

Dunbeath and District Centre: 'It has given me the motivation to get up and get out and get on with life'

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Published: 11:00, 12 December 2025



Activities coordinator Cameron Chambers with Daniel Macleod, operational growth manager, outside Dunbeath and District Centre. Picture: Alan Hendry

Dunbeath and District Centre is a warm and welcoming community health and wellbeing hub that makes an immeasurable difference to people's lives. Staff and volunteers work together to create a friendly, nurturing environment – and comments by a cross-section of the 300 centre users give a glimpse of how valuable this support is.

Some refer to it as a “lifeline” and a “sanctuary”. One person points out: “This is part of my community and it's accessible. There is nowhere else like it.” Another says: “Since my husband died last year it would have been easy to become isolated and depressed. The centre has offered me support, activities, food and friendship, all through difficult times, and improved my sense of wellbeing. It has given me the motivation to get up and get out and get on with life... I would have felt lost without it.”

For more than three decades, the centre has helped to meet the needs of older people, vulnerable adults, carers and those living in isolated or rural locations in the Dunbeath area and beyond. To help meet what it calls “the growing and changing needs of our communities” there are ambitions to move into a new, purpose-built health and wellbeing centre, on ground adjacent to the current building, if funding can be secured.

The present centre opened in 1992 in Neil Gunn Road, just off the A9, and originally it served as a daycare centre.

“We came away from registered care to unregistered care, and we went into the health and wellbeing bracket,” the centre’s operational growth manager Daniel Macleod explained. “That’s how we’ve grown, and that’s why there is the need for an expansion on the current premises.”



A Christmas lunch at Dunbeath and District Centre. It offers a variety of services and activities to help physical health, mental wellbeing, independence and social connection. Picture: Dunbeath and District Centre

Daniel, born and bred in Dunbeath, was [appointed to his role in 2021](#). He and the senior centre coordinator, Dorothy Lyon, are full-time employees and there are five part-time staff, along with a dedicated team of 35 volunteers who attend at different times.

Daniel emphasised that the centre exists to help local residents “live well, independently and with dignity, while reducing the health inequalities that disproportionately affect small and remote communities”.

Dunbeath and District Centre offers a variety of services and activities designed to help physical health, mental wellbeing, independence and social connection in ways that are engaging and

enjoyable. There is an emphasis on friendship, learning, creativity and stimulation.



Outreach in action with a meal delivery during wintry weather. Picture: Dunbeath and District Centre

Activities include craft workshops, exercise groups, reminiscence sessions, games, music and singing groups, bingo and whist. The centre works alongside NHS Highland and other partners to deliver practical aid ranging from gentle movement sessions to digital inclusion support.

Freshly prepared meals are produced five days a week, contributing to good nutrition and supporting older adults who may struggle to cook daily for themselves.

Helping to overcome the challenges of distance, weather and transport in rural Caithness, there are deliveries of meals, newspapers and prescriptions directly to residents who can't easily travel to the centre.

Dunbeath and District Centre holds emergency activation status, which means it is [ready to offer support during adverse weather, transport disruption](#), electricity outage or other emergencies – providing warmth, shelter, food and assistance.

Volunteering opportunities at the centre help local people to gain skills, support neighbours and contribute to the overall wellbeing of the community.



Daniel Macleod, operational growth manager at Dunbeath and District Centre. Picture: Alan Hendry

“Dunbeath and District Centre plays a critical role in sustaining community life,” Daniel said. “In an area where public services are stretched by distance and geography, where isolation and loneliness are everyday challenges, and where access to health and social care is often limited, the centre fills a gap that would otherwise leave many without support.

“Each year the centre delivers thousands of hours of activities, social support, wellbeing interventions, meals and community assistance – improving quality of life and preventing the escalation of health needs that place further pressure on NHS and public services.”

The support extends to a community sharing shack where all items are donated.

Daniel explained: “It’s ambient foods [food products that can be safely stored at room temperature and don’t require refrigeration or freezing]. There can be sharing items like jigsaws

or puzzles, anything that we can put in there that the community can benefit from.



A selection of items in the sharing shack. Picture: Dunbeath and District Centre

“It’s a discreet service and the service user can put a donation in if they so wish – they go in and they take what they believe they can benefit from. It’s just there for the community.”

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“We do get products from Tesco and the Co-op in Wick. Another partner is Cfine [Community Food Initiatives North East] in Alness. They donate products to us, which we can put in there, which will go back out to the community.

“In a nutshell, it saves it going to landfill, so it’s a win-win for everyone.”

In addition to its core services, the centre is “exploring ways to expand provision, enhance community resilience and develop new approaches that reduce isolation, remove barriers and ensure that people in Caithness can age with dignity, connection and opportunity”.

Daniel pointed out: “Social care is not confined to care homes or clinical settings – it lives and breathes within communities like ours. At Dunbeath and District Centre, we are proud to deliver

person-centred, preventative support that keeps people healthy, connected and independent for longer”



Outreach lunches ready for delivery to the community. Picture: Dunbeath and District Centre

Again, feedback from those who use the centre underlines just how important and meaningful this support is.

As one user puts it: “I feel nurtured and nourished and this is not something that can be quantified. It is a constant source of care and support – a wonderful resource.”

Another user, who has been inspired to put their name forward to work as a volunteer, says: “I have enjoyed art and craft sessions, singing, beading, flower-arranging, lino-printing, music and talks by visiting speakers. All this and much more have added value to my life. The quality of life that I have now, and the friends that I have made there, has made the process of getting older less threatening and more like a privilege.”



A snowy scene during an A9 closure in January 2024 when the centre welcomed stranded motorists. It provided meals, soup and sandwiches as well as teas and coffees, while toilet facilities were made available. Picture: Dunbeath and District Centre

Part two, next week, will look at Dunbeath and District Centre's ambitious plan for a new, larger base.