity of our passengers, drivers and others in the huge increase in donations. Thanks to all those concerned.

Our funding with NHS Highland comes to an end in March 2025, so this year we are engaged in another round of funding applications to try and continue our services and to secure our relationship and support for NHS Highland in getting people to hospital appointments and other primary care appointments that are no longer available in the area, such as opticians and dentists.

Linking in with other organisations

SWRCCS continues to value working closely with other organisations; sharing good practice, sharing responses and solutions to different scenarios, and listening to people about their needs and ways in which we can support our communities. This year we have worked with a number of different organisations including:-

- Community Transport Association (Scotland)
- Highland Third Sector Interface
- Volunteer Scotland
- Shieldaig Parents Group
- Skye & Lochaber Council for Voluntary Organisations
- Applecross Community Company
- Ross-shire Community Transport Organisations
- Highland Hospice
- Connecting Carers
- Alzheimers Scotland
- Adult Mental Health & Wellbeing panel

We have also been fortunate to have strong and growing relationships with local community councils, medical practices, the newly named Lochcarron Centre and other local organisations. Our strong relationships have meant that we can be more responsive and meet the needs of our local communities appropriately, and respond quickly to local needs.

Challenges

The challenges remain – how to support local people get to the places they need to be with a finite number of volunteers and funding. We do our best, but can't always deliver what we want, so please help us face these challenges by volunteering as a driver or telephonist, becoming involved in the Board and supporting local people in this remote area.

Finally, as always, the challenge to support both volunteers and users to access the services they need remains at the heart of what we do, long may that continue and improve.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT