



# Highland Senior Citizens Network

*Nothing about us without us*



*"We are all a community, and you are a major part of that. You are not a burden on society just because you are getting old. The community has to give you the kind of deal you deserve. You fought for the community, you brought it up and have helped to keep it....."*

*This is an opportunity for you to join together and make your collective voice heard on issues that affect your life."*

Councillor Sheila MacKay OBE at a Public Meeting held in Inverness Town House on Friday, March 24<sup>th</sup> 1995 (as reported in The Inverness Courier)

## A Voice for Highland Senior Citizens: The Early Years

### Highland Senior Citizens Network's Speaking Up for Our Age Project

#### Chairman's Introduction

In April of this year, Highland Senior Citizens Network became an Age Scotland History Partner, helping to research and celebrate 75 years of local and national older people's groups and organisations in Scotland, 1943-2018. "Speaking Up for Our Age" History Partners are Age Scotland member groups who wish to organise activities to enable members to look back on their group's history, learn more about how the group started, share and record reminiscences of their group's activities and achievements, and to gather materials that help tell their story.

While Age Scotland celebrates its 75th birthday in 2018, our own special celebration will come in 2020, when we mark 25 years of "speaking up for our age". We have begun to document the birth and development of Highland Senior Citizens Network in preparation for our Silver Anniversary, starting by capturing the stories of our founding and early members.



**LOTTERY FUNDED**

We thank Heritage Lottery Scotland and Age Scotland for a grant awarded to hold a reminiscence afternoon tea and to produce this special edition newsletter .

This special newsletter sets out to draw together what we already know about our foundations, the early years from **1995 - 2005**, and to request your help in filling in some gaps in our history.

Our efforts have proved timely: recent weeks brought the sad news of the death of Molly Doyle, long-term and valued HSCN secretary and treasurer, and of William Shand, past committee member and staunch supporter, both of whom were welcome guests at our reminiscence tea on October 1st. Our organisation is fortunate to have benefitted from their involvement and support.

**Ian McNamara**

## Where to begin?

We wanted to establish exactly where, when and how Highland Senior Citizens Network started.

## Filling in Gaps

Thanks to our Chair, Dr Ian McNamara, a comprehensive set of Minutes and newsletters exists for his period of office - 2005 to the present. However, we hold very few records of anything before that, except an old constitution that states *"Constitution as revised May 1999, from the 1995 Constitution."* There was also a fairly substantial "folk memory" of our organisation being kick-started by a big meeting in Inverness Town House organised by Councillor Sheila MacKay OBE.

One of our co-ordinators, Jo Cowan, set off to track down concrete evidence of a 1995 start date. Lengthy trawling through Inverness Courier back-editions in Inverness Library confirmed that a public meeting was held on Friday 24th March 1995 to *"set up a senior citizens' network in Inverness"*. Sheila is quoted saying *"This will be a non-political organisation, simply a pressure group lobbying politicians of all parties to achieve the best deal for a section of the population whose voice has been unheard for too long."* Around 60 people attended.

Inverness Courier - Tuesday March 28th 1995  
*"Following the meeting a steering group of about 10 people was set up to co-ordinate a campaign for the elderly. The group, which has not yet been given a name, will operate from Inverness but will link elderly folk throughout the Highlands, representing their views and acting as a pressure group."*

## Calling On Expert Witnesses

A couple of visits to former committee member Alec Dickson provided not only a great account of his own involvement in that first meeting and in HSCN, but also contacts for other founder and early members. In Alec's archive, we struck gold in the form of an information sheet from December 1995. This confirms that both the name and constitution were adopted in 1995:

***The H.S.C. Network was launched on 24th October '95 in the Spectrum Centre in Inverness....Now that we are an officially constituted organisation the work of the network has just begun.***

HSCN Background Information Sheet Dec 1995

*Below: Alec Dickson and William Shand*



HSCN Trustees invited several early committee members to a special Reminiscence Afternoon Tea in the Royal Highland Hotel on 1st October 2018. It was a lovely event filled with memories, renewing of friendships, and much laughter.



*Above: Janet Home, Ian MacKay and Molly Doyle*  
Following the recent deaths of Molly Doyle and William Shand, we feel additionally grateful to have shared such a happy occasion in their company.

*Below: Grace McDonald with Alec Dickson's daughter, Donna Stuart*



**Early Homes:** Hilton Community Centre was HSCN's main meeting place from inception until January 2009, with early AGM meetings being held at the Dr Black Hall in Inverness. After a short period in Volunteering Highland's offices, our meetings moved to Inshes Church, our current venue, from August 2009.

### Some Early Tensions & Challenges:

HSCN 1996 Information Leaflet

*"Because we are a campaigning organisation we don't get charitable status - this means we are in nobody's pocket - but it also means we don't get funding either."*

- Charitable Status

The debate about Charitable Status continued, as the organisation was seeking funds to develop but still wished to retain freedom to campaign on the issues affecting older people. By 2008, HSCN had become a registered Scottish Charity and is now a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO).

- Campaigning

The 1996 information leaflet states in large letters, "***Our motto from the beginning has been Don't Complain - Campaign***". There are evident tensions over the years between campaigning or employing other means of gaining a voice for older people - e.g. through research, representation on committees, co-production of services etc. Our current strapline, "***Nothing About Us Without Us***", perhaps suggests a move towards less confrontational approaches. However, HSCN remains committed to ensuring that the voice of older people in Highland is heard in the most effective way.

**Early Employees:** There were a couple of early attempts to secure funds for development workers. George Hobson worked with us from 1999/2000. Sara Bradley was appointed as Development Worker in August 2005 and continued to work for HSCN in a development or research capacity for the next decade.

**Early Partnership Working:** The initial steering group had the support of, and involved, representatives from Age Concern and Highland Regional Council's community education department. As it formalised, the organisation quickly made links with other like-minded bodies such as Highland Community Care Forum and Inverness Community Care Forum.

**Early Linking with Regional and National Older People's Organisations:** In the first year, the steering group met with North East counterparts, Grampian Senior Citizen's Forum, for an exchange of views and experiences. There are also records of HSCN being represented at "A Strong Voice for Scotland" - a Strathclyde Elderly Forum conference held in Stirling in 1998, at Help the Aged's 1998 "Home is Best" conference and at Scottish Pensioners Forum Annual Conference in 1999. Alec Dickson continued to represent HSCN at this event for several years. In 2000, Mary MacLeod, HSCN Chair, attended Dumfries and Galloway Old People's Forum.

**Early Issues:** Transport, community care, standing charges, Council Tax, water rates, benefit uptake and level of state pension are mentioned in the 1995 information sheet.

In the May 1998 Minute, it is suggested "*that future campaigning issues should include the matter of housing shortage for the elderly in the Highlands, poverty in the Highlands and how it affects the elderly, and fuel bills.*"

In 2004, HSCN undertook a research project "*Better Support for Older People in the Highlands*" in co-operation with the University of Teesside and Help the Aged, through the Older Peoples' Project Support Programme. Findings were based on responses to 1960 questionnaires sent out across the Highlands.

**First Annual Conference:** Our first annual conference took place in Lochardil House Hotel in April 2006. It continues to this day, attracting members and supporters from all over Highland and providing a forum for debate about the issues that matter most to senior citizens in Highland.

## Sheila MacKay and Molly Doyle: HSCN Co-Founders

Sheila and Molly, Molly and Sheila. Our co-founders are spoken of in tandem, and acted as a formidable duo through a long period of our history. Both were Inverness District Council councillors and shared a mission to “stick up for” those whose voices might otherwise go unnoticed.

### Sheila’s HSCN Story

Sheila is Inverness born and bred. Very bright at school, she left to take a job despite the rector doing his best to persuade her to stay on. She had a variety of jobs over the years: working in Riggs Butchers, Eastgate, with Universal Stores on Academy Street, Inverness Farmers Dairy, and as a night operator in the telephone exchange.

Her husband Ian’s BT job took him away a lot travelling the West Coast, so Sheila threw herself into community activities. Once the family were grown up, she “caught the political bug”, initially through a family connection with Russell Johnston’s wife, Joan. She started attending Liberal Party meetings – eventually leading to her standing for office as a district councillor, serving for a time as Deputy Provost and being honoured with an OBE in 1995. Despite reaching these illustrious heights, people never really used any of her official titles...It was always just “Sheila”.

Both her political life and Highland Senior Citizens Network were products of Sheila’s keen sense of justice: she often came home to Ian saying of something she had heard that day: “That’s not right - something should be done about it!”.

At the heart of the fight for a new community centre for Hilton, Sheila was delighted when its doors opened in 1991. However, with a large proportion of older people using the centre, she was constantly hearing of the issues affecting them and being asked to help.

The Inverness Courier, March 21<sup>st</sup> 1995 “

***The Highlands and Inverness is one of the few areas left in Britain where the collective voice of the elderly population is not being heard....This will be a non-political organisation, simply a pressure group lobbying politicians of all parties to achieve the best deal for a section of the population whose voice has been unheard for too long. ” Sheila MacKay OBE***

Her response, in early 1995, was to call via the local media for anyone interested in helping to set up a senior citizens network, and the rest is (our) history! Sheila was instrumental in building up HSCN, remaining its public voice for many years. Her focus was always on older people *themselves* working together to change things.



Dr Ian McNamara presents Sheila with Age Scotland’s Jess Barrow Award



Farewell and thanks to Molly and Sheila in 2012



In 2011, Molly and Sheila received Age Scotland's Jess Barrow Award for Campaigning: a fitting tribute to their commitment to creating better lives for older people in Highland. Both Sheila and Molly stepped down from the committee in 2012/13.

*Our thanks to Ian, Sheila's husband, for sharing his memories of Sheila's involvement in HSCN: Sheila is now living with dementia, and resident in a care home in Inverness.*

*Sadly, Molly died on 19<sup>th</sup> October this year, aged 87. We are grateful that she had recently shared some HSCN memories during two very sociable visits from Jo, our Co-ordinator, and at our Reminiscence Tea Party in the Royal Highland Hotel on 1<sup>st</sup> October. Thanks to her family for permission to share these memories with you.*

### Molly's HSCN Story

Mary Christina Doyle, better known as "Molly", gave a simple reason for her involvement in HSCN: "I'm a bit bossy, and I like getting things done!"

Molly's organisational skills were evident in her work as a medical practice manager, and her commitment to public service shone through in the community roles she loved – as district and community councillor, as Girls Brigade officer, as church organist and as a volunteer in Cameron House Care Home "shop".

*"Sheila MacKay, a fellow councillor, asked if I would help get some kind of forum for older people up and running, and I agreed to help – although I didn't think I would get as involved as I did. I liked the idea of linking up older people across the Highlands. We went on some great visits to other groups across the Highlands to try and get them to join forces to make the voice of older people louder and stronger. I really enjoyed these trips. It was important to come and listen, to ask if anyone had anything to say, to open a conversation and have a blether, rather than coming with the idea that you were telling them something. They were often feeling that they didn't get a chance for their issues to be heard, that they were "out of things", so just listening was important."*

Keeping people in touch, and building a real "Highland network", was what mattered most to Molly. Her HSCN Newsletter was eagerly awaited for chatty content, intermittent family news and information about sources of help.

*I am enclosing a form about Post Office queuing which you might feel like filling in and returning to the address given .....  
That is if you still have a Post Office!  
HSCN Newsletter, August 2005*

*Have you paid your annual subscription? If not, we will be grateful to receive it. We need the cash!!!  
HSCN Newsletter, June 2000*

Molly's amusing personal postscripts were much appreciated too! Her fundraising recipe book was also a great success.



Molly was both Secretary and Treasurer for much of her tenure, and loved the challenge of finding and raising funds. Her gentle "reminders" in the days of an annual subscription weren't always subtle. Reading them back recently, she said with a big smile, "I was quite cheeky then, but it worked."

Asked whether there was anything she thought HSCN should be careful not to lose sight of in their work, Molly replied, "I enjoyed my time with the network, and Dr McNamara has kept it in good hands. We should always listen to what people are needing, and not be frightened to speak out and campaign when things just aren't right."

## Our next task: Gathering Personal Stories and Insights

Our recent afternoon tea brought together early committee members and supporters, our staff and Board members. There was a real buzz as people renewed acquaintance and exchanged news and memories.



We had a delightful reminder that our organisation's history is ongoing, as Co-ordinator, Anne McDonald, and Board Member, Irene Robertson, celebrated exactly 3 years with Highland Senior Citizens Network on 1st October!

We have launched the process of gathering memories and stories, starting with the founding and early members who are still in touch with HSCN. Jo has spoken to three of our early committee members already. **If you have memories to share, please get in touch with us!**

### Here are snippets from Alec, Grace and Mary's contributions.....

#### **Alec Dickson, Founder Member and Committee Member until 2010.**



Alec attended the first meeting in Inverness Town House and was on the Steering Group formed thereafter. His background encompasses naval service, industry, union representation and community involvement. Alec had a particular interest in linking with senior citizens groups from other areas of Scotland and in ensuring that Highland pensioners views were represented. He was in the press in 2016 talking about NHS Highland's Reach Out Campaign to combat loneliness and isolation.

#### **What do you remember about the early days?**

*Nobody took much notice of us: we were just another group. Eventually we got well known and we campaigned. We became a charity and some people were a bit worried about it, that we wouldn't be able to campaign. We took advice from lawyers and they told us what we could do and couldn't do and it was decided that we would go ahead and do that.*

*It didn't stop us from campaigning, you just had to be careful what you did.*

*I remember standing outside the Town House there, and we had our banners. We were trying to stop the closure of a certain care home. We didn't manage it at the time, but what we did get was a promise that they were going to build a new one in place of it, and that's what happened.*

*And we would look into some of these care homes that were absolutely terrible; they were just "granny houses", just for money. Some of the caring wasn't good, and we would report that to the Care Commission.*

*We travelled to other places, to other committees, Strontian, Black Isle, Wick and Thurso. We tried to get people organised so that we could visit these places, find out what their problems were.*

*I was a delegate to the Scottish Pensioners' Forum in Glasgow. I went every year to their meeting and represented the Highland Area. I was a bit wary of them. The group in Glasgow were more into politics, more political than we were.*

#### **What should we keep doing?**

*I think you need to keep looking into things about care homes. That's a very important thing. Find out what's happening in other areas for elderly people. That's what's good about the AGM: you get talks by various people, then you split up into groups and each group elects a spokesperson who writes down what's being said, and then feeds back. You're getting a good feedback from that.*



### **Grace McDonald, Founder Member, and Treasurer until 1999.**

For Grace, getting involved in Highland Senior Citizens Network, was a natural continuation of her commitment to social responsibility. She echoed many of the other early members in saying she was brought up believing you should be active in your community to benefit others—particularly those most in need of support.

Raised in Renfrew, and then living in Clydebank, Grace trained as a primary school teacher as a mature student. Having family connections in the Highlands, she was keen to find a position “up North” and was delighted to be offered a post at Dochgarroch Primary School where she taught from 1979 until 1994.

Grace’s interest in Highland Senior Citizens Network was sparked by a letter about potential care home closures in the newspaper. She already knew Sheila MacKay as a councillor, and wrote to her to say that she would be interested in supporting the formation of the new group. Following a post-retirement trip to New Zealand, Grace attended the Town House meeting in 1995 and became involved, eventually taking on the role of treasurer. However, she had to retire from involvement due to caring for her husband.

#### **What do you feel Highland Senior Citizens Network should be mindful of today?**

*It’s really important to keep issues to the forefront that affect older people. There are people coming behind us who will be in a much worse situation if austerity continues. We also need to ensure that care workers are properly recognised for the work they do. Vocational training should receive the same respect as other academic avenues. We should also be fighting for a proper Older People’s Parliament!*

#### **Minute of HSCN Committee Meeting Monday 25th May 1998,**

***“As Sheila is stepping down as Chairman, Mary has agreed to take her place.”***

#### **Dr Mary MacLeod, HSCN Chairman 1998 until 2001/2.**

You would think that her career as a consultant psychiatrist with a psycho-geriatric specialism, would be the obvious link, but it was acting which provided Mary’s first connection to Highland Senior Citizens Network! Molly’s son, John, met her through the Operatic Society and said, “My mother is part of a senior citizens group which you might find interesting.”

Mary’s strongest memories of the early days are that the committee’s own personal stories, experiences and interests very much contributed to the initial focus of the organisation. There were also strong links with Hilton Community Centre and the surrounding community. People on the committee brought their strengths – as members of the community, councillors and former councillors, health workers, social workers, union representatives. Her own interest in health and social care was backed by personal as well as professional experience of the care system - and this was true for other committee members too.

As the organisation strengthened, Mary recalls a growing commitment to networking with other groups in Highland and further afield.

Fundraising was always needed and, in March 2001, Mary’s son Malcolm ran the Inverness Half Marathon to raise funds for Highland Senior Citizens Network.

A change of work commitments led Mary to retire from the Chair in 2001/2.

Given the growing number of people living with dementia, she feels it is important for us to keep up to date with what is happening in that arena.





# Highland Senior Citizens Network

*Nothing about us without us*

Highland Senior  
Citizens Network

Box 301

8 Church Street

Inverness

IV1 1EA

Tel 07716 884 989

“Nothing about us,  
without us”

Email:

[hscn@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:hscn@hotmail.co.uk)

Website:

[www.hscn.co.uk](http://www.hscn.co.uk)

*“ I believe that  
the more you  
know about  
the past, the  
better you are  
prepared for  
the future”*

Theodore Roosevelt

## Filling in the Gaps.... 1995—2005 We need your help!

Although we have tracked down many early committee members, and Jo is busy collecting their stories, we would be interested in hearing from anyone who has memories of Highland Senior Citizens Network which they are happy to share.

- ◆ Do you have any Highland Senior Citizens Network newsletters, minutes, leaflets, photographs or newspaper cuttings dating from 1995 - 2005?
- ◆ Does anyone have a copy of the original 1995 constitution?
- ◆ Would anyone be interested in volunteering to help Jo to trawl through the newspaper archives in Inverness Library?
- ◆ Did you, or your organisation, have a particular connection with Highland Senior Citizens Network during that period?

**If you can help in adding to our story, please write to us at our HSCN address, or contact Jo by phone on 07933 653585 or by e-mail at [jo-hscn@outlook.com](mailto:jo-hscn@outlook.com)**

## What do you think Highland Senior Citizens Network’s priorities should be?

It was really interesting to hear from past committee members what they thought we should prioritise. What do our current members and supporters think? **Please let us know 3 issues you think we should highlight over the next 3 years.** Contact details in the blue page margin.

## What Happens Next for Speaking Up for Our Age?

Highland Senior Citizens Network is indebted to Age Scotland and to Heritage Lottery Fund for this opportunity to start researching our story. We are also thankful that so many of our past office-bearers, committee members and supporters have agreed to add their memories to our records, and we are working our way through gathering their stories. Our Reminiscence Afternoon Tea proved successful in providing further stories and “leads” to be followed.

We hope to hold some kind of celebratory event in 2020 to mark our Silver Anniversary, and will be seeking funding and support to make this a special occasion through which we can share Highland Senior Citizens Network’s story of

***“Speaking Up for Our Age”***

**Connect, inform and campaign .....Join HSCN today!**