



Rural and Remote Activism - the recording and outputs from the 2021vSRP Session on 8th March 2021

Session curated by Scottish Rural Action and chaired by Esme Leitch, Communications and Engagement Officer.

This session was a celebration of the diversity and success of Rural and Remote Activism. It was attended by 77 participants. As well as exploring activism in general, the session looked at the topic through four issue specific lenses- racism, gender-based violence, the rural housing crisis and Gaelic discrimination. Despite discussing different topics, the presenters echoed each other on the rural specific barriers to activism and a common theme of the prevalence of issues being denied or played down in communities was clear. Appropriate and up to date education and safe spaces for people to discuss issues were acknowledged as important for supporting activism.

Summary of Presentations

Gurpreet Sidhu, founder of BLMintheStix, discussed her journey of setting up the campaign to support rural communities to end rural racism and what her hopes are moving forward. Gurpreet's presentation gave an insight into the added dimension rurality can have for those experiencing racism and the particular importance of being anti-racist, rather than non-racist in small communities. Key points covered included:

- Non-racist people need to become anti-racist. This would mean behaviour is no longer tolerated in communities.
- White people need to use their privilege and speak out against discrimination. This should be informed by the experiences of people of colour.
- Up to date resources are key in supporting teachers to educate on racism.

Lavinia Schmitt and Ellie Ratter from the Shetland Rape Crisis BEE youth group (Bold, Equal and Empowered) shared a video featuring some of the young people from the group discussing their experience and motivation for becoming an activist for gender equality. Key points covered included:

- A whole school approach is key in prevention work.
- Sex education in schools needs to be improved and inclusive of the LGBTQI community and all genders. More education around consent, boundaries and gender-based violence is vital.

- Dress codes should be less gendered.

Pàdruig Morrison, a signatory of the Uist Housing Letter and housing activist, gave a presentation on the changes that need to be made within the sector to ensure it is accessible for all and his experience of campaigning so far. Key points covered included:

- Need to look to best practice elsewhere and conduct research to show viability of a slightly less “open” model that would result in a more equal, accessible market.
- Community buy-outs are positive but cannot protect communities from locals being outpriced.
- Housing needs to be looked at more holistically, considering it as a part of wider systemic issues in rural and island areas that challenge the viability of schools and minority languages.
- Need for fit-for-purpose, regionally specific housing policies that meets the needs of local communities and people living there. This includes taking a local approach to funding for building social housing that will result in housing being built in the areas it is needed the most. A guarantee that people on social housing lists will be assigned a home in appropriate areas would also encourage people to stay in rural and island areas.
- A welcoming, non-discriminatory community is important in encouraging people to stay and live in an area.

Màrtainn Mac A'Bhàillidh, Gaelic language activist and organiser with pressure group Misneachd Alba discussed the challenges faced by Gaelic communities and current lack of activism for the language. Key points covered:

- There is minimal community activism for Gaelic as many Gaelic speakers are employed within the sector so are limited to what they can say.
- Duolingo is a way to encourage daily use of Gaelic.
- More education is required around the challenges faced by Gaelic communities. This will help non-Gaelic speakers identify and challenge discrimination.

Discussion Points and Closing Remarks

The cross-cutting themes from the presentations and Q and A were:

- The need for **education**, both about relevant issues and what individuals can do to support positive change. This will lead to more **informed communities** that can identify issues and feel empowered to **take action**.
- **Safe spaces** and opportunities for people to come together to talk about issues/plan change making is key.

Other documents and initiatives mentioned during session:

- Misneachd’s Manifesto for Sustainable Gaelic Communities

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Dajk3SgUcG9vNRmuC8jWZcuMI9tmwjiB8/view?fbclid=IwAR3sUIya4sffnexNYluMrAgaagYP1VYeptkf40ZKpMViMo8_VsqjR8wRqa4

- Open letter: Save the Highlands and Islands from an “economic clearance”

<https://sourcenews.scot/open-letter-save-the-highlands-and-islands-from-an-economic-clearance/>