



Thistle Foundation Impact Report 2022-23

Welcome

from our

Chief Executive and Board Chair



“Our employees, volunteers and the wider Thistle community have remained steadfast and committed to our ambition - a world of inclusion, free of isolation and loneliness, where a health crisis doesn’t mean a life crisis.”

This year has been challenging. We continue to live with the long-term impacts of the pandemic, Brexit, and the resulting broader national economic difficulties. These challenges have made fundraising more difficult, resulted in reduced levels of funding, and created a cost-of-living crisis that is impacting people across our communities.

Recruitment and retention of social care workers is an ongoing challenge in our chronically undervalued sector which needs greater investment to truly reflect the skilled and important role of social care workers – a role that provides vital support for all of us, our friends, family members and communities across Scotland.

Despite these challenges, our employees, volunteers and the wider Thistle community have remained steadfast and committed to our ambition - a world of inclusion, free of isolation and loneliness, where a health crisis doesn’t mean a life crisis. Over the course of this last year, our health and wellbeing team has supported 1000s of people across Scotland. Our supported living teams have also continued to provide support to over 90 people across Edinburgh, the Lothians and Fife supporting them to live life their way.

2022-23 saw Thistle Learning go from strength to strength. There’s been an increase in post-pandemic demand for our consultancy support, and we have engaged in a contract with the Scottish Government that will make non-specialist rehabilitation more accessible to people living across Scotland. These exciting developments allow us to take the Thistle Approach ‘on the road’, reaching more people through the work we do with the NHS, health and social care partnerships, healthcare practitioners and the third sector.

We could not have done all of this without our donors, fundraisers, and funders. Thank you to everyone for helping us to support people living with long-term health conditions and disabled people this year and into the future.

We are extremely proud of all that our teams, our volunteers and the people we support have achieved, in what continues to be a difficult economic landscape for us all. Please do enjoy reading the stories of hope, courage, and resilience that you will find in this report.

Mark Hoolahan,
Chief Executive

Chris Bruce,
Board Chair

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A huge Thistle thank you



We are Thistle

Our ambition

At Thistle Foundation we believe in a world of inclusion, free of isolation and loneliness, where a health crisis doesn't mean a life crisis.

What we do

We believe that life is for living. We support people with disabilities and long-term health conditions to lead good lives and achieve what matters most to them.



How we do it

At Thistle Foundation we know that people are unique. We offer a pioneering range of support which is focused on the person and not the condition. This is our Thistle approach. It runs through everything we do.

Our Health and Wellbeing team provides support for 1000s of people living across Scotland with long-term health conditions or facing challenging life situations, to achieve what matters most to them.

We support people living in Edinburgh, the Lothians and Fife through our Supported Living team. We have over 400 Personal Assistants and Wellbeing Practitioners providing personalised support for people with disabilities, ensuring that they can live in their own homes in their local community.



The Thistle Learning team works with healthcare professionals, services and the third sector on transforming care and support within the health and social care sector.



47% of people
in Scotland report living with a
long-term health condition

Health and wellbeing

1.4m of those people are
young adults aged 16-24

Our health and wellbeing team works with people living in communities across Scotland.

Over the course of this last year, we've seen a significant rise in referrals from people living with the ongoing impact of the pandemic and current cost-of-living crisis. More and more we're seeing that loneliness and isolation are having a significant impact on the wellbeing of people living with long-term health conditions.

➔ **How are we funded?**
By grants, trusts and foundations, alongside much-needed donations from people and businesses. Thank you to everyone who supported us - the impact your funding has made on people we support is HUGE!

1 in 4 people
are currently living with a
mental health condition

Supporting people across Scotland

This year, our national wellbeing programme continued to deliver remote support to people in Scotland.

- ➔ In 2022-23, we worked in over 50% of Scotland’s local authority areas including Glasgow, Dundee and Inverness.
- ➔ We offered 270 appointments to 56 people and alongside providing 1:1 support, the team delivered four Lifestyle Management Courses.

Support in Midlothian

Our Midlothian Wellbeing programme has continued to work in all 12 GP practices in the area supporting people living with long-term health conditions, mental health conditions, and complex life circumstances.

Over the course of the year, the team has supported over 1,100 people, with 82% of those people being offered an initial appointment within four weeks.

The team facilitates a range of group support: from our Lifestyle Management Course to mindfulness in nature and new beginnings courses. Just over 90 people took part in these courses, giving them the opportunity to find connection with others in the group as well as the direct support from Thistle.

Over half of the people we support live in areas of high deprivation and are experiencing

health inequalities

including anxiety, depression and chronic pain



Natalie’s story

“I was born with Spina Bifida so I’m no stranger to dealing with health difficulties. Despite this, I always managed to lead a full life. I’m a ceramic artist with a degree in 3D Design and have spent years volunteering for a local charity. It was there, while I was volunteering, that someone noticed I was struggling to walk more than usual. I had started developing some new symptoms and was soon diagnosed with Functional Neurological Disorder, or FND.

“My energy levels had dropped even lower than usual, and I’d developed a stutter which was getting worse and worse until the point that I stopped being able to speak altogether. I found this really frustrating which probably just made it even worse. The symptoms of FND can vary so much from one person to the next, making it harder for people to understand. I’ve lost friends as a result of this, which has been really painful for me.

“Someone I volunteered with told me that he had FND too, and that he’d been on a Lifestyle Management course (LMC) with Thistle which really helped him. I learned so much from the course, not only from my Health and Wellbeing Practitioner but from the other attendees too. Hearing other people standing up for

themselves and their rights made me feel that I have the right to say what I need as well and gave me the confidence to say it. I left with a better understanding of myself, my disability and how I can improve things for myself, but also about how I can help others. Self-understanding has been so empowering for me.

“Doing the LMC helped me to gain perspective over my situation and has allowed for my inner voice to grow stronger so I can be my own cheerleader. I now give myself permission to take more time for myself and to go to bed early. These small changes mean I have more energy which hugely impacts on my wellbeing. I’m quite an introverted person, but I’ve learned to tell people about my needs and what doesn’t work for me.

“I have so many plans for my future. I’ve been working on my Adult Achievement Award which is almost complete. In the back of my mind I always wanted to do a Master’s in Art Therapy, so I’ve decided that this will be the next step for me. To others considering doing the LMC, I’d say it’s well worth it. There are so many subjects that have helped me, and my life has gotten so much better.”





Elaine’s story

“I attended a Mindfulness in Nature course that Thistle offered. Going to this really helped me to have something scheduled to do each week. Previously I had lots of routine in my life and the exercises taught me to observe the little things in nature and be more present and in the moment.

“I have learned that things change all the time, and these changes influence my life. I have learned that although I’ve been through a lot of change, I still have my spot in life. I watched a little plant and how it still found a way to grow and survive even although it was difficult – I thought about my own self and it made me reflect about my role as a Mum. The little plant still found a way to grow, even on top of a wall against all odds.

“I have learned that although I’ve been through a lot of change, I still have my spot in life.”

“I have also learned about what really matters to me in life. I have spent a lot of time reflecting and realise that people do need me, and I need to get myself better to help others but in a different way now.

“Using the memories from nature, especially the little plant growing through the crack on the wall, was very symbolic for me, and I would never have noticed such a thing if I hadn’t done the course with Thistle.”

Improving the Cancer Journey

We’re proud to have continued to host Midlothian’s Improving the Cancer Journey programme, which supports people with a cancer diagnosis and their family or carers by focusing on non-clinical issues.

In 2022-23, 107 people have had an appointment and a Holistic Needs Assessment which focuses on the individual, their needs and wants.

The team also trialled how they can better work with GPs to support patients. The trial took place in one GP practice and was focused on enabling patients to be more prepared, making best use of their time with their GP and to consider the benefits of having an Improving the Cancer Journey Practitioner working more closely with the GP and the patient as a “patient partner”.

“I think the test of change has shown enormous potential and proof of concept. The patients I have been directly involved with have spoken very highly of Dawn and she has brought a prepared patient (and a prepared GP) together for some significant conversations which have saved GP time, improved the cancer journey and improved patient care.”

Dr Peter Kitchin

Support in Fife

The Fife Neurological Wellbeing Programme was grant funded between April and October 2022. The programme supported 35 people, with a successful engagement rate of 74%. Our Health and Wellbeing team continue to support people in Fife through our national wellbeing programme.

During this period, we also secured funding to provide support specifically focused on mental wellbeing. This involved supporting people primarily in Leven, Glenrothes and Dunfermline who were experiencing ongoing physical or mental health conditions, or challenging life situations. This service has been a hybrid remote service, with one of our practitioners based in Airlie Medical Practice in Fife.

Supporting People in Edinburgh

At Thistle we are committed to delivering person-centred support via 1:1 sessions, courses and supported physical activities for people living in Edinburgh.

In the last year, we have supported over 140 people through 1:1 sessions, offering over 800 appointments, and running four Lifestyle Management Courses.



Vivien’s story

“This time last year, I was struggling to deal with the symptoms from Covid, and I spent Christmas and New Year in isolation and was confined to my bedroom, unable to even join my family for Christmas dinner. I had found out a month earlier that my sister had cancer, which was devastating. It started off in her kidney – which was treatable – but it then transpired that it was on her spine, and things got progressively worse. Everything felt like it was spiralling downwards.

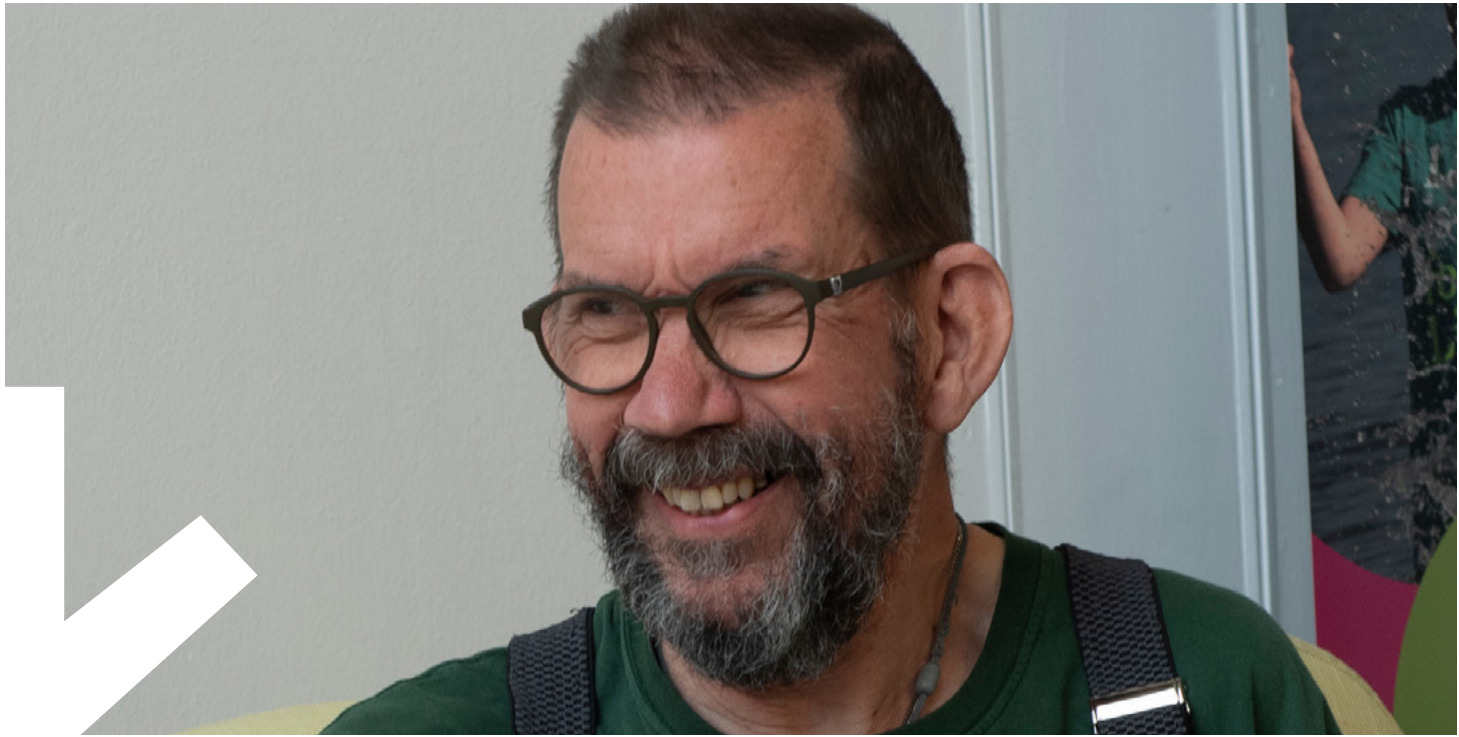
“There was no judgement from anyone, and it felt like we were all in the same boat and there to support each other.”

“The fatigue from the long Covid was horrendous. I would go to work, come home, fall asleep, have my tea and fall asleep again for the night. I had no quality of life at all. I was really struggling with my sister’s illness as well. I felt like I couldn’t show how upset I was when I was with her – I wasn’t able to process how I was feeling at all. It was horrific.

“I’m so grateful that I decided to reach out to my GP, who suggested I get in touch with Thistle. I referred myself for support and I started seeing a Wellbeing Practitioner, which helped me to have a more positive outlook on life. She taught me breathing exercises and I started to be able to relax. That also helped me sleep better, which meant I could start taking things in my stride more. It had all these positive knock-on effects. She got me to start keeping a diary of my activities and how I was feeling: this showed me that there were certain things which knackered me more than others, so I could manage my energy levels and pace myself better.

“I then started on the Lifestyle Management course which was great. There was no judgement from anyone, and it felt like we were all in the same boat and there to support each other. The pacing really helped me as well – without having learned that, I don’t think I’d have been able to build my hours back up at work.

“When I think about my life before finding Thistle, it’s like night and day. I wasn’t coping with my symptoms, and I was really struggling with how my quality of life had changed.



Pete’s story

“At the time of my stroke in March 2019 I was CEO of a small Scottish charity, Positive Prison? Positive Futures, a peer-led organisation working to improve the Scottish justice system based on the lived experience of people who served time in Scottish prisons.

“After the first few years I got a bit carried away and obsessed with it all. I got to the stage where I was more focused on campaigning than how I was as a human being. So, at a board meeting in Glasgow, I collapsed with a stroke caused by a brain haemorrhage. I lost my vision and my voice, as well as control of the left side of my body. I was in Glasgow then Edinburgh Royal Infirmary before I was transferred to the Astley Ainslie Hospital. That was where, instead of simply being kept alive, I was being helped to have a future.

“After over four months in hospitals, I was discharged and referred to the Edinburgh Community Stroke Service for a wide range of things to do with building self-confidence physically, emotionally and psychologically. That all stopped with the onset of the pandemic.

“My journey to Thistle was started after a friend heard one of their practitioners speaking at an event about the

organisation’s work and encouraged me to get in touch. When I first came to Thistle, I had no idea what to expect. Despite all the physio I’d done, I was far from comfortable about the idea of coming to a gym but found it both welcoming and spacious. It was quite busy when I arrived and the staff were very friendly. There was no sense of being patronised or mollycoddled. It was all done without judgment.

“The difference Thistle has brought to my life is immense.”

“Through coming to the gym, I discovered that I could readily accept help, something I’d found hard to do before. To begin with it would take two or three people to help me on and off the cross-trainer and rowing machine, but once I was on the equipment, I’d be okay. Now I can use these machines unaided. The difference Thistle has brought to my life is immense. People who knew me before and since my stroke can see straight away that I’m quite different in the way I now stand and move, and that I’m quite active. It’s been a remarkable experience.”

Supported physical activity

Thistle gym and Thistle Outdoors supported a wide range of people and over the course of this last year, we’ve seen an increase in the number of people coming to us looking to improve their mobility to counter the negative impact of living with the ongoing effects of the pandemic.

Thistle Gym

In 2022-23 we have seen a significant return to, and increased usage of our gym with 292 memberships, 120 of which were renewals!



These days, I’m not back to how I was before I got Covid, but I’m able to do so much more than a year ago.

“I’m also beginning to enjoy life again. I was always thinking about things negatively and expecting something bad to happen. Since Thistle, my outlook is much more positive. Before, I would go to work and be really stressed, wondering if I’d be able to get through the day. Now, I don’t think like that. Now, I know I can do it – in the way I want to do it – because I’ve got the tools and skills that I learned at Thistle.”



Thistle Outdoors

Thistle Outdoors continued to deliver community-based outdoor projects which aim to address the negative impacts of a sedentary lifestyle and the impacts of loneliness and isolation.

Our adaptive bike sessions run in Craigmillar and Saughton Park, providing inclusive cycling opportunities to local people. This year, we’ve seen an increase in the number of people taking part, with over 4,000 pedal journeys taking place!



Thistle YP (Young People)

Our Thistle Young Person’s team is a dynamic and collaborative project that, this year, has supported 134 young disabled people and their families/ carers, as they transition from school to adult life.

We have continued to deliver the Big Plan, (which supports young people and their families, to make plans for the future) offer peer support through Parents’ Plus and run a Summer of Fun programme.

The team also piloted our sport and art themed school engagement programme and have reached more people via a relationship with Edinburgh Sick Children’s through Ronald McDonald House!





Paul's story

"I'm an ex-serviceman and served in the first gulf war and a few other places around the world. After that I had a lot of physical jobs working as a bin man, doorman, etc. Everything was going ok until a few years ago when my wife's brother died in Iraq after joining the military on my recommendation, that's when I started to not feel ok.

"Work started to become really difficult to cope with. Points of tension were feeling tricky to let go of and I was starting to have really dark thoughts. Things had gone downhill really quickly and daily life was a struggle.

"We made a few changes to help for my wellbeing at that point, like moving from the city to the country, which was good, but it didn't stop things feeling so difficult. I contacted the GP and went on medication, but nightmares started during this time. I started to shut down completely and didn't speak to friends. On top of that, there were ongoing stressors at work with covid compliance, and I

ended up getting covid really badly, to the point where I was in hospital. After 33 days I got out of hospital, but there was no long-term ongoing support afterwards. I was not in a good place myself and never had physical strength to do anything, which really impacted on my mental wellbeing. The brain fog was also bad as well, to the point that I forgot names of people in my own family.

"When you talk to the people from Thistle, they listen. The fact that someone was there to listen made such a difference, and I felt so heard."

"After reaching out to my GP and not getting enough support, I found Thistle and started speaking to a

practitioner there on a regular basis. Over time, I started to open up more and attended a Lifestyle Management Course. It was really great being in a room with people who just understood it. I would talk about struggling to walk up the stairs and everyone else would nod along because they got it, they had similar experience of fatigue or ongoing health issues. The course was like a safety net, like having a big brother who understood things. I went on a second course a bit later on, which was even better. I felt that I engaged with the topics more and absorbed the practices more. I've stayed in touch with people from the course too, so have built a bit of a community around it.

"Throughout this I was still chatting to my practitioner at Thistle, which was really lifesaving at some points. When you talk to the people from Thistle, they listen. The fact that someone was there to listen made such a difference, and I felt so heard. After hearing me talk about my experience

in the military, she suggested that I attend one of the Veterans Lifestyle Management Courses at Thistle. I have a complicated relationship with the military, so I had my reservations, but it was actually great. There was that bond with the other veterans, because we had something in common, most of us had a service number. This course put me in a better place physically and mentally.

"I'm still now housebound, I still have the same physical and mental health issues, but Thistle changed things, and I'm hoping to still be involved again. Doing the simple things like the chair aerobics was really helpful, and the pacing of the course really helped me engage with the information. I honestly believe that Thistle has kept me alive. Thistle has given me so much, and I can't thank them enough."

Supporting veterans

Thistle has a proud history of supporting veterans. We offer personalised support, Lifestyle Management Courses, referral services and supported physical activity.

Over the course of the year, we have supported 37 veterans, the majority of whom were new referrals.

57% of the veterans that are referred into our wellbeing programme come to us specifically for our outcomes-focused Lifestyle Management Course which supports coping, confidence and resilience.

Over the course of the year

we have supported
37 veterans
the majority of whom were **new referrals**



“It’s a friendly, welcoming group and everyone’s ideas are valid and listened to. There’s been input from various artists which is also exciting. They show us different techniques and offer encouragement which is good for your self-esteem. The group also helps to reduce isolation, it’s a good way to meet people and to socialise”.

Art Group Participant



Connecting Craigmillar

Our Connecting Craigmillar team have continued to support a range of community-based projects including leading on the internationally renowned Craigmillar and Niddrie Community Festival and supporting with various groups and events in the area. Here are a few that have stood out!

Craigmillar Art Club were supported by our team to create, print and distribute a book: ‘Buildings of Craigmillar and Niddrie’. The book features paintings by local artists of culturally and historically significant buildings and the group held an exhibition as part of ArtWalk Porty.

‘**Let the People Sing**’ is group of local residents with lived experience of addiction and recovery, the group led to the opening of The Bothy (a community-led and run recovery hub) and supported the set-up of the Craigmillar and Niddrie Recovery Forum with a focus on peer-led recovery advocacy in the community and improving services for people in recovery.

Bereavement group worked in partnership with the Richmond Church, the weekly peer-led Syrian Men’s group and their engagement with the Scottish Parliament, the development of three volunteer led ESOL groups at the Kurdish-Turkish centre in Niddrie, the tapestry group and the Sports Social Club at the Jack Kane.

The team continued to develop many collaborations and partnerships with local organisations including

- | | |
|--|--|
| ➔ Places For People | ➔ Turning Point |
| ➔ Richmond Church | ➔ Craigmillar Alliance Trust |
| ➔ Starpic Youth Project | ➔ GP Link Workers (Carr-Gomm) |
| ➔ St. Teresa’s Youth Club | ➔ Pir-Der Abdal Sultan Cultural Centre |
| ➔ Mental health nurses | ➔ Cemevi |
| ➔ The Edinburgh Alcohol and Drugs Partnership (EADP) | ➔ and others! |

“This is a beautiful group who has produced wonderful work that goes way beyond the group, making friendships and fostering talent. Brilliant!!”

Art Group Participant



Fundraising

We'd like to say a huge THANK YOU to our fundraisers and people who give to Thistle.

Over the course of this last year, you raised £155,446 allowing us to provide vital support to ensure that a health crisis does not become a life crisis for people living with long-term health conditions.

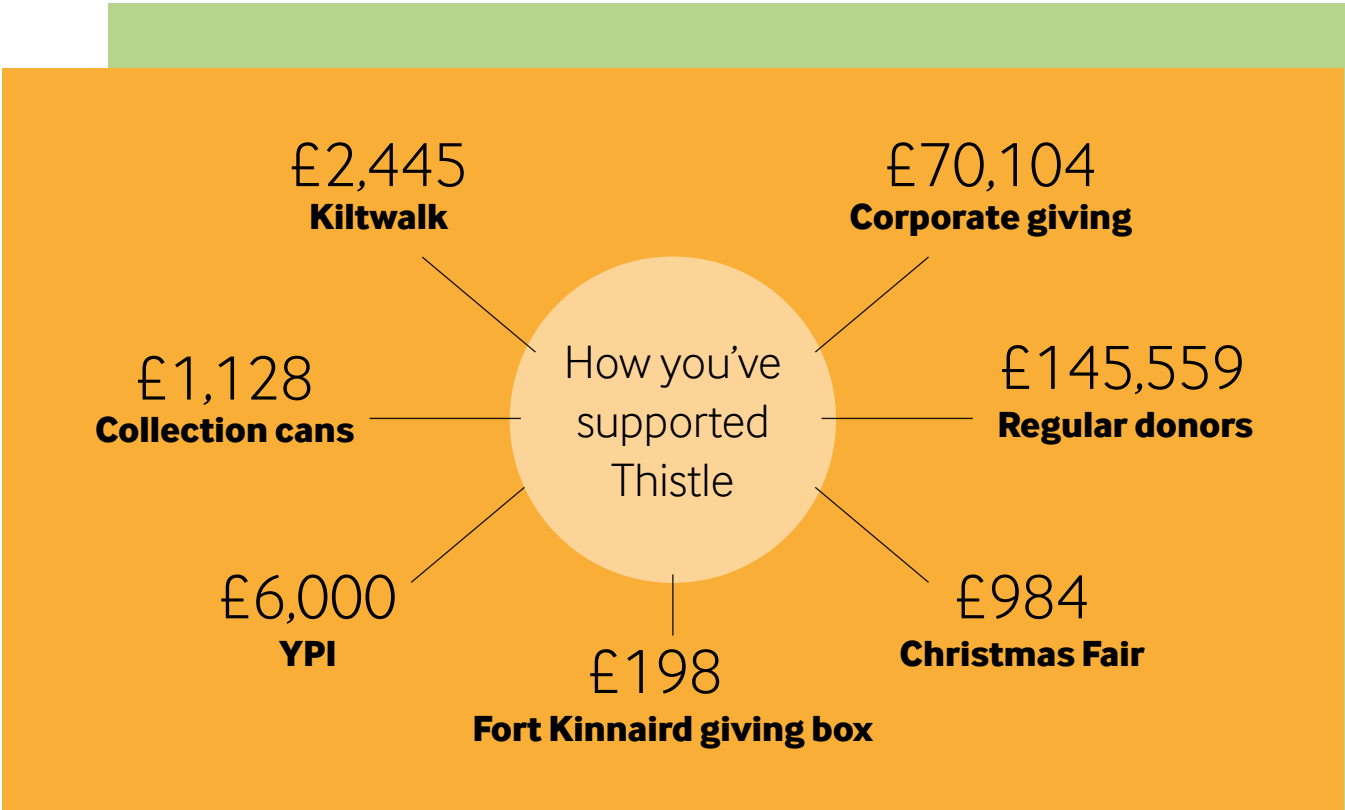
Here are some of the highlights of how our amazing community enabled us to support people across Scotland.

Kinross Tangent

Kinross Tangent raised money for Thistle at their Scottish Regional Tangent Lunch in September. Julie, Chair of Kinross Tangent, said: “The raffle raised £720 for Thistle Foundation, which was extremely important to us as we wanted to support a smaller Scottish charity. Zoe Galbraith [who was supported by Thistle] was a guest speaker and her speech brought tears to the eyes of many and was very inspirational.”

Youth and Philanthropy Initiative (YPI)

This summer, we were delighted when two groups of local students chose to represent Thistle in their schools’ YPI Scotland initiatives. The teams from George Watson’s College and Lasswade High School won £3,000 each for Thistle with their presentations, which highlighted stories from Malcolm and Brian. Thank you to James, Emma, Adam and Leo from George Watson’s College, and Cara, Eilidh, Keryn and Hannah from Lasswade High School.



Kiltwalk

This year, 12 people took part in the Edinburgh Kiltwalk. From the 21-mile Mighty Stride to the 4-mile Wee Wander, and the 13-mile Big Stroll in between, we had fundraisers walking every route to raise much-needed funds for Thistle. Our fundraisers included Aaron from Fife and his team of Thistle Personal Assistants, a group from get2gether (a disability charity based at Thistle) and Thistle colleagues, old and new. Thanks to the fantastic efforts of our Kiltwalkers the group raised a grand total of £2,444!

“I wanted to support Thistle’s work so it could continue – it provides much more than support; it is making sure people can live their life to the full!”

Sharon, Fundraised for Thistle

In memory and legacy giving

£26,896 was raised through generous legacy and in memoriam donations, for which we are so grateful. Leaving a gift in your Will to Thistle or donating in memory of a loved one is a wonderful tribute and a meaningful way to keep their legacy alive.



In 2022-23 we're delighted to have seen our training and consultancy support services (Thistle Learning) grow substantially. With an increase in post-pandemic demand for our support, the team delivered more face-to-face training in Good Conversations with organisations such as Fife's employability services, The William Quarriers Epilepsy Centre and MacMillan's Improving the Cancer Journey.

➔ **How are we funded?**
We charge consultancy fees for delivering training and development.

Thistle Learning

What we do

Thistle Learning supports services within the health and care system to improve their person-centred practice.

Improvements typically support services to move away from a reductionist view of illness and disability and toward a more holistic, wellness approach. Practitioners are trained to adopt more collaborative approaches which focus on outcomes (what matters to people and what they want) and strengths (what people already know and are doing).

Knowing what matters to people, and knowing their strengths supports practices such as shared decision-making and care and support planning. It also enables more effective use of limited resources by tailoring this resource to fit exactly with what people need to achieve the outcomes that matters to them.



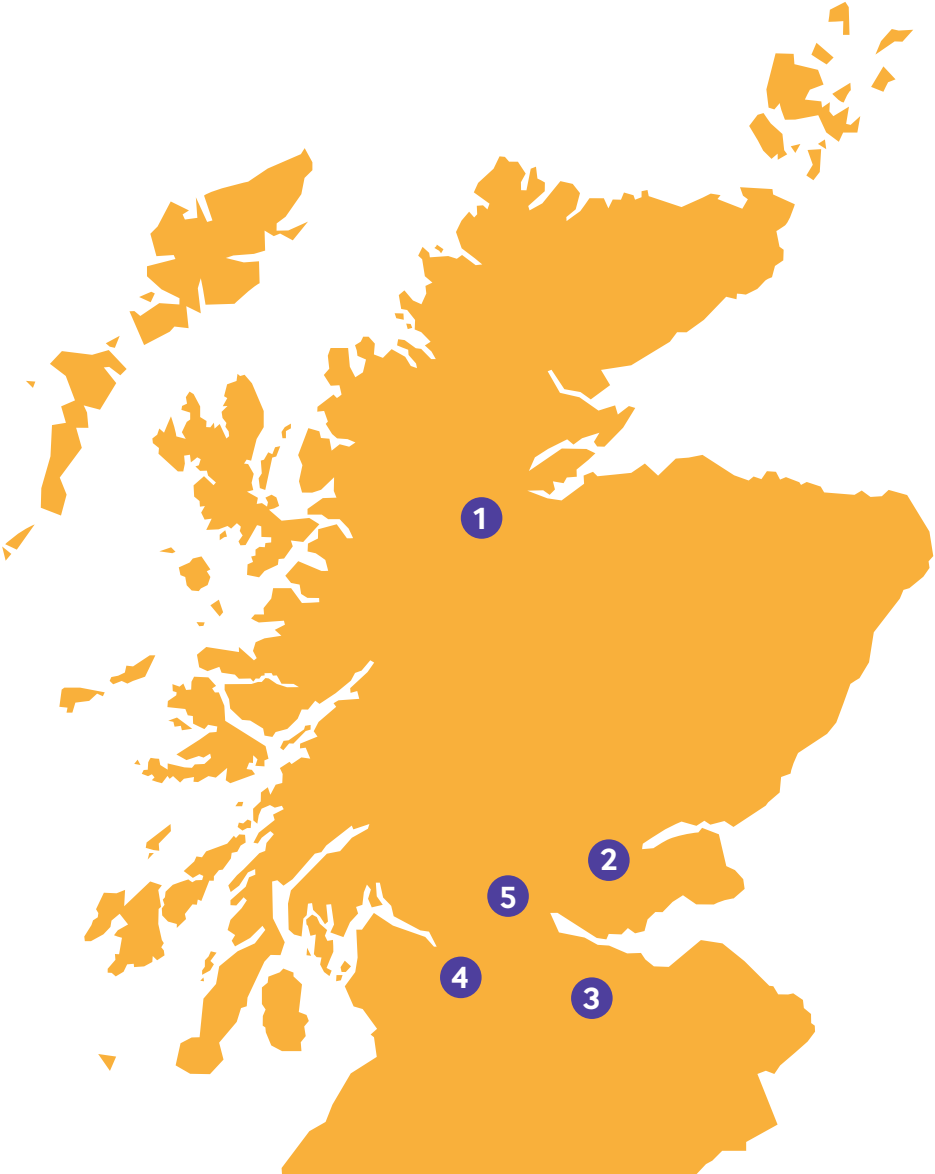
Once for Scotland

In October 2022, we received funding from the Scottish Government to support the implementation of their Person Centred Rehabilitation and Recovery Strategy: Once for Scotland. This exciting development gives us the opportunity to embed the Thistle Approach across health and social care sectors nationally.

Between October 2022 and March 2023, we made connections with five health boards across Scotland, including NHS: Forth Valley, Greater Glasgow, Highland, Lothian and Tayside.

NHS Health boards

- 1 Highland
- 2 Tayside
- 3 Lothian
- 4 Greater Glasgow
- 5 Forth Valley



“It’s been great to see engagement across so many health boards, councils and third sector organisations. There is a real desire by practitioners to learn new ways of working with people to have Good Conversations about what matters whilst also designing services so that the person feels they are a partner in their care. This creates greater capacity to provide rehabilitation and supported self-management to those accessing their services.”

Tracy McLeod, Once for Scotland Project Consultant



Our teams have provided an average of
10,262 hours
of support a week – that's almost
534,000 hours per year!

Supported living

Our Supported Living teams are made up of skilled Personal Assistants and Wellbeing Practitioners who support disabled people in Edinburgh, the Lothians and Fife. They are human rights defenders who are committed to working alongside people and supporting them to live lives of meaning and purpose in their local community.

Over the course of this last year, recruiting into the social care sector has been challenging. Despite this, our teams have remained resilient, living our values and delivering person-centred support to over 100 people!



“Eliot’s newfound confidence didn’t just stay on the farm. It spilled over to other areas of his life as well.”

Eliot’s story

Eliot’s journey of overcoming fear and building confidence around animals has been nothing short of inspiring. Lockdowns hit everyone hard, but for Eliot, a person supported by Thistle Foundation, it meant a complete shutdown of his routine. As someone who requires additional support, Eliot found himself isolated and cut off from the world.

As lockdown restrictions began to ease, Eliot started venturing out with his support workers. In January 2022, Julie joined Eliot’s team and they started exploring new activities. One day, they went to Claireville Alpacas, a farm that housed a variety of animals. Eliot had never had any pets of his own, and he was always wary of animals. When he saw Bambi, the alpaca, for the first time, he froze. The only thing he could do was cling on to Julie and stand three feet away from Bambi.

But something changed that day. As they spent more time at the farm, Eliot started to let his guard down. With Julie by his side, he tentatively approached Bambi and rubbed him gently. It might have seemed like a small thing, but it was a giant leap for Eliot. From that day on, Eliot’s outlook

changed completely. He started looking forward to visiting the farm once a month, and Bambi became his new best friend.

Eliot’s newfound confidence didn’t just stay on the farm. It spilled over to other areas of his life as well. He started interacting with Julie’s dog, whom he used to be afraid of, and now enjoys visiting him each week. In the end, Eliot’s transformation is a testament to the power of resilience, patience, and love. With the right support and environment, anyone can overcome their fears and build confidence.



Training our teams

At Thistle, we nurture our teams and value the skilled role they have in supporting people – our family, friends and neighbours – to live good lives.

Thistle Academy is our innovative approach to providing high quality ongoing learning and development, where our colleagues can hone their skills in practicing the craft of providing excellent person-centred support.

What is Thistle Academy?

Our Academy Programme is made up of three key stages:

Six-week Foundation Course – an introduction to Thistle and our approach to person-centred support focuses on developing human relationships and practicing important relational skills and competences when working with people.

Person-Centred Principles into Practice - A course designed to deepen your knowledge of person-centred practice when you have worked with us for at least a year and completed all your initial training.

SVQ Accreditation - We will fund and support you to achieve your SVQ Level 3 Health and Social Care qualification.

In the last year
51 people
have taken part in our
six-week foundation course

“I worked in architectural designs and construction back in Nigeria before coming to Scotland, so everything I heard and learnt at the Academy was new to me.

“The most important take away from the Academy for me, is the person-centred approach. I don’t see working here as a job because it feels more like a lifestyle. I support the person I work with to feel in control of his life and decisions.”

Ubong Effiong

Service Development Team

For some of the people we support routine, structure and predictability is really important to ensure that their support is effective and works well for them. For some people, if their support is not routinely structured and predictable this can lead to periods of significant stress and/or distress and ultimately the person may then communicate in ways that challenge other people around them. Ensuring that people get this type of support if they need it requires skilled communication, consistency, and a disciplined focus on what matters to the person.

In 2022, the Scottish Government published the Coming Home Implementation Report which outlines that, “Everybody with a learning disability and complex care need who can should be able to live in their own home, supported by specialist staff.” At Thistle, in order to ensure sufficient resources are available to work with people who need this type of support, we have set up the Service Development Team.

There are around
300 people
with a learning disability or autism
living in hospitals in Scotland



Alice’s story

When I first started, Alice’s team was breaking down. Alice was communicating her distress by hurting staff and damaging property. It quickly became evident that she was communicating that she did not feel safe. If you think about a time that you have not felt safe, imagine not being able to voice that, what would you do to try and get people to understand?

“The first thing we did was introduce a stable team around Alice. A team that saw the real Alice, who is funny, smart and caring. The team ensured structure, predictability and routine which is hugely important to Alice. Having this in place, we were then able to voice to other professionals that the main times Alice was in distress was around seizure activity which we could evidence through the meticulous records we kept. This led to Alice being assessed in The William Quarriers Scottish Epilepsy Centre and a referral to the neurology department. Alice has had new seizure medication that has been introduced, it is early days but it seems her seizures are reducing.

“Since the introduction of the Service Development Team, Alice has been less distressed. Her team works with her to support her to do the things she enjoys in life: going to Jump In, getting her hair and nails done, going out for lunch and being a part of a choir called Forget-Me-Notes.”

Carrie Newland, Service Development Lead.

Alice’s mum, Elaine adds, ‘Alice has complex needs. Predominantly she has intractable epilepsy and severe autism. She also has learning difficulties, challenging behaviours and right-sided hemiplegia. All of these conditions impact upon Alice’s quality of life and prevent her from being independent.

“Alice’s team help her to wash and dress, they cook healthy meals for her and support her in her everyday living. As Alice’s anxiety levels tend to be acute her team are adept at managing her challenging behaviours by appropriate communication and understanding of her neuro-diversity.

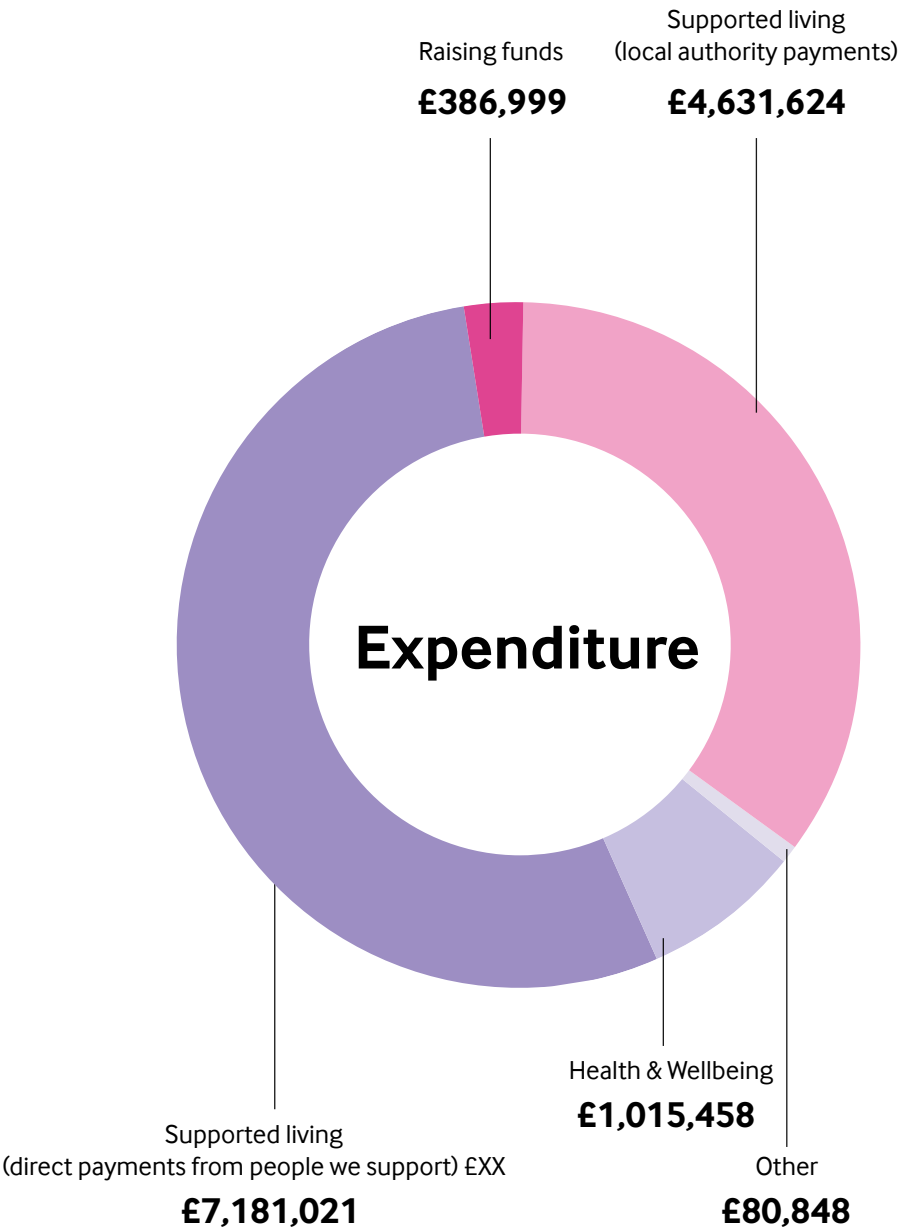
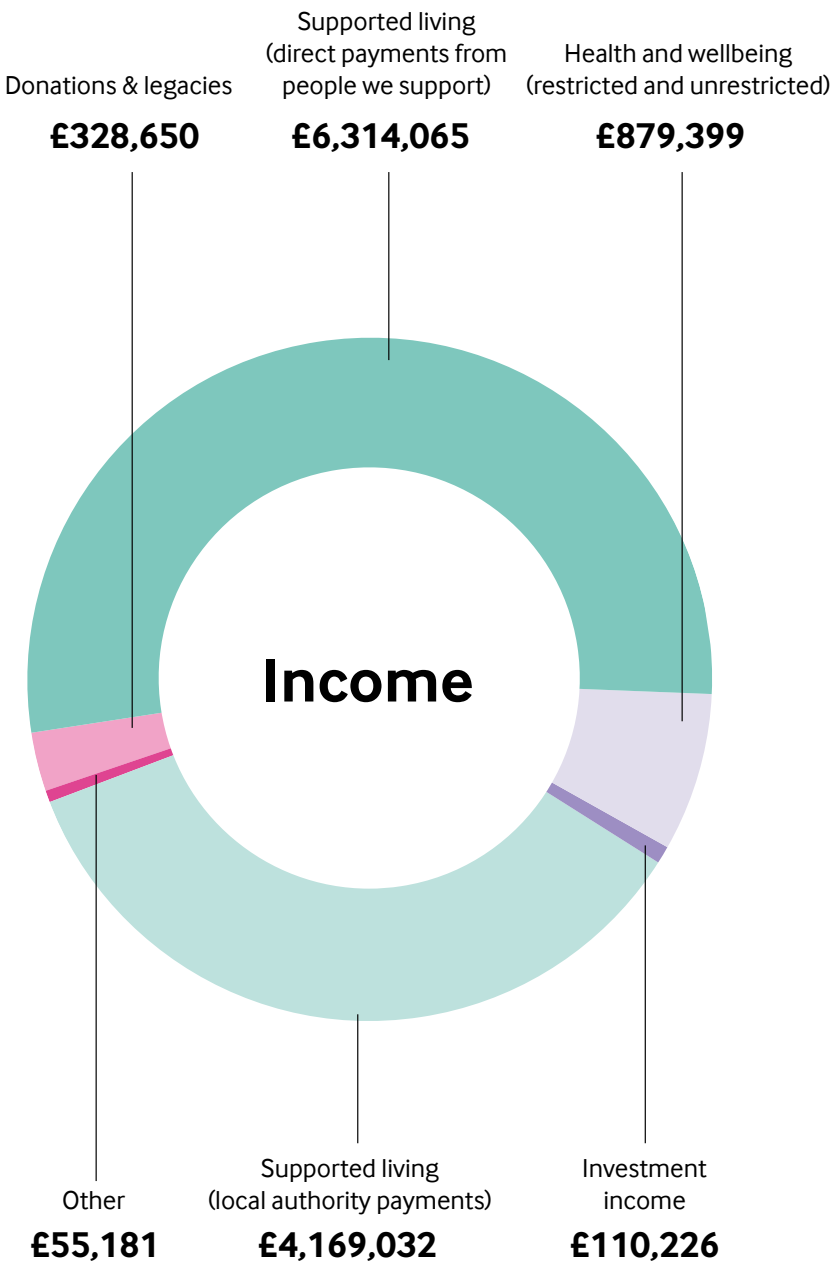
“Alice requires a consistent, predictable, structured approach in all areas of life and when this occurs she is calm, funny and engaging. It is clear to me that Alice feels safe with her team when she is confident enough to sing with a choir, visit the zoo and the National Museum and when she goes trampolining!”

“It is clear to me that Alice feels safe with her team when she is confident enough to sing with a choir, visit the zoo and the National Museum and when she goes trampolining!”

Alice’s mum

Our finances

The support we offer at Thistle Foundation is diverse and we receive funding from a number of sources.





A HUGE Thistle thank you

To our team, the people we support and their families, our amazing
volunteers and to everyone who has supported us over the last year!

