

EDI in Action:

WHALE Arts, Wester Hailes, Edinburgh

WHALE Arts is an award-winning charity, community arts centre, and social enterprise based in Wester Hailes, Southwest Edinburgh. It aims to improve community health and wellbeing through accessible arts and creative opportunities.

Wester Hailes, a working-class area of the city with a relatively young population, faces higher-than-average child poverty rates and is among the 5% most deprived communities in Scotland according to the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD). Child poverty rates in the area are stark: 37.8% in Murrayburn and Wester Hailes, and 35.5% in Clovenstone and Wester Hailes North, compared to the national average of 24%.

Local GPs highlight the negative health impacts of living in Wester Hailes, citing poor housing, lack of economic opportunities, and food deserts, leading to higher rates of certain conditions and an oversubscribed healthcare system.

WHALE Arts aims to alleviate some of these challenges by providing a comprehensive arts and wellbeing program designed to improve physical and mental health, enhance economic opportunities, and foster equity and inclusion while serving the diverse needs of their community. There has been immense demand for their services in the community, in 2023 alone they:

- Welcomed over 14,000 people.
- Delivered over 2,000 hours of activities.
- Worked with 2,253 young people and 2,998 adults.
- Held 134-holiday sessions and partnership events for children and families.
- Engaged 39 volunteers who contributed over 900 hours.

WHALE Arts is a charity funded predominately through foundations, trusts and ongoing fundraising, with only 25% of their funding coming from local and central government. Their unique 'arts triage' approach identifies community needs, whether it's access to creative opportunities, specialized services for young people, tackling social isolation, or offering accessible activities, and addresses them through creative opportunities.

They offer a range of specialized programs for children, women, adults with complex support needs, and those with mental health conditions. These programs center around improving access to arts and culture, improving wellbeing, and offering youth-specific services. The programs are structured to accommodate different abilities and needs and to support and encourage progression. They range from highly structured therapeutic groups, slightly less structured social and creative groups, and self-directed drop-in groups which are open and more flexible.

Details and impact of some of their programs can be found below:

Access to Arts and Culture:

With 23% of residents in Wester Hailes under 16 in 2020, compared to 15% in Edinburgh and 17% in Scotland they offer specific services to engage young people, such as:

- Let's Play Wester Hailes, a project in partnership with Napier University to incentivize children to create games inspired by their local area, engaged 13 young people through 50 sessions in 2023.
- 431 children and staff from local schools attended free performances and creative workshops in 2023.
- Their Smarties program supported over 50 children aged 6-12 in 2023 in creative activities and trips to venues such as Edinburgh Zoo, Camera Obscura and Jupiter Art Land.

- Partnerships with Puppet Animation Scotland, All or Nothing, Starcatcher's and SCORE Scotland, which resulted in a holiday program attracting over 150 people in 2023.
- Street Arts, their long-running youth arts outreach program, engaged over 300 young people in 2023, building confidence and resilience.

Improving Wellbeing:

- Art in the Open sessions at Clovenstone House significantly benefited residents with dementia, improving communication, concentration, and fine motor skills.
- Open Studio sessions attracted over 50 regular attendees in 2023.
- Stitch 'N' Time makes a range of textile-based projects which are donated to other community groups, giving a real sense of purpose and value for group members. Examples include: a giant snakes and ladders game for Hailesland Nursery, heart-shaped cushions for breast cancer patients at Marie Curie, drain bags for cancer patients at the Western General and an Old McDonald Had a Farm mat, cushions and toys for the creche at WHALE Arts.

Despite their successes, WHALE Arts continues to face challenges in a community with diverse needs and high support levels. One of the key issues identified was working with individuals to overcome the perception of arts and culture as inaccessible and costly. For this reason, WHALE Arts maintains all their projects free of cost to users, providing all necessary materials.

Boyndie Trust, Boyndie, Aberdeenshire

The Boyndie Trust, established in 1999, has been serving the local community in Aberdeenshire for over twenty years. Operating as a social enterprise, the Boyndie Trust manages a successful visitors centre with a garden centre, restaurant, and shop. The visitors' centre, a former school acquired from the local council in the early 2000s, has evolved into a significant commercial venture.

Their visitor centre ensures the Trust's financial sustainability and serves as the venue for their **skills development program**. This program employs individuals in their visitors' centre with physical disabilities, mental health issues, learning difficulties or other complex support needs that preclude them from some traditional employment. They work with these individuals in diverse areas, including retail, customer service, food prep, and gardening.

The Trust receives referrals from social work and mental health professionals from the council, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), and the NHS to provide services for individuals with mental health issues, physical and learning disabilities, and multiple support needs. In some cases, they will also accept self-referrals.

They typically support 30 individuals through the skills development program, with around 10 undergoing preliminary 'taster' sessions before committing to the program. The trust has experienced a noticeable trend towards supporting younger people who have only recently finished school, likely a result of their strong links with local schools, highlighting their role in bridging the gap between education and employment.

The skills development program approaches training through personal goals, aspirations, and overall wellbeing over specific skill acquisition, fostering resilience, confidence, independence, and building social skills. While participants are trained in diverse skills ranging from IT, food preparation, customer service, gardening and more, the program incentivises exploration in an environment that encourages them to try new experiences and learn from failure. This supportive setting builds their confidence and prepares them for independent living and employment. Many have successfully transitioned to jobs in retail, restaurants, gardening, and more.

The Trust's inclusive model profoundly impacts both participants and the broader community. Integrating the skills development program within the visitors' centre creates a dynamic environment where individuals with diverse needs interact and work alongside non-disabled and neurotypical visitors and staff. This interaction helps dismantle stereotypes and demonstrates that, given the proper support, individuals with complex needs and disabilities can thrive in various roles traditionally deemed beyond their reach. Their efforts contribute to a more inclusive community where everyone can contribute and be valued.

Challenges

Despite their successes, the Boyndie Trust faces significant challenges. The primary issue is the need for progression opportunities in the region. While the Trust prepares individuals for the workforce, the limited availability of suitable employment means many struggle to find jobs matching their skills and aspirations. This limitation underscores the need for broader economic development and more inclusive employment practices in the area.

Additionally, while self-referrals are on the rise, whether this trend will positively impact the Trust's operations and outcomes remains to be seen. Balancing the influx of self-referred individuals with the available resources and maintaining the support quality.

The Boyndie Trust exemplifies how development trusts can effectively operate within the EDI sphere. It provides invaluable services to individuals with diverse needs while fostering a more inclusive community. Its innovative approach and commitment to personal development have made a significant impact.

Woodlands Community Development Trust, Glasgow City

The Woodlands area is a diverse community located near central Glasgow, hosting a large population of Asian communities, students, and other young professionals. An estimated 30% of the population of the group's area of benefit are individuals from minority ethnic backgrounds.

Woodlands CDT has been around since 1986, when the charity was gifted 13 gap sites by the council, housing was built on most of these plots of land and the charity subsequently went dormant. In 2010 the group was revived with the goal of turning the one remaining site into a community garden. The community garden was the original project, from which the charities activities have grown out of. Since 2010 the charity has grown significantly and now employs 10 part-time staff across a range of programme areas. Staff are supported by a diverse team of volunteers and guided by a board of trustees consisting of 8 local residents.

The rapid and widespread popularisation of the Black Lives Matter movement after the brutal murder of George Floyd in 2020 resulted in local people of colour (POC) identifying the need for a forum to discuss their experiences with racism in their community and invite non-POC to educate themselves on these experiences. The subsequent creation of an online discussion and reflection book club in the community, which focused on books by POC authors, proved extremely popular. The online forum worked to continue community cohesion, keep socially in touch during lockdown, and importantly served as a precursor to the groups thriving anti-racist community library, the first of its kind in Glasgow. As lockdown restrictions eased, the group began to meet outdoors, and discussions led to the formation of Scotland's first anti-racist community library.

Anti-racist community library:

The anti-racist community library runs as a fortnightly popup mainly in Millenium Park, a local park very frequented by the local Asian community. It has proved extremely popular providing reading options for children and adults alike, at various reading levels, completely free of charge. In its first 18 months just under 300 different people took out over 1200 book loans. Due to its popularity the library has become a central pillar of the work delivered by Woodlands and is now recognised as a core service. The library is complemented by cultural programming with seasonal events which give a platform to local POC artists/performers as well as a well-attended anti-racist film club, that uses film as a medium to provoke discussion and learning. A regular user of the library notes that:

“The library has gently helped me to reconnect and thrive in my POC identity. It has helped me look at my heritage with different lens. I am more comfortable, more aware and more confident in my POC background now.”

The group also began delivering POC only support groups after noticing the benefits the space provided. POC-only sessions were introduced to enhance the already beneficial qualities of the library: providing a chance for POC to be the majority in a space, and share their experiences, troubles, and feelings in a judgement-free third space. These spaces and services have also proved popular among people of mixed backgrounds, that don't fit neatly into any existing POC groups that may be organised around specific ethnicities, religions or focused on asylum seekers.

Another community member says, of the benefits of a space like this:

“We are minoritized and it sometimes feels like there's hardly any of us. But there's loads of us and we want to connect with each other. Being able to do that through the library's POC support groups has been so healing.”

All this work and core programme delivery around anti-racism has shone a light on the organisation's internal workings, and oversights around racial justice. The group has been working with CEMVO, a national intermediary supporting the ethnic minority voluntary sector and its communities, to produce a 3-year anti-racist plan for the entire organisation. This plan focuses on the staff, board, and volunteer profile of the charity as well as the organisation's community programming, communication strategy and training needs; all with a view to ensure the charity is led by POC voices and responding to their community. WCDDT has also published an anti-racist community toolkit, with strong input from volunteers, to raise awareness and educate on the causes, impacts, and scale of racism within local neighbourhoods.

Recently the group has also focused fundraising efforts on improving the accessibility of their community garden. This award-winning garden is now 13 years old, and its original infrastructure was not built with mobility and accessibility in mind. They are working with disability experts to advise on what improvements can be made, and how they can integrate those needs into the eventual refresh of the space.

Other widely utilised and cherished services ran by woodlands CDT include their family support sessions, veg box scheme, climate futures programme, mental health support, community cafe, meeting, and event spaces, and of course their community garden.

