

CASE STUDY

Investing in Insight: Funding Project Evaluation

IDENTIFYING THE NEED

Unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people in the Highlands often arrived carrying trauma, loss, and uncertainty. Many faced barriers to feeling safe and included in their new communities, and opportunities to connect with nature were limited.

Staff from Comraich, a partnership service including Aberlour Children's Charity, Barnardo's Scotland, Gateway, Right There and Highland Council – identified the need for new ways to nurture wellbeing, resilience and belonging.

THE CHALLENGE ON THE GROUND

Many of these young people arrive in the Highlands thousands of miles from their homelands, navigating the complexities of the asylum process while trying to build a sense of belonging. In spring 2025, conservation charity Trees for Life invited eight young people, supported by the Comraich service for separated asylum-seeking young people, to take part in a Rewild and Recover residential week at Dundreggan Rewilding Centre in Glenmoriston. Amid the beauty of the restored Caledonian forest, they experienced community, connection, and nature in new ways.

Conventional evaluation and feedback methods risked excluding their voices, and there was limited evidence on whether nature-based projects like Trees for Life's Rewild and Recover programme could offer meaningful benefits for mental health and inclusion.

HOW WE RESPONDED

To capture the impact of this week, the Charity awarded £4,700 through our Research, Development & Innovation grants programme to NHS Highland's Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) to deliver a project evaluation.

Recognising the barriers posed by language, the team chose creative methods over written questionnaire or feedback forms. Local artist and Trees for Life volunteer, Jane Frere, worked alongside the young people to develop a photographic record of their experiences.



Look to See

A Refugee Week (16th – 22nd June) Exhibition at Eden Court, Inverness, by Young People Sharing their Reflections of a Rewilding Experience in the Highlands through Photography

THE CHANGE WE ACHIEVED

Following the conclusion of the evaluation work, an exhibition was created. 'Look to See' was co-designed with the young people and shown at Eden Court, Inverness, as part of Refugee Week 2025 (16–22 June).

“The resulting exhibition – co-designed with the young people – offers the public a rare and intimate window into the personal impact of this nature-based journey. It invites viewers to consider not only the stories of those seeking sanctuary, but also the potential of green spaces and creative expression to nurture resilience, hope, and connection.” – Jane Frere

Read more about the exhibition by [clicking here](#).

THE JOURNEY AHEAD

This project is part of a wider effort to understand the long-term value of creative, nature-based interventions for mental health. The insights gathered through this evaluation will inform future Rewild and Recover programmes and broaden understanding of how this form of intervention can support the wellbeing and inclusion of vulnerable young people across the Highlands.

Thanks to the support of our donors, the Charity has helped ensure the voices of young asylum seekers are captured authentically and meaningfully. The insights gained will inform future opportunities, making it possible for more young people to benefit from nature, creativity, and community in the Highlands.

Dr Nick Barnes, Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist with NHS Highland CAMHS and Honorary Senior Lecturer at the University of Aberdeen, said:
“Projects like Rewild and Recover are hugely important as they offer more than just a break from the routine – they create space for healing, identity, and connection. This exhibition is not only a testament to the strength of the young people involved, but also a compelling example of what's possible when therapeutic practice is grounded in community, nature and co-creation.”