

2023

ROADSHOW

**Campbeltown  
& Kintyre**

July 2023



The Scottish Women's Convention

# Introduction

From the 3<sup>rd</sup> to the 7<sup>th</sup> of July 2023 the SWC team travelled to Campbeltown, meeting women from the town and the wider Kintyre region. The purpose of our visit was to understand the issues that these women face, with key themes arising throughout our conversations.

Women explained that mental healthcare provision did not meet the needs of the community and that there were also key gaps in wider healthcare services. They went on to highlight that transport links were insufficient, with inconsistent ferries and long bus journeys adding to the isolation of the area. Local women also stated that educational and employment opportunities were sub-par, resulting in young people moving away from the area, which was then worsened by a lack of housing. Women went on to explain that domestic violence rates in the area were high, and that the rural aspect of life in Campbeltown had made this a markedly complex issue. These problems have ultimately increased poverty, as well as an uptake in drug use amongst young women. Generally, women hoped to see a return of services to the area, and that their concerns were taken more seriously by government bodies.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the women who joined us in Campbeltown to give their lived experience. Our work would be impossible without the continued support of women, and we are forever impressed by the strong roles women carry out across rural communities in Scotland.

## The Scottish Women's Convention (SWC):

The SWC is funded to engage with women across Scotland to ensure that their views are represented in policy and decision-making processes. The SWC uses the views of women to respond to a variety of parliamentary, governmental, and organisational consultation papers at Scottish, UK, and international levels.

The SWC gathers information using different methods, including roadshows, thematic conferences, surveys, and both in-person and online roundtable events. This submission presents the views of a range of women, reflecting their opinions, ideas and lived experience. Working together with many other equalities organisations and community groups, we use our broad network to ensure that women from a range of backgrounds are heard and acknowledged. We are continually reviewing innovative ways of engaging with women and developing our trauma-informed and culturally sensitive practice to support vital contributions from as many women as possible.



# Health & Social Care

Women in Campbeltown stated that they felt that a key issue facing the area was a lack of mental healthcare. This was a consistent theme throughout discussions, with women explaining that they had lost CPN's and comprehensive coverage from psychiatrists. This had caused voluntary services to fill gaps, despite a complete lack of regular funding, creating uncertainty and a strain on volunteers' mental health. Unfortunately, despite the efforts of the third sector, women explained that suicide rates had increased across the area, aligning with National Records of Scotland data, which shows that between 2017 and 2021 the age-standardised probable suicide rate for Argyll and Bute was 17.3%, compared to the Scottish national average of 16.8%<sup>1</sup>. This data is regrettably two years old, with up-to-date data needed to account for the significant changes in lifestyles Scotland has experienced in a post-pandemic society. In order to reverse this increasing trend, however, women called for a return of mental health servicing, alongside further investment for local people and voluntary services.

“The lack of provision down here is awful. Apparently, it used to be great down here, they had three psychiatrists and half a dozen CPNs.”

“Mental healthcare is ridiculous, absolutely ridiculous. I think it's mostly volunteers, and they've had to fight for their funding.”

“I've got a friend who works at the hospital, and they call Saturday night, 'suicide watch'”

It was also stated that the lack of mental health services has actively contributed to a growing drug problem in the area, with women who have experienced hardship being more likely to take up drug and/or alcohol use. This was stated by those supporting women who have experienced domestic abuse, with substances being a key coping mechanism in dealing with significant trauma. Women also explained that there is a growing drug use pattern emerging amongst young women, due to a lack of amenities and opportunities for personal and professional development. It was therefore proposed that further work must be carried out to reduce poverty in the area, which would have an inevitable impact on reducing drug rates, through increased education and employment for young people as well as improved mental health services.

“They're [domestic abuse survivors] addicted to prescription medication, which have been given to them to handle their trauma, and then illegal substances or alcohol, or a mixture of both.”

“...so many teenage girls are getting involved. It's sad for the area”

“...there's no one solution, but I would like see better employment opportunities to give them careers that they're passionate about...I think that would stop the drug use.”

Gaps in gynaecological healthcare were also raised by women, in particular a lack of treatment options for menopause symptoms. Women explained that they had experienced poor knowledge from medical professionals around the menopause, alongside inappropriate

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<sup>1</sup> National Records of Scotland. (2022). Probable Suicides: Data. Available at: <https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/statistics-and-data/statistics/statistics-by-theme/vital-events/deaths/suicides>

prescribing of antidepressants as standard. Those who wanted to access hormone replacement therapy experienced push back from doctors, and as a result had to advocate for their own healthcare. We believe it is key that long-standing discrimination against menopausal women across healthcare settings should be better tackled by the Scottish Government. Women believed that this could be achieved through informal discussions between women so that the stigma surrounding menopause was diminished, and that a women's health specialist should be assigned to the area, who could facilitate such conversations.

**“A friend of my niece recently went in because she couldn't stop crying, and the doctors prescribed antidepressants, and we told her no! It was the menopause.”**

**“I think on the HRT thing, we don't have any special women's healthcare. Even if it was a nurse who could travel around because trying to get my testosterone was like drawing blood from a stone.”**

Similarly with other rural areas, poor transport options contributed to a lack of access to healthcare. Women explained that the increased centralisation of services had pulled dedicated care, such as dentists and audiologists, further afield. Those who need to access further, more specialised care often travelled to Glasgow, with patients expected to travel long distances via road. Women we spoke with explained that if an individual has a disability or long-term health condition the bus options can be inaccessible and uncomfortable. When this is paired with potentially difficult hospital visits, it can create an upsetting experience. These issues were then made worse with the consistently unreliable ferry services on offer, making it more difficult for rural women to access vital healthcare. We would therefore recommend expanding ferry services for Campbeltown, making it a year-long service, alongside ensuring bus services are accessible for all individuals, regardless of mobility.

**“My mum...uses the bus a lot. And sometimes the drivers will refuse to stop at Inveraray if they're running late...and because of what's wrong with her she can't use the bus toilets and that puts her off using it.”**

**“...it's [the bus] not accessible for disabled people.”**

As well as clear issues with healthcare provision, women explained that social care options for elderly and disabled peoples are not adequate. Women cited long waiting times for care packages and an absence of trained care professionals across the region as driving poor outcomes for vulnerable adults and children. It was stated that individuals who have sought care in Glasgow during periods of significant ill-health, have then had to return with little to no support from the health and social care partnership. This has put further strain on unpaid carers and the third sector, worsening mental wellbeing and increasing burnout rates. With both of these roles being made-up of majority women, it is therefore having a disproportionate impact on women. It was suggested that more young people should be guided into adult care roles when leaving secondary school, as well as an increase in healthcare options at local GPs and hospitals to provide further care to those who have been seriously ill.

**“...we've had some parents who have had some seriously unwell children, who have had great treatment in Glasgow and then they've come back and there's nothing”**

**“That's interesting what you're saying about the college offering loads of childcare options, but they won't think about elderly care.”**

# Transport & Infrastructure

Transport came up as a consistent issue for women in Campbeltown and the surrounding areas. They explained that the harsh weather can cause landslides, blocking road access for locals and tourists, and can also significantly delay bus services. The bus on offer received mixed reviews, with women feeling that it was frequent, particularly during the summer, but, as mentioned above, was not always accessible for disabled and/or elderly users. This situation was made worse through a lack of alternative transport options, with the local ferry being out of commission throughout 2023's summer months. The ferry is normally only offered on a seasonal basis, however due to mechanical issues with a ferry which operates between Islay and Kennacraig, the Campbeltown service has been pulled to mitigate issues there<sup>2</sup>. Women were generally unhappy with this decision, but did also explain that when the ferry returns, major changes are required surrounding timetabling. It was felt that the timetable on offer limited tourism numbers and prevented locals from easily accessing the rest of the country. Therefore, women are calling for the reintroduction of ferry services to the area, with this new service being all-year rather than seasonal, as well as improved road links to the central belt.

**“We have quite a regular bus service actually, we have more in the summer than winter, but it’s not too bad.”**

**“I think the fact that it’s summer only is absolutely ridiculous, and the timetable is a joke.”**

Women went on to explain that there was a lack of tourism infrastructure, resulting in complications for locals and visitors. Those we spoke with highlighted the removal of the tourism information centre as a potential barrier to increasing tourist numbers, with a local shop carrying out these duties, despite poor support from local government. Women went on to refer to the increase in campervans and caravans to the area and the absence of designated parking zones for these vehicles. They explained that tourists would sometimes park on the street, causing potential hazards and reduced accessibility for those with mobility needs. Those using motorhomes also do not have access to suitable waste disposal sites or water refill stations, which locals believe could be off-putting to potential tourists. This was also worsened by a lack of fuel pumps across the region and very few electric charging points. Overall, women believed that tourism was vital to the areas local economy, and therefore believe it is important that the local council provide increased facilities for tourists.

**“We’ve also got nowhere for the campervans to go, they’re just parking on the street, and you know, that’s not ideal for someone to get round.”**

**“It just doesn’t look good on us you know. Like we want people to visit, but if we haven’t got the facilities to offer them, then they’ll stop coming.”**

Campbeltown and the surrounding area has experienced considerable depopulation over the last 15 years. It can be seen that between 2001 and 2021 the population of the area has gone from 91,300 to 86,220, a decrease of 5.6%. It is also estimated that between 2018 and 2028 the

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<sup>2</sup> Campbeltown Courier. (2023). Campbeltown Ferry Faces Further Delay. Available at: <https://www.campbeltowncourier.co.uk/2023/07/20/campbeltown-ferry-faces-further-delay/>

75 and over group will increase by 23.3%, while the 0-15 age group will decrease by 17.6%<sup>3</sup>. A key driver of this depopulation is the reduction of suitable housing stock. Women believed that second homes were to blame, with there being around 3,000 second homes across Argyll and Bute, making up 6.2% of the council tax register, with the Scottish national average sitting at just 0.9%<sup>4</sup>. This high proportion of second homes makes it incredibly difficult for young people to get onto the property ladder, driving them to the central belt, including those with skills that the area needs, such as nurses and police officers. It was suggested that there should be changes made to council tax rates to reduce the number of second home purchasing, as well as greater controls put in place on Airbnb and holiday lets. Women also believed that it was important that Argyll and Bute Council was properly funded by the Scottish Government to carry out increased housing developments, including repurposing older buildings which are currently lying empty and a return to key worker housing policies.

“...there’s a huge amount of second homes in Carradale that have been there for generations. They’re not full-time, they’re part-time, and it breaks my heart.”

“I mean there are properties that have been converted in Glasgow very successfully...so why have they not renovated the ones we have here?”

“What used to happen was the key worker housing thing, it would have your nurses, firefighters, etc. and so they would get a house...They need to look at resurrecting that.”

Women also highlighted renewable energy opportunities as a chief driver in infrastructure changes and improvements. They explained that windfarms had brought increased revenue to the area, however, this has been hard-fought for through community groups. Those we spoke with stated that many of the private windfarm companies have refused to enter into community payback schemes, and that this had resulted in a loss of potential thousands for the surrounding area. Women proposed that a deciding factor for future developments should be commitments made to include local communities through shared ownership and/or community payments. They believed that the Scottish Government should take a more proactive role in ensuring these agreements are in place and withdrawal of support should be made if requirements are not met.

“...we’re negotiating with some of these developers, trying to get them to pay community benefits...There are two or three of them that are refusing to pay”

“...we don’t think they should be given permission unless they commit to paying community benefits and/or community shared ownership.”



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<sup>3</sup> National Records of Scotland Argyll and Bute Council Area Profile. (2022). Available at: [https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/files/statistics/council-area-data-sheets/argyll-and-bute-council-profile.html#pop\\_proj\\_plots4](https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/files/statistics/council-area-data-sheets/argyll-and-bute-council-profile.html#pop_proj_plots4)

<sup>4</sup> Argyll and Bute Council. (2023). Council Favours Proposals to Increase Council Tax on Second Homes. Available at: <https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/news/2023/jun/council-favours-proposals-increase-council-tax-second-homes>



# Employment & Opportunities

Another major concern for women in the Campbeltown area was the lack of employment opportunities. They explained that due to poor investment for infrastructure, as discussed above, companies have been pushed towards larger towns and cities. The ultimate result of poor resourcing is a reduction in the number of potential workers, with many young people also choosing moves to towns and cities to find viable work. Between 2001 and 2021, the 24 to 44 age group has decreased by 30.3%<sup>5</sup>, resulting in an absence of economically active individuals across the region to maintain the local economy.

Women highlighted that this issue was clear when accessing services, such as plumbers, electricians and beauticians, with demand outstripping capacity, leading to workers holding an increased level of power over customers. They stated that they felt their business was not needed, and that this particularly impacted women who lived more rurally, as it was less likely that service providers would make the journey for one individual. This could also be seen when women attempted to procure childcare for young children, with costs consistently increasing due to the cost of living and the significant demand. This lack of childcare has prevented women from re-entering full-time work, limiting their economic stability. Furthermore, the reduction in services across the region has made it difficult to maintain public sector workers, such as nurses and teachers. One woman explained that some professionals in Norway are offered incentives, such as paying off student debts to work in rural areas. This idea was met with positivity, particularly in the procurement of teachers and medical professionals. Therefore, women believed that more amenities had to be developed across the area to stem the flow of depopulation, alongside alternative ideas, to retain young people and the local economy.

*“Our population has gone down as well. The lack of employment and the ageing population; it all combines.”*

*“Carradale struggles...if you’re a tradesman, you’re going to stay in Campbeltown where you’ll have a few jobs, you might be able to pick up extras.”*

*“Childcare is terrible here; it has a huge impact on women’s work. Most people who have had kids struggle to get back to work.”*

*“If they [teachers] were paid to reduce their student debt, then some people would maybe consider moving here.”*

Some women we spoke with also explained that misogyny prevented women from entering and retaining employment. It was stated that misogyny within the workplace can present itself through subtle phrasing or through direct sexual harassment. One woman, for example, recalled an incident where she was asked not to return to a potential employer if she planned on having children, while another explained that she was ‘touched up’ on a regular basis. It was also highlighted that women and girls can be qualified, particularly within traditionally men-dominated careers, but due to engrained prejudices find it difficult to find employment.

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<sup>5</sup> National Records of Scotland. (2022). Argyll and Bute Council Area Profile. Available at: <https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/files/statistics/council-area-data-sheets/argyll-and-bute-council-profile.html>

Misogyny, therefore, is an ever-present force across Scotland, and more must be done to actively tackle this issue to better protect women and girls.

“The guy pulled me back as I was leaving and said to me “If you’re thinking about getting pregnant or moving away, don’t come back.” Now I found out I was pregnant a week later, so I didn’t!”

“...they thought it was alright to touch me up on a daily basis...They used to bend me over...and kid on they were going to stamp your arse, and they did stamp arses back then.”

“I actually have qualifications in engineering...I wanted to do something with that, and when I asked about it, they asked if I wanted to help out in the shop.”

Women were also concerned about the education situation in Campbeltown and surrounding areas, with there being a lack of teachers and poor opportunities for young people. As stated above, due to the poor transport links and infrastructure in the area, it is difficult to gain or retain young people in public sector professions. This has had an inevitable impact on local schools, and the chances of consistent education across the region. It was also explained that the schools themselves were too focused on academia, despite a need for certain vocational skills, and that options for young women were limited. There was a feeling that girls were being pushed into beauty and nursery assistant courses rather than STEM subjects at college, and that any young people that do carry out apprenticeships may be forced to leave the area due to a lack of employment options.

“The school suffers from a lack of teachers because people don’t want to live here. It’s hard to get the public services”

“There are apprenticeships going, but they get them and then bugger off to the cities”

The inevitable impact of the poor employment and educational opportunities in the area is an increased likelihood of poverty. Rural poverty may be more difficult to see than poverty in large towns and cities, but its influence is no less damaging on individuals’ lives, with women’s consistent subordination to men contributing to poorer outcomes for themselves and their families. Women we spoke with explained that the rising cost in living, particularly fuel costs, had made life increasingly challenging. In an area where bad weather and poor infrastructure result in households requiring multiple energy sources, the increases in oil and coal costs have caused significant hardship for some. Also, some households in particularly rural parts of Kintyre may not have access to cooking facilities, and as such, require further assistance. In addition to fuel, food costs have also rose, triggering more families to access the local foodbank, where donations of food have also decreased. These factors have all combined to create a worrying situation for women in Campbeltown, and without increased financial support for those at the bottom end of the economic ladder, women will be left open to further difficulty.

“...fuel poverty is really high here. Campbeltown isn’t so bad because we’re gas connected but all the villages in the periphery, most of them have no gas connection.”

“...a lot of people don’t have cooking facilities...you just assume that everyone has a cooker, an oven...but some only have a wee gas stove to cook on. In 2023!”

“We are probably seeing more women with families now accessing the foodbank”



# Domestic Violence & Justice

A further area of concern for women in the Kintyre area was the prevalence of domestic violence. The inherent nature of rural life can add levels of complexity to domestic violence, with women being easily geographically and socially isolated. Also, the interconnectedness of communities provides further cover for abusers, as they are able to use their position within small communities to alienate friends and family. In addition, women explained that the Covid-19 pandemic had changed the landscape in which survivors and sufferers of abuse lived, bringing both negatives and positives. For example, the increase in online consultations as a result of the pandemic has meant that support services are able to access more women across the region, widening their reach. However, those living with domestic abuse were suddenly trapped within their homes with abusive partners due to regular lockdowns, increasing the likelihood of significant injury. This led to more women attempting to access alternative housing options, however due to a lack of housing, they were, at times, unable to leave dangerous situations. Therefore, it is key that rural domestic violence is not sidelined, as it has many complicated layers that require specialised, local solutions.

“...it [domestic abuse] can be a bit different here. He might be a pillar of the community or whatever”

“I mean before lockdown we had to travel, and I mean travelling from Oban to Campbeltown would take about five hours...but now it's more cost-effective and we're seeing more women and children now”

“...during lockdown a lot of women came to us for houses to get away. It wasn't for the housing, it was to get away, they realised that they had to.”

Women also believed that children are consistently used as tools of manipulation by abusive partners, as they are able to exert control over mothers through social workers and childcare. It was explained that abusive partners regularly seek access to their children as a means of controlling women who have left them, and that this was worsened as social workers actively encouraged two-parent involvement. Domestic abuse workers suggested that women were often put under more scrutiny than their male partners, as women were more likely to be the primary carer for a child, and therefore were expected to attend regular meetings and check-ups, with the same not always being true for fathers. Survivors of abuse stated that the difficult social work process associated with leaving abuse, put them off seeking help, as did the thought of unsupervised childcare scenarios. They explained that they would rather stay within the household where they could continue protecting their child. It is therefore vital that increased funding for domestic abuse services is ensured, as is increased training for all professionals involved, particularly social work, to reverse engrained stereotypes around abuser-victim relationships.

“Social work is very... they're not getting domestic abuse still, even with the training. They say that they do, but they're not seeing the coercive control with the kids”

“...they use children as tools to further abuse, because they can make an accusation to social work that the mum has poor mental health...She's going through meetings, reviews, and then she's getting judged”

“One woman asked me why it was worth leaving, when you would have to give him the kids for a week, when she left to keep them all safe. If she had known that she would have to hand them back, she said she wouldn’t have left. She would have been there at least. A lot of families say that.”

Furthermore, women explained that access to justice for women can be fraught with issues, particularly for women who have experienced rape. It was highlighted that no access to medical facilities at night prevents victims of potential rapes and sexual assault late receiving timely assessment, and instead have to travel to Glasgow. This adds further distress to a traumatic event, and as transport is not guaranteed home, can even leave women stranded in an unfamiliar city. It was also felt that despite major improvements across police and ambulance services, trauma-informed practice was not universal, causing further distress. It was suggested that it has been the increased media focus surrounding domestic abuse and rape which has helped to change attitudes, rather than in-work training. Women therefore believed that it was vital that 24/7 rape services are available for victims of sexual assault to provide increase protection, alongside increased training on trauma-informed practice and further media campaigns.

“Another thing is that we don’t have a full-time police station, it’s part-time. So, if you’re sexually assaulted in the evening, you have to be taken to Glasgow. It’s so sad.”

“Services might take you there to get treatment or checked, but they might not bring you home. You’ve just been raped, been dragged to Glasgow, you’ve been assessed, and then they’re just going to leave you there on your own.”

“I’ve been in this job for ten years, and when I started the police were horrendous...all the public services were horrendous. They didn’t get it. But the more it’s in the media, the more people are seeing it, people are talking about it now.”

Moreover, it was suggested that proper education through engagement with schools, is key in reducing domestic violence and sexual assault. Women proposed that further collaborative work should be done between educational establishments and third sector organisations, so that messaging surrounding violence against women and girls (VAWG) was uniform and correct. It was also felt that young men had to be included throughout these conversations, so that misogyny and stereotypes could be better tackled. Some women highlighted that any dialogue had with boys should focus on how they can be better allies, rather than placing blame, with it being felt that, that approach had been unsuccessful in the past. Therefore, a reformed PSE curriculum is required to properly engage with young people about domestic and sexual assault, through collaboration and communication with the third sector and pupils.

“...there are some organisations going into schools, because it’s the boys that need to get educated as well as the girls.”

“...one of the teachers got in touch with me and asked if I could do something, so over the holidays I’m going to have a think about what we can do, and what we can bring into their PSE classes, so that we can actually do it without blaming the boys.”

“They need to sit boys and girls down and have these conversations, rather than... they don’t like you preaching to them. Just have an informal chat, talk about real experiences rather than hypotheticals.”

## Conclusion

To conclude, Campbeltown and Kintyre residents are facing continuous barriers while attempting to access vital public services. The lack of healthcare, particularly mental health care and gynaecological healthcare, has contributed to poor health outcomes, as well as the continual depopulation seen across Argyll and Bute. This depopulation has also been driven by a lack of housing stock, bad transport links and poor employment opportunities for young people, pushing the economically active towards larger towns and cities. Women expressed genuine concern surrounding this issue, with the ageing population contributing to an already stretched health and social care system. It can be said however, that women continue to maintain a strong sense of community across this region, and inevitably fill the gaps left behind by the public systems which too often forget about the unique aspects of rural life in Scotland.

## 8 Key Recommendations

Below we have highlighted eight key recommendations we believe align with the wants of the women of Caithness:

1. An increase in mental health provision, such as more CPNs and psychiatrists, is vital in improving mental wellbeing and reducing drug use rates across the area.
2. Appoint a specialist health professional for the region to provide advice on gynaecological care.
3. Invest in the local social care system, through increased carer roles to ensure that all adults receive prompt and respectful care.
4. Provide increased childcare options for women, particularly for under threes, to improve return to work rates.
5. Ensure a year-long ferry crossing is provided to allow residents to travel more easily to larger towns and cities.
6. Put in place mandatory guidelines which bind potential renewable energy developments to community-based benefit packages, such as community ownership and/or community payback schemes.
7. Provide and advertise financial incentives for young professionals, particularly public sector workers, to relocate to the area, such as a reduction in student debt or guaranteed housing.
8. Ensure that social work staff carry out mandatory, good-quality training to tackle stereotypes around domestic abuse.



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