



# Spotlight



## Embedding sustainability in community learning

March 2025



The Lairg District Learning Centre has helped people realise how they can play their part in reducing waste and emissions by embedding sustainability within their existing courses, events and workshops. This has been achieved by fusing waste reduction activities with mixed media projects, providing something people can take part in and learn from while discussing climate change issues and taking positive action through fun activities.

### How it started

Lairg District Learning Centre (LDLC) had previously engaged in climate change activities like the 'Seasons of Change' project which was funded by the Climate Challenge Fund delivered by Keep Scotland Beautiful. This project kick started local campaigns called 'Grow Your Own' and 'My Rainbow Garden', which encouraged local families to start growing their own produce, and gave them the tools and opportunities to do so. This was very well received, so LDLC joined the Highland Community Waste Partnership (HCWP) to develop and deliver further activities.



Example of local 'grow your own' projects

Originally, LDLC was more geared toward educational learning and some recreational workshops thrown in for good measure. The last decade has shown a shift in the funding toward ecological responsibilities and change. We decided to embrace this shift, which has enabled the centre to become more popular for its variety of workshops that have a 'share and repair' or 'life skills' ethic.

During the time of the HCWP, there has been a strong drive for us to continue encouraging a skill share and upcycling moral in the local area. Every class we have put together over the last few years has been with the view to normalise and instil the ethic of reduce, reuse, recycle. Many of our favoured workshops have been tailored to a more eco-driven approach using scrap fabrics, old clothing/bedding/curtains, reclaimed wood, recycled materials and locally grown food, instead of buying in materials to use.

We believe that this has helped many to see behind the constraints of reusing items, especially when it comes to sewing and the ease that there now is to buy clothing online for just a few pounds – which is more than most fabric can usually be bought directly for!

In a time where money is becoming tighter for many families across Scotland, there's an interest in ways to be thrifty which has resurfaced through a percentage of the population (mainly 35-70 year olds). As many of our class attendees are mature in age, we find that our ethic is usually well received and has been put into use in our participants' lives.

## Activities

Since HCWP activities started in early 2022, we have hosted many events. Where it has been possible to collect data, the ticketed events have shown that **610** people have attended classes during the span of the project.



Regular sewing classes hosted by LDLC

In early 2022, we offered **thrift flip sewing classes**, where participants would learn how to use old clothing to make something new. We did the same with **woodworking**, and began to use off-cuts from a local sawmill so attendees could re-use the materials for projects. At the same time, we began to host a weekly **crafting club** in the centre.

The **Maker's Space** was, and still is, one of our crowning achievements. Locals can come along to the open session and receive guidance on how to upcycle/repair their own items or just come along to finish their projects whilst using our machinery and expertise.

The next big event that we ran was a **swishing event**; the first of its kind in the Lairg area, which we were proud to host. The event was well attended, with over **100** items donated and **40%** of them re-homed. We have continued to run swish events once or twice a year since then.

During Summer 2022, we saw the opportunity to support a local paddle boarding group '**Sutherland Girls on Boards**' by combining sessions with them that would take teens out onto the water for the exercise element and then bring them back to the Centre to sew something new out of old/discarded wetsuits. These items included bags for water bottles, purses, and other simple items.

Summer also saw the beginning of our **composting and foraging** workshops, which have also continued up until now. The foraging workshops are usually held every month in different locations. One of our most successful classes involved foraging in the morning and then cooking up the findings for lunch! 2023 saw mostly the continuation of these events. It was also the beginning of a 3-month programme called 'Let's Get Growing', which was comprised of 8 sessions covering different topics of growing in the Highlands, including composting, seed saving and propagation.

We also took the HCWP to the Belladrum festival in the Summer of 2023, where we showed festival goers how to weave fabric through looms – this was great fun, and a really good interactive activity to do with families during the daytime. Lots of fabric scraps were used up and made into rugs and placemats.

In late 2023, we attempted to join Planet Sutherland to host Climate Cafes in Lairg; unfortunately, this did not make it off the ground and no participants were forthcoming, so we decided to not pursue this further.



Craft workshops at Belladrum

However, in 2024 we began a **Climate Change Book Club**, which has been rewarding and emulated Climate Cafes with lots of lively discussion and debate coming off the back of the books we had read. This confirms to us that the direct information approach in Lairg is not as successful as the indirect manner that we strive to deliver through our activities. 2025 ended with a celebration event to showcase what we have achieved with the Highland Waste Partnership

## Impact

During our Maker's Space (not all items recorded) and other workshops, the amount of items we have repaired has been around **65** pieces, and **228** items have been re-used.

Through our Composting and Food Waste workshops from 2022-25, we have managed to put about **980kg** of waste into composters and will have generated around **200kg** of compost from people putting what they've learnt into action.

We have diverted the following amounts from landfill:

**Food waste** – 253kg  
**Garden waste** - 100kg  
**Textiles** – 56kg  
**Wood** – 700kg  
**Other craft materials** - 34kg

## Reflection

We've really enjoyed working with the HCWP for the last 3 years. So many of our classes were born from this project, and local people have really enjoyed and learnt so much from it. It's a shame such a vibrant project is coming to an end, and it does seem as though this sort of project should be spread over a longer period as it is trying to alter people's habits, which is no easy task.

In Sutherland, a large majority of our population are sheep farmers or retirees. A lot of the older crofting generation aren't interested in changing their habits and attitudes toward sustainability; unfortunately, there are few or little incentives to help them move towards an eco-friendlier way of crofting, so many do not embrace it. This is quite a challenge for us, which is partially the reason we continue to offer upcycling and skills instead of direct information classes, as these are notoriously attended by fewer people in the area.



We try to feed information in more subtle ways through making things and showing more relatable film-style documentaries. This is what has worked best for us. However, we do see a slight shift into the modern era using practices from the past, such as spinning with wool. There is also quite a large interest in learning how to make food items such as sourdough, sauerkraut, oat and almond milks, kefir, and other fermented items. These classes were always fully booked.



Kefir food waste reduction workshops



Working in partnership with other organisations was invaluable – you can share a wealth of information such as other climate-focused contacts, instructors, feedback and ideas.

There have been times when we have had an idea for a project, but didn't know quite how to orchestrate it, only to speak to others in the partnership to find out that they had tried something similar – this leads to information about what went right or wrong, and how they would've have approached something differently if they had to do it again. This sort of information is so useful when you're planning events! It can help you to tweak things you hadn't thought of or even give you a new perspective on something you were planning to do.

Examples of HCWP activities carried out by LDLC and their legacies can be found on our website: <https://www.lairglearningcentre.org.uk/what-we-do/projects/>

How to guides for composting, making your own sewn items, beeswax wraps and woodwork pieces can also be found on our website: <https://www.lairglearningcentre.org.uk/resources/>

### **The Highland Community Waste Partnership (2022-2025)**

Funded by The National Lottery Climate Action Fund and coordinated by Keep Scotland Beautiful, the Highland Community Waste Partnership (HCWP) brought together eight community groups in the Highlands to reduce waste and promote more sustainable consumption.

**Learn more here:** [www.KeepScotlandBeautiful.org/highlandcommunitywaste](http://www.KeepScotlandBeautiful.org/highlandcommunitywaste)