

# Melissa Reilly

Age: 29  
Location: Lanark  
<https://lanarktrust.co.uk/>  
 @LanarkTrust

## Main Challenges



Long-term & affordable housing



Digital connectivity

## Rural Youth Project Involvement

Melissa has attended the 2018 and 2019 Ideas Festivals.

“Living in Lanark, I think young people are actually fairly lucky in terms of the opportunities that we have”

- Melissa Reilly



Image: Rural Youth Project

## Background

Having grown up in Lanark herself, Melissa Reilly is now in an ideal position to be supporting her community through her role as Development Manager for the Lanark Community Development Trust.

This is a charitable, non-profit body which carries out projects for the common good – be it social, economic, or environmental.

The projects aim to have mutual benefits; helping Lanark to fulfil its potential, and the volunteers to fulfil theirs. The projects help raise the profile of Lanark, creating a positive ‘brand image’ for the town, whilst supporting the volunteers to connect, develop their skills and ultimately build stronger community relations. For Melissa, building these partnerships is at the heart of establishing a thriving rural community.

One project that demonstrates the wide-reaching benefits of the trusts activity, is the Castlebank Horticultural Centre which occupies formerly derelict land in a public park in Lanark. This project – now 10 years old - has involved the complete regeneration of Castlebank’s gardens by a team of volunteers, as well as the creation of the horticultural training centre. Melissa is proud of the wider community impact this project now has, partly due to the employment of a full time Educational Gardener, enabled by National Lottery community funding. Through this role, the Trust is now able to engage with a range of community groups, schools and organisations; bringing people together through a vibrant calendar of events, activities and workshops that aim to connect people to their environment and develop their horticultural skills.

In her role as Development Manager, Melissa is all too aware of the challenges facing young people in rural communities: “There are the same challenges which I think are across rural areas in Scotland, like limited affordable housing and connectivity”.



“Volunteering is a fantastic opportunity for young people living in rural areas; personally for them to socialise and mix with people of all different backgrounds and walks of life that they might not typically come across either through school or their own social groups. ”

- Melissa Reilly

## Background

However, Melissa’s outlook is positive, and she is keen to focus upon the opportunities that the geographical and rural location affords.

“Living in Lanark, I think young people are actually fairly lucky in terms of the opportunities that we have, in that we are basically right in the middle of Glasgow and Edinburgh and we have commuting links to both those cities. We also have a really active community with lots of clubs, societies and activities that young people can get involved with”

Melissa is passionate about the opportunities that can arise through volunteering. Not only is this a chance to boost CV credentials, but it can help develop wide range of vital social skills and broaden perspectives through meeting a diverse range of people that one, perhaps, would not ordinarily cross paths with.

“Volunteering is a fantastic opportunity for young people living in rural areas; personally for them to socialise and mix with people of all different backgrounds and walks of life that they might not typically come across either through school or their own social groups. Professionally, I think its hugely important for them to “dip their toe” in different industries and for their CV. In my experience, it is not so much about what qualifications you have. Employers are looking for you to have actual real-life experience and volunteering is a great way to get that.”

The fact remains, however, that organisations and young people are not always joined up and able to reap the benefits of these mutually beneficial partnerships.

To help organisations engage more effectively with young people, Melissa suggests they should, “Partner up with different organisations that might provide links with youth services or local schools, and make your volunteer opportunity as flexible as possible - because people are doing it within their busy lives”.

## Solutions

1. Be proactive: look for the opportunities that your area presents. Reach out to community groups to help support you to overcome the rural challenges.
2. Volunteer: help broaden your range of experience, meet new people, give your CV a boost and get a taster of what working in different sectors is like. Find opportunities through local 3rd sector interface, on social media platforms or community notice boards.
3. Build relationships in your local area: Not only will this feel good and develop closer community bonds, you never know where these connections will lead. The more people know about where you want to be heading – the more people to support you to get there.



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