



# A love of language led to new chapter for city publisher

A passion for languages and books inspired **Pauline Mackay** to take the plunge and open her own bookshop and publishing business, Ablekids Press

Small Business Focus  
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**Q How would you describe your business to a stranger?**

**A** Ablekids Press is a friendly, quirky place to come and indulge a love of languages. You can also access fun, info-packed, family-friendly trails around Inverness and get Scottish books signed by the author. As Ablekids Press is an unusual mix of children's publisher and bookshop, this provides an excellent opportunity to offer customers – locals and visitors – a unique experience. I've put together one of the largest selections of Gaelic books in Scotland from a variety of publishers, and my own bilingual picturebooks, in a range of languages including French, German and Spanish.

**Q What inspired you to start the business?**

**A** I was already specialising in selling children's language books when I took the plunge in 2007 and started Ablekids Press to publish my own stories. I love children, books and languages and the world of self-publishing was opening up. A marketing consultant for my existing business at the time introduced me to a potential illustrator and the whole adventure began.

**Q How has your business developed?**

**A** Three main strands have emerged: Wee MacNessie, my version of the Loch Ness Monster – originally illustrated by Shelley Mackay and then Brian Robertson – now features in six stories with bilingual versions available; Wild About Inverness, which consists of two trails around Inverness, put together by myself, author and historian, Norman Newton, and illustrator, Marjory Tait; and The Storyflower Project, which started during lockdown



**Pauline Mackay, owner of Ablekids Press, 10-12 Market Brae, Inverness.**  
Picture: Callum Mackay

when I grew a giant sunflower called Peekaboo for The Family Centre – Merkinch. It continued when I commissioned The Musician's Storyflower from Liza Mulholland which also centred on growing a flower for someone special, and is expanding year on year as primary schools create their own Storyflower Project.

**Q What are your plans to develop your business in the future?**

**A** Wild About Inverness has always been planned as a trio of trails so there is still one to go. The Storyflower Project is just getting going as schools begin to recognise its vast potential for encouraging pupil creativity. I am greatly indebted to schools here in Inverness and on Lewis who have already run successful projects. My selection of Gaelic books from other publishers is due to expand.

**Q What lessons have you learnt from your time in business?**

**A** Running a business is hard work and when it's your own business, the work never stops! But when a parent tells me one of my own books is their child's favourite or a must-read at bedtime, even after all these years, it brings a tear to my

eye, and makes all the effort worthwhile. When you create something from scratch, it's personal!

**Q What do you love about working in Inverness city centre?**

**A** I get the chance to interact with lovely people I would otherwise never have met. So many visitors tell me how much they love Inverness and how friendly people are which is wonderful. I must also give a shout-out to the small business owners on Market Brae Steps. There is a strong sense of community here as we all chat, pass on information and put the world to rights!

**Q Can you tell us something interesting about yourself?**

**A** I love looking at old maps and photographs of Inverness. I wish I could time travel to see the castle, known as Fort George, which stood on the hill and was partially blown up by the Jacobites before the battle of Culloden in 1746. It appears in Thomas Pennant's View of Inverness printed in 1771 and is my favourite image along with JMW Turner's 1830s watercolour painting, which is in Inverness Museum and Art Gallery.