



Scottish Government  
Riaghaltas na h-Alba  
gov.scot



SRUC

SAMARITANS  
Scotland



**Research Report – Easy Read Version (2024)**

**Mental health and well-being protective factors of lone  
and isolated workers in the West Highlands and Skye**

**Dr K Lamont & Dr L Jessiman**

### Acknowledgements

The authors would like to express their appreciation for the time and candid responses provided by those who contributed to this study.

The research was commissioned by Samaritans as part of the Scottish Government funded project:

[Samaritans Scotland's West Highland & Skye Project](#)

The project is funded by the Scottish Government Transition and Recovery Fund: [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): mental health - transition and recovery plan - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

Please note that the full report is available at [www.samaritans.org/highlands-training](http://www.samaritans.org/highlands-training)

Photos: Steven Carter (www.stevecarter.com)

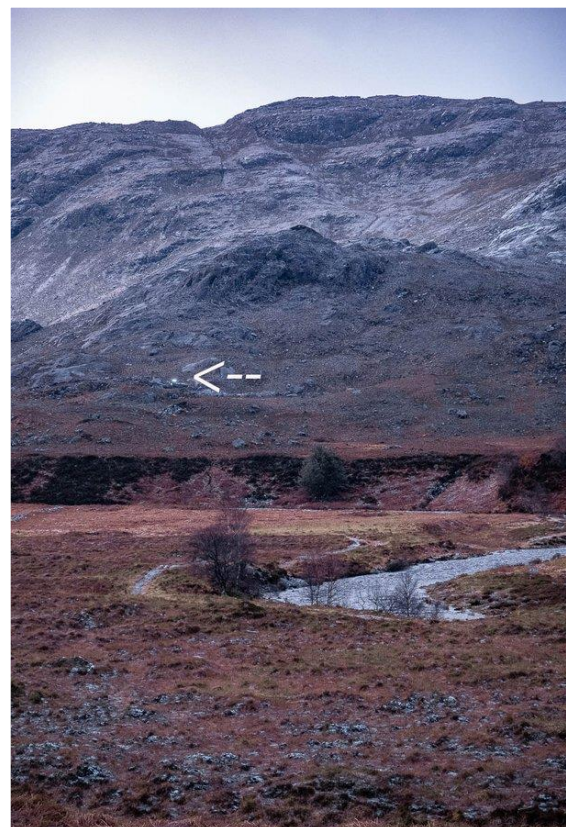
## What we wanted to find out:

We wanted to find out what helps lone workers in the West Highlands and Skye to keep mentally well.

## Who we spoke to, where they lived and what we asked them:

We spoke to people who worked in different jobs, from all around the West Highlands and Skye, and to people who were their employers or managers.

Some of them did the same job as a person in a big city, but they were the only one doing that job in their area. Some people worked outside or in areas with hardly any other people. We asked people by telephone, online, and in-person to describe what can make it difficult to keep mentally well, what helps them to be well, and what they think helps people to keep being well.



## What we found out:

There are lifestyle preferences and personal characteristics which help individuals to fit well into living and working in the West Highlands and Skye.

*I think I'm drawn to a rural context, I grew up in it.*

Being adaptable, flexible and to using own initiative helps you to work well and are skills which are very much appreciated by employers.

Rural lone workers with the capability to adapt, be flexible and use their own initiative often found that they had additional responsibility which was beyond their role and had to respond to a diverse range of situations as they arose when no-one else was around to help.

*If something goes wrong, you're on your own with it, you've got to solve that problem yourself.*



Getting away was important in relation to the ability of lone workers to function in their work and to thrive as individuals. This can take careful planning and can be costly, especially if workdays are lost as a result of travel disruption.

*The winters are extremely long and extremely dark. You know, the summers are obviously very light, but winter lasts a long, long, long, long time ... You just have to get through it. It's horrible. And one strategy is to escape.*

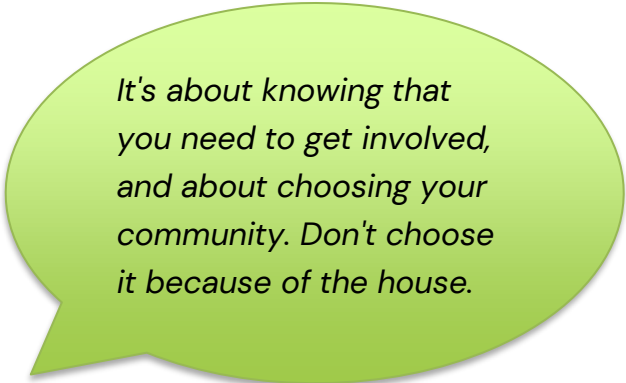
*I think there's a lot of romanticism around the setting and the landscape from people who aren't in there or working or it, and I think the relationship that people experience who work with it is different.*

People can get 'swept away' by the beauty and can have romantic ideas about living and working in the area which are not based on reality. However, the attachment to nature and the landscape is vital to many.

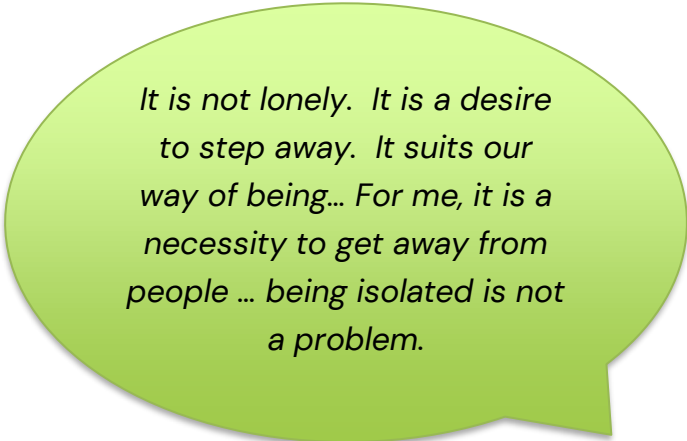
Some people find being close to nature has a restorative effect on their mental health and well-being. They feel a spiritual connection with nature.

*It's kind of rawness about it that's different, slightly different from anywhere else. And I love that. I love being the author of my own life.*

Some communities seem to suit some people better than others. Division and negativity in some places prompts people to leave or makes them feel unwelcome. This can make it more difficult to manage mental health and well-being.



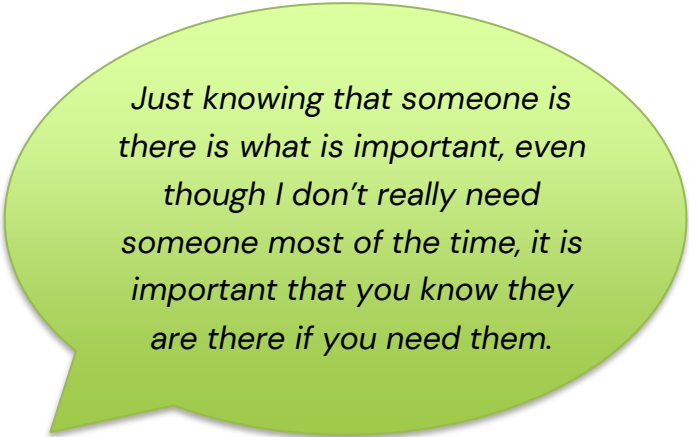
*It's about knowing that you need to get involved, and about choosing your community. Don't choose it because of the house.*



*It is not lonely. It is a desire to step away. It suits our way of being... For me, it is a necessity to get away from people ... being isolated is not a problem.*

It is important to avoid making assumptions about what social support rural lone workers need. Indeed, the opportunity to be alone and away from people is a highly desirable aspect of life for many lone workers in the area.

However, even for lone workers who prefer to spend time alone, there is a need to maintain contact with others, whether friends, family, managers or colleagues. The nature of the contact should be tailored to the preferences of individuals.



*Just knowing that someone is there is what is important, even though I don't really need someone most of the time, it is important that you know they are there if you need them.*

Even people who love to spend time alone need some contact with others.

Employers, families and friends, should ask individual rural lone workers how they would like to keep in contact (face-to-face, by phone, online) and how often they want contact.

*But being on your own for a very long time, if you're not used to it can be quite traumatic.*

The unseen nature of work undertaken by lone-workers and their lack of visibility in the workforce means that effort is needed to value individuals and to recognise the contribution they make to sustainable communities in the West Highlands and Skye.

[For further information please contact \[kate.lamont@sruc.ac.uk\]\(mailto:kate.lamont@sruc.ac.uk\)](mailto:kate.lamont@sruc.ac.uk)





# SRUC

## **At the heart of the natural economy**

SRUC is a charitable company limited by guarantee, Scottish Charity Number: SC003712. Registered in Scotland, Company Number: SC01033046. Registered Office: Peter Wilson Building, King's Buildings, West Mains Road, Edinburgh EH9 3JG. SAC Commercial Limited. An SRUC Company. Registered in Scotland, Company Number SC148684. Registered Office: Peter Wilson Building, King's Buildings, West Mains Road, Edinburgh, EH9 3JG.