

CASESTUDY: BAIRN BANTER IN THE GLENKENS

KEY INSIGHTS

- ✓ In rural communities with populations spread over large areas, it is vital to nurture connections. Social opportunities are really important for young children, as they impact significantly on children's development. They are also important for parents and carers.
- ✓ Local services are critical for nurturing positive population trends. Bairn Banter has enabled many young families, including those who have moved into the area, to meet socially on a regular basis, to enable children and families to socialise with each other, a critical investment for the future population, economy and community in the area.
- ✓ The loss of a local school can be a real blow to the sustainability of a local community; schools are often the very heart of a community. While there are frameworks to ensure that local schools are not closed without consultation, local authorities are circumventing any community influence over such decisions by mothballing schools (i.e. not officially 'closing' them).
- ✓ Bairn Banter is another example of great things being delivered in rural and island communities by energetic and committed volunteers. This is all part of community resilience and cohesion, but exacts a significant toll on rural and island people. And dependency on volunteering limits how much communities can do. Funding to pay some hours to volunteers who deliver on so many Scottish Government priorities could have a dramatic impact on services and cohesion within rural and island communities.
- ✓ The 'Community Action in Uist and Glenkens' project clearly demonstrates how even small amounts of funding for locally rooted community initiatives can trigger significant action: the returns on the investment are large when communities are enabled to deliver on their priorities, what they are passionate about. This was demonstrated so clearly in practice during the pandemic, but since then funding has often reverted back to the much more highly controlled and outcome-driven processes, with outcomes so often determined by distant policy-makers or funders, rather by communities themselves.
- ✓ In the case of Bairn Banter a small grant of £2,500 has enabled the group to raise match funding and purchase a trailer to take the group's activities to other areas in Glenkens, and to enhance outdoor educational opportunities for young children, all within a few months.



CASESTUDY

Bairn Banter is a volunteer run stay and play children's group based in the rural hill village of Carsphairn in Dumfries & Galloway. The group was established in July 2021 by the founder Melissa Ade and her husband, Ben. Together with their three small children, they continue to provide a welcoming, nurture enriched, inclusive, fun play space for children and their families to attend on a weekly basis for free.

So how did Bairn Banter begin? As the country emerged out of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2021, which caused a detrimental effect on rural communities and young families, it was felt by many local parents and grandparents that there was a lack of social opportunities within the local area for pre-school children. Carsphairn also suffered within the same year with the mothballing of the local primary school, which severed vital connections for young children within the parish. Coupled with the on-going cost of living crisis, social situations seemed to 'dissolve' and many young children begun to struggle without their vital socialising needs being met.

Research carried out by the Institute of Education concluded that; *"children's social background impacts the early development of cognitive and social-emotional competences, like verbal skills, self-control and peer relationships, and their subsequent outcomes in adulthood."* (see [here](#))

All these considerations led Melissa to establish Bairn Banter. To aid with local networking and some experienced support she set to work approaching the Carsphairn Community Council who now offer a very helpful 'umbrella' for the group. As well as children, parents/carers also suffered from lack of social interaction with others, with potential knock-on effects on their social and mental wellbeing and, in the longer term, on the overall economics of the rural area.

Bairn Banter has grown into a much loved asset to the Glenkens, as it is the only pre-school/children's group operating in the area. The group offers a wide variety of fun activities and experiences for children ranging from 0-7 years and always welcomes older children including siblings along. Bairn Banter consistently operates every Saturday morning from 10am – 11.45am in Carsphairn and aims to offer a nourishing healthy snack for both children and adults to support families with potential food poverty issues. Many of the snacks are now being sourced through the Galloway Food Hub.

"The Glenkens is a collection of remote-rural villages in SW Scotland. It has a very low population density, and the population demographic is among the oldest in Scotland. Two of the four themes of the Glenkens and District Community Action Plan are 'A Connected Community' and 'An Economically Flourishing Community'. We know that to flourish, we need young families living and working in the area, but there are very limited private or statutory facilities to support them.

Bairn Banter's stay and play sessions on Saturdays offer important socialisation opportunities for ex-COVID babies who are now pre-schoolers and their older siblings, as well as respite and peer support for parents and carers.

The Glenkens Community and Arts Trust, who lead on delivery of the Community Action Plan, see Bairn Banter as a key partner in delivering these priorities in the Plan."

Helen Keron, Executive Manager, GCAT

As Bairn Banter moves forward into the future, they want to break down the barrier of social exclusion due to transport barriers. Bairn Banter know that they are not reaching all the young families in the area. A particular barrier to attendance is the location of Carsphairn at the top of the Glenkens area. Public transport links to it are basically non-existent. So Bairn Banter is launching a new way of working where they bring Bairn Banter to the other communities in the Glenkens. They did a survey in 2022 that showed that transport was the main barrier to attendance, so they are confident that it will be well received.

With a small amount of funding through the project, quickly matched with funding from the local windfarm, Bairn Banter has now purchased a box trailer that will be used to advertise, store, and transport the group's equipment and resources to occasional free events and other local venues, like Town Halls or outdoor parks, around the wider Glenkens. The first event, outdoors, is booked for 1st June. The word is out that Bairn Banter have the opportunity to be mobile and is sparking interest from other areas.



The group is now awaiting quotes from artists to design and decorate the trailer with a unique mural to help promote Bairn Banter and other aspects of the local area such as farming, renewable energy, local community initiatives, etc. Bairn Banter hopes that when the trailer is 'on tour', many will be drawn to the attractive display and perhaps be encouraged to visit and indeed, down the line, **settle in the area**.

The trailer will allow Bairn Banter to 'branch out' to offer more outdoor learning opportunities to enhance opportunities for outdoor learning for children, young people and their families, and connect communities together within the beautiful outdoor environment. Melissa is working towards obtaining a Level 3 Forest School Leader qualification this year. The trailer will become Bairn Banter's 'mobile welfare base' as well as vital storage of equipment such as waterproofs, water, tools, safety equipment, etc., whilst travelling to areas of woodlands around the Glenkens.

DELIVERING ON SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES

"I have now been coordinating Bairn Banter since June 2021, and over this time span, I have met a wonderful selection of families from many walks of life. Both me and my children have developed some long lasting friendships. Given the current absence of the local mothballed school and the damaging after effects on social and emotional well being from the Covid 19 pandemic, many families have been left feeling socially vulnerable and isolated, as they struggled to meet these essential needs to socialise, and develop vital attachments/social relationships with other peers. I feel confident that Bairn Banter has provided this community need as we continue to provide a consistent, warm, safe, comfortable play space for these families to attend weekly, without the restrictive 'barriers' of an entry fee. Our volunteer run group also ensures that the children and their parents/carers are offered a nutritional snack during the session, as a 'means' to support healthy eating amongst children, and to help with the on-going cost of living crisis and food poverty issues which many families face at present. Bairn Banter welcomes all ages to attend, and we all have lots of fun indoor and out every Saturday morning. I look forward to this essential, fun little group growing into the future, including with the new trailer.

Melissa Ade

Bairn Banter delivers on many Scottish Government Priorities, for example within the National Performance Standards, e.g "we grow up loved, safe and respected so that we realise our full potential", "we live in communities that are inclusive, empowered, resilient and safe", and "we are healthy and active".

While so-called 'remote rural areas' do as well or slightly better than other rural and urban areas in terms of attainment, employment and other positive destinations on leaving secondary school, numeracy and especially literacy levels at primary school are lower in 'remote rural areas' ([Rural Scotland Data Dashboard](#)). This may well reflect the lack of pre-school opportunities in some areas, making community initiatives like Bairn Banter critical for those areas.

Bairn Banter's focus on developing more outdoor education, using the trailer as a mobile facility to take equipment and activities into outdoor spaces, is also delivering on the Scottish Government's commitment, made in *Scotland's National Outdoor Play & Learning Position Statement*, to value and expand opportunities for playing and learning outdoors.

And not least Bairn Banter contributes directly to the Addressing Depopulation Action Plan (2024), by providing a critical local service that connects local families, to each other and to their locality. Creating opportunities and a positive space for young families is vital to ensure a long-term demographic future. The mix of families that have stayed, returned or newly settled in the Glenkens is a striking feature of the Bairn Banter sessions, and provides an important incentive for them to stay.

The Depopulation Action Plan "endorses the importance of local leadership and seeks to exemplify the maxim 'local by default, national by agreement'. We know that a place-based approach to applying national, regional, and local policies will be essential to sustainably and effectively address depopulation." Bairn Banter is one piece in the local jigsaw to deliver on these, and is integrated into the wider local strategies set out in the Glenkens and District Community Action Plan, which includes delivering on local childcare as a priority for a flourishing local community.

Playing outdoors is fundamental.

All children and young people have the right to play and the right to learn as enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Playing outdoors enhances learning and is fundamental for children and young people to thrive in health, wellbeing and development.

It is our shared responsibility to support and enable all of Scotland's children and young people to access our diverse greenspaces and natural landscapes and to empower them to enjoy these spaces for the purposes of playing and learning. We commit to working together to meet these responsibilities.

LINKS FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

The Glenkens & District Community Action Plan at <https://glenkens.scot/community-groups/community-action-plan-steering-group>

The Glenkens Community and Arts Trust at <https://gcat.scot/about-gcat/>

The Galloway Food Hub at <https://gallowayfoodhub.org.uk/>

Scotland's National Outdoor Play & Learning Position Statement: <https://inspiringscotland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/National-Position-Statement-Dec-2020.pdf>



Community Action in
Uist and Glenkens

Glenkens
Community
& Arts Trust

