2025

Annual **Report**

Prepared By :

Kerry Lowe
CEO

Safe Strong Free

Chairwoman Statement

"We aim to continue helping children develop resilience and equip them with the skills they need to become safe, healthy and well-adjusted adults."

The Safe Strong & Free organisation has had another very busy year. Kerry Lowe continues to spearhead new projects aimed at preventing harm to children, whilst continuing the fundamental pre-school sessions empowering children to stay safe. The latter were delivered to 4,998 pre-school children during the last academic year, alongside primary school update sessions.

In recognition of her increased leadership role, Kerry is now recognised as our Chief Executive Officer and Kath Kernaghan, who provides great support to Kerry and the wider team, is now our Project Co-ordinator.

There have been some changes within the team this year and the Board and I would like to record our thanks and best wishes to those who have moved on, including Angela Ogilvie, Norma Holm and Jo Guthrie. We also extend a warm welcome to Saleema Miah & Lorin Cameron.

The organisation continues to apply for and receive widespread sponsorship and grant funding, which is detailed within our accounts, alongside generous support from Highland Council and other funders.

Kerry presented a poster at the International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (ISPCAN) conference last year and this has led to further networking opportunities and international connections.

We are also delighted that Safe Strong & Free has recently been welcomed as an ISPCAN Country Partner.

This year, the Stronger Together project and toolkit have been developed to help schools tackle racism and promote inclusion. The toolkit was launched at an event in the Town House and has received interest from organisations across Scotland.

The Rights & Respect project will be explained later in the programme and I look forward to learning more about this important new initiative.

Deborah MacRae
Chairwoman

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Prevention through Education

Every child deserves to grow up safe, strong and free from abuse. Yet too often, intervention happens only after harm has occurred. We believe the greatest opportunity to protect children lies in prevention, equipping them with the knowledge, confidence and skills to recognise unsafe situations, build healthy relationships and know where to turn for help.

Education is one of the most powerful safeguarding tools available. By creating safe spaces for open conversations from an early age, we help children understand topics such as personal safety, bullying, consent, healthy relationships, inclusion, emotional wellbeing and respect. Prevention not only reduces risk but also empowers children to make informed decisions, challenge harmful behaviours and develop the resilience needed to thrive.

Safe Strong & Free delivers evidence-informed, age-appropriate workshops and resources for children and young people from early years through to secondary school. Alongside our work with children, we provide training and support for parents, carers, educators and professionals, recognising that safeguarding is most effective when entire communities share the knowledge, confidence and responsibility to keep children safe.

Our approach is rooted in children's rights, partnership and early intervention. By working collaboratively with schools, community organisations and statutory partners, we are helping to build environments where children feel safe, respected, included and able to speak up, creating lasting change through prevention rather than reaction.

Our Impact

What impact have we made during the 2025/26 academic year?

A snapshot of our reach and impact across the 2025/26 academic year.

6416	contacts with children attending our workshops
1359	contacts made at public engagement events
783	pre-school abuse prevention workshops delivered
94%	of parents & carers felt their children benefited from attending our pre-school workshops
97%	of parents & carers have read/intend to read the story books from the pre-school workshops with their child
96%	of staff felt the workshops provided an opportunity for further discussions on the topics

Our Impact

What impact have we made during the 2025/26 academic year?

Feedback from Children & Young People

"All I know is that it was a great workshop and I learnt a lot"

"I know when my body feels like a jelly I need to speak to my safe grown-up"

"It was amazing!"

"I won't be a bystander if I see bullying"

"Bullying can change someones life and is serious"

"it was great, I will miss them coming to the school, what they taught was genuinely interesting"

"It was good and it has changed my perspective on a lot of things"

"I liked that it was very hands-on, and we got to do activities rather than just listen all the time"

From School

"The workshops have had a really positive impact on the children. They are more open about discussing feelings and emotions, and the language used is now embedded across the school."

"The resources are age-appropriate and engaging. Children respond really well to the interactive elements."

"It has supported our PSHE curriculum brilliantly and given staff confidence to continue conversations in class."

"Parents have fed back positively too, which shows the impact extends beyond the school day."

"The facilitators build excellent rapport with the children very quickly. They feel safe to share."

"We have seen a noticeable reduction in playground incidents since the programme started."

"It complements our safeguarding work perfectly and reinforces key messages in a child-friendly way."

From Parents & Carers

What families are saying about our programmes

"My child now talks openly about feelings and knows it's okay to ask for help. That's something we struggled with before."

"The programme gave my daughter the words to describe what she was feeling. She's so much more confident now."

"I was impressed by how age-appropriate the content was. It opened up conversations at home too."

"As a parent, I feel reassured knowing the school is addressing these topics in such a thoughtful way."

"My son came home and told me about 'safe secrets' vs 'unsafe secrets' — such an important lesson."

"The team were brilliant. My child felt comfortable and actually looked forward to the sessions."

"It's made a real difference. I'd recommend it to every school."

Every voice matters. .

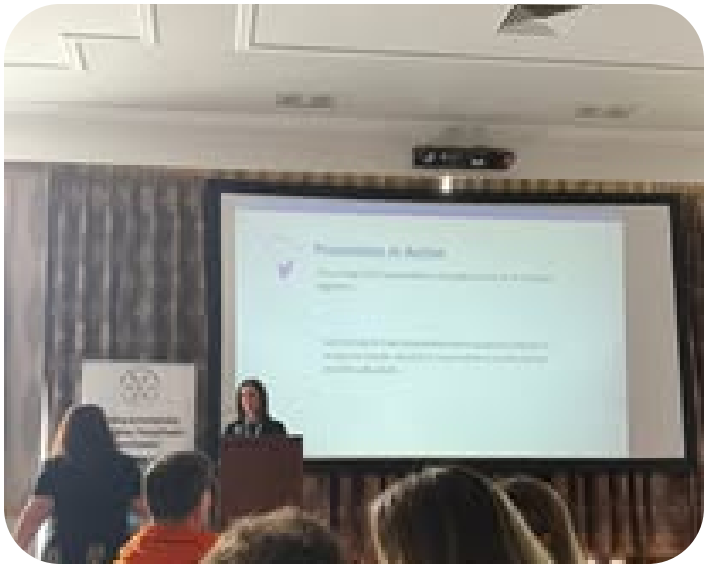
Community Engagement

Safe Strong & Free believes that preventing harm to children is a shared responsibility. Alongside our education programmes, we have continued to build meaningful relationships with communities, faith groups, businesses and partner organisations to create safer, more inclusive environments where children and young people can thrive.

Throughout the year, we strengthened our partnership with Inverness Mosque through community engagement sessions and participation in Eid celebrations, creating opportunities to build trust, improve understanding and promote safeguarding within diverse communities. We were also proud to support Refugee Week, celebrating inclusion, belonging and the importance of welcoming every child and family into our communities.

Collaboration remains central to our approach. Working in partnership with Police Scotland, we co-delivered a bullying prevention workshop, combining our expertise to help children and young people better understand bullying, respectful relationships, reporting concerns and the role everyone plays in creating safer school communities.

"Prevention is everyone's responsibility and every child should have the opportunity to grow up safe, strong and free."



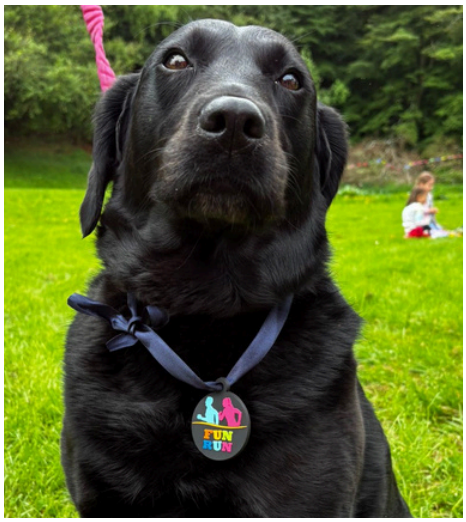
We were also invited to share our work at the Highland Child Protection Conference, where we highlighted the importance of prevention, early intervention and belonging as protective factors in keeping children safe. At the Highland Third Sector Interface Conference, we delivered interactive workshops and joined sector leaders to explore how organisations can work together to strengthen communities and prevent harm before it occurs.

Community support has continued to be instrumental in helping us achieve our mission. We were honoured to present the Community Shield Award to Born to Lose Motorcycle Club following their remarkable fundraising challenge, raising £1,650 to support our prevention work. This recognition reflects the strength of community partnerships and the shared commitment to improving outcomes for children and young people.

By working alongside communities, sharing knowledge and strengthening partnerships, we are helping to build a culture where prevention is everyone's responsibility and every child has the opportunity to grow up safe, strong and free.

Community Colour Run

Inverness, 2026— families, friends and four-legged supporters came together for a day of colour, community and celebration.



Over 200 participants raised funds while celebrating inclusivity and wellbeing across the Highlands.

> "A day that brought the whole community together — colour, laughter and connection."

The Community Colour Run brought together over 200 participants of all ages across Inverness in a vibrant celebration of inclusivity, wellbeing and togetherness. Families, friends and even four-legged supporters joined the fun, raising vital funds for Safe Strong and Free's programmes across the Highlands.

The event was supported by local businesses and volunteers, with music, kindness pebbles and refreshments creating a festival atmosphere. Funds raised will directly support our work delivering prevention programmes in 2026

ISPCAN Congress & International Collaboration

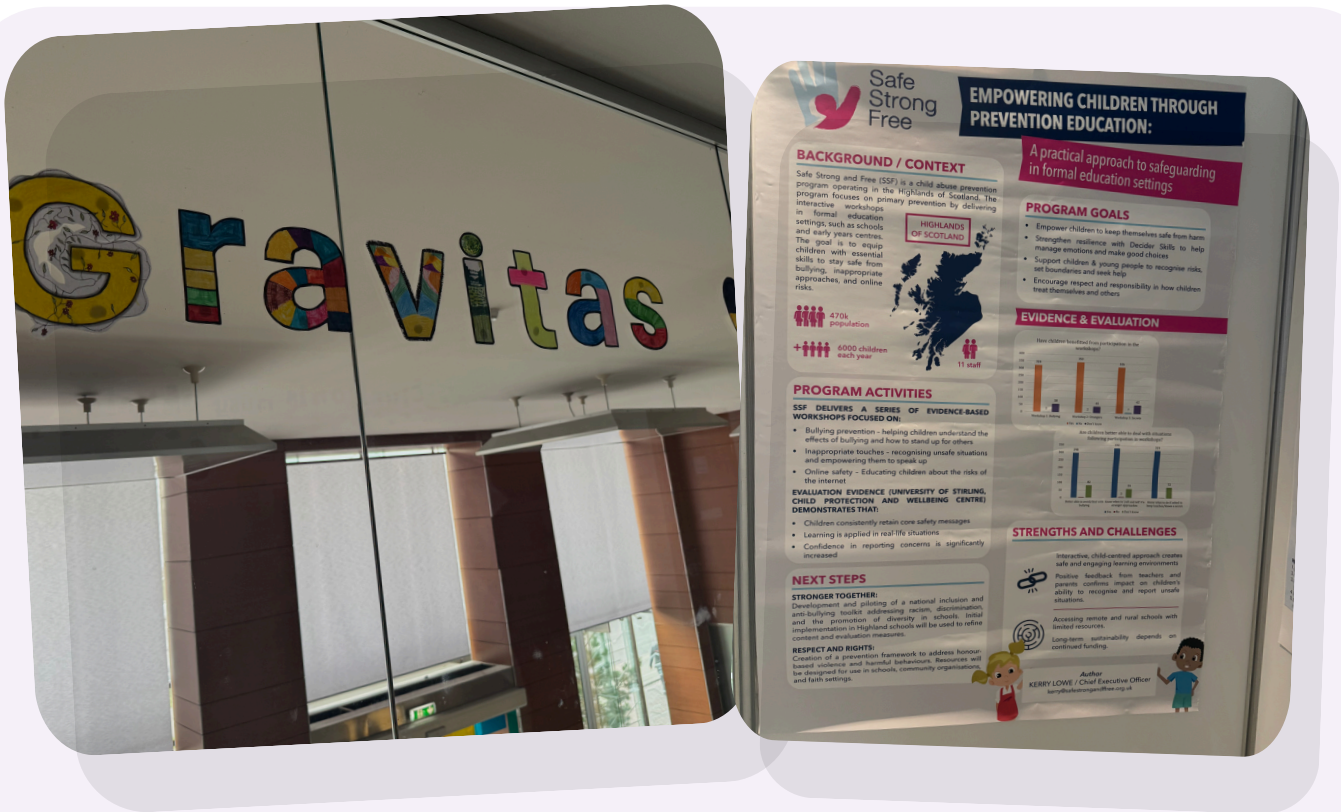
Lithuania 2025 — presenting our prevention model on the international stage at the ISPCAN International Congress.

In September 2025, Safe Strong and Free delivered a poster presentation at the ISPCAN International Congress on Child Abuse and Neglect in Lithuania. This was a significant milestone for the organisation, providing an opportunity to share our prevention-focused model with researchers, practitioners and policymakers from across the world.

Our presentation outlined the development of our Prevention of Child Abuse Programme and how early intervention and preventative education can empower children and young people to recognise and respond to abuse.

The congress brought together over 1,500 delegates from more than 80 countries, creating a unique space for shared learning and collaboration. Presenting alongside leading international organisations reinforced the quality and relevance of our approach.

Participation in the conference enabled us to learn from global research and best practice, develop new professional networks and explore innovative approaches being used internationally.



"Presenting at ISPCAN reinforced that our prevention model is not only locally impactful but internationally relevant."

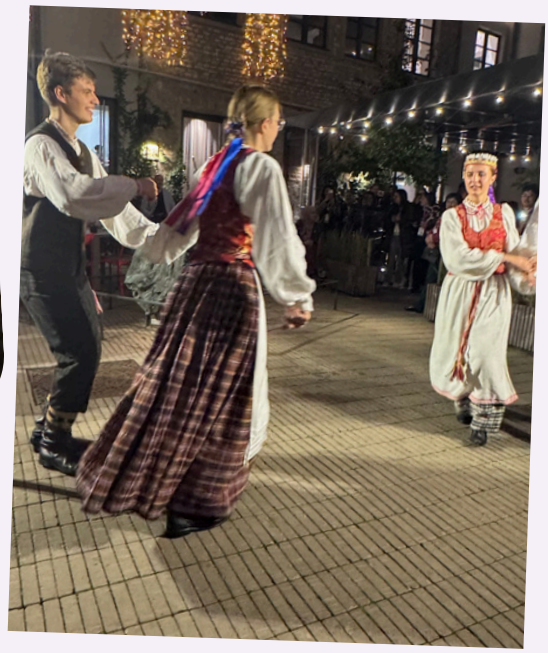
The experience has informed the development of our continuum and strengthened our commitment to prevention and early intervention as the foundation of child protection.

National & International Recognition

As part of our visit, we donated a selection of Safe Strong and Free resources to a school supporting Ukrainian children. The donation reflected our commitment to sharing preventative education and child safety messages beyond our local communities and demonstrated how simple, practical resources can support children's wellbeing regardless of location or circumstance.

Beyond the conference itself, experiencing Lithuanian culture provided valuable insight into how communities can come together to support children and families during times of crisis. We learned about Lithuania's response to welcoming Ukrainian refugees, where schools, community organisations and local services worked collaboratively to help children feel safe, included and able to continue their education despite the trauma of displacement.

Witnessing this compassionate, community-led approach reinforced the importance of belonging as a protective factor for children. It demonstrated how safeguarding extends beyond formal services and is strengthened when communities embrace inclusion, remove barriers and ensure every child has the opportunity to feel valued, connected and supported.



"Witnessing this compassionate, community-led approach reinforced the importance of belonging as a protective factor for children."

International Learning – Bangladesh

This year, our Project Worker, Saleema, travelled to Bangladesh, the country she proudly describes as her motherland, to strengthen relationships, learn from local communities and deepen our understanding of the challenges affecting children and young people.

During her visit, she met with schools, community organisations and local professionals, gaining first-hand insight into the barriers many children face in accessing education and protection. While education is free and protected by law in the United Kingdom, Saleema witnessed how, in Bangladesh, access to education is often determined by poverty, family circumstances and economic hardship. She saw how some girls leave school because of early marriage proposals, while some boys leave to undertake child labour to support their families. These experiences reinforced that the right to education is not only a fundamental children's right, but also one of the strongest protective factors in preventing abuse, exploitation and poverty.
Saleema also reflected on the richness of Bangladesh's culture, language and strong family values, recognising that culture can be a powerful protective factor when communities work together to uphold children's rights.

Her visit reinforced the importance of listening to communities, understanding different lived experiences and ensuring safeguarding approaches are culturally informed while always keeping children's rights at the centre.

The learning gained from Bangladesh will continue to shape our work across the Highlands, strengthening our Rights & Respect programme and our commitment to ensuring every child regardless of their background, has the opportunity to be safe, heard and realise their right to learn, thrive and reach their full potential.

"The right to education is not only a fundamental children's right, but also one of the strongest protective factors in preventing abuse, exploitation and poverty."

Saleema's visit reinforced that safeguarding is most effective when it is culturally informed, community-led and rooted in children's rights.

Safe Strong & Free is committed to ensuring every child, regardless of background, has the opportunity to be safe, heard and to thrive.

Programme Development & Innovation

Launch of Stronger Together

This year saw the launch of Stronger Together, our new prevention programme focused on promoting inclusion, celebrating diversity and tackling bullying, racism and discrimination. Developed in response to growing concerns around prejudice-based bullying and the changing needs of communities across the Highlands, Stronger Together takes a proactive approach to building understanding, respect and belonging among children and young people. The programme encourages participants to explore identity, challenge stereotypes, celebrate differences and develop the confidence to become positive allies within their schools and communities.

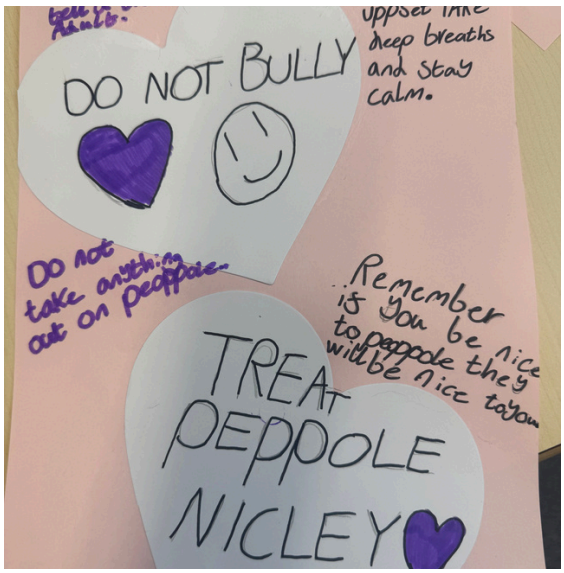
Safe Strong & Free's commitment to prevention, inclusion and partnership reflects the kind of upstream approach that helps create safer communities for children and young people. Stronger Together provides practical tools that empower schools to build respectful relationships, challenge harmful behaviours and foster cultures where everyone belongs.

Jimmy Paul
Chief Executive
Scottish Violence Reduction Unit

Programme Development & Innovation

Throughout the year, resources, workshops and training materials were developed to support schools, youth groups and community organisations in creating environments where everyone feels safe, valued and respected. Stronger Together represents an important step in expanding our preventative work and responding to emerging issues affecting children and young people.

As communities across the Highlands continue to become more diverse, Stronger Together aims to support positive relationships, reduce discrimination and help create a stronger sense of belonging for all.



Rights & Respect

A significant milestone this year was our Rights & Respect Launch Event, which brought together professionals, community members, faith leaders and partner organisations to explore how we can work collectively to protect children and promote equality. We were honoured to welcome representatives from different faiths, including the Imam from Inverness Mosque, reflecting our shared commitment to preventing abuse through understanding, education and collaboration.

The programme includes workshops for children and young people, parent engagement sessions, professional training and practical resources designed to build confidence in recognising unhealthy behaviours, understanding consent and knowing where to seek support. Rather than focusing solely on responding to abuse, Rights & Respect aims to prevent harm before it occurs by empowering individuals with knowledge, confidence and safe opportunities to speak up.

Throughout the year we have continued to strengthen relationships with diverse communities across the Highlands, delivering community engagement sessions, supporting dialogue around safeguarding and promoting inclusion. These partnerships are helping to break down barriers, reduce stigma and ensure prevention messages reach those who may previously have been underserved.

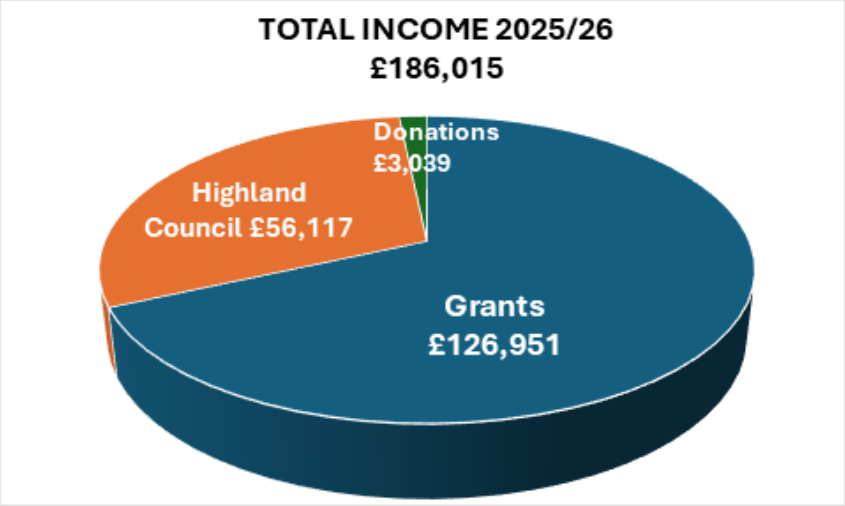
Rights & Respect reflects our belief that every child has the right to grow up safe, respected and free from abuse. By working alongside communities rather than imposing solutions, we are creating sustainable change that protects children while celebrating the diversity and strengths within our communities.

This programme represents another important step in Safe Strong & Free's mission to move upstream, preventing harm before it happens and ensuring every child knows their rights, understands respectful relationships and has trusted adults they can turn to when they need help.

Our Funds

Income

During the year SSF received grant funding of £186,015 (40% increase on previous year) from a range of funders for both the core workshops and projects. SSF are delighted to have received grant funds as detailed in the table below:

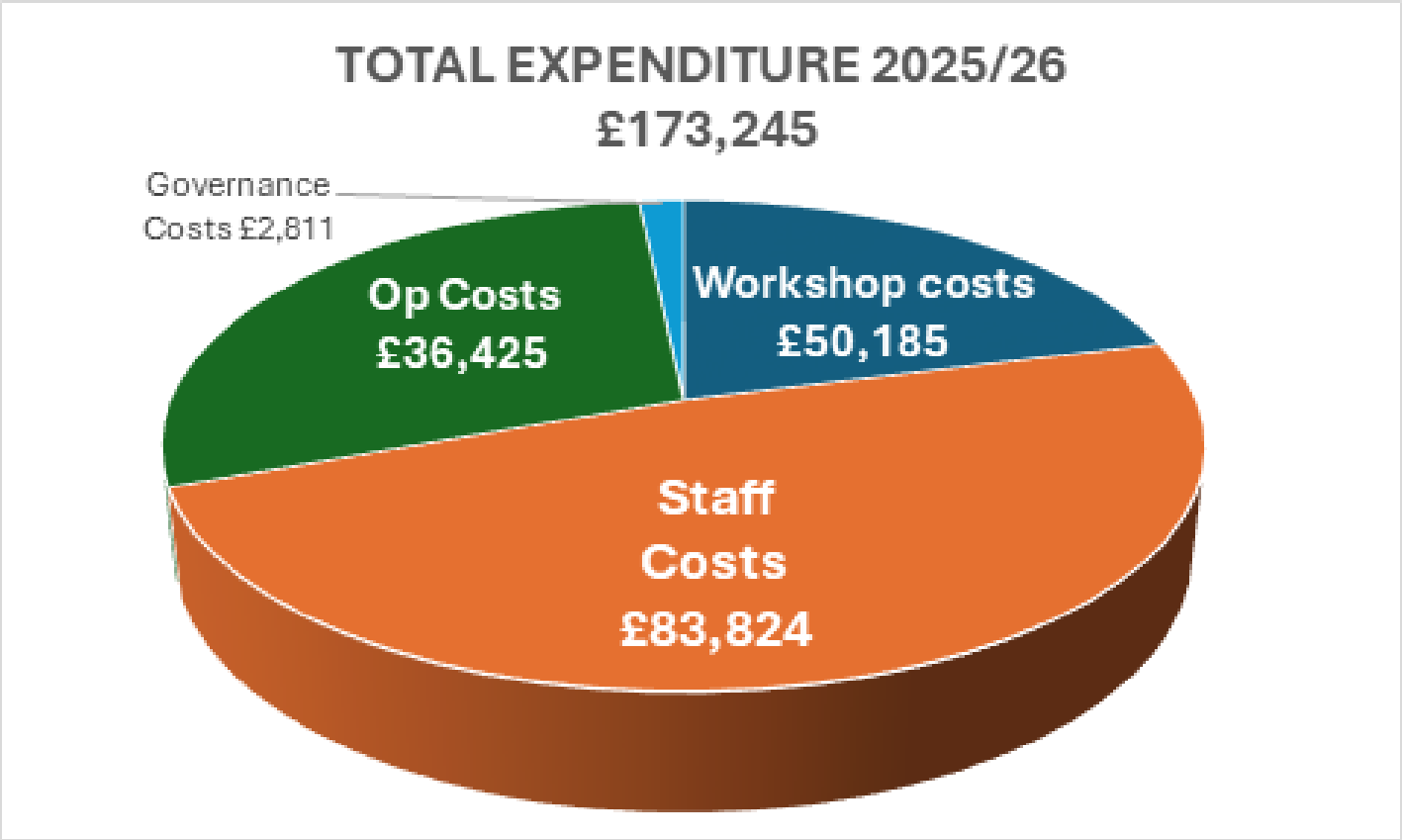


Highland Council / NHS	£56,116
National Lottery Community	£53,118
Essentia Foundation	£10,000
Garfield Weston Foundation	£10,000
Weir Charitable Trust	£10,000
Volant Trust	£10,000
Highland Third Sector Interface	£9,396
Gordon & Ena Baxters	£5,000
Foundation Scotland Bridging	£4,285
Hugh Fraser Foundation	£4,000
Haventus Ardesier Port	£3,282
Scottish Children's Lottery	£3,000
SJP Foundation	£2,500
Co-op Community Fund	£1,745
Others	£625

Our Funds

Expenditure

Expenditure in the year increased to £173,245 (12% increase on previous year). The increase in costs was due to an increase in salary (associated to the Stronger Together project, a new SSF website, and project cost associated with the Stronger Together project. The costs for the website and the Stronger Together project costs (including salary) are offset by grant funding.



Looking Ahead

A message from the CEO

As we look ahead, one thing remains clear: prevention matters. Every day, we see the difference that early intervention, education and positive relationships can make in the lives of children and young people. We know that when children are equipped with the knowledge, confidence and support they need, they are better able to stay safe, build healthy relationships and reach their full potential.

Over the coming year, we will continue to strengthen and expand our core prevention programmes while responding to the changing challenges facing children and families. We will further develop our Stronger Together programme, supporting schools and communities to tackle bullying, racism and discrimination and create environments where everyone feels a sense of belonging.

We will also continue to grow our Rights & Respect programme, working alongside communities, faith groups and partner organisations to ensure that children and young people understand their rights, feel empowered to use their voice and know where to seek support when needed.

As our communities continue to evolve, we remain committed to listening, learning and adapting. Emerging issues such as online harms, artificial intelligence, discrimination and changing social pressures require preventative approaches that are informed, relevant and accessible. We will continue to develop innovative resources that meet these challenges, while remaining grounded in our mission of keeping children safe. Our recent recognition as an ISPCAN Country Partner has strengthened our ability to learn from international best practice and share the work taking place here in the Highlands. We look forward to building on these relationships and bringing new ideas, evidence and opportunities to the communities we serve.

None of this would be possible without the continued support of our staff, volunteers, schools, families, partners, funders and supporters. Together, we are helping to create safer communities for children and young people.

Thank you for being part of that journey.

With warm regards,
Kerry Lowe

Company Information

DIRECTORS	ADVISORS	REPORTING ACCOUNTANTS	REGISTERED OFFICE
Deborah Macrae	Education	Kevin Leitch FCCA	Fairways House
Kerrie MacLean	Social Work	Leitch Accountancy Services Ltd	Fairways Business Park
Isabelle Mackenzie	NHS Highland	3 Beech Avenue	Inverness
Yvonne Ross	CALA	Inverness	IV2 6AA
	SCRA	IV2 4NN	
	Police Scotland		
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Inverness	Inverness		
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