

## **Eco Savvy's first year**

**Just over a year ago, on 11<sup>th</sup> April,, a small group of people began to prepare the shop for opening. This involved a lot of cleaning, scraping, upcycling and painting. Shop volunteers were trained in what then seemed complicated processes of recording sales of different types. And then, on 19<sup>th</sup> April 2014 the Eco Savvy Community shop opened for business.**

To our delight and astonishment we had a very busy summer with much appreciation from islanders and visitors. Members flooded in and new volunteers stepped forward. As we got used to the shop routines, we began to draw breath and prepare for some of our wider Eco Savvy tasks. Schools were visited and involved, encouraged towards environmental green flags. We had a stall at the Highland Games demonstrating our ethos and ways of saving waste and upcycling.

On 21st September we held our first Skills Share day and on 30<sup>th</sup>, our first Members meeting to look at progress so far. Throughout this period we had been developing ways of working together, with a small working group forming, to carry out the main tasks and regular Volunteer meetings for updating the wider group and helping to form policy by means of discussion and forums.

In late October, we branched out further with an evening of fun and glamour, but a serious, waste reducing purpose, the Fashion Show, immediately followed by a hugely successful Auction. After a brief pause to update the shop itself for a refit, we celebrated the close of 2014 with Christmas lunch for volunteers at Coast.

This year has been just as busy so far, starting with Understanding Social Enterprise, a Training course open to all and attended by several of us in February. This was also an opportunity for networking and sharing ideas with others in the Arran voluntary sector.

On 22nd February we held another Skills Sharing and Seed swap event with the emphasis on skills like knitting and felting which could be used for the Woollen Woods scheme. In March, we had another extremely busy weekend with the Pop-up Shop and second Auction. These events were great publicity both for Eco Savvy and for our whole aim of reducing waste, but were also extremely hard work for a large number of people and have led us to question whether we would do them again.

And so to 18th April Eco Savvy's first Birthday party, celebrated in style with non-alcoholic bubbly for volunteers and shoppers alike, and plenty of cake, brilliant bunting and festive decorations.

Our thoughts then began to turn purposefully towards future developments. We had been discussing for some time the possibility of access to part of a field in the Arran Community Land

Initiative in order to develop a community garden, and we took first steps towards this goal by funding a 2 day Introduction to Permaculture course in late April, led by Lusi Alderslowe and open to both Eco Savvy and ACLI. Twelve of us attended and learned far more than we would have thought possible, both about working with the land and with each other. A report follows.

Another Skills Sharing at the end of April focussed totally on getting ready for Woollen Woods; a report on this will also follow.

Throughout our first year we continued to establish effective ways of working together by regular meetings with volunteers, Forums, and the opening of the working group at the heart of the project to anyone who wants to be involved. Thanks are due to so many for the success of this first year and I cannot begin to name them, but there are more than a few who have given wholehearted dedication, creativity, time and energy. It has been one of the delights of my involvement with Eco Savvy, to see so many who care so much for our goals giving their individual skills and ideas, and to know that each one of us is a unique contributor.

Sue Weaver

chairperson.