

Amy Dunnachie

Age: 26

Location: Isle of Jura, Scotland

 @amydunnachie

Main Challenges



Infrastructure



Employment



Long-term & affordable housing



Background

Jura is an untouched island within the Inner Hebrides of Scotland with an untamed beauty that is tempered by its harsh weather and isolation.

Amy Dunnachie grew-up on the Isle of Jura before moving to the mainland to study silver smithing at the Glasgow School of Art. After graduating, Amy decided to move back to the mountains and coastline she calls home.

“I always knew I wanted to come back to Jura at some point. Family connection is a big reason why we – my partner and I – decided to be on Jura as our families live here. It was important more-so for my partner who has a wider emotional connection with much more of his immediate family here.”

But moving back wasn't an easy transition.

“Job prospects for young people, or anyone really, can be one of the biggest difficulties. There's not a lot of choice and I have no job security. The main industry people work in is hospitality - shops, hotels, and the distillery. At one stage I was working three jobs across two islands.”

Amy travelled from Jura to the Isle of Islay three to four times a week with what Amy would describe as her 'beat-up' car to the ferry, which costs £65 for a book of 5 return tickets to Islay. There Amy parked her 'better car' which she used to drive to her job.

“Many islanders require two cars for use between islands with most keeping a beat-up car on Jura and a nicer car on Islay. This helps to keep the cost down, and helps to keep your 'good car' in decent nick - the roads on Jura are not well maintained.”

Travel for work is a long and costly process, but unfortunately it wasn't the only barrier.

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- Amy Dunnachie





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Background

“Many people on Jura are professionals in lots of different fields, but there is often this idea that islanders are not well educated, skilled or cultured. This is far from the truth. One way we might be able to combat this perception is to encourage companies and organisations on the mainland to allow employees to work and live in remote and rural settings. Could there be an accreditation system for Islander employers?”

“Unfortunately, internet infrastructure is currently a barrier to achieving this. Generally speaking, the internet is pretty rubbish on Jura, although 3G and 4G is slowly getting better. With a small pool of internet providers providing poor coverage and poor customer service, it remains a challenge.”

Inadequate Infrastructure isn't isolated to internet connection - a lack of long-term rental accommodation has also proven to be difficult to find on Jura.

“A massive challenge on Islands - not just Jura - is available housing, with a real lack of a secure rental property market. There is a high instance of second home ownership, meaning that many houses lie empty for much of the year,” said Amy. “My partner and I are living in a caravan on his parents' farm for now. We were living in a house on a private estate (intended for the game keeper who doesn't require housing) but it was very expensive to maintain with heating and inefficient, and very cold in winter. We're very lucky that both our parents have crofts and that we have the option to build in the future, but for now this works.”

Although faced with unique challenges, island culture and the community have been a comfort to Amy. With only 200 permanent residents on the island, just 8.2% of Jura's population is aged 16-29, compared to the national average of 18.5%.

“One of the best things about living on an island with a small community is that you are friends with everyone no matter what their age; we have friends aged from as young as 18, and as old as 94.

“Many younger people come back to start their family, though a lot of folk I went to school with have left. The opportunities on Jura to connect with people are there, with a thriving social calendar. We are a really caring community and I think that intergenerational friendships are a big part of this - there is a window into different perspectives that allows for a deeper level of respect. The word resilience gets thrown around a lot - but on Jura, we prefer to be known as resourceful.”

Solutions

1. Amy is studying a Masters of Art in Social Practice through the University of Highlands and Islands with an aim to create her own social enterprise on Jura.
2. Amy and her partner currently reside in a caravan on her parents croft with an aim to build in the future.
3. Although a stable internet connection can be hard to find, Amy values the importance of connecting with the local community and has established a wild swimming group that meets each Sunday.



Rural Youth Project Focus

Amy has been a delegate at the 2018 and 2019 Rural Youth Project Ideas Festivals and currently sits on the project's Steering Committee of which 40% are under the age of 35.

Amy was a speaker at the 2019 Ideas Festival where she spoke about the challenges and opportunities living on Jura, inspiring delegates to think different about island life.

