



***Building strong, resilient, and supportive communities where people take responsibility for their own actions and how they affect others.***



## **Annual Report 2023-24**

### **Our Vision:**

MAP exists to support the needs of Marr's communities and third sector organisations through the delivery of high quality, entrepreneurial and inclusive support. It is a financially and environmentally sustainable organisation adding clear identifiable value to projects and service provision across the area through the actions of its dedicated staff and board. It is widely recognised and respected for what it provides to communities and partners.

MAP's mission is to support Marr communities to improve their quality of life through third sector action.

MAP's values revolve around informing, guiding, and supporting third sector endeavours to improve the quality of life of Marr residents through an inclusive approach that pays particular attention to the needs of the least advantaged people and communities.

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# Marr Area Partnership Annual Report 2023-24



## Introduction

This report covers the period from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024. The report aims to reflect the range of activities undertaken by Marr Area Partnership (MAP) staff and volunteers. Marr Area Partnership work to realise the Scottish Government, Cairngorm National Park Partnership Plan and Aberdeenshire Community Planning Partnership priorities in relation to “supporting communities”, particularly the Local Outcome of creating;

***“Successful, achieving, inclusive communities with the confidence, capability and capacity to tackle the things that matter to them”.***

## Chair’s Report

The past year has brought greater stability to our local communities as we all move on from lockdown and several big storms. The Marr Area Partnership has had a very busy and successful year and contributed in many ways to local community resilience and development. The log bank continues to help a good number of households across the ward and now has a network of local hubs. We have assisted with Community Action Plans and Place Plans across the Ward. A lot of work has been done to assist village hall committees and we have some excellent examples of well run energy efficient halls. We have facilitated grants to local groups through the Initiative Grant Scheme and Braemar Community Hydro. There has been a lot of work done on Food Security and helping the Climate Emergency. The Community Ward Forums have proved to be more challenging and in conjunction with the Aberdeenshire Council Area Office we are looking at ways of delivering them in the future. These Forums have proved to be excellent information and networking events in the past, but attendance has recently dropped off. Community Resilience remains an important theme and we hope to play our part in helping communities as we all face an uncertain future. We also produce an excellent weekly email bulletin of events and opportunities.

I would like to thank our three Development Officers Lindsay, Kate and Cat for all their hard work and enthusiasm. They can often be found in the Ballater office on Wednesday mornings so do drop in.

I also must thank our funders Aberdeenshire Council and the Cairngorms National Park as we could not operate without their support. But we all understand the future financial climate is uncertain so we continue to explore other funding avenues and income generating opportunities.

Last but not least I would like to thank all our Board Members, many of whom put in many voluntary hours to ensure the Marr Area Partnership is an effective and sustainable organisation. We are always looking for new Board Members so please contact one of the Development Officers if you can help. Nigel Healey our very long-standing treasurer has stepped down and I would particularly like to record my thanks for keeping us on such a very secure financial standing over a great many years. Fortunately he has agreed to remain on the Board as his experience is invaluable.

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## Treasurers Report

During the 2022-2023 financial year MAP received a total income of £67,592 and Incurred expenditure of £73,005, leading to a deficit of £5413. This compares to a surplus of £8086 in the previous year,

Grants of £4560 were made to various community organisations via the Initiative Grant Scheme.

MAP continues to be grateful to Aberdeenshire Council and the Cairngorms National Park Authority for their support during a time of difficult financial constraints and maintains its efforts to find additional income streams.

## Finances

Marr Area Partnership receives income from Aberdeenshire Council Marr Community Planning Group. It also has an agreement with the Cairngorms National Park Authority to continue to support the delivery of actions highlighted through the Community Action Planning process, helping to facilitate project development. The office of treasurer is held by Nigel Healey and Lindsay Gallagher provides support as part of her Development Officer duties. MAP is registered with Companies House, and as a registered charity MAP is also accountable to the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR) and submits an annual return and annual accounts.

## Our Team

### **Lindsay Gallagher, Development Officer/Administrator.**

Working 25 hours a week, Lindsay is your go-to for the Initiative Grant Scheme. She is the project co-ordinator for the Marr Log Bank project and is admin of the Marr Food Group WhatsApp group, that aims to connect the various pantries and food groups in the area. Lindsay organises and facilitates the Community Ward forums on behalf of the Marr Community Partnership. Working with CNPA, Lindsay is helping Braemar and Strathdon communities update their Community Action Plans and is Secretary for the Braemar Hydro Community Fund. Admin and book-keeping are also Lindsay's responsibility.

### **Kate Redpath, Development Officer.**

Working 7 hours a week, Kate is responsible for the MAP weekly community bulletin, available via email subscription and on the MAP website. The bulletin shares updates from Aberdeenshire Council, Marr Community Planning Partners, Scottish Government, the Cairngorms National Park, and many third sector groups. Opportunities for funding, volunteering, employment, and to have your say via community engagement initiatives are some of the key items included each week. Kate is part of the team who helps organise the Community Ward Forums and is here to help with all elements of development work and supporting local groups including a newly formed Tarland Flood Group.

Kate has supported Cat to create the new Marr Halls Network and is currently looking at ways to support community food initiatives in Marr.

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**Cat Houston, Development Officer.** Having worked extensively as a volunteer with various community groups in her local area, and producing quarterly magazines for Aboyne and Alford, Cat joined the team in November 2023 and is working 10 hours a week. She continues to support the village community through the development of @theHalls Events (Ballater) and, more recently, Ballater Academy, which was established to act as an umbrella over @TH, The Wee Ducklings Upper Deeside Playgroup and Ballater Playpark Improvement Group (PIG). Cat is a great addition to our team and is working with a particular focus on Village Halls and has created a database of around 40 email contacts, as well as a Facebook group "Marr Halls Network" to help connect and support individuals and community groups involved in the running of their village hall. She attended the SCVO's Village Halls Conference in Dunkeld in May. Cat is also keeping an eye on rural transport developments, especially where that overlaps with care issues. She attended the recent CNPA Community Engagement Day with Lindsay and is keen to assist with MAP's agreement with the Park, particularly with regard to Glenshee's communities, and business development generally.

### **The MAP Board**

Simon Blackett, Chair

Nigel Healey, Treasurer

Bill Slee, Gillian Needham, Bryan Begg, George Wordie, Patricia Fraser, Jim Bruce, Margaret McNaught, Janice Smith, Dave Hirst

### **Service Level Agreements (SLAs)**

Marr Area Partnership operates under an SLA with Marr Community Planning Group, and an agreement with the Cairngorms National Park Authority.

The SLA process, provides a good basis for planning, performance management, accountability, and resource allocation.

Elements of the SLA, as described in the "Definition of Service" section are as follows;

- 1. Providing a local advice service to groups to help realise opportunities in their communities**
- 2. Providing business and administrative advice to social/community enterprises seeking to develop economic opportunities**
- 3. Supporting community planning within communities**
- 4. Facilitating a two-way flow of information between communities and agencies**
- 5. Supporting Community Ward Forums**
- 6. Working to identify outcomes that fit with the Single Outcome Agreement**
- 7. Working with CNPA to bring benefit to Aberdeenshire communities**

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### **Our Work**

MAP worked with many community groups across the Marr Area in 2023-2024. The section below highlights elements of MAP's work and demonstrates the scope and scale of local initiatives supported by MAP officers.

Marr is the largest area in Aberdeenshire with the smallest population and so our work supporting communities is made more challenging given this spatial dispersion.

It is worth noting that for all the projects and initiatives mentioned below MAP continually work with communities to set appropriate expectations and build the foundations for each committed group that is involved. This is a crucial aspect of our work and often fundamental to success.

MAP also maintains capacity building support for the delivery of community priorities in Eastern Cairngorms. This may be as varied as working to improve the sustainability and resilience of community groups, support for Social Enterprises, to responding to emerging economic opportunities.

### **Website, Bulletins and Social Media**

The MAP bulletins are distributed weekly, sometimes more often if there is urgent information to share, to over 550 subscribers. The bulletins continue to provide a vital, accessible resource to groups and individuals across Marr. Bulletins are added to the MAP website and shared on social media. The Marr Area Partnership website is undergoing a revamp, and the Facebook and Instagram pages are growing with a wide reaching following of community groups and individuals.

### **Marr Food Group**

MAP organises and hosts quarterly meetings of the Marr Food Group, a network of food banks, pantries, and other community food initiatives across the Marr area to bring together everyone in one virtual space to share challenges and information. We are also the administrators on the Marr Food WhatsApp group. We are currently exploring the possibility of employing a development officer to help with delivery of Marr Community Planning Group's Marr Community Food Plan.

We have a board member on the steering group of the MCPP Food Plan Group.

### **Braemar Hydro**

MAP administer the Braemar Hydro Community Fund, liaising with the chair, panel, and applicants.

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## Community Ward Forums

The Community Ward Forums, organised on behalf of the Marr Community Planning Group (MCPG), are a mix of online and face to face meetings with a steady attendance from Community Councillors, MCPG partners, members of community groups, and other 3<sup>rd</sup> sector groups. Chaired by Councillors, topics in 2023-24 the Cost of Living and its social challenges in Marr and Resilience and Community Action Planning. We also held a "Meet the Partners" forum where we had representation from the Community Partners including; Community Planning, Housing, Sports Hubs, CLS, HSCP, AVA, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, Police Scotland and Nescan. This was a great opportunity for communities to hear about the work of the partners and ask questions. Thanks to Tullynessle Hall and Alford Mens' Shed for use of their facilities to host these latest forums.



## Marr Village Halls Network

Following our work with the Village Halls Manual, MAP has created a database of around 40 email contacts, as well as a Facebook group "Marr Halls Network" to help connect and support individuals and community groups involved in the running of their village hall. We will be hosting a meeting of the Village Halls Network later this spring to pass on learnings from the SCVO Village Halls Conference.

## Tarland Flood Group

MAP has supported Tarland Flood Group to co-ordinate meetings between householders, landowners and Aberdeenshire Council. The group now has a small but committed team focused on looking at solutions to flood issues in Tarland. Demonstrations of flood gates have been given to local residents, and to people from Banchory affected by similar issues.

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## Marr Log Bank

The 2<sup>nd</sup> season of this innovative project was possible thanks to funding support from The MacRobert Trust, Cairngorm Trust Community Led Vision fund, and Aberdeenshire Charities Trust. Using a local wood processing yard to log and bag donated timber, and volunteers to distribute to individuals and hubs across Marr, we worked with schools, foodbanks, community and elected Councillors, pantries and larders, Citizens Advice Bureau and faith groups to reach those in our communities who needed our help. In this, our second season, the project has delivered almost 1000 bags of seasoned firewood to hubs and homes across all corners of Marr. We now have hubs up and running in Huntly, Braemar, Tap 'O Noth, Strathdon and Tarland with The Strathdon Hub provides their own wood and is supported by donations of logs from Candacraig Estate and storage space for distribution by Dunecht Estates.

As always, a huge thank you must go to our volunteers who give up their time to collect timber and deliver logs, we could not do this without our volunteers. The project is also grateful for the donation of timber from local households, Crathie Kirk, Candacraig and from Aberdeenshire Council.



Tap 'O Noth Hub



Strathdon Hub



Collecting donated wood

## CLD Community Needs Assessment

The Community Learning & Development team of Aberdeenshire Council, undertook community needs assessments in Lumsden, Echt and Alford. With two board members on the steering group and through our membership with DTAS, MAP was able to provide community insight reports to assist with the data analysis.

## Signposting

MAP is on hand to help with signposting and networking, bringing groups together and providing advice and support. This year we have helped with enquiries about community asset transfers, place planning, funding, food, and pantries, setting up of a Men's Shed, wheelchair accessible playparks, youth hubs... to name a few!



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### MAP in Partnership

MAP plays an integral role assisting in the development of partnerships formed around issues, initiatives and projects, and is also a significant stakeholder in several formal and informal partnerships at a national, regional and local level.

MAP sits on the following groups;

- **The Local Learning Partnership.** Community and Learning Development partners deliver positive outcomes for communities and learners. The groups look at learning demand and opportunities across the Shire within the communities they cover. The partnership delivers discrete initiatives meeting those objectives along with Live Life Aberdeenshire.
- **Health and Wellbeing Group.** is a partnership with NHS, the Marr Community Planning Team, MAP and AVA identifying work strands that support wellbeing initiatives in Marr, for example men's mental health.
- **Marr Community Planning Group.** This is a representative body of stakeholders in the community planning arena including NHS Emergency services, CLD and AVA
- **Association of Cairngorm Communities.** MAP sits on this body which is a networking and information sharing group of development trusts, community associations and community councils from with the Cairngorms National Park
- **VABS (Voluntary Action Badenoch and Strathspey).** MAP is working with support from VABS, to incorporate new approaches to Community Action Planning, with the aim of developing consistent approaches to engagement within the Cairngorms National Park area. We would like to thank Karen for all her support this year.

With the loss of funding from Aberdeenshire Council's Economic Development, the Aberdeenshire Rural Partnership Federation folded. This was a group of all six rural partners from Aberdeenshire that met to discuss community development and share knowledge and challenges.

MAP is a valued proactive participant in these groups which show the geographically diverse and range of topics engaged in. All these partnerships produce specific packages of work and complement our networking and engagement at the local level.

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### **MAP Initiative Grant Scheme**

MAP manages the Initiative Grant Scheme (IGS) as predominantly a seed corn fund which helps demonstrate confidence in the project to the community and other bigger funders. A panel of board members and development officers have a process for determining the grant applications and go to great lengths to ensure the application process is simple, straight forward and appropriate to local need.

In 2023-24 we have given funds to 13 groups across Marr, totalling £7000.00.

### **2023-2024 Projects supported by IGS**

#### **Banchory U3A Group**

The Banchory & Deeside u3a is part of the University of The Third Age which is a UK wide network of branches which aim to promote informal education and self-learning for those who no longer work full time although there is no age limit. They have around 180 members from across Deeside and have 25 interest groups ranging from walking and book groups, board games, genealogy, art appreciation, lunch groups, Scottish history, crafts, discussion groups to name but a few. They meet monthly at the West Church and use the venue's laptop and technical facility to allow speakers to show slides as part of their presentation. The IGS fund helped pay for a roving microphone to enable the audience hear the speakers and so it can be passed round so everyone can hear questions asked.

The Banchory Heritage Society also meet in the West Church and will be using the roving microphone for their meetings. Any other community groups who use the West Church can ask to borrow the mic if it is required.

#### **Tyred and Cranky**

The IGS award to Tyred and Cranky, is helped buying equipment for a new Trail Rangers project. The idea of the project is to help people who are less experienced to enjoy the many bike trails in the area. Two qualified and experienced personnel will work together to promote good practice on the Trails (Cycling), meeting and greeting trail visitors, chatting about the trails, promote positive use and sharing of the trails, and will cover topics such as how to approach horses and their riders, how to approach water logged sections of trail, approaching other riders from behind that may be going slower and so on. At the BaseCamp they will have two bike wash stations available. While one person is manning Base Camp, the second person will be on "Trail Patrol", equipped with an e-bike, carrying tools, a map of the trails, a walkie talkie to keep in touch with base, and first aid kit; they will be familiar with the trails, and be a qualified mechanic to assist with visitors that might be lost, and the ability to assist with basic trail side repairs and first aid where necessary.

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### **Oneto One Counselling**

One to One provides free at point of service person centred counselling to residents on Deeside. With a staff of 3 and 15 volunteer counsellors, they provide around 1000 hours of counselling a year to local people from their office in Aboyne and rooms in Banchory. With funding from the IGS, One to One was able to buy a new, cost-effective printer/scanner/copier to support the work they do, which, in turn, will lead to it being easier to support and promote better mental health and well-being for local people

### **Well Women Aboyne**

Well Woman Aboyne, a not-for-profit organisation that provides much needed support to women of all ages suffering from anxiety, low mood, low self-esteem, isolation, and loneliness. Money from the IGS, has made it possible for Well Woman Aboyne to learn new skills and undertake Trauma training. They will then set up local workshops for those who would benefit.

### **Kinnord Village Hall**

The creation of a warm and cosy space in the kitchen and small meeting room for the benefit of hall users is the focus of Kinnord Resilience Committee. With funding help from the IGS, Kinnord Village Hall has installed an oil tank. As the hall has been identified as a Resilience Hub, the plan is to be able to heat this space easily for community members in a crisis situation and so that hall users can benefit from the full facilities the hall offers.

### **Alford Heritage Museum**

With funding from the IGS, Alford Heritage Museum was able to carry out certified first aid training of volunteers from Alford Heritage Museum, Alford Valley Community Railway and Alford Men's Shed. The training is required to ensure visitors to these local attractions have a safe environment.

### **Aboyne Youth Café**

The new Aboyne Youth Café is a monthly welcoming café for the young people of Aboyne catchment area (age 11-16) to meet, socialise, make friends, and connect with one another, and the community. It is hoped that, with time, the young people of Aboyne will offer to volunteer, taking responsibility for running the café as well as shaping its future direction. Funds from the IGS, have helped the café has pay for it's membership with Youth Scotland, buy games and provide for delicious treats and hot chocolate for the youngsters.

### **Cromar Community Council**

IGS money helped pay for printing of resilience leaflets that were distributed to each household in the Tarland area.

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### **Ballater Academy**

The Beaton Craigie Room in the Victoria and Albert Halls in Ballater is home to the new voluntary association, Ballater Academy. With a board of five people, it aims to create, provide, and develop opportunities for play and learning in Ballater, Aberdeenshire.

Food and Art are both subjects with deep and useful connections to any young person's employability, locally or much wider. Being able to cook and feed yourself and others is a valuable life skill. With help from the IGS, The Ballater Academy has been able to offer monthly free at point of use, art and cooking sessions over the winter.

### **Grampian Transport Museum, Young Engineer Group**

The Grampian Transport Museum Young Engineers club is run by volunteers and offers young people between 11 and 16 years old, the opportunity to get involved with overcoming engineering challenges. The projects encourage young people in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths). They compete in the Greenpower Formula 24 Challenge and have been successful at a regional and national level. As a strong advocate of GreenPower, GTM is now a Centre of Excellence for Green Power providing expert advice and support to other teams in the area. Young people are being offered the opportunity to take advantage of learning life skills and deepening their engineering knowledge, at no cost to themselves. They learn from the volunteers and tutors. This will encourage our young adults to think about green energy and consider STEM related careers. We wish the team luck in their upcoming race in East Fortune.

### **Rannes Hall, Kennethmont**

Community Give and Take Hub at the Rannes Hall. The aim of the project is to provide a suitable space for any excess produce, plants, books, children's clothing, DVD's etc people in the community may have available to swap or recycle. With funding help from the IGS the committee are able to purchase a log cabin/summerhouse which will be located in the hall carpark. This will be available at all times for members of the community to drop off-excess produce they have or have grown and pick things up that they can make use of. The aim is to reduce waste, recycle items, provide fresh free local produce. It will also house seeds from the local seed library.

### **Ballater Primary School**

Along with funding from Live Literature grant, money from the IGS secured author visits to Ballater Primary School. The sessions were delivered by professional authors or illustrators (through the Scottish Book Trust Directory and aim to engage and stimulate the children in creative writing and specifically in creating characters and give them the opportunity to meet "real live authors", learn from and be inspired by them.... will we see the next J K Rowling coming from Ballater thanks to the IGS??

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### **Torphins Paths Group**

The main aim of this project is to provide a path design report for the Lumphanan to Torphins proposed path. This will enable TPG to complete and submit the planning application. The initial report was completed on behalf of TPG by CR Contracting North Ltd (CRC). Following stakeholder/ landowner engagement, a revision of the route and design plan is required.

### **Future Plans**

The following strategic objectives were agreed at board meetings facilitated by Karen Derrick of VABS to review our purposes and modus operandi and undertake preparatory work for a strategic plan:

- To provide practical and advisory services to Marr voluntary organisations and their partners
- To assess existing and emerging needs in rural communities and small towns in Marr and behave proactively to increase awareness and encourage community led responses
- To support community planning processes and engage actively with the community planning and the community led development agenda
- To assist in the formation and development of new and existing third sector organisations, including social enterprises
- To initiate encourage and promote collaboration between the voluntary sector, statutory bodies and the private sector in ways that support community development
- To assess existing and emerging community needs and develop and deliver income-generating projects which address those needs
- To grow MAP membership to engage with and respond to the diverse communities of place, interest and identity in Marr
- To encourage active citizenship through engagement with consultations, collaborative community planning and volunteering
- To invest in the MAP team (paid and unpaid) and enable their personal development in ways that enhance their and the organisation's potential
- To ensure that MAP operates as an efficient and cost-effective TSO

Through funding, MAP intend to employ a Food Project Co-Ordinator. This role will support delivery of the Marr Community Food Plan Action Plan 2024-2026, focus on Challenges of the MCFP working with Marr community food initiatives (CFIs). (Those tackling poverty and equality, and food security). Ensure inclusivity of marginalised and vulnerable groups and target areas where there is a lack of existing support.

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**Summary**

MAP continues to adapt well to the changeable funding landscape with committed, experienced, expert, and resilient staff. The ongoing cost of living crisis and personal and community resilience is forefront in our support to communities going forward. MAP will continue to help new groups and projects build firm foundations and support established groups with on-going governance. MAP will work to ensure community sustainability, inclusivity and diversity across all its activities, in accordance with The Scottish Government and Aberdeenshire Council's vision for communities.

**May 2024**

*If you require a larger print version of this document please contact:  
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