



**Social  
Firms**  
Scotland

## **Briefing Paper**

# **Reuse, Repair & Recycling: The role of Social Firms**

## **Case Studies:**

**Glasgow Wood Recycling**

**Kintyre Recycling**

**LAMH Recycle**

**Spruce Carpets**

## This Briefing

The aim of this briefing is to highlight the significant role that Reuse, Repair and Recycling social enterprises play in using their activities to create pathways to work and real jobs for people furthest from the labour market.

It profiles 4 member Social Firms working in a variety of industry sectors, managing waste resources at a local level through recycling, reuse, repair and waste reduction activities.

These case studies give a flavour of how these members meet both environmental and social objectives

- Creating a more sustainable society by helping reduce waste and save resources
- Creating a fairer, more equitable society by providing employment, training and meaningful activity for some of Scotland's most vulnerable and socially excluded individuals.

"There's a real opportunity for social enterprises and social firms across Scotland to respond to the climate change crisis. This global environmental problem urgently needs a local community response. There are many simple and easy to implement ideas such as starting a repair cafe, tool library or community fridge, both tackling climate change and providing wider community benefits. Care for planet and care for people often goes hand in hand."

*Michael Cook, Chief Executive, CRNS*

## Social Firms

A social enterprise (SE) is a business that trades to meet a social purpose (please see the [code](#), the voluntary code of practice for social enterprises in Scotland for more information). They address social needs, strengthen communities, improve people's life chances and protect the environment.

A Social Firm is a specific type of social enterprise, its social mission is to create employment and meaningful work *within the enterprise* for people furthest from the labour market – in particular, people with a disability (including mental ill health and learning disabilities) a substance misuse issue, a prison record, a homelessness issue and young people.

Social Firms operate in many market sectors, offering an inclusive workplace environment – where people are valued for their abilities, encouraged to participate and supported to achieve. Contributing to social and economic inclusion, Social Firms can act as a stepping stone for some people on their way to open employment, or serve as the ultimate employment goal for others who may have difficulty retaining a job in a mainstream company.

Social Firms recognise that for people experiencing barriers to employment - social inclusion is as important as employability, and that a focus on work integration should also be accompanied by a commitment to social integration.

## Reuse, Repair, Recycle: The Circular Economy & Social Enterprises

The world's population is growing, its resources are finite and waste is a significant environmental problem. One route to improving resource efficiency and reducing waste is to develop a 'circular economy'. In simple terms this involves keeping products and resources in use for as long as possible through recovery, reuse, repair, remanufacturing and recycling – to maximise resources.

Products are designed smartly with their whole life cycle in mind, re-used and repaired to extend their useful life, and then when their life is deemed over, remanufactured to create new products from old. In a circular economy, products and materials keep circulating in a high value state of use, through supply chains, for as long as possible.

In addition to protecting the environment, the Circular Economy potentially offers substantial economic benefits and the opportunity to make a valuable contribution to improving Scotland's labour market inequalities – through a social enterprise approach it can have significant potential to provide quality employment for people, particularly targeting those with complex barriers to work.

Social Enterprises provide a genuine person-centred, asset based approach, building in sufficient flexibility to adapt to an individual's unique circumstances, allowing them to progress at a pace they can sustain. A significant number of social enterprises working in the circular economy are committed to providing a range of jobs, training and meaningful activity at all skill levels to suit the abilities, talents and interests of vulnerable and disadvantaged people who are often socially and economically excluded. In addition to gaining (transferable) skills and experience, individuals also gain a sense of self-worth, pride and confidence.

## Policy Context

The main benefit of having a circular economy is the same as the reason why it is needed: that once operational, a circular economy is a practical solution to the world's emerging resource crisis.

Moving to a circular economy will contribute to the Scottish Government's aim of sustainable economic growth. It has the potential to increase productivity and create jobs, whilst reducing carbon emissions and preserving valuable raw materials. Evidence suggests that shifting to a circular economy could be worth up to £1.5bn to Scotland's economy and save around 11 million tonnes of greenhouse gases per year by 2050.

In its [2010 Zero Waste Plan](#), Scottish Government has several ambitious targets for reducing waste and increasing recycling. By 2025, they aim to:

- reduce total waste arising in Scotland by 15% against 2011 levels
- reduce food waste by 33% against 2013 levels
- recycle 70% of remaining waste
- send no more than 5% of remaining waste to landfill

In addition, they are working to reduce Scotland's greenhouse gas emissions by 66% by 2032.

In 2015, the Scottish Government launched its first [Circular Economy Strategy](#) for Scotland titled "[Making Things Last](#)" in which the priorities for moving towards a more circular economy were set out.

The environmental impact of social enterprise reuse and recycling services is also intrinsically aligned to Scottish Government's [Climate Change agenda](#), and transitioning to a low carbon Scotland to help deliver sustainable economic growth and create a greener, fairer and healthier Scotland.

### SE Strategy and Action Plan

The Social Enterprise Strategy 2016-2026 recognises that social enterprises are making a particular contribution to inclusive growth, a fairer Scotland and improving the lives of Scotland's citizens. It acknowledges the key role that social enterprises play in promoting equality and tackling inequalities; stating 'social enterprises have been shown to deliver fair work and well paid jobs' highlighting their ability to '*unlock the full potential of people furthest from the labour market*'

Under the 10-year Strategy, Scottish Government makes the following commitment: *We will step-up our support to Work Integration Social Enterprises. This includes finding creative ways to enable Social Firms to take on employees with higher support needs (including the use of targeted wage incentives) and to enable an expanded base of Supported Businesses to flourish commercially and sustain employment for disadvantaged and disabled people.*

Social Firms are businesses that generate income through trade, however there are costs to providing person-centred support to people with complex needs and these costs are not always able to be covered through their trading activity. The Social Enterprise Strategy acknowledges that the contribution of social enterprise remains fragile as '*by nurturing some of Scotland's most vulnerable individuals, they incur higher employee support costs, lower productivity and reduced profitability and that this situation is not always recognised or adequately compensated.*'

### Census

The Social Enterprise Census 2019 demonstrates the scale, reach, and contribution of social enterprises. It reveals the extent to which social enterprises actively work with and seek to extend opportunities to people often considered furthest from the labour market. The evidence from Scotland's social enterprise census (total: 6025 social enterprises)

- 79% of SE employ more than half with workforce from area(s) in which the SE is based
- 69% employ previously unemployed people

- 55% employ someone with a disability or long term health condition
- 56% of SE employ young people under 25 years and 42% employ young people that were previously unemployed
- 69% provide training or support intended to improve employability
- 31% have 'providing training for employment' as one of their main organisational goals

The Census also shows that 28% of social enterprises have an explicit remit to protect or improve the environment, with 20% committed to reducing waste. In terms of activities 179 social enterprises (3% of the total) carry out work in Environment and Recycling, and employ the full-time equivalent of 1577 employees.

## Resources

[Community Resources Network Scotland](#) (CRNS) is the national membership body representing and supporting reuse, repair and recycling social enterprises. Together their members diverted over 37,000 tonnes of material from landfill, achieved an estimated net saving of 75,000 tonnes of CO2 and an annual turnover of £75 million. Active in all 32 local authority areas, latest figures show CRNS members employ 1039 staff and utilise 5563 volunteers.

[Zero Waste Scotland](#) exists to create a society where resources are valued and nothing is wasted. Its strategic outcomes are to

- Build the demand for, and supply of, circular economy products, services, and solutions
- Change the way we live, work, and do business, so that consumption is more sustainable and disposal choices prevent waste and increase recycling
- Reduce food and drink waste at home and along the supply chain
- Resource Efficient Scotland: Support the public and private sector components of the Energy Strategy's target to increase by 30% the productivity of energy use across the Scottish economy by 2030

## Social Firms Scotland: Our role

Social Firms Scotland is the national support agency for Social Firms and we operate as part of the wider social enterprise support landscape. We are a membership organisation and have been representing and serving the interests of our members since 2000.

We also facilitate the national Employability Social Enterprise Network (SEN), a wider network of social enterprises delivering employability support services, particularly for people furthest from the labour market. See [www.socialfirms.org.uk](http://www.socialfirms.org.uk) to find out more.

Representation and Policy work is a key part of Social Firms Scotland's role and we take every opportunity to champion our members' work - campaigning for a policy environment that recognises the contribution of Social Firms. We work to ensure Social Firms are recognised, consulted and included as a cornerstone of the employability landscape.



[Glasgow Wood Recycling](#) (GWR) is a social enterprise which finds meaningful ways to reuse and recycle waste wood, reducing wood going to landfill. The enterprise finds creative and socially inclusive ways of transforming this valuable resource into quality products including garden and indoor furniture and designed bespoke pieces. At the same time, GWR provides a wide range of volunteering and training opportunities to local people, as a practical way of tackling unemployment and social exclusion.

## Problem

- People with barriers to work are often very far removed from the job market and need a safe space and time to re-engage with work and people and practice work skills
- The 'fear factor' changing your life is scary and it takes a leap of faith to give up the familiarity and security of benefits. Often people on health-related benefits are penalised for recovery, as this can reduce their income and increase their interaction with DWP
- People have been passed through a range of employability schemes run by private contractors for profit and view themselves as unemployable, have low confidence and self esteem

## Impact

GWR gives people a place to be and a sense of purpose. It is a constant in their lives, a chance to get out of the house, meet a wide variety of people, learn practical skills and increase their confidence. Volunteers and trainees play a very active and valuable role in the business. Their training programme specifically tackles loss, social isolation and loneliness and uses the Dejong Giervald Loneliness scale to measure impact.

## Solution

GWR provides people with opportunities to gain practical work experience and develop social skills to help people adapt to the workplace. Training or volunteering in a real work environment is hugely meaningful and helps people prepare for the demands of employment with the safety net of staying on benefits.

GWR provides a safe environment where people are encouraged to do what they can, when they can; to test the water to see if they are ready to return to work. They take a person-centred approach to employability, offering people support when required. People at GWR want to be there and there is often a waiting list.

## Result

5 GWR staff are former volunteers and another 1 took part in the training programme GWR offer. 16 volunteers have taken part in training opportunities at GWR. This year, 4 volunteers have progressed to employment and 2 have been accepted to start a NQ Furniture Making course at college.





GWR is a charity and Company Limited by Guarantee. They support people with a range of significant barriers to work (including people in recovery, carers and former carers, and people with health conditions or disabilities). They generate around 75% of their total income from trade, the remainder is grant/project funding towards their training and volunteering services.

They are a Revolve accredited retail business; showing their commitment to high quality retail, giving the customer reassurance that second hand and recycled products meet the highest quality standards.

### Testimonial – Individuals

"I liked making things for customers, it makes you feel worthy and appreciate your skills"

"It's learning by doing, not learning by learning"

"This course has really helped me to improve my woodwork skills"

"The environment helps create confidence"

"It was good meeting new people, I felt awkward at first but good to speak to them"

### Vision for Future

Their vision is that volunteers become more involved in the running of the organisation and that they find better ways of engaging them in team meetings and decision-making processes.

### What do you need?

Services to volunteers and trainees has increased significantly in recent years, as has the quality of their offering. They are currently managing this due to the commitment and energy of the existing team but with no proportionate increase in resources. This is clearly a challenge to maintain.

### What advice would you give?

- ✓ You don't need to be experts in training or development. People respond to the informal training approach and genuine interest and concern for them. They work to make the GWR the best that it can be for the people.
- ✓ Soft outcomes are equally, if not more important than hard outcomes when working with people with barriers to employment.

### What would you never change about what you do?

Treating people with respect and as individuals, making time to support them through crisis situations. Having the flexibility to attend appointments with people and advocate on their behalf, being connected within the community and able to signpost people to the most appropriate services



[Kintyre Recycling Limited](#) (KRL) was formed as a community-led response to the need for inclusive employment for people with additional support needs. KRL offers a range of recycling, reuse and waste management services, expanding and diversifying their operations to include kerbside and collection point recycling services, security shredding and customer support staffing of the Civic Amenity site to deliver their social purpose of creating employment opportunities for people furthest from the labour market.

## Problem

- There is a lack of opportunities in Kintyre that are meaningful or challenging for people with barriers to work – particularly in relation to paid work, but also for individuals who may not sustain employment but wish to contribute to society, gain skills and ‘work’
- Changes in employability training opportunities and funding has meant it has become more difficult to provide longer term employment training opportunities
- Opportunities for self-improvement often seem unattainable to people excluded from the labour market

## Impact

16 of their current 24 employees have support needs or other barrier to work, (full and supported part time employment, including permitted work and therapeutic earnings) with progression opportunities offered as their skills and confidence develop. People feel valued, part of a team, and take considerable pride in the work carried out and the social, economic, and environmental benefits to the area.

## Solution

KRL operates as a Social Firm, using business to offer 6 months to 1-year job opportunities for anyone with a barrier to work. All employees play an important role in the business activities of recycling, reuse and waste management services.

KRL provides support to individuals to develop a range of skills, including adult literacy support, driving and machine operation training. Soft skills development is also an integral part of the support provided, assisting individuals to develop confidence, self-esteem, independence, social interaction and physical fitness.

## Result

KRL has supported 37 employment and training opportunities for unemployed people over the last 5 years. 60% have progressed to further employment or training as a positive outcome. The organisation is recognised as a quality provider of employability support by SCVO, Fyne Homes, Capability Scotland, Argyll & Bute Council and DWP.





Kintyre Recycling (predecessor was Campbeltown Waste Watchers) is a Company Limited by Guarantee with Charitable status. Their last audited accounts showed 73% of their income from trade including a council contract; 27% were donations and grants including a proportion for employability. They support and employ people with a range of support needs including Down's syndrome, learning difficulties and people on the autistic spectrum, also people with substance abuse issues, mental ill health and people with convictions.

### Testimonial – Individuals

“Working at Kintyre Recycling has given me a good outlook on life”

“I have been able to learn new skills that I never thought I could so and I love coming to my work”

### What do you need?

New premises are essential for KRL to sustain and grow employment opportunities for local people with additional needs, whilst expanding services to provide affordable furniture. A community-owned building asset will also ensure there are future opportunities to expand and grow from the base to meet local needs. KRL has successfully diversified their business activities over the past 5 years to reduce dependence on a single contract with Argyll & Bute Council.

### Vision for Future

KRL has purchased land as a community asset to develop factory and retail premises (Scottish Land Fund supported this recognising the need for new premises; Big Lottery supported the commission of a project management team). This combined support has enabled KRL to develop plans for a Design and Build construction of the Factory and Retail premises. A tender process identified a preferred contractor and a detailed design/full costing of the project has been established.

Sustainability is an ongoing challenge and with contracts never guaranteed, KRL is working hard to establish a new Reuse project alongside a furniture shop in town as a way of diversifying income streams to secure the ongoing future of the organisation

### What advice would you give?

The joys and benefits for all concerned working with people with a range of barriers and what can be achieved.

### What would you never change about what you do?

The non-judgemental and inclusive ethos that has developed through KRL's model of work which involves people of all abilities, backgrounds and age groups working collectively for environmental and economic benefits locally.



Based in Motherwell, [LAMH Recycle](#) provides safe, efficient and fully licensed IT Waste Management and WEEE Recycling services, mainly recycling cans, cardboard and paper, as well as the refurb and resale of IT equipment. They provide training, volunteering and employment opportunities within a supportive work environment for people facing barriers to employment, offering a variety of roles within the business from admin, customer care, warehouse operatives, van assistants/drivers to baler operatives.

## Problem

- Support for people further from the labour market needs to be more joined up. When individuals are working with multiple agencies, it can be confusing, cause duplication but also mean that one vital element of support to help someone progress is more likely to be missed
- The early stage support is often the most crucial and needed, it is also the hardest to provide and the most difficult to get funded as it does not generate immediate or even shorter term job outcomes. Progression for people with significant barriers to work can go unrecognised but is most meaningful for the individual

## Impact

LAMH Recycle makes a tremendous difference to people's lives and the feedback they receive from individuals and families is what makes it all worthwhile.

In addition to supporting people back into the workforce (whether at LAMH Recycle or more mainstream employment), they also support people who will never work but who want to feel part of society through meaningful activity to help their local community.

## Solution

LAMH Recycle is a one stop shop where individuals can undertake work trials in the many different areas of the business to see where their skillset, interests and talents lie. This naturally builds self-esteem and confidence in the individual.

They provide inclusive and meaningful opportunities for people to learn new skills and improve their chances of finding paid work in the future. As an SQA accredited centre, they can offer work experience that leads to qualifications. Working in the recycling industry also helps individuals gain a variety of useful and transferable skills.

## Result

LAMH Recycle's employability programme for Skills Development Scotland has achieved an average of 93% for qualifications (outputs) and 59% for outcomes across their Stage 2/3 North & South Lanarkshire contracts.

An example: Through LAMH Recycle's partnership with Highlander International 2 males struggling to get into work received a paid work trial and more informal interview. One has been employed there for over a year and promoted, the other for 6 months.



LAMH Recycle is a Company Limited by Guarantee with Charitable Status, as well as being a social enterprise/firm they are also a Supported Business (meaning at least 30% of their paid workforce are disabled or disadvantaged within the labour market). They have a mixed revenue model reflecting their different activities with income streams from employability/training, waste management recycling contracts, with grants at an all-time low of 10%.

They support any individual with barriers to employment who have a long term goal of working, part-time or full-time.

### Testimonial – Trainee

I can't thank you enough for all the support that has been given to me whilst on the programme, especially my supervisor who kept me focused on the right path and encouraged me every step of the way when I had jitters about applying for jobs. If I wasn't for being here I would not be starting my job on Monday. Wish it was here but it's not so thanks again

### Testimonial – Customer

Could I thank you and especially the guys who made the uplift this morning for the manner in which they carried out their duties in a very efficient and professional manner. The job was done and dusted in a matter of minutes. I hope to use your Company again soon for other items that require disposal and will contact you soon

*Police Station*

### Vision for Future

To continue what we are doing, and how we do it with more financial security.

### What do you need?

Some longer term funding to support individuals who for various reasons will never make it into paid employment but do feel tremendous benefit from working at the organisation, whether it be helping their health issues, addiction problems or social isolation.

### What advice would you give?

- ✓ Every day is completely different and every individual is different so the approach to providing support requires flexibility and adaption

### What would you never change about what you do?

Support people who have written themselves off. Make time to provide this support (never let the work become more about figures and outcomes than actually helping and supporting people).



Spruce Carpets is Scotland's only reuse/recycle floor covering social enterprise. They supply high quality, new, unused offcuts and surplus stock carpet, carpet tiles and vinyl (otherwise destined for landfill) to households, Housing Associations and businesses throughout Scotland. This enables Spruce to provide training and work experience opportunities for people who have found themselves excluded from the job market.

## Problem

- There is a lack of training and work placements available to people in Glasgow and surrounding areas, particularly young people furthest from the job market.
- Often mainstream businesses cannot provide the supportive environment people with barriers to work require in order to sustain work.
- These businesses are also not able to be flexible enough to work with individuals who have challenges with attendance

## Impact

### Spruce Carpets

- provides opportunities for those furthest from the jobs market to take the first steps along the employability pipeline in a supportive environment.
- reduces flooring waste going to landfill; increases the amount of reused carpet and vinyl flooring in Scotland
- supplies low cost flooring solutions for sale to members of the public and businesses throughout Scotland.

## Solution

Spruce provides quality floor coverings at affordable prices. They also create training volunteering and employment opportunities - with a variety of roles to suit everyone - within a real business for people furthest from the labour market. They tailor each individual's experience around their needs, ensuring it is a person-centred rather than a one size fits all approach.

Spruce offers a flexible workplace, helping people regain structure and routine into their lives. They operate an open-door policy, no previous skills are needed, as training is provided.

## Result

In the last year, 14 of Spruce's volunteers have moved into paid employment; 4 of those with Spruce. In addition, some participants have moved onto further volunteering and education.

Individuals have reported increased motivation, confidence and self esteem



Spruce Carpets is a Company Limited by Guarantee and a Registered Charity. In 19/20 their total budgeted income is 95% self-generated from the provision of goods and services to domestic, housing association, voluntary sector and commercial customers; 5% is from grants.

Spruce works with individuals who face a wide range of barrier including poor mental health, asylum seekers/refugees, offending behaviour, addictions (substance and alcohol), poor literacy and numeracy, physical health issues and being on the autistic spectrum.

### Testimonial – Trainee

I volunteer at Spruce as it “gives me confidence about working in future and experience of work”. “I enjoy the fun and the laugh and learn new things”.

### Testimonial – Customer

Had four different members of the team come over two / three weeks to fit three bedrooms, kitchen and bathroom. All very friendly. Got the job done fast and would definitely recommend”

### Vision for Future

The continued growth of Spruce to allow for the creation of more employment and volunteering opportunities.

### What do you need?

New larger (or additional) premises would allow the organisation to expand, which in turn would increase the capacity in terms of volunteers and paid staff.

### What advice would you give?

Never try and predict how a volunteer will get on as you can end up looking silly

### What would you never change about what you do?

Spruce would never accept referrals from agencies that make it mandatory for the individual to volunteer within Spruce.

**Social Firms play a key role in promoting equality, significantly contributing to social and economic inclusion, health improvement and improving people’s lives. Because Social Firms are businesses and earn a proportion of their income through trade, they are part of the solution to improving employability of and creating employment for people who experience significant barriers to work**