



HIGHLANDS R US – EVENT REPORT

Introduction On 19th February, 2007, three people met together to discuss how we might combine a celebration of Scotland's Year of Highland Culture with the European Commission's Year of Equal Opportunities for All. The Highlands & Islands Equality Forum (HIEF), Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS) and Northern Constabulary (NorCon) were soon committed to delivering a large-scale event to celebrate Highland diversity – "Highlands R Us" was born. Highland 2007 and Eastgate Centre joined the steering group and additional funding was secured from Communities Scotland and Highland Council.

Our vision remained constant throughout the planning and delivery of this event. We wanted to convey the message that Highland culture is diverse and that we should celebrate the richness of it. Who defines themselves as belonging to the Highlands and what that identity is, is down to each individual and not created by stereotypical notions. The Highlands is moving beyond welcoming people in to the area to becoming a community that includes everyone who wants to be part of it; a community in which there is no 'them and us'. The event aimed to showcase a small sample of who 'we' are – "Highlands R Us". We also wanted to reassure any who might feel their own image of Highland culture to be threatened. Diversity in the Highlands does not take away any of the more traditional aspects, it merely adds other layers into the mix. Diversity adds colour, depth and meaning; it does not diminish or dilute any element.

The event took place on Thursday 5th July between 11am and 4pm. A large stage with full audio-visual technology supplied by Dynam took pride of place on Falcon Square along with various display buses from Northern Constabulary and the Fire & Rescue Service. Moray Firth Radio set up an outside broadcast between 11am and 1pm with Nicky Marr interviewing various local people. Inside the Eastgate Centre, a series of privacy booths gave passers-by the opportunity to discuss concerns such as harassment, discrimination and domestic abuse with expert counsellors from Leddingham Chalmers, Harper MacLeod and the Terrence Higgins Trust. Upstairs in one of the Eastgate Centre's bridge links, a diverse series of informative stalls complemented the rest of the day's activities: COPFS, Fire and Rescue Service, Violence against Women, NHS Highland, LGBT Youth Scotland, Gay-Ness, Studi'03, Advocacy Highland, Highland Muslim Education

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Association, BEMIS Bòrd na Gàidhlig, Comunn na Gàidhlig, Cànan and Air Splaoid – all helped the public to understand the good work being done to support minority groups and how to live a good and safe life in our local community. The show-stopper for kids and adults alike was Nick Martin's stall, 'Creatures Great and Small' which showed us the diversity in the insect and reptile world.

Participants on and off stage provided a colourful mix to underline the diverse groups, individuals and activities that contributed to the celebration. Bubbles & Co soon got the public into the act too, by painting faces non-stop for five hours! Helpers gave away free gifts and balloons, and the whole spectacle was one of colour, vibrancy and happy faces. Even the sun shone!

From the moment Rachel MacDonald took to the stage with her bagpipes, we knew we were in for a great day's entertainment. Provost Bob Wynd gave the opening address in which he welcomed everyone to the event and voiced his own support for a diverse Highland culture. This was followed by Fyonn who had written a special song for the occasion. Master of Ceremonies, Bryan Beattie did a brilliant job of putting all participants at their ease, interviewing local elected representatives and keeping the whole event flowing smoothly and running to time. Knowing that Bryan was in charge allowed all around him (including event helpers) to relax and enjoy the day.

Music and dance was popular with the audience and ranged from Val Houston's Highland Dancers and Tain Music Group playing modern Scottish ceilidh music, to colourful Russian dancing by Elena Reid with her daughters and their friends who were later joined by a party of young visitors from Belarus. Just as when youngsters from Fèis na h-Òige took to the stage, passers-by stopped in their tracks to watch.

It was good to have representation from both Crown Church and the Muslim Association, demonstrating the good community relations we enjoy in the Highlands. Added to this was a play on sexual orientation issues by members of the Terrence Higgins Trust. Yet more diversity was evidenced when Kathleen Riachi treated us to a demonstration of Lebanese/Turkish belly dancing, and this was contrasted with Just Not Cricket, a local heavy metal band who had all the youngsters in Falcon Square moshing. Suddenly it was their event too – a fantastic validation of what we had set out to achieve.

Chief superintendent Laurie Stewart gave the closing address in which he praised the event. Members of Northern Constabulary who attended the event claimed to have had a lot of interest for recruitment – more than is usual at open days, leading us to wonder if people who would normally hesitate to approach them perhaps felt more confident of being welcomed at an event that encouraged equality and diversity. Officers manned their display bus, patrolled the square and shopping mall to provide highly visible, friendly community safety, and generally joined in the fun – foot tapping was observed when Just Not Cricket were onstage!

Local councillors – long standing and newly-elected - John Finnie, Pauline Munro, David Chisholm, Drew Hendry, John Holden and Hamish Wood were interviewed by Bryan Beattie, as were Mary Scanlon MSP and Elspeth Attwooll MEP. All were happy to give their views on Highland diversity and applauded the ideas behind Highlands R Us.

Our message was broadcast in many different ways to reinforce the same key points to a large and disparate audience. Before the event, we had a double page editorial in The Hub magazine which is distributed free of charge to Inverness homes. We also had short mentions in local press and extensive coverage on Moray Firth Radio. On the day itself, our message made its way over the airwaves for a full two hours on MFR, was televised by Grampian evening news and watched live by a very large number of passers-by. Falcon Square and the Eastgate Mall were never empty and large crowds gathered at certain points of the day. After the event, we gained coverage in all of the local press. It was disappointing to read the Highland News' disparaging comments about our funders, but our response to their article was published in the Letters to the Editor column. All other reports had grasped our key messages and gave positive reports. The event was filmed and a DVD is being produced which can be used at other events to showcase the Highlands, so all in all, our message has reached a very large proportion of the public, and is set to continue being heard.

Public Response showed that our message was understood and welcomed. Our Vox Pops exercise captured comments from the public, and these can be read in full in Appendix (i). Here is a flavour of some of them:

"Inverness feels really cosmopolitan today – up there with other world cities"

"Good that everyone is individual"

"I love diversity I do"

"Today is fantastic"

Thank you to all participants, and to our sponsors who made this great event possible - HIEF's partners (SCVO, HIE, UHI, HC and ESF), Communities Scotland, COPFS, NorCon and HC. Thanks also to Carol MacPherson, Promotions & Administration Manager Eastgate Centre, and Alison Bell of Highland 2007 for their support in the planning stages and to Karen Sutherland, Graphic Designer at Highland Council, for the fabulous Highlands R Us posters. We were also grateful for the generosity of local shops who made no complaints about our invasion of Falcon Square. Thanks to the Euro Information Centre and Highland 2007 for their donation of give-away gifts. And a really big thank you to our army of helpers, family and friends without whom we just could not have tackled such an ambitious project. Everyone involved was thrilled with the success of the day, that it all ran smoothly and that we managed to get some really important messages out to a wide section of the general public.

/More about the event's participants

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Stage activities started with talented 13-year-old **Rachel MacDonald** piping us in. The quality of her performance was a foretaste of what was to follow throughout the day, and she returned to the stage twice more, singing some songs that she learnt through the Gaelic Medium School, and closing the event with another medley of piping.

Master of Ceremonies, **Bryan Beattie**, did a brilliant job of putting all participants at their ease, interviewing local elected representatives and keeping the whole event running to time. Knowing that Bryan was in charge allowed all around him (including event helpers) to relax and enjoy the day.

Provost Bob Wynd, wearing his chain of office, gave the opening address, welcoming all to the event and underlining his support of Highland diversity.

Next up was **Fyonn**, a 15-year-old singer and acoustic guitarist who is making a name for herself in local music venues. Fyonn wrote a song especially for the day. Entitled 'A Highlander's Love' it sends out a clear message of respect and love for fellow beings - 'You're part of the Highlands, Whoever you be'. (cf Appendix (ii) for the full lyrics) She then followed this with her own cover of Sister Sledge's classic, 'We are family'.

Ailsa Spindler, together with **Agnes Boes, Alan Parker and Kita Mackintosh from the Terrence Higgins trust** performed a short piece of drama on sexual orientation issues. In 'The worm has turned' which was written by Ailsa, courtroom scenes contrasted trials on sexual orientation issues in 1806 and 2007. Whilst fictional, these trials were based on fact and highlight that in 1806, homosexuals were criminalised (more men were hanged for sodomy than for murder) in Britain, while in 2007 legislation is moving more towards the protection of diversity of sexual orientation.

Kathleen Riachi treated the audience to a colourful and exotic display of Lebanese & Egyptian modern belly dancing using veils and a cabaret stick. She danced to music by Lebanese Julia Boutros, Assi El Hellani & Raheb Alama, and Egyptian Amr Diab – all famous singers in the Middle East.

Young people from the children's Gaelic festival, Fèis na h-Òige, sang, fiddled and played accordion and guitar to the delight of a large crowd. These children had a confidence on stage that demonstrated that this attribute is not only to be found in older, more experienced performers. They were followed onstage by **Rachel Alcorn from Cànan and Dwelly**, the large purple cartoon character, who chatted with Bryan about their work in promoting the Gaelic language through Air Splaoid! (www.airsplaoid.co.uk).

The **Tain Music Group** comprised three young women on fiddle and one young man on guitar. All are members of the well-known local modern Ceilidh group, Gizzen Briggs, and they played throughout the day in the Eastgate Centre and also on the main stage. Their own brand of traditional music certainly drew a crowd and got toes tapping.

The **Reverend Peter Donald and friends from Crown Church** gave out a clear message of the Christian values of love, peace and respect for fellow humans. A DVD showing the work of their church was also shown.

Shameena Yusuf and Shiria Rashid of the Highland Muslim Educational Association joined Gordon Ellis of the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service to introduce their DVD called 'I'm quite unique' which celebrates racial and religious diversity in the Highlands.

Val Houston's Highland Dancers were just delightful. Visitors and locals alike stopped to watch their high quality performance of traditional Highland dancing.

The biggest crowd of the day was probably when **Elena Reid** took to the stage with her daughters and friends to perform some traditional Russian song and dance. Resplendent in bright red and gold, the dancers resembled a colourful set of Russian dolls. **Young visitors from Belarus**, here on holiday thanks to the Chernobyl Children Life Line Charity and complete with national flag, joined Elena onstage to sing a traditional song. The whole assembly then came down into the square and joined with members of the audience in a circle dance. Elena and the girls were invited back onstage later in the day for an encore.

Another encore was given by **Fyonn** before the final act of the day by **Just Not Cricket**, a 5 member metal band of local lads. When Sean Toye took the microphone and 'screamo-ed' "This event is about diversity, we are diversity" the event suddenly connected with a whole new section of the public. Just Not Cricket's music is LOUD, but thankfully local traders made no complaints. On-duty police officers could be seen enjoying the spectacle of Falcon Square full of 'moshers' and youngsters using their mobile phones to take photos. Thanks to Sean on vocals, 'Moley' (Darren) on drums/vocals, Elliot on rhythm guitar, Pat on lead guitar and Jamie on bass.

Ears still ringing, **Morag Redwood** from HIEF gave a vote of thanks to all sponsors, participants, helpers and spectators before handing over to **Chief Superintendent Laurie Stewart** for the closing address. In this, he warmly congratulated all involved for successfully conveying an important message. He acknowledged that Northern Constabulary have a role to play alongside everyone else in Highlands to create positive community relations and a rich and diverse society in which each individual is given equal opportunity to play their part, and where everyone is treated with respect for their different needs.

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Stage interviews were conducted by **Bryan Beattie** between the various stage acts. All of those who took part were very supportive of both the day's event and key message of celebrating Highland diversity, and many expressed their hope that there would be more such events in future.

Cathie Way and Watch Manager Davie Bell from Highland Fire & Rescue Service made an impromptu stage appearance to discuss their commitment to delivering a service equally to all members of the community.

It was good to have **Elsbeth Attwooll MEP** with us and to learn that she came to Inverness especially for our event. Long-term supporter of equality and diversity in the Highlands and other parts of Europe, and of the work of HIEF, Elspeth sent out a caution against making assumptions about groups of people we don't know. We should value the individual for who he or she is. Communication is key to better understanding of what causes some people to face barriers to inclusion in society. Elspeth made the valid point that "what makes disabled people disabled are the obstacles society puts in their way"

Mary Scanlon MSP, is also a supporter of the Equalities agenda in the Highlands and gave a very strong endorsement of the event's objectives.

Councillors **John Finnie and Pauline Munro** discussed how diversity impacts on council services, and the various positive measures being taken to improve access to services for all – through better physical access for people with disabilities, provision of English language classes etc. They mentioned the difference between positive action and positive discrimination and explained that "treating everyone equally does not mean you treat everyone the same".

Councillor Hamish Wood focussed on equality in employment, highlighting equality for women in senior positions and the right of older people to request to work beyond the age of 65 thereby continuing their valuable contribution to society. He urged all employers to follow good Equal Opportunities procedures and systems, and his message to the wider audience was to "think of others and be positive".

Cllrs David Chisholm, Drew Hendry and John Holden delivered similar positive and supportive messages that encourage mutual respect for others and equality of opportunity for all.

The onstage interviews gave a clearly united view that all levels of electoral office agree that diversity in the Highlands is here and that it is good.

We also had a letter of support for our event from **Richard Lochhead MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment** in which he said, *"We very much regret that it was not possible to join you in today's celebrations. Events such as this provide an excellent opportunity for communities to come together to celebrate their differences and also share what they have in common. The cultural diversity of peoples and cultures found in the Highlands today is something we should all embrace as it is beneficial for social, cultural and economic reasons. But we must not forget*

that racism, discrimination and exploitation are sadly still the reality for many in our communities and therefore we must continue to work together to tackle this so that everyone has the chance to fulfil their potential and share the benefits a multi-cultural society brings.”

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Stalls were situated on the bridge of Eastgate Centre and gave an excellent opportunity for a few groups to interact with passing shoppers and explain their services.

Bòrd na Gàidhlig, Comunn na Gàidhlig, Clì Gàidhlig, Cànan and Air Splaoid joined forces to staff a stall with lots of information on the Gaelic language

Advocacy Highland is a highland wide voluntary organisation. Information was available on the support offered to assist people of all ages who have mental ill health, learning disabilities or are frail and elderly, to speak up and be heard. There was also information for potential volunteers, the general public and for other organisations.

The Studi'03 artists are a group with learning disabilities working from the Highland Print Studio; they produce paintings, prints, drawings and works in coloured tissue and have exhibited in various places around Inverness. The soap they had on display was on behalf of another group who work at the Corbett Centre. They are Ness soaps, a social firm working with people in the Merkinch community and learning disabled volunteers from the Corbett centre.

Creatures Great and Small was a hit attraction. Nick Martin brought along large poisonous and non-poisonous snakes, spiders, hissing beetles etc. All ages really enjoyed such an exciting display.

LGBT Youth Scotland and Gay-Ness joined forces to provide an educative display that informed on sexual health and other issues around sexual orientation.

COPFS had a display which allowed the public to learn more about the wide service they provide.

The Highland Muslim Educational Association and BEMIS gave information on support for ethnic and religious minorities.

Violence against Women and NHS Highland put across some key messages about the sensitive and sadly prevalent issue of domestic abuse. Counsellors were on hand for anyone who wanted to talk, and it was good to learn of the wide range of support services available in Highlands.

Highlands and Islands Fire & Rescue Service had an information and recruitment stall and were keen to get across the key message that the Fire Service welcomes a full diversity of applicants.

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MFR Interviews were conducted by Nicky Marr and featured as part of their live broadcast which cut into Tich McCooley's show and was widely broadcast over the central Highland area.

Inspector Gordon MacLeod was quick to reassure listeners that the issues around the heightened national security status were not evident in the Highlands where there are good and peaceful relations between different racial and religious groups. He went on to talk about the programme of events for the day.

Morag Redwood of HIEF explained the reasons why we held the event and the key message behind the title 'Highlands R Us', and **Gordon Ellis of the Crown Office & Procurator Fiscal Service** talked about equality and diversity issues in Highlands and the stalls represented at Highlands R Us.

Fyonn also spoke to Nicky and gave her personal opinion about the need to respect diversity. She discussed the lyrics of the song 'A Highlander's Love' and her part in the day's events.

Cait Maclaighlin of L'Arche talked about the work of her project in supporting disabled people into work.

Rosemary Mackinnon of Highland Council talked about various projects to provide support for inward migrants settle into the area delivered by the Community Planning partners in the Highland Wellbeing Alliance including a number of Community Based Language Assistants to help children and families settle in to the region.

Moira Paton of NHS Highland talked about violence against women and men using primary care services

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Outside activities included **Northern Constabulary's Display Bus** and the **Fire & Rescue Service's Community Safety display and fire tender**. The police reported high interest in their recruitment exercise.

Bubbles & Co had folks queuing up to have their faces painted and customers were delighted by the colourful and professional results. Such a variety of designs certainly added a carnival feel to the crowds.

Several hundred **helium balloons** were given away throughout the day to delighted children, and our volunteer helpers had eventually to retire with stained and numbed fingers!

Many boxes of **free gifts** such as Scotlandistheplace, European Union and Highland 2007 marketing goods were 'sold out' within a couple of hours. The number one favourite seemed to be the European items, especially the laminated maps, with people excitedly pointing out which country they came from. A large map of Europe inside the Eastgate Centre attracted similar interest.

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Privacy Booths inside the Eastgate Centre gave the public the opportunity to meet with experts on sensitive and confidential issues. **Gillian Shaw of Leddingham Chalmers** and **Shareen Auckbarallee from Harper MacLeod** gave legal advice on employment legislation and potential cases of discrimination, and **Ailsa Spindler of the Terrence Higgins Trust** gave advice on domestic abuse and sexual orientation issues.

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Vox Pops comments were collected by **Lindsey Clark of Northern Constabulary** and posted onto a board beside the privacy booths. There were no negative comments and everyone seemed to be celebrating, viewing diversity in the Highlands as a positive thing and welcoming Highlands R Us as an excellent event. One person commented that "Inverness feels really cosmopolitan today – up there with other world cities". (cf Appendix (i) for full details)

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Security was provided by **Eastgate Centre staff and members of Northern Constabulary**. Participants commented on how safe they felt at such a high-profile event on potentially sensitive issues. Although security was highly visible, we achieved our objective of providing this in a reassuring and considerate manner.

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Helpers were key to the success of this complex programme of events. The setting-up had to be done before the Eastgate Centre opened for trading at 9am and cleared up after 6pm, and several of our helpers worked without rest from 7am to 8pm. Wearing highly visible red T Shirts with HIEF written on them, they managed to be both highly visible and unobtrusive. We would like to record our thanks to the following army of helpers:

John Ferguson, Helen Sandison, Nicole Deufel, Norette Ferns, Wilma Chestnut and Barbara Love of SCVO

Lindsey Ferries, Lynsey Clark, Gordon MacLeod, Carrie Shanks, Alasdair Duff, Jennifer Brown and Duncan McKenzie from Northern Constabulary

**Gordon Ellis and Hilary of Crown Office & Procurator Fiscal Service
Community Safety staff from Highlands and Islands Fire & Rescue Service**

Vic, Trina and staff of Dynam

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Duncan Chisholm and Nikki Marr of Moray Firth Radio
Alan Sutherland of the Hub
Carol MacPherson, Promotions & Administration Manager Eastgate
Centre and her security staff
Alison Bell of Highland 2007
The HIEF Team of Morag Redwood, Lisa Buchanan, Catherine Munro
and Christine Taylor

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Sponsors provided the means with which to stage the event. We are very grateful to HIEF's partners – **SCVO, HIE, UHI, HC and ESF** – and also to **Communities Scotland, COPFS and NorCon**