

‘We catch people who might otherwise fall through the gaps’

Steven Gilfoyle manages a community radio station that’s helping to alleviate poverty in one of Scotland’s most deprived areas

By Rosie Mullender

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Imagine a radio station where you can hear African music introduced in French, a drama set in a 1970s Glaswegian shipyard, followed by an impassioned discussion about the menopause and then recipes written by an octogenarian grandmother.

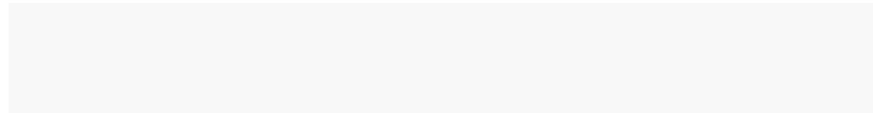
Sunny Govan Community Radio is that station, a registered charity broadcasting from Glasgow, which has been going strong for 22 years.

“Some people might think we’re a bit too diverse compared with mainstream radio,” says station manager Steven Gilfoyle. “And yes, we are quite radical in some ways. But our listeners seem to enjoy that.”

Gilfoyle was inspired to co-found Sunny G, as it’s affectionately known, by the 1990s BBC comedy Rab C Nesbitt, which is set in Govan. “That show painted us as a community of unemployable alcoholics, to the extent that people within our community began to believe there was no hope for them,” Gilfoyle, 51, explains. “So when I heard a local woman, Heather McMillan, was setting up a community radio station, I decided to get involved.”

It’s Gilfoyle’s way, he suggests, of leaving his own legacy. Finding ways to give to the community and give it the help it needs.

“Govan is one of the most deprived areas in Scotland – it’s badly affected by poverty, addiction and low employment – but we wanted to promote the good that goes on in our area too. Our aim is to use music and conversation to alleviate poverty and encourage people to access local services – especially those who have felt let down by them in the past.”



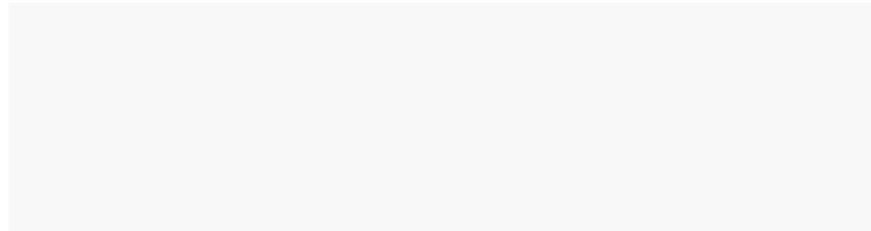
Run by a team of 45 enthusiastic volunteers aged from 10 to 82, Sunny G's output reflects the diversity of the team behind the radio station. As well as music ranging from reggae to classical, volunteers host regular slots on topics relevant both to themselves and the wider community.

Locals tuning into 103.5FM might find themselves listening to first-hand addiction recovery stories, experts offering advice on mental health, a pair of 'Menopause Warriors' discussing women's health, or a programme focusing on multiple sclerosis.

"Radio is a great leveller, and we like to see ourselves as a family, where everyone has a voice," says Gilfoyle. "One of our shows is presented by three volunteers; two are blind, and one uses a wheelchair – although of course, you'd never know that from listening to their show.

"We have volunteers from every conceivable background, who are passionate about things such as community, the environment and feminism. It means Sunny Govan is like a giant patchwork quilt, where everyone has their own patch. We put them together – all the patches, all the different colours – and it just looks amazing."

As well as providing listeners with engaging content, Sunny Govan's aim is to give its volunteers the skills and confidence they need to go on to bigger and better things, in the hope of leaving the town with a lasting legacy.



“We see ourselves as a first-steps project for people who might otherwise fall through the gaps, helping people towards what we call positive destinations,” Gilfoyle explains. “That could be college, a job, volunteering elsewhere, or simply getting out of the house for a couple of hours to socialise, which is great for your mental health.”

One of the people to have benefited from Sunny Govan’s inclusive outlook is Matthew Ward, 28, who is registered blind and hosts *The Rave Ward*, a weekly underground dance music show.

“I first heard the station in the taxi that took me to high school,” Ward remembers. “A few years later, after I’d taken some lessons in DJing, I decided to get involved in volunteering. Due to a lack of services in the area, I’d started feeling socially excluded, but joining Sunny G helped me to overcome that.

“It welcomes people from so many backgrounds and helps young people find their footing. Nobody is stigmatised – we’re always looking at broader opportunities for each individual – and although my focus when I joined was simply getting involved and my love of radio, it’s opened so many doors for me.

“I developed confidence in working with people with a broad range of needs, and I now work and volunteer for Sense Scotland as well as Sunny G, helping to make music more accessible. As far as I’m concerned, it’s just utterly fantastic.”

With the radio station focusing its energies on providing support to local communities and giving local people like Matthew a voice, Gilfoyle feels Sunny Govan has a synergy with Macmillan Cancer Support and services like the [Macmillan Support Line](#), which offers practical and emotional support to those living with cancer.

“We’re all very aware of the serious effects of cancer in Govan, and I recently lost my cousin to the disease,” Gilfoyle explains. “Last winter, we also did a series of events called Winter Warmers, to help people cope with the cost-of-living crisis – they could come to the station in the evening, have a hot drink, and save on their energy bills.

“One family came in every night, a mum and her two daughters, and we found out she had stage-three cancer. Coming to Sunny G meant she could save money, and we could help take the stress off her situation.

“Seeing how she was so resilient, and how she was trying her best despite having nothing, shows how vital the support networks provided by charities like Sunny Govan and Macmillan really are.

“We’re both charities that encourage people to talk, and are about community, connection and caring – and like the people we reach out to, we both need all the support we can get.”

What's your legacy?

Gifts in wills fund more than a third of Macmillan Cancer Support's vital work supporting people living with cancer, and leaving a gift in your will could make sure someone who is going through a life-changing experience has someone to talk to.

Order your free [*Gifts in Wills* guide](#) from the Macmillan website or call them on 0300 1000 200 to find out more.

