

LOUD and CLEAR

For friends of Sense Scotland **Summer 2025**



We care.
We connect.
We communicate.

LOUD and CLEAR

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Sense Scotland is a Scottish charity and specialised care provider supporting people with communication support needs associated with complex and sensory disabilities, and their families, where individual needs and choices come first. Every service we provide is tailor-made and designed with individual wishes, potential and independence in mind.

Sense Scotland now supports hundreds of families all across Scotland. We are recognised as leaders in our field and still hold true to our family values, caring for children through adolescence and into adulthood whilst supporting them through all the challenges and opportunities along the way

Your donations fund all the things that make Sense Scotland unique: music, art, social groups, play and communication sessions – fun, fun and more fun. But serious stuff too – making sure people we support are included in decisions which affect their life, are able to choose where they live and how they spend their time.



Front cover: HRH, The Princess Royal cutting the cake to celebrate our 40th Anniversary

A Birthday Celebration



Forty years ago, a determined group of families refused to accept that their deafblind children should be hidden away, institutionalised, or underestimated.

Back in the 1980s, life for people with complex disabilities in Scotland was bleak. Long-stay hospitals were overcrowded, under-resourced, and dehumanising. People were often isolated from family, stripped of dignity, and denied even the most basic communication.

That reality was the catalyst for action. Parents came together in frustration, in hope, and with a fierce belief that their children deserved better. And so, Sense Scotland began.

Their vision was clear: every person, no matter how complex their support needs, has the right to communicate, to be understood, and to live a life filled with relationships, purpose and joy.

We've come a long way. From our first service at Overbridge and Scotland's first school for deafblind children – Carnbooth - we now support people of all ages with complex disabilities and communication support needs, and their families, to live rich and fulfilling lives. In addition to providing direct care, we enhance lives through advice, play, arts, music and specialist communication training – all funded by supporters just like you.

But there is still so much to do. Families continue to face barriers to accessing the support they need. Too many people are still being placed in inappropriate hospital settings. And funding remains a huge challenge.

Thanks to you, we have weathered many social care funding storms. We are currently facing a tsunami of additional costs due to changes in National Insurance contributions. But we are still taking time to celebrate some of our many achievements, and I hope you enjoy reading more from people we support and staff about how Sense Scotland has impacted their lives.

With heartfelt thanks for being part of this journey.

A handwritten signature in white ink, reading 'Angela Bonomy'.

Angela Bonomy,
Chief Executive



We Just Knew It Worked

How Communication Became the Heart of Sense Scotland



In June 1987, Dr Paul Hart began a journey that would shape not only his own career but the very foundation of Sense Scotland. Hired as a “Social Tutor” at Overbridge—our first ever service—Paul joined a pioneering team who were quietly transforming the way people with deafblindness and complex communication needs were supported.

Nearly four decades later, that same commitment to communication is still at the heart of everything we do.

A Radical Start

Overbridge Continuing Education Centre opened in 1987 as a post-school placement for people who were deafblind. It was the first of its kind in Scotland, rooted in the idea that learning doesn’t stop at school—and that communication is key to learning, connection and independence.

From day one, staff were more than carers. Inspired by a Danish model of social pedagogy, they were educators and supporters in equal measure. “*It was drummed into us.*” Paul recalls. “Yes, we

were there to provide care, but our main role was to help people learn about the world—and that meant learning how they communicate.”

Communication Was Never One-Size-Fits-All

It quickly became clear that no two people experienced deafblindness the same way. Some had some vision or hearing, others had none. Some had used British Sign Language, while others had never been taught to communicate at all.

“There was quite a spectrum,” Paul says. “And so no single communication system would work for everyone.”

The team learned BSL, explored tactile signing, used objects of reference, visual planners, and created entirely new systems tailored to individuals. In one case, a young man who had spent years in an institution began to connect with others through a consistent bedtime routine which was focused on building trust and anticipation. *“That predictability helped him realise the world was safe—and that he could engage with it.”*



When Music Speaks

Paul, who had recently graduated with a music degree, was encouraged to bring his musical passion into the workplace—a practice Sense Scotland still champions. Music became a powerful tool, even when the reasons behind it weren’t yet fully understood.

“We didn’t know the theory—but we just knew it worked,” Paul says.

Years later, the idea of communicative musicality—the rhythm and pattern of early human interaction—would help explain why these techniques were so effective. *“What we were doing in the 80s just felt right,” Paul says, “but now the science backs it up.”*

Drumming in rhythm, mirroring gestures and sounds—what others developed into Intensive Interaction—created the conditions for genuine breakthroughs. *“When someone realises they can influence how you*



respond—that’s the beginning of communication.”

Learning and Sharing

From the very beginning, staff were encouraged to learn from international best practice. Trips to Denmark, Italy, the Netherlands, and the U.S. brought fresh ideas, including methods from the Perkins School for the Blind in Boston. Experts came to Glasgow, and those early exchanges laid the foundation for what would become a uniquely Scottish approach to communication.

Growing with Communication at the Core

As Sense Scotland grew, communication remained central. Services like Newark Drive—our short break service for children—and the Practice Development and Advisory Teams were all built around the same principle: support starts with understanding how someone communicates.

Our Advisory and Early Years team now work in homes, schools, and communities—supporting people to connect in the ways that make sense to them. **And it’s all made possible by our supporters, whose donations fund this essential work.**

A Legacy in Every Connection

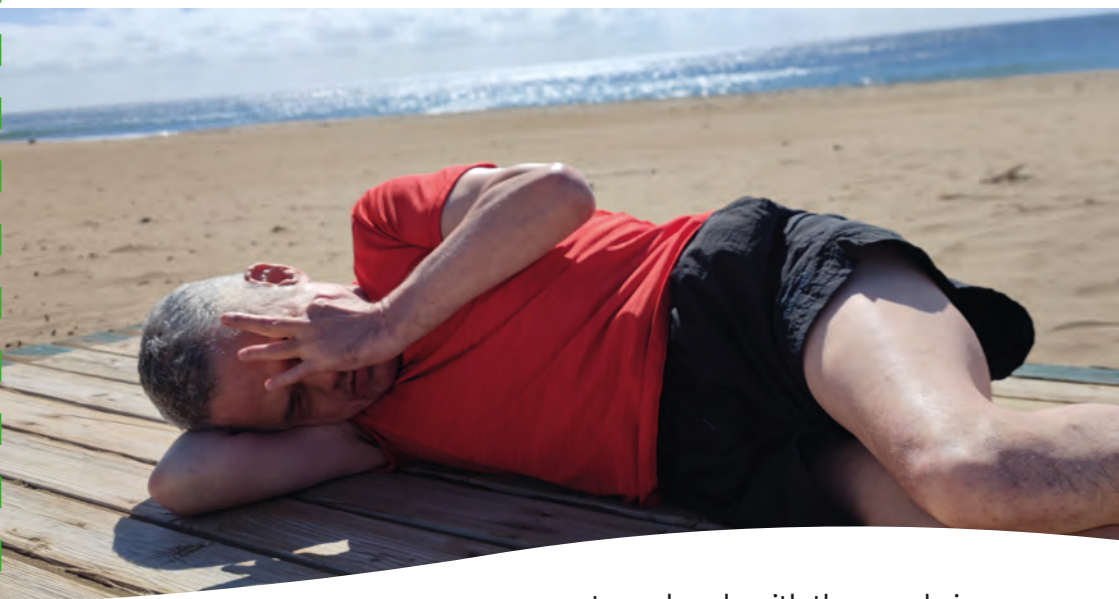
Looking back, Paul doesn’t just remember strategies or policies—he remembers moments. *“I can think of dozens of times when someone realised they were being understood. That moment when they tap three times, and you tap back—and they realise this is communication. That’s the magic.”*

Nearly 40 years on, that magic is still at the heart of Sense Scotland.

We communicate.

Peter

Through Emma's Eyes



Peter is deafblind and before reaching us at a young age, lived in an institution. I've had the privilege of supporting him for many years, helping him carefully carve out a life that suits him perfectly.

Peter, now 56, has lived in his shared home with Morag, another person we support, for 20 years, and they receive 24-hour care from a team of Sense Scotland staff. He has three sisters, one of whom—Lee—is his guardian. While Peter isn't one for socialising in the conventional sense, he has formed

strong bonds with the people in his life, including his close friend Marshall, with whom he travels on Deafblind International holidays each year.

A Man Who Knows What He Wants

Peter is independent in his own way. He knows exactly what he wants and makes sure you know it too. If he wants a coffee, he'll walk to the kitchen and bang on the counter until someone supports him to make one. If he's out and about, he will stop—wherever he is—to find the perfect stone.



Stones are Peter's thing. He'll sit on the ground, feeling the ground for just the right one, sometimes taking 20 minutes to choose. He holds it, places it under his tongue, and keeps it with him until he's ready to let it go and find another. It's a comfort - something that helps him feel settled. If he's upset or unsettled at home, I've discovered that taking him outside to find a stone will help soothe him and re-adjust his mood.

A Life Full of Activity

Peter has a routine that keeps him active and engaged. Swimming is his absolute favourite thing—he doesn't just swim; he needs to be thrown into the pool with a big splash! He's fearless and loves being dunked and floating under the water. After a swimming session, he sleeps for hours, completely content.

He also enjoys going for sensory walks, where he experiences different textures underfoot. But he only wears shoes when he goes outside – otherwise he lives his life barefoot. He adores food, especially spicy dishes, and will never say no to coffee or chocolate.

Holidays are another highlight for Peter – especially Lanzarote. He's a sun-worshipper and loves relaxing outside on his beanbag, soaking up the warmth.

Small but Meaningful Achievements

Peter surprises me all the time. On a Deafblind International holiday in the Netherlands, he walked independently in an unfamiliar setting—something he rarely does outside his home. He also took part in activities like crawling under nets and through tunnels with a little encouragement.

Another big moment was last year when he sat on a bike for the first time — something unheard of for him, as he usually refuses to sit on anything which feels even remotely unstable.

One of the most profound things about Peter is his ability to teach those around him how to support him. His communication is

minimal, but he makes his choices very clear. He uses touch signing to communicate – and has signs which are very specific to him.

Peter often chooses to spend time on his own – I imagine that when he does this, his world stops, and he exists in a quiet bubble. It's important to recognise when that might be the case, and to interact with him respectfully, touch signing to let him know what's about to happen eg “time for medicine” or ask him what he would like, e.g “want a coffee” or “you want what”? Short phrases work best for him.

A Life Well Lived

Peter is a joy to support. He's straightforward, easily pleased, and incredibly patient with new staff as they learn how to work with him. He knows what he likes and sticks to it, but every now and then, he throws in a surprise—like sticking his foot in your face for a massage or deciding, out of nowhere, to enjoy a bike ride.

When I think about how best to describe Peter, one word comes to mind - angel. I strongly believe



that Peter is here to teach us that being deafblind doesn't mean your life should be restricted. Peter has evidenced this throughout my time supporting him - he has built a life where he feels safe, happy, and understood. And that's exactly how it should be.

*Emma Thomson,
Relief Support Practitioner and
Fundraising Team member*

We care.

Independent Woman

For almost four decades, Alison has been supported by Sense Scotland, and her journey is nothing short of inspiring.



Alison first left her family home in Ayrshire to join our groundbreaking Overbridge centre in Pollokshields. Later, she moved to supported accommodation in Coatbridge, where she shared a home with good friends David, Bobby, Mark and Tracy. With the support of Sense Scotland's Housing Support Team, Alison thrived in this close-knit environment.

But Alison had big dreams. In 2005, she took a bold step towards independence, securing her own tenancy—just a few doors down from her friends. Having her own home is a dream come true, giving her the perfect balance of independence but still retaining connection to the community in which she feels safe, happy and included.

Spreading Her Wings

Now an independent woman, Alison (55) has built an incredible life for herself. She is always on the go and making the most of every opportunity that comes her way.

Alison has explored many interests, including art. Her talent has been recognized in a big way—her artwork was displayed in a gallery as well as the City Chambers, but now hangs proudly in her downstairs toilet!

But her creativity doesn't stop there. Alison uses sign language to communicate and wanted to teach children. Sense Scotland staff arranged a weekly visit to a local primary school where Alison taught the pupils how to sign along to the song "You Are My Sunshine". She forged a very special bond with the children and was over the moon to be invited

to their First Holy Communion as a special guest.

Before the pandemic, Alison also worked at TouchBase Glasgow. As receptionist, she greeted visitors and handled paperwork. She loved the role, as it gave her a chance to interact with people—a perfect fit for her sociable nature.

ALISON'S DIARY 😊	
MON	Dancing, chatting, tea with friends
TUE	Circs all-abilities exercise group
WED	Swimming
THU	Tea dancing
FRI	Meal planning, food shopping, social club
SAT	Monthly social tea dance
SUN	Bingo with friends and ex-housemates

Living Life to the Full

Alison is a keen people-watcher and enjoys relaxing in her back garden, where she can keep a close eye on her neighbours, chatting over the fence and enjoying barbeques and meet ups in their garden.

Keeping up with her is Anna Marie, a long-time member of Alison's support team, who said. *"She's come such a long way. Although she's had some health challenges, she's overcome them. Since moving*

into her own house, her confidence has soared—she's much more outgoing now."

Alison loves handbags and meeting new people, but she also finds comfort and security in familiar faces. Although she lost both her Mum and Dad a few years ago, she speaks about them often. Her sister, who lives in Ayrshire, visits regularly, and always brings her a new bag. They have a special bond, shared birthdays and always enjoy their time together. But it's her strong relationships with support staff and friends that give her a sense of stability and reassurance to live her independent life.

Full of Character

When asked about Alison, Anna Marie sums her up perfectly *"She's got a great sense of humour, she knows what she wants and she loves people. She's friendly, independent and always up for a laugh."*

For Alison, her perfect day involves dinner and socialising. But in truth, every day in her life is filled with fun, friends, and laughter—just the way she likes it.

We connect.

A Lifetime of Memories

My Journey with Sense Scotland



I started with Sense Scotland in my final year at university, fresh from a year in Russia and looking for a job. My start date was 1st of July 1994. I had no idea at the time that this would become not just a job, but a lifelong passion.

Back then, we were called “Social Tutors” and our only services were Overbridge and the Family Resource Centre, both in Glasgow. I began as a Relief Worker, then moved into a part-time role after graduating and eventually worked my way up to Service Manager.

Overbridge was more than just a place - it was a community, and for some an extended family.

Officially it was called a Continuing Education Centre, and 12 people lived there—six downstairs, six upstairs, with classrooms in the attic. Later, an extension was built with a gym. It was a place where people not only lived but learned. Where life skills were developed and where we tailored education for people with dual sensory impairments—those who were both deaf and blind. Some had struggled in schools for blind people or deaf people, but no one had understood their unique needs. Sense Scotland changed that.

One young person we supported had a heartbreaking time in school. They were expelled

multiple times simply because they were misunderstood. They had been placed in a school for blind people but were forbidden to use sign language. Imagine being told you couldn't communicate! Others came from long-stay hospitals where they were simply 'managed' rather than supported to thrive. I remember being told that it was expected that one young person's placement would immediately fail. But I was determined they never went back. They never did.

There are so many stories like these, moments where I realised the impact we have. It is all about making someone's day, year, life just that little bit better.

What I love about Sense Scotland is that it has always encouraged personhood. We do this every day in how we connect, communicate and listen. Creative arts and music have always been at the heart of Sense Scotland. One person supported dreamt of being a rock star and with support from our team, a CD was recorded and gigs played across the country. They were invited to perform at a Conference, and I was then asked to share their story in front of over a hundred people. Whilst they fronted the band with confidence like a true performer, I was a nervous wreck. Moments like these remind me of why I love this work.



I have spent over 30 years with Sense Scotland, and it has been a privilege. Every day I learn more than I am taught. I came into this work with no experience of learning disabilities or deafblindness, yet I was given the opportunity to grow alongside the incredible people we support. We never say “no” at Sense Scotland. The question is always, “How can we make this happen?” And that creative mindset has led to the most phenomenal experiences, both for the people we support and for us as staff.

Looking back, I feel immense pride. The people we support have accomplished so much, and I am honoured to have played even a small part in their journeys. This work isn't just about support—it's about celebrating individuality, pushing boundaries, and making sure every person gets to live their life to the fullest. And I wouldn't change a single moment of it.

*Heather McCrae,
Operational Support Manager*

Taking the Biscuit at Mecoco

At Sense Scotland, we believe that everyone should have the opportunity to reach their potential and be recognised and celebrated for what they can do, not defined by what they can't.



Nowhere is this more true than at Mecoco, our social enterprise which makes

amazing home fragrances – candles, wax melts and reed diffusers.

With probably the most diverse workforce in the country, disabled and non-disabled people work side by side, learning from each other in a space that is fun, respectful, and deeply inclusive.

And now, Mecoco has launched something extra special! “Taking the Biscuit” is our newest creation—and it’s already made a royal impression! A fragrant dance of butter and vanilla, it caresses the senses and makes your mouth water, taking you back to opening your Granny’s Biscuit Tin (one of the other name options!)

The very first candle produced was presented to HRH Princess Anne, our Patron, during Sense Scotland’s 40th birthday celebrations, gaining the royal “scent of approval”.

From start to finish, “Taking the Biscuit” was a team effort. Volunteers in the Dalry workshop helped test scent blends and come up with playful name ideas. The final scent, name and quirky design were put to the test by our Fundraising Team at events across the country—and they were a hit!

You can order yours online at www.mecoco.org, direct from the workshop in Dalry, or purchase from our charity shops in Ocean Terminal (Edinburgh), Peebles, Bathgate, Dumbarton Road (Glasgow), St Andrews or Blairgowrie.



Fundraising News



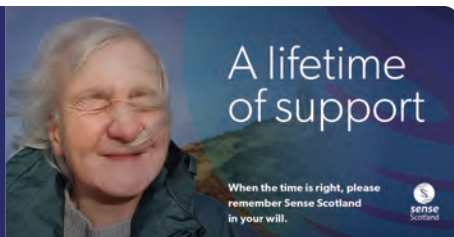
Our 40th Anniversary year is going to be our toughest to date, with the implementation of increased Employers National Insurance contributions meaning we have an additional £750,000 of costs to cover.

We have had a fantastic response to our Urgent Appeal. Thank you to everyone who has donated or increased their regular donation by direct debit. But we still need your support.

Your donations ensure that our charitable services such as Advisory, Communications, Art, Music, Early Years and more are able to continue their specialist provision. Here are some ways you can help us:

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FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE GET IN TOUCH

You can contact us via phone on 0300 330 9292 or email fundraising@sensescotland.org.uk



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