



Spotlight

Swap & swish events in Thurso

March 2025



Thurso is a remote town, and we don't get many opportunities to shop and try on clothes. People in our community mainly shop online, which often leads to buying clothes in several sizes or getting the wrong fit. Not everyone has the time or patience to return their purchases, and frequently fast fashion items are cheaper than the postage cost. For this reason, there is a lot of unwanted clothing going to waste in our local area. Our swishing events aimed to tackle this problem.

Background

The Carbon Footprint of Scotland's Household Waste, a report from Zero Waste Scotland in 2021, showed that the carbon impact from textiles ranked highest and Thurso Community Development Trust wanted to address the issue of textiles going to landfill as part of our Highland Community Waste Partnership activities.

There are a lot of ways to swap stuff. For instance, we know that our partners in Ullapool have a brilliant format for their **Re-Loved swishing events** that involves exchange of money. There are other formats when each individual can only take away as many items as they have donated, and many variations in between.



Craft swap.

We wanted our swapping events to be as inclusive, easy and "no nonsense" as possible. Anyone is able to donate as many items as they wish, and adopt as many items as they like. If people are only interested in donating for the swap, or only need to pick something up, they are equally welcome. We never require money for a swap and only take donations from those who wish to give something on the day.

Traditionally we think of swaps for clothing, but we have also organised thematic swaps for various categories including "warm stuff" (such as electric blankets, thermoses, draught excluders), "baby articles", "plants & gardening tools", "pet accessories" and "craft items".

Our learning

Busting stereotypes

When it comes to swaps, the main challenge is removing the false stereotype that this is only for those who cannot afford to buy new. We are beginning to see this change, but the stigma is definitely still out there. Therefore, we put a strong emphasis on the waste reduction aspect of the swaps when marketing our events. At every opportunity, we reminded everyone that the swap is for rescuing quality items from landfill, and we always say “thank you for adopting this item and giving it a new life”, we make them feel like they are doing a the planet a favour, not just getting themselves a freebie.

However, swaps should not be underestimated as a powerful tool for acquiring otherwise unaffordable things! We will still mention that this is a “budget friendly” event when advertising swaps, but never focus too heavily on this

We allow for those members of our community who might struggle financially to feel no guilt if they choose to adopt quite a few items, whilst also sounding more attractive to people who may have previously felt that swaps aren’t for them. Swap after swap, we have noticed a shift in demographic and an increasing diversity of visitors.

2 in 1

We trialled both swaps on their own and hybrid events where a swap is coupled with other community activities such as repair cafes, fayres, competitions etc where we could attract more footfall. For example, as part of our pet swap, we used the fully enclosed tennis courts in the centre of Thurso to run a doggy toy swap – we laid out loads of dog toys and let the dogs in, one by one, to have fun and choose themselves a new toy! Our final celebration event “Say Bye to Waste” was a swap and sustainability fayre held simultaneously.

Logistics

One very important consideration is how to receive donations for a swap event. We were fortunate to have a local zero-waste shop where donations could be dropped off during the working hours of the shop, usually for 2 weeks in advance of the event. If you do not have a location that is open and manned for considerable periods of time, you might approach local community organisations, shops, libraries etc. with a request to become your drop off point. In this case you'll need to collect donations regularly so that the bags don't pile up. Another way is to announce one-off times when donations can be dropped off. We would recommend having at least two drop-off sessions, one within working hours, and one in the evening or during the weekend.

As a last resort, donations may be brought in straight to the swap, however, this can be very time-consuming for volunteers, and if items are donated closer to the end of the swap, the chances for those items to be adopted are reduced.



If you end up with a lot of items at the end of your swap, below are two solutions we have used:

- Team up with other organisations which run swaps in our area so that any leftovers from one swap can be shared with another. This circulation through different locations and different groups means that eventually most pieces find their new homes.
- Donate leftovers to local charity shops you'll be helping a good cause and even if some items are not in great condition, many charity shops (inc Highland Hospice) have established procedures to send off textile as rag to be recycled responsibly, for which they can receive a small income.

Impact

Over the 3 years we have participated in the Highland Community Waste Partnership, we have held **19 swaps**, 4 of which were in collaboration with other local community organisations. Across these events, a total of **609 visitors** helped us to rehome **14,022 items**, diverting them from landfill.

What next?

Our swaps in Thurso have become really popular and we hope to continue offering these events for our community.

We also encourage other Thurso-based groups and individuals to organise and host their own events.

Our swap event equipment is available to borrow through the Caithness Asset bank, including four lightweight clothing racks with wheels for easy movement, that are easy to assemble/disassemble; as well as hundreds of coat hangers of all sizes, colours and styles which we have been donated to us during the swaps.



We also can provide a lightweight, standing mirror, as not every venue has suitable fitting rooms.

We also have guidance which you can find [on our website](#).

For more information, visit: www.thursocdt.co.uk/swaps-how-to

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.keeptoscotlandbeautiful.org/highlandcommunitywaste