



**Cobhair Barraigh – June 2021**



**Organisation name:** Cobhair Barraigh

**Project name:** Supporting carers and sustaining independent island living

**Location:** Isle of Barra, Scotland

**Grant Amount:** £90,000

**Award date and duration:** January 2017, 3 years

**Project context:** Cobhair Barraigh is a charity that provides caring services for the elderly on the island of Barra. There is a day centre that people can attend during the week. The grant from The National Lottery Community Fund was used to pay the carers and allow the charity to continue offering their services.

**Project aims:** The project aimed to provide respite for carers by offering caring services to those requiring it: mainly older people in the community, including those suffering from dementia. Through this service the project has combatted loneliness as well as helping the physical and mental health of those who use the service. They have also provided respite for families,

## Project aims

Cobhair Barraigh was established in 2002 with the main aim of providing respite for carers on the island of Barra. The project began with one member of staff caring for two dementia patients and has grown to offer several services that provide support to the elderly and their carers on the island of Barra and Vatersay. It is a 'ground-up' organisation, created by the people of Barra because, prior to its establishment, there were no day care services for the elderly and no dementia carers provided by the statutory bodies in Barra. Since its creation Cobhair Barraigh has become the main dementia service for the island.

## About the grant

Cobhair Barraigh is a charity that provides a day centre for elderly people on the Isle of Barra and Vatersay in the Western Isles of Scotland. The centre provides activities and meals to elderly residents of the island up to four days a week whilst relieving their carers. The grant from The National Lottery Community Fund was used to supplement the pay of the two care staff at the centre which allowed them to keep working.

The project is a charity established by residents on the Isle of Barra to support carers on the island by offering a **day centre** that can be attended by the elderly. Barra is a small island with an aging population as many of the working age population have left the island to find work. Around **60-70% of service users have dementia**, but the organisation also caters for users with other needs or problems including those with non-degenerative mental health problems, those suffering from loneliness and those who are frail or immobile. Previously they have helped younger people suffering from conditions such as Down's syndrome who have spent periods of time on the island visiting family.

Since 2002 Cobhair Barraigh has consistently received funding from The National Lottery Community Fund that has contributed to various project costs including the centre itself and bus services. The grant from The National Lottery Community Fund that ended in December 2019 went mostly on staff costs, with a smaller amount spent on operational costs.

Cobhair Barraigh employs four carers, on part time hours, who work at the centre looking after service users. This round of funding paid for almost the full wages of two carers.

## Project Set up and Delivery

“It has become a well-established third arm of social care on the island.”  
**Dylan, Service user**

Service users can attend the day centre up to four days a week. On top of this Cobhair Barraigh offers other services such as home support for people who cannot or who do not want to access the centre: this consists of up to two hours a week of home caring, depending on their needs. There is a shopping service where they can take someone shopping or do the shopping for them. They also offer a befriending service which allows carers to leave the house while someone from Cobhair comes and sits with the person they are caring for while the carer is out. Additionally, for the carers they have put on events that allow them to socialise with other carers.

The daily activities for users begin with them being picked up in the morning by Cobhair Barraigh’s dedicated bus service. The bus service costs around £15,000 a year to run and consists of two buses equipped with a lift and an escort if something happens while the bus is travelling. The grant partially pays for this aspect of the service.

The day normally begins with a cup of tea and an informal chat. This is followed by various physical and mental activities put on for them, such as quizzes, armchair aerobics, reminiscing and memory games to get them animated and talking. Following this there is a lunch, and the staff focus on making sure that all service users are eating a nutritious meal. After lunch they might put on something on the television, often BBC Alba documentaries. Finally, the service users will be taken home. During the day they try to have a blend of dementia and non-dementia service users together because the larger group helps to encourage conversation.

Cobhair Barraigh also has several volunteers who come in to help the two members of staff: at least one volunteer would attend each session, sometimes two. Their role is to engage the service users in conversation, as well as assisting with the activities.

There are around **25 service users** that come to the day centre each week. Cobhair Barraigh also offers up to ten free hours per week of home support: about **12 people** are helped each week in this way, and it provides respite for their home care carers.

“When it comes to carers, if they are not given respite, they too will start to deteriorate. The result of this means that not only the person they are caring for becomes more dependent on statutory bodies but also so do the carers as their mental health begins to suffer.”  
**Margaret Ann, Project Lead**

During the COVID-19 pandemic they offered extra services such as shopping for the community, pharmacy deliveries, and a 24/7 hotline for anyone to use. They also created activity packs for people.

## Project impact

### Key highlights

#### Numbers supported

- 25 people who attend the day centre at least once a week.
- 12 people per week supported through home caring.
- Several carers who receive respite while their family members are at the day centre.
- Several volunteers support at the day centre sessions.

#### Key impacts

- Improving mental health and wellbeing for the elderly on the island and their carers
- More social contact for the elderly on the island
- Local access to services

#### Website

<https://www.disabilityscot.org.uk/organisation/cobhair-bharraigh/>

### More social contact for the elderly on the island, helping combat loneliness

“Now that they’ve gone back to the centre after Covid I can see the difference in my mother. She’s more alert and engaging, she’s more with it. For months and months, she wasn’t seeing anybody apart from me.”

**Hayley, Service user**

There are no other similar services available on the island, and without this service it would be hard for the elderly to have the same level of social contact and interaction. Some live on their own and do not have the opportunity to mix with others. There were multiple reports of people seeing their relatives deteriorate while the centre was shut due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

## Better mental health and wellbeing

Cobhair Barraigh has a positive impact on the mental health and wellbeing of the service users and their carers. It gives carers time when they don't have to focus completely on being a carer and can catch up with other aspects of their life while having peace of mind that their loved ones are being looked after. One carer spoke of sometimes having to work away at short notice and he greatly valued being able to call Cobhair Barraigh to ask them to check in on his mother (and bring her food) or for his mother to attend the centre for a day.

For service users, the day centre allows them the opportunity to socialise with friends, reminisce about their shared histories and to have a change of environment. Many found their mental health deteriorated during the pandemic when the centre was closed.

## Local access to services

Because Cobhair Barraigh allows carers time off from caring it can mean these individuals are able to work and provide services for the rest of the island. One example was given of a couple who had recently been diagnosed with dementia, and whose only relation on the island was a key worker. She was able to send them to the centre four days a week which allowed her to carry on her role. Another carer

"You're not going to be able to attract more people into the community due to the lack for jobs and lack of housing, so if you lose say a nurse that impacts the whole island."

**Margaret-Ann Project Lead**

also provided a key service to the island, which he mentioned he would not be able to do if his mother could not visit the centre.

Allowing these carers to do their work and provide these services is particularly important given the small

population of the island, its remoteness, and the difficulty in attracting workers to the island.

## Overall reflections

The island has relied quite heavily on this type of funding and the project lead flagged that all the residents are aware of how much the Fund has helped. Cobhair Barraigh would have found it hard, and time consuming, to try and source the money themselves.

Without the grant money Cobhair Barraigh would have struggled to run the full service they offer. Their service requires two staff members per day, and the £30,000 grant covered nearly all of their salaries. Without the two staff members

they could not have run the day care as they did and would likely have had to reduce the services they offered (for example focusing just on those with dementia).

“With that money you’re able to have a much more coherent, cohesive service. You’re not having to cut things out of the service and by cutting things out you’re making it all more disjointed.”

**Margaret Ann, Project Lead**

Focusing on dementia patients and turning away other service users with less acute needs would have been detrimental in many ways, not least because mixing those who have dementia with those who don’t helps to stimulate more conversation.

The funding has provided reassurance for families that the full service has been maintained for their relatives.

The funding has also been used to help purchase the building, for repairs of the building and to train up their carers. As well as this, the grant has been used to leverage and attract funding from other sources. They have a duty to build up reserves of around fifty percent of the annual running costs if funding isn’t available. This latest funding from the Fund helped them to avoid furloughing their staff members which would have resulted in a big loss to the community. They would have had to reduce the numbers of service users they could support, as they would not have the staff to care for them all.

The biggest challenge they face is finding carers, as the island is small and the hours they are able to offer are limited. They are already able to offer care hours to those on the island that need it.

Cobhair Barraigh received a lot of support in the funding application from the Fund and always felt that they were trying to help them as much as possible.

## About the case study

As part of this case study, IFF Research spoke to Margaret Ann, the head of the project, Victoria\* volunteer and member of the board, Hayley\*, volunteer and beneficiary, Louise\*, beneficiary whose mother attends the day centre and Dylan\* a beneficiary whose parents have attended the day centre.

*\*Names have been changed*