

# Rural Inequalities and rights. Hopeman Community Bus.

## The Project

Hopeman Community Bus is a connection for the rural community and provides support for people in need of support due to disability, ill-health, financial difficulties and serves as an asset to support wellbeing and maintain independence.

[Burghead](#), [Hopeman](#), [Cummingston](#) and other small villages along the coast don't have direct public transport connecting them to Lossiemouth where the General Practitioner (GP) service is based. To access the GP service, people need access to a car, or they must travel to Elgin to change bus up to Lossiemouth. At £6.30 this journey is expensive and time-consuming. (For reference, Burghead is only 8.5 miles along the coast from Lossiemouth).

The bus was established as a SCIO in 2012 and prior to the pandemic was utilised for hire for sport and recreation purposes. During the pandemic the ongoing transport concerns within the area intensified, the public bus service was significantly reduced and with local medical surgeries closed a way forward was required to support community residents quickly. Working with initial partners [Outside the Box](#) and [tsiMoray](#) a new committee was formed in August 2020 to respond quickly to local needs and make best use of the bus as a local resource. Volunteer drivers were recruited and trained, new protocol and equipment arranged to operate during restrictions. We also appeared in the [newspaper The Northern Scot](#).

The Buses aim is to provide affordable transport to address local challenges of health and wellbeing, employment, isolation, climate inequalities – giving residents the right to access services by;

- Connecting people to essential health services in Lossiemouth and Elgin
- Increasing social, educational, and employment opportunities for younger people
- Using the bus as a space to promote social connections as well as a transport service to connect vulnerable/isolated people
- Creating local jobs and volunteering opportunities for local people, providing relevant support/training
- Contributing to developing a network of transport providers, green/active travel social enterprises, local anchor organisations to strengthen learning, collaboration, opportunities across Moray
- Liaising with community transport organisations across rural Scotland and Wales who will share knowledge, experience, best practice to build long-term support after ICF
- Provide a bus service connecting Burghead, Hopeman, and Cummingston to Lossiemouth GP practice and wider Moray health & wellbeing services where transport is a barrier
- Supporting the connectivity of the neighbouring rural villages to enable village life to thrive

## Challenges

The tension between transport, training, and employment affects people of all ages and contributes to the decline of many rural communities. The Hopeman Community Bus aims to address these inequalities and rights infringements of rural living by providing an affordable bus service. Unfortunately, with only one bus this service is limited in capacity. We are currently in the process to become part of a community transport network in Moray – this will allow us to expand the service and learn from each other.

## **Our rights based approach**

These disconnects between places and provision impacts every aspect of life in rural communities. People can't easily get to their doctor or health centre. This not only impacts physical health but mental health and wellbeing. There are also implications reference the rights a person has to maintain their independence around these issues when there are barriers to self-access.

The disjointed transport connections create additional challenges when addressing social isolation and loneliness – people can't get to family, friends, or social activities. There is an additional financial strain for people who already face inequalities as they must choose between costly bus/taxi fares or other daily essentials like food or heating.

The [right to health](#) and wellbeing is recognised in the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) (Article 25 - Adequate standard of living) and in the [1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#) (Article 12 – enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health).

We see the bus as a tool for maintaining independence for example;

Without a community bus young people must rely on parents to transport them to social events, training, and jobs. This can limit their prospects and opportunities to learn, work, and live in the communities they have grown up in. Without a car young people can't get to afterschool activities in Lossiemouth and families can't attend school meetings. Concerns like these are also anchored in the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the Child](#) (UNCRC), which aims to ensure the safety and health of people under 18. We believe there should be a right for young people to access services independently – the right to maintain their anonymity.

A targeted transport option enables patients to maintain their independence when accessing services, for many of those who travel on the bus they wish to keep this independence and privacy around their health and wellbeing for as long as possible which is challenged when having to rely on others to access provision.

## **Contact**

You can find out more about the Hopeman Community Bus via

- The [Hopeman Community Association website](#)
- The [Hopeman Community Bus Facebook page](#)
- Our dedicated booking and enquiry phone line: 07485 561007