

Transitions

Annual Review April 2019–March 2020



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Transitions

Every year, Thistle supports people to make transitions, to live life their way, regardless of health condition, disability or personal situation.

As we work alongside them, people use their unique talents and strengths to make meaningful contributions to the lives of their families, friends, work, and their broader communities.

We support people to reconnect with their innate resilience, courage and skills and to explore what matters most to them as they transition to living life their way.

This year, Thistle made a transition of its own with the retirement of our dynamic, inspirational and much loved CEO, Diana Noel Paton. Diana established a strong person-centred culture at Thistle and with our Board of Trustees and our Chair, David Giffin, who also stepped down this year, worked tirelessly to create the Thistle we know today.

Thank you, Diana and David for your many years of leadership at Thistle. I feel privileged to be the new CEO and look forward to building on what has gone before and ensuring that we continue to make a sustainable difference for people and communities.

Highs and Lows

It's been an incredible year. We have truly experienced the highs and the lows; from celebrating our 75th anniversary – a joyous time – to the onset of the covid pandemic.

Both occasions demonstrated the strength of our unique organisation. Employees, people we support and our wider community faced both situations with boundless goodwill. And our enthusiasm for celebrating was matched only by our determination to cope with the demands of covid, staying true to our values and our humanity.

Our organisation stands strong thanks to the commitment and dedication of so many people – our talented employees, our steadfast Board of Trustees led by our new Chair, Chris Bruce, our incredible volunteers, loyal supporters and wider community. Thank you all.

As we all look forward to making the transition to a world where covid is controlled, I am delighted to bring you stories of joy and hope showing how people are making successful transitions to better lives.

Mark Hoolahan, CEO



Mark Hoolahan
CEO



Chris Bruce
Chair of the Board
of Trustees

Health and Wellbeing

Zoe and Gillian's Story

Zoe, and Gillian, her Mum, shared their heart-warming story to support Thistle's Christmas fundraising campaign.

"Thistle was there for us when a life-changing diagnosis shattered our lives," says Gillian.

"Growing up, Zoe was so active and a real live wire. But when she was 16 everything changed. It started with flu-like symptoms, but soon progressed to extreme fatigue. It was devastating to see the life drain out of our bright, bubbly girl. Zoe was diagnosed with M.E, a cruel and unrelenting disease that destroys thousands of lives.

"It was like a member of the family was missing from our lives."

Zoe explains, "I started to feel like a misfit. My friends were disappearing out of my life. They couldn't see anything wrong with me. Gradually, they stopped asking me to go out with them. I didn't see how I would ever be able to live the sort of life I wanted."

In desperation, Gillian scoured the internet for support. And found Thistle.

Zoe explains, "The focus at Thistle was on what I could do, not what I couldn't do. The meditation and relaxation sessions really helped me. Although they were older than me, the people I met became my friends. We listened to and supported each other.

"Thistle helped Zoe to realise that she could still achieve her dreams in life," says Gillian. "Music has always been Zoe's passion and, in spite of everything, she managed to secure a place at The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland in Glasgow. I can't tell you how proud we are!"

And a final word from Zoe, "I was so happy when I got my place at the Conservatoire.

"My life is very different now."

Thistle helped Zoe to realise that she could still achieve her dreams in life



Support for people with long-term conditions

Thistle is open to everyone, regardless of physical or mental health condition, and we support people to regain control over their life, by focussing on what matters to them. We support veterans and civilians, children and adults, and people from all walks of life.

This year, we received 295 referrals of people struggling with long-term health conditions or going through a difficult time in their lives. Everyone who is referred to Thistle – or who self-refers – has an hour-long consultation with one of our experienced practitioners to discuss how best we can support them.

The support we provide ranges from ten-week Lifestyle Management Courses, to Tai Chi classes, mindfulness courses or access to creative or social activities at the Centre. This year, we supported 23 veterans and our community groups continue to develop.

For many people, the diagnosis of a long-term condition can be a life-changing and isolating experience. We are there for anyone who might be struggling to live the life they want while managing their condition.

We are there for anyone who might be struggling to live the life they want while managing their condition



Thistle's participation in the Midlothian Wellbeing Service brings our support to people through all 12 GP practices in the area



People who give back

Thistle peers are people who have received support from Thistle and now volunteer to support others, by helping out or leading classes and courses. This year, we reinstated our three-day volunteer training programme.

Thanks to a local yoga teacher, we supported our volunteers with free yoga classes. And during volunteers' week in June, some of our fantastic peers enjoyed a celebratory day out at Linlithgow Palace.

In Midlothian, trained peer volunteers are helping Thistle to deliver Lifestyle Management Courses giving the benefit of their lived experience to support others to identify what matters to them.

Thistle works with young disabled people (and their families) across Edinburgh, Midlothian, East Lothian, Fife and Argyll and Bute who are planning for life after school. This year, all our Big Plan courses were co-facilitated by young peers.



Without our 63 wonderful peer volunteers, we would not have been able to deliver such a variety of courses and classes. They led 145 sessions of Tai Chi this year alone.

Liz, Thistle volunteer, and one of her wonderful floral arrangements for the Centre



Thistle Wellbeing Courses and Activities

Music and Photography

7 Lifestyle Management courses

Creative Writing classes

2 Veterans' Voices courses

3 Mindfulness courses

Indoor Curling

Seated Exercise

Find out more about our online and telephone support during covid from emma.hollands@thistle.org.uk



How Your Support Helps Others

Thistle's work would not be possible without the wonderful support we receive from our generous donors, volunteer fundraisers, trusts and corporate partners.

We're grateful to everyone who responds to our fundraising with such generosity. Everyone who chooses to walk, run, swim, pack bags, sell things or donate helps us support people struggling with the devastating diagnosis of a long-term condition.

1. Fundraisers bought a new treadmill for our subsidised gym
2. We've had fantastic support from people who work for local businesses this year. Thank you Moredun Research team
3. The Hobby Hut supported our Easter Coffee Morning with a wonderful cake and craft sale
4. Chris and Moose the dog walked the British coastline raising money for charities including Thistle
5. Currys PC World at Fort Kinnaird held a World Grand Prix fundraiser and raised £500 for Thistle
6. Our supporters raised an enormous £12k doing the Kiltwalk for Thistle!
7. The Edinburgh BioQuarter Community Choir, BioRhythms donated to us
8. Our face-to-face fundraising team



Thank you to everyone who supported our work.



Wellbeing Strategy

Thistle is implementing a Wellbeing Strategy designed to ensure continued, high-quality, person-centred support for the future and to promote wellbeing for all – for people we support, staff and volunteers – through the way we work together. A key element is self-organisation.

Thistle is working towards having a self-organised team for every person we support who is living with a disability, long-term condition or both. And we're committed to using the principles of self-organisation throughout Thistle.

People we support are actively engaged in this journey and attend training sessions along with family members, where appropriate. Self-organising allows for more localised decision-making, more robust accountability and teams have access to an experienced coach to support them through the transition and beyond.

This year we established a 'test and learn' phase for self-organising and four teams are now recognised as self-organised.

"This is an excellent opportunity to learn and develop new and existing skills, enhancing self-esteem and team morale and progression with our roles and responsibilities being recognised."

Thistle Team Member on 'test and learn'

Pioneering

We are passionate about transformative leadership practices that promote self-organisation, resilience and innovation at work.

The principles of self-organised teams have been successfully pioneered and deployed by revolutionary, nurse-led healthcare organisation, Buurtzorg, Thistle is one of the first organisations in the UK to adopt this approach to supporting people. We are working closely with Buurtzorg and the Care Inspectorate and other organisations as we implement our strategy.



Lianne works for Thistle supporting people to live life their way

Christine, a member of Thistle's coaching team who support self-organisation.





Tracy and Paula show who matters to them

Supported Living

We support people living with disabilities and long-term conditions to live independent, meaningful and fulfilling lives. This means something different to every person we support, so we have a personalised approach. Our approach is based on: good conversations that focus on an individual's gifts and strengths; supporting someone's aspirations; we encourage people to exercise choice and control in their lives; we work together at a pace set by the person we support and encourage active citizenship.

Thistle supports 117 people living in Fife and the Lothians providing an average of over 7,000 hours of support every week.

People we support and sometimes their family members continue to engage in recruitment processes and we work hard to ensure that staff skills, qualities and values align with both those of the person being supported and the organisation as a whole.

This year, the Care Inspectorate, who review our activities, graded us 'Very Good' (grade 5) across all areas.

In particular they noted:

- evidence that the needs, wants and wishes of people we support are well understood by staff
- we adapt and respond to changes in people's requirements
- we encourage people to try new things.

- Support focuses on promoting people's independence and this is underpinned by a person-centred and outcome focused way of working.
- the development of self-organised teams is generating improvements in support

The following quotes were provided by the inspector:

"With the support my daughter receives she has grown in confidence. She has matured and become more sociable..... I always feel my daughter is safe with her support worker, due to their training." Family Member

"Very proud to work for Thistle Foundation, in my opinion they are the most forward thinking, person-centred organisation I know of. Great management team and workforce, very caring and supportive." Thistle Team Member

A full copy of the report is available on www.thistle.org.uk



Laura supports many of Thistle's events. Thank you, Laura!

Who matters to you?



Our employees work in small teams to support people with physical or learning disabilities to live the life they want. Two of our personal assistants give an insight into their role.

Lesley has been supported by Andrea for almost 16 years. Here, Andrea tells a story from their time together.

"The supermarket had become Lesley's hub. She's so sociable and we were there so often that everybody had got to know her. When we found out that a friend from Lesley's schooldays worked there,

we wrote a really heartfelt letter to the manager, introducing Lesley and saying she'd like a job.

"At first there were health and safety concerns, then they said 'we could give you a uniform and you could just walk about...' We had to get back to them to say that wouldn't be meaningful to Lesley. She wants to be part of the team. We kept asking the supermarket every single week until after six months Lesley was offered a voluntary role. It felt like winning the lottery!

"On her first morning at work, Lesley was just so happy. She loves wearing the uniform and is enormously proud of having a badge with her name on it. She wanted to work with DVDs so that was her first role – one hour, once a week. It's the social aspect and being part of a team that's really important. It makes the team's day when Lesley comes in, they're so happy to see her and she makes everybody smile – customers as well."

"She's had other jobs before but nothing's ever lasted, but this one - she loves it."



All the world's a stage

From the age of 6, theatre has been a big part of Joe's life. He's worked as an actor and theatre tutor, has a BA in Youth and Community Development (with a thesis focussed on supporting people with autism), worked at a theatre company with young disabled people, taken drama workshops into care homes and set up his own theatre arts company, GrandDram.

If that's not enough, Joe has also qualified as a life coach. And he works for Thistle.

"Theatre and the arts is how I associate with things. As a person I have an incentive to both play and care about people, and I do that in my role here.

"I've learned a lot about myself from the people I work with; from learning how they like to be supported, and learning from mistakes. A person I worked with doesn't like surprises and likes to feel in control. When I look at it from her point of view it makes sense – she's very knowledgeable

and aware of herself. However, when she has a seizure she isn't in control, so of course the rest of the time a sense of control is important to her. I found I really connected with her through physical theatre. She likes it when other people makes mistakes - when I fall over she thinks it's hilarious!"

"I think theatre helps me lose my inhibitions and that helps me connect and be present with the person I'm with. Whether in drama or when I'm working with someone I support, my focus is always completely on the moment, on the person I'm with."

"Listening to people is key in person-centred support, whether with people you support or colleagues. Being person-centred, it's so important."



Joe enjoys a cuppa with Lesley and Andrea

Dawn's Story

Dawn is a valued member of our Centre of Wellbeing reception team who enjoys helping others. Here she shares her story about working as a volunteer before covid.

"My role is with the Thistle reception team. I help out with admin, answer the phone and input data on the computers. I also welcome people to the Centre, help them get a cup of tea when they arrive, show people where to go for their group or activity and generally make sure that visitors to the Centre feel welcome.

"The role suits me as I'm a real people person. I don't like to be stuck in the house, I like to go out, socialise and contribute. I like to get dressed up for work each day and put on a nice blouse, meet new people and make people feel welcome.

"In my role at Thistle I'm able to use skills from my earlier career; for years I worked in sales for two computer companies. I loved it. I'd travel around lots, every week was different. I demonstrated and sold software and met lots of new people. I had a really good grasp of the computer systems and it built my confidence being in new places with new people. So it's good to be able to volunteer in a role when I can still use my skills."

"Volunteering gives me a raison d'être. The best bit is helping people; people might think that after having a stroke you can't do much, but I can. I like to be active, to give back and it's really important to me that I do. At Thistle my skills are appreciated."

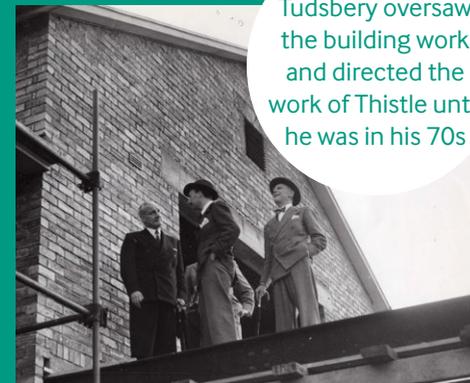


Dawn is supported by Thistle to live the life she wants.

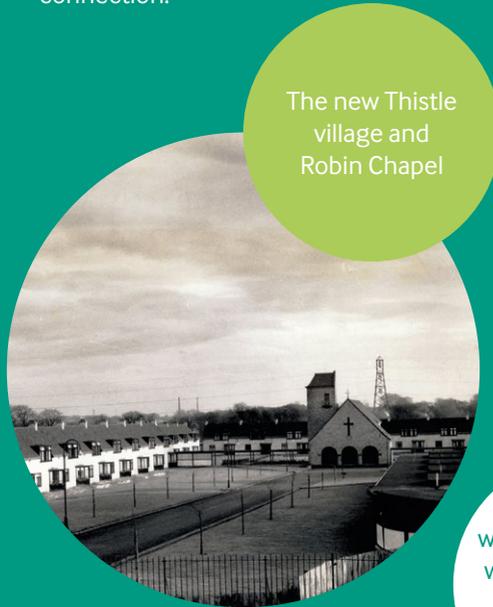
Thistle Celebrates 75 Years

Our history is entwined with that of the local Craigmillar community. Sir Francis and Lady Isabella Tudsbery founded Thistle so that disabled servicemen returning from WW2 could have "the solace and comfort of home life... surrounded by their own families and their own belongings." This meant funding the building of specially designed houses, covered walkways and a medical centre which also created a unique village or community setting.

In the 75 years since, we have built our support on principles of inclusion and the belief that everyone has a place and a contribution to make to their community. And, in our 75th year we ran significant projects to continue developing this connection.



Sir Francis Tudsbery oversaw the building work and directed the work of Thistle until he was in his 70s



The new Thistle village and Robin Chapel



Achieving the vision of family life for veterans



Original wrought-iron gates were restored this year thanks to Castlerock Edinvar

75 Years of Community



Archie's Trail

At Doors Open in 2019, people had the opportunity to follow Archie's Trail through the spaces around our Centre of Wellbeing.

Archie Ramsay, local resident, disability campaigner and sculptor, created a series of small beautiful bronze markers which were installed around the Thistle estate along with a trail of 13 information panels. Together, they celebrate seven decades of people's contribution to Thistle and society.

Flourishing Communities

Keen to understand what makes a community and how communities flourish, Thistle hosted an afternoon tea of reminiscence and stories involving local residents, people supported by Thistle and employees. It was a celebration of people who had lived in the Thistle village over the years and who have shaped both our organisation and our wider society.



Thank you, Archie, for the inspiration and for creating the beautiful bronzes. Our thanks also to Eastern Exhibition and Display who handmade the beautiful oak panel supports and installed the boards free of charge, and to everyone involved.



Robin's Garden

Sadly, Sir Francis and Lady Isabella Tudsbery's only son, Robin, died on active service before the end of the World War II. In his memory, and with the kind support of GP Landscapes and many volunteers, we created a small, peaceful orchard and garden of reflection.



Power to the Womb'an

Thistle values its partnerships with other organisations. With the Hobby Hut's incredible knitted wombs on display, we supported the Royal College of Nursing Scotland by working with Connecting Craigmillar and hosting a world café about women's health. The event was attended by Monica Lennon, MSP for Central Scotland.



To celebrate our 75th, we started to create an orchard garden, choosing apple trees to provide fruit for people to enjoy.

Our 75th Celebration

On a glorious day – 7 June – we celebrated 75 years of Thistle at the Centre of Wellbeing. People supported by Thistle, local residents, partner organisations, local councillors, volunteers and the wider Craigmillar community joined employees for a fun afternoon.

More than 750 people came along to enjoy circus workshops, crafts, fairground rides, putting a stitch in the Craigmillar Tapestry, sampling delicious Syrian baking and celebrating a diversity of talent in Thistle's Got Talent.

Thanks to a wonderful partnership with Drake Music Scotland who worked with us so that people in our community could learn to play instruments and write songs, we had four new groups of musicians participating, all of whom were using their creativity to support their wellbeing.

Thank you to everyone who came along and made the day so special.



Thank you, Diana!

Here, in the words of her colleagues, are the things people value about Diana – as a person and as our CEO. Thank you, Diana for your warmth and wisdom and for your positive lasting legacy.



“generous, always focused on what is possible, believing in people and always seeing the potential”

“Who would not want to work with someone whose laugh can be heard down the corridor, who kneels at your desk to ensure she has eye contact, who makes you feel the most important person she is seeing that day and leads with passion and charisma”



“Diana has that rare ability to ask questions which can shake up a room and create new pathways in uncharted territories.”



“consistency in her optimism and her risk-taking has for me been inspirational”

“removes barriers to allow traditionally disparate people to communicate and grow together.”



“She had the true leadership qualities to recognise that non-conformism was a strength, and that without being brave, and challenging the norm, we were never going to make things better.”



Transitions

Farewell from Diana

“Thistle is all about its people and I have got to know so many amazing, lovely, generous, warm people during my 24 years here.

“Thistle is often described as being more than an organisation – more of a community or a family – and so it has felt for me. I have always felt part of a dynamic, vibrant, exciting, supportive, caring community.

“Together, we have pushed boundaries, carved out a pioneering path and been catalysts for positive change, challenging each other as well as society. Wellbeing is now on most agendas whether government, third sector or corporate and this certainly hasn’t been the case for most of our history. It stands Thistle in good stead both for the present and the future.

“In Mark, our new Chief Executive, we have someone who has already made a tremendous and positive contribution to Thistle and I wish him every success in his new role.”

About Mark

Mark joined Thistle in 2014 as Deputy Chief Executive and took on the role of CEO in June 2019. He has over 20 years’ experience working across the private, public and voluntary sectors.

During his career, Mark has provided support and leadership to teams of learning and organisational development practitioners both within the NHS and Local Government. He is also experienced at leading and facilitating large scale change.

Mark is committed to ensure that supported people have choice and control over how their support is designed and delivered. This is reflected in our ambitious Wellbeing Strategy.

“I am inspired by the stories of people who come to Thistle and who have experienced and overcome significant challenges in their lives. It is a privilege to work alongside them and to play a part in supporting them to live the life they want.”

Thank you, David

We acknowledge the considerable contribution and tireless commitment of David Giffin, Chair of the Board of Trustees, who retired in 2019. During his time as Chair, David brought his financial acumen and deep understanding of our supported living work to Thistle providing sound guidance and expert chairmanship. Thank you, David.

Welcome Chris

Succeeding David is Chris Bruce who has been a member of the Thistle Board since 2017.

A learning disability nurse by background, Chris is the NHS Lothian Lead on Equalities & Human Rights, and Lead for Healthcare Improvement Scotland’s work on Neighbourhood Care – testing the principles of self-organisation.

Chris is also part of the pioneering Collaborative Leadership work sponsored by Workforce Scotland.

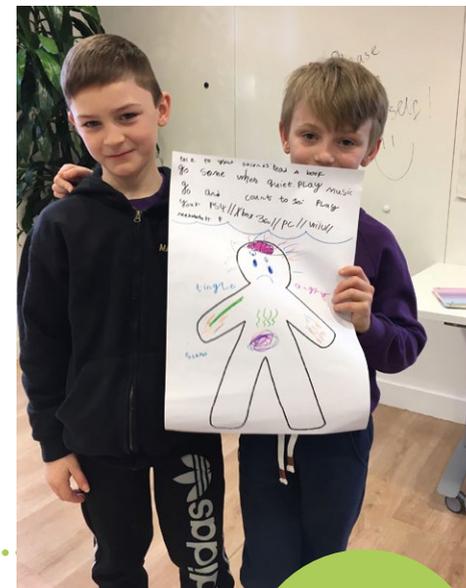
He is also a keen cyclist.

Children’s Wellbeing

We believe that primary-school children can be supported to contribute to their own wellbeing, feel more in control of their lives, manage difficult emotions and support each other.

In the past year, we were delighted to work with Castleview Primary School and Brunstane Primary School with 38 children in total taking part.

At the start of 2020, three new schools were looking for support but the global pandemic has meant we have paused our programme.



Children identifying emotions, thoughts and feelings

Teachers told us

“I think an important thing that most of them have taken from this is the ability to talk things over and verbalise that they are stressed and have some strategies in place to help them in these situations.”

“The vocab and language we are now more open to using in the classroom has been a huge plus for me, and also helped me with my own teaching and classroom practice.”

The success of our children’s work was recognised in a motion to the City of Edinburgh Council’s Children, Education and Families Committee in March 2020.

And the children said

“I have learnt ways to know how to be calm which are awesome”

“I now sleep a lot better”

“I have learnt about my emotions”

Thistle Young People

Our support starts with in-school drama workshops and can be followed-up with large-group sessions using person-centred planning to support them and their families to make plans for the future. These sessions are called 'Big Plan'.

Thistle was delighted to secure on-going Scottish Government funding to continue our work with young disabled people who are about to leave school and embark on adult life. With this funding, we have been able to work with 9 schools (up from 3 in 2018), reaching 67 young people.

This year, we ran two Big Plans (with six sessions in each Plan), engaging with 17 young people and their family members. We were delighted to welcome 19 volunteers and enjoyed co-facilitating the sessions with former Big Plan participants.



Transitions

Hannah participated in the Big Plan and showed us a brilliant website she runs called Communitea (www.communitea.me) that explores her experiences of life as a young disabled person.

One of Hannah's dreams is to grow Communitea. 'I've made it my mission to create a space for my people where they can see themselves, share their stories and experiences and educate others by spreading awareness of disability.'



Big Plan facilitators make sure Young People's voices are heard

Thistle Young People Stories

We continue to work alongside young people as they make their plans for life a reality. Here are some of the young people's wonderful stories.



James

When James did the Big Plan, he talked about his interest in the police. Thistle YP put him in contact with Craigmillar police station, and they arranged for James to visit. He was shown around by Sergeant Gordon Duff of the Community Policing Team.

Helen, James' granny, said, "We can't thank you enough! Gordon was brilliant. He showed us the cells and the interview rooms. He let James try on his uniform and see the police cars and van. James says he really enjoyed it and had a great time! Gordon said that in a few years, with hard work, James could work in the police."



MacKenzie

MacKenzie shared that he wanted to learn more about art so Thistle YP supported him to start a weekly traineeship at Out of the Blueprint, a print studio in Leith.

Mac learnt a lot about riso printing and said he really enjoyed being part of the team. Johnny and Beth who run the studio were impressed with Mac's use of initiative, his attendance and his team work.

Mac's mum Marie said: "He is thoroughly enjoying it. He loves the fact that he is learning new things, he is actually contributing to the business."



Murrin

At Big Plan, Murrin spoke about wanting to work with food and to learn more about cooking, as she is a keen baker.

Thistle YP helped her to find a traineeship at the Old Schoolhouse Café at the Canongate Youth Project. Murrin said she really enjoyed working there and that it was getting her ready for the world of work. She said the best thing about it was making the food - especially the mince pies.

Dan Styles, Old School Café Manager, said: "Murrin is getting on really well in the Cafe, she has become an expert cake and scone maker and likes to take wee samples home to show off her talents to her family. It's so lovely having Murrin in the cafe and seeing how confident she's becoming."

We're so proud..

Of our wonderful panellists, Alexander Warren, Ashleigh Milroy, Kieran Massey, Emma McKendrick and Elaine Boyd who took part in a joint Thistle and Lothian Centre for Inclusive Living event, 'My Life, My Choice'. The event was for young adults and their families to find out more about opportunities after school and to take inspiration from the panellists who had successfully made the transition and are living the life they want.



Thistle Learning

Thistle is a leading contributor to the development of person-centred, outcomes-focused approaches to support self-management within health and social care in Scotland. We have a strong in-house team of facilitators and trainers who support other organisations to transform care using this approach.

We train practitioners in collaborative approaches which focus on outcomes (what matters to people and what they want) and strengths (what people already know and are doing). All of this supports the approach advocated in the Chief Medical Officer’s annual report, *Practising Realistic Medicine* (2018).

Demand for our training services remains high across Scotland and we continued to deliver on 28 training contracts across Scotland’s central belt. We have worked with health and social care partnerships, councils, the NHS as well as third sector organisations.



Four of Thistle’s Strategic Leadership Group are coaches; Steve, Julie, Ross and Lindsay

Lothian House of Care

For the past three years, Thistle has co-led the Lothian House of Care programme – one of three Early Adopter projects funded by the Scottish Government – sharing our innovative and proven approach to supporting people to live well with a long-term condition. The programme embeds ‘good conversations’ at the heart of primary care and social care.

Working with GPs in ten practices focusing on what matters to people, there is evidence that the approach is making a difference to both patients and staff.

“It has been helpful to prompt discussion around things that wouldn’t usually come up in a routine appointment. It has changed the course of the conversation and this is more satisfying.” Practice Nurse

“The difference this approach makes is that the care is individualised. Disease is no longer the primary focus. When we focus on what matters for the person it is a healing and an upward spiral for them.” Practice Nurse



Our Thistle Learning team train health and social care professionals and our employees

Our people

Thistle employs 423 people, most of whom support those living with disability, long-term health conditions, or both, to live independently in their own homes.

The route to work

Thistle is privileged to work with people who demonstrate their unique strengths and talent every day. Many who are supported by Thistle choose to volunteer for us, bringing their life experiences to help others. And for some people, this has been a route into employment. This year, Thistle has benefited from the talent of four people who have supported employment contracts with us and whose contribution enriches our work.

Meet Emma

"I learned a lot volunteering as part of Thistle Learning's employee training programme and I was told that my contribution was really valued both by the team and by participants. By taking on a supported employment role within the team, I can continue to develop and use my skills, work in new areas of engagement with people we support and be paid for what I do."

And Malcolm

Known to many as the face of Thistle - on our 2018 bus and billboard fundraising campaign - Malcolm had volunteered for two years before joining the Development Team. "I'm really interested in photography, filming and social media. As a volunteer, I worked on a number of projects where I learnt a lot about editing and production. My role at Thistle involves film work and social media as we need to make sure more people know about our work."

Christine's Story

"My work is mainly outside. Thistle has a lot of outdoor space around the Centre of Wellbeing in Craigmillar and as part of the Facilities team, I love working in the garden and I look after the plants in the building too. There's always a lot to do and I'm lucky because I get 'help' from Apple, the dog."

Alice Arrives

"The end of my Lifestyle Management Course coincided with Thistle's preparations for celebrating its 75th anniversary. Before my illness was diagnosed, I was a teacher and I've always been interested in design and Thistle identified that I would be a good fit to support community activities that were central to marking 75 years. I'm really enjoying having a sense of belonging and being recognised for having skills and talents that have value."



Emma



Malcolm



Christine



Alice



Volunteers are an invaluable part of the Thistle team



Emma and Tracey featured in our recruitment campaign

People: See Life Differently

We launched our successful recruitment campaign, 'See Life Differently' last year. The best candidates for roles that support others to live the life they want are those who want to work where their personal values matter and where their life experience is valued.

We value our employees and the contribution they make both to the lives of those we support and to the working environment at Thistle. An employee engagement survey carried out last year gave us the following feedback:

- **84%** of respondents said the mission and purpose of Thistle makes their job feel important;
- **72%** said they had the opportunity to do their best at work every day;
- **92%** said they know which Thistle policies and procedures to follow at work;
- **66%** said that someone encourages their development;
- **84%** said they frequently or sometimes had opportunities to learn and grow; and,
- **76%** said they would recommend Thistle as a place to work.

Three areas we are working on to improve are staff wellbeing, communication, and workload.

Training and Development

Because we recruit many people with no previous experience of social care, we have a learning pathway – developed in-house – for all Thistle employees.

Aligned with our values and inclusive in its approach so that employees in any role can attend, our comprehensive training programme also supports our transition to self-organisation.

We also run specialist training sessions as required and support employees to attain SVQs so that we can maintain the highest standards.

Gender Pay Gap

All employers with 250 or more employees are required to publish figures each year comparing and reporting the difference between men and women's average pay across the organisation. We report on both the mean and median averages. This year, organisations have been given additional time to prepare the reports due to the pandemic and we will publish this in due course.

In the financial year 2018-19, our mean average showed a very small difference in the rate of pay per hour in favour of women and no difference at all when looking at the median hourly rate of pay for men and women.

Thistle is a Scottish Living Wage and equal opportunities employer.

Our Finances

Thistle’s work is diverse and we receive payment and funding from a number of sources.

Supported Living: our work supporting people living with disabilities and long-term conditions to live the lives they want as independently as possible is funded by Local Authorities through Self-Directed Support (SDS) arrangements.

However, this money doesn’t cover all the costs of the comprehensive training and development programme we provide for our employees.

Health and Wellbeing: our charitable work supporting people living with long-term health conditions and our schools outreach is wholly funded by successfully applying for grants from trusts and statutory bodies and much-needed donations from individuals and businesses.

And our work supporting young people living with disability relies on statutory grant support.

Our health and wellbeing practitioners working out of GP surgeries in Midlothian (Midlothian Wellbeing Service) are funded through a 3-year contract with the local authority.

Thistle Training and Consultancy: we charge consultancy fees for our work supporting external partners with training and development that uses Thistle’s unique Approach based on person-centred support and self-management.

Given the range and scope of our activities, we provide a summary here of our income and expenditure and full details are available in our statutory accounts which are published on our website at www.thistle.org.uk/who-we-are/our-impact. Or, you can write to us and we’ll send you a print-out.

This year...

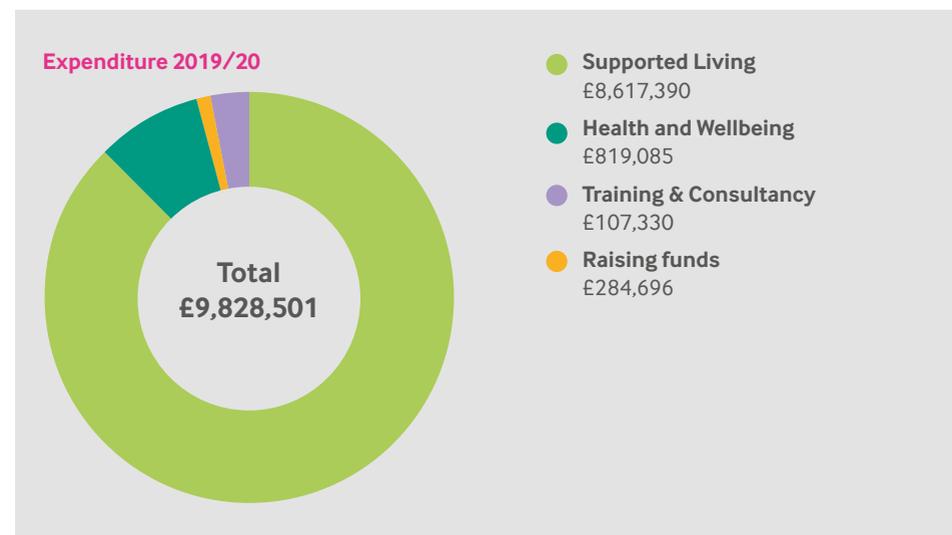
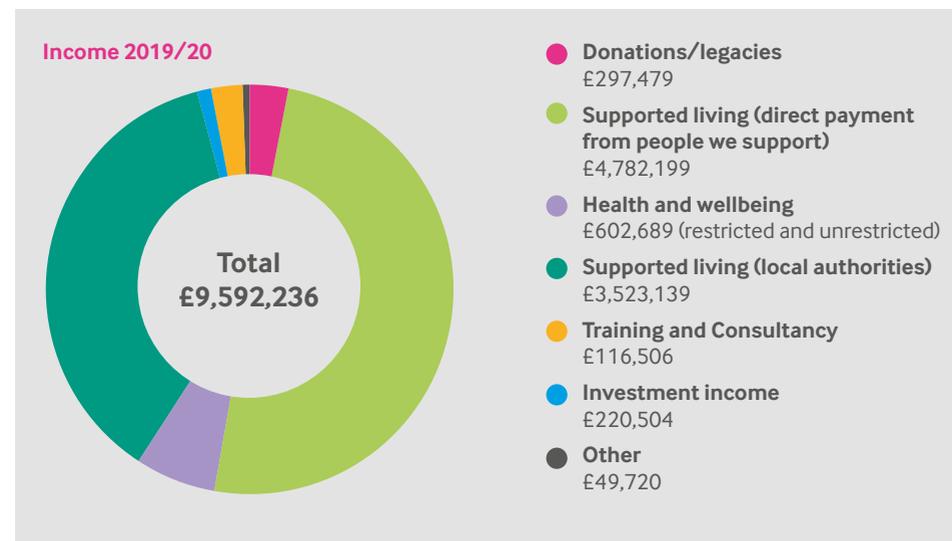
We continued to develop our in-house face-to-face fundraising team to help create longer-term financial stability. The team was out and about in the community spreading the word about the impact of our work and showing how people could help support those most in need. This activity is on-hold due to covid.

The largest proportion of our fundraised income comes from our monthly individual donors without whom we would not be able to reach so many people who desperately need Thistle’s support.

Thistle has reserves of around £5m that underpin our operations. Our Board monitors and develops the reserves policy to reflect the changing economic climate, movements in the market and organisational needs.

Following the completion of the Centre of Wellbeing in 2016, approximately £200,000 per year is granted by the Thistle Foundation to support the running of the building.

- Group income up from £9.01m (2019) to £9.29m (2020), an increase of 3.1%, excluding donations and legacies
- Group expenditure up from £9.41m to £9.83m, an increase of 4.5%





What we do and how we're funded



Health and Wellbeing

Our charity supports people with long-term conditions to live the life they want.

At our Centre of Wellbeing we provide:

- Consultations
- Lifestyle management, tai chi, nutrition and mindfulness courses
- Veterans' programme
- Support for Syrian refugees
- Creative and social activities
- Gym
- Schools' outreach



Funded work this year: Our community and Centre of Wellbeing work is funded by government grants, trusts, foundations and individual donations.

We also have a local authority contract to work with Midlothian Council providing wellbeing support in GP practices.



Thistle Learning

Providing training and development for our employees and consultancy services for external organisations wanting a more person-centred, asset based approach.



Supported Living

We provide support for disabled people to live the life they want, independently in their own homes.

Funding is by local authorities (self-directed support arrangements).



Young People

Working with young disabled people, their family members, team members and volunteers to help with the transition from school towards a life that makes sense to them. We currently have Government funding for this work.

Thank you to all of our funders, donors and supporters. Thank you to all the individuals, clubs, societies, teams, businesses, schools, statutory and non-statutory organisations. You make everything possible.

- ABF – The Soldiers' Charity
- B&Q
- Bank of Scotland Foundation
- Beeslack Community High School
- Castlebrae High School (Youth Philanthropy Initiative)
- Caledonian Society
- Callendar Charitable Trust
- Castlerock Edinvar
- Centre for Regenerative Medicine
- Craigmillar Library Café
- Cruden Foundation
- Currys PC World, Fort Kinnaird
- Miss Rachel E Duncan's Charitable Trust
- Mr W J & Mrs C G Dunnachie's Charitable Trust
- Department for Work and Pensions
- Eastern Signs
- European Social and Economic Fund
- Forestry and Land Scotland
- Glebefoot Charitable Trust
- GP Plantscapes
- John Lewis Partnership
- Lindsay & Gilmour
- Lodge Lockhart St John No 248
- Lodge The Gael No 609
- Mother Lodge Kilwinning
- Hugh & Mary Miller Bequest Trust
- The Miss Eliza C Pedersen's Trust
- Queen Margaret University
- Robertson Trust
- RS Macdonald Charitable Trust
- The Scottish Government
- Taynuilt Golf Club
- Tesco
- Thistle Trust

We believe that life is for living.



Thistle's Board of Trustees. With thanks to retiring Chairman, David Giffin, and Chief Executive, Diana Noel-Paton for their fantastic contribution and legacy

Contact us

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