

Strategic Framework

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venturetrust

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Introduction

Venture Trust believes in people. We believe that people who, because of their life experiences, have become marginalised and vulnerable and are living chaotic lifestyles have the capacity to change, and can be supported to take responsibility for their lives. Venture Trust helps people recognise what they need to change; then gives them the confidence, motivation and life skills they need to make those changes. At the heart of all our programmes, we give people time, space and support in a wilderness setting, far away from the pressures of home, where physical, emotional and social challenges take them into a personal 'stretch' zone where powerful learning can happen.

VISION

Our vision is to be the world leader in delivering wilderness-centred personal development journeys to those most vulnerable within society who want to make positive changes in their lives.

MISSION

Venture Trust works with marginalised and vulnerable people to support them towards making and sustaining positive changes in their lives so that they understand who they are today, where they want to go, and have the confidence, belief and skills to get there. We help individuals develop skills and strategies to improve confidence and motivation and to maintain positive personal relationships or enter into training, education or employment and for those involved in offending to reduce the risk of reoffending. We work in partnership; in communities and in the wilderness of Scotland, delivering transformational and innovative personal development programmes to effect change.

ETHOS


Our ethos and approach is to:

- Recognise the value each person brings to our work.
- Harness the strength of the individual and the power of groups in making changes possible.
- Highlight the importance of choices, and the consequences of actions.
- Enable, support and empower – we do not force.
- Learn from experience – both at an individual and organisational level.
- Work in partnership.
- Ensure our work is sustainable – both environmentally and organisationally.

Strategic context

Venture Trust was originally set up in 1982 to create and deliver personal development programmes for young people involved in offending, initially at the request of the UK Government's Home Office, and subsequently in partnership with the Scottish Government since devolution in 1999.

Between 2000 and 2008, Venture Trust also operated a highly successful lottery-funded programme, offering personal development support to disengaged young people referred by third sector organisations from across the UK. Since then, we have developed and delivered a wider range of programmes which offer support tailored to the needs of client groups such as female offenders, young people misusing drugs or alcohol, young carers, young people who have been looked after by



the state, homeless people, those at risk of offending, and those struggling with other complicated life circumstances. The bulk of our work is currently Scotland-focused, although we also operate a small national programme open to young homeless people referred by Foyers¹ from anywhere in the UK.

We help marginalised and vulnerable people to make positive changes to their lives through:

- Direct delivery of programmes.
- Nurturing partnerships to further our contribution in supporting people to sustain positive futures.
- Developing external training programmes based on the Venture Trust philosophy and approach.
- Influencing policy and practice.

Over the last three years, Venture Trust's success in attracting new programmes and sources of funding has generated significant growth in the size and scale of operations. Going forward, the key drivers include refocusing of priorities to create new programmes and deepen partnerships, attracting new sources of funding to build resilience and maintaining focus on agreed strategic outcomes, underpinned by robust plans and clear lines of accountability aligned to the size and scale of programme operations.

The prevailing economic climate and the challenges of short term funding will focus energies in securing sources of funding and new business from across the UK, beyond Scotland, including maximising the potential to attract greater voluntary giving. By being responsive in the changing context in which we deliver our distinctive community based support and wilderness-centred personal development programmes is intended to maximise the long term resilience of Venture Trust.

We believe we can draw from our experience in working with marginalised and vulnerable individuals to inform policy and decision making in relation to future delivery of services. To that end, we have built strong working relationships with key officials and politicians in the Scottish and UK governments, local authorities, Community Justice Authorities (CJAs) and other statutory and voluntary organisations in the sector.

Our track record

In addition to our monitoring and evaluation framework, we also commission external evaluations and learn from participant feedback to evidence our track record and help participants celebrate their achievements. Results prove that our work is extremely effective, helping participants to make, and more importantly sustain, positive life changes.

Since December 2007², Venture Trust has:

- Identified and assessed almost 2,000 marginalised or vulnerable people referred to our programmes.

¹ Foyers are integrated learning and accommodation centres providing safe and secure housing, support and training for young people aged 16 – 25.

² Venture Trust's current monitoring and evaluation framework was introduced in December 2007.

- Provided wilderness-centred personal development support to 607 people.
- Helped at least 258 of them to enter employment, education or training within 12 months of taking part in wilderness journeys (43%).
- Enabled more than 75% of those completing wilderness journeys to improve their confidence and employability, and 54% to make better use of local services and support in their communities.

Aims and objectives


We aspire to make a difference for marginalised and vulnerable people by raising aspirations and generating long term impacts in terms of socio-economic wellbeing through innovative and distinctive outreach support and wilderness personal development journeys in the UK. In turn, we hope that the benefits of our work will positively shape strategy, policies and plans affecting the individuals we work with.

Current agendas offer potential opportunities. We have seen positive outcomes from the *More Choices More Chances* programmes, focused on young care leavers and carers, which will contribute to taking the agenda forward in the coming period. The introduction of the Community Payback Order (CPO) in Scotland provides new opportunities for Venture Trust and there is potential for broadening criminal justice work in England and Wales.

Specifically, we aim to:

- **Launch major programmes** in partnership with agencies in England and Wales. Efforts would focus on developing the staffing capacity and securing additional resources to deliver an increased number of programmes and pilots.
- **Publicise** the expansion of our work, and the results it helps marginalised and vulnerable people achieve. Development of well-targeted communications and publicity will complement voluntary fundraising and facilitate the growth of UK programmes and partnerships.
- **Set up a social enterprise** to commercialise activities building on Venture Trust's strengths and track record in wilderness journeys, development and training. This will support employment and employability for former participants, enhance organisational capacity and resilience, and directly engage customers with the work of Venture Trust.
- **Diversify our income** by launching a voluntary giving scheme. This will involve gradual entry to this area of funding, combining some "quick-win" aspects with building a longer-term, expanded, donor base.
- **Demonstrate the impact of our work** by making best use of monitoring and evaluation data generated about its programmes, and targeting information more effectively towards key audiences including partners, government and funders.

Although our current programmes embrace a small number of referrals from outside Scotland, a comprehensive expansion into England and Wales forms a major part of our ambitions to support more people over the next three years and make the most of our niche expertise in helping those struggling to overcome chaotic lifestyles. By extending our work into England and Wales and thereby reducing our reliance on two major sources of Scottish funding, will mitigate the impact of



public sector cuts potentially destabilising the delivery of programmes. New partnerships and new programmes will also utilise our premises, vehicles and management capacity more effectively.

As such, we will aim to deepen partnerships with a small number of major charities who are recognised as leaders in their field; who have identified the complementary nature of our work; who share our ethos and commitment; and who provide local support services that would form the core of outreach and links in communities across England and Wales.

Importantly our ability to source new work and/or contribute lessons from our work towards creating a more receptive policy environment is reliant upon developing a UK-wide profile and range of programmes helping a diverse range of people in need of support. Whilst we are recognised and our work acknowledged amongst specialists in the criminal justice and youth sectors, a greater presence and delivery for people in England and Wales will undoubtedly broaden our credibility and opportunities to communicate success.

Although the main focus of expenditure will be on programme activity, we will establish a small amount of seed-corn funding for research and development to draw on evidence and good practice to ensure that our programmes are carefully designed without compromising the integrity, distinctiveness or quality of our approach. To that end, opportunities will be sought to pilot new ideas and to develop activity with other disadvantaged groups. It is recognised that this carries an element of risk because by their very nature not all pilots will achieve all outcomes in the short-term, but will provide useful evidence for informing future policy landscapes and programmes, whilst maintaining our reputation as a leader in wilderness-centred personal development.

We believe the Scottish wilderness is generally the most conducive to the independent journeying and sense of distance that lie at the heart of our work, and we aim to support more people by maximising use of our existing facilities in those localities. The transformation in the scale, diversity and sustainability of our work depends upon developing partnerships in England and Wales. This will create a broad referral base that enables us to offer appropriate support to many more people with differing needs from across the UK.

The majority of work will be in the UK – consolidating and developing the work already underway in Scotland and developing partnerships in England and Wales. Venture Trust has also developed work internationally. As part of the Scottish Government Malawi Initiative, Venture Trust has established a project working with young prisoners in Malawi. The organisation is looking to develop this further over the next two/three years.

To achieve our aims, we recognise that quality staff are the key to successful outcomes for marginalised and vulnerable individuals. We will demonstrate commitment to staff through programmes of personal development offering opportunities to improve enhance and develop skills and experience.



Appendices

APPENDIX 1: DEFINING OUR APPROACH

Wilderness

Venture Trust believes that the wilderness environment, and the activities that it can offer within the wilderness, are naturally conducive to enabling people to plan and make life changes.

- Actions, and their consequences, are magnified – the consequences of a particular choice or action are immediate and transparent, so it is easy to isolate, identify and consider the concept of “action and consequence”.
- “A great leveller” – the wilderness environment is inherently public and primitive. All individuals in a group cook, clean, take care of their own kit and equipment, and look after their own ablutions. The environment strips away pretension, emphasising the essential characteristics of being human.
- Challenging – the wilderness environment is inherently challenging; physically, socially and emotionally.
- Time and space – the wilderness offers time and space away from the pressures of everyday life, away from existing relationships and away from difficult situations and circumstances, enabling participants to focus on themselves as individuals.
- “Sense of space” – in addition to the actual time and space that the wilderness offers, it also magnifies individual’s feeling of space.
- Magnified sense of solitude and reflection – the actual and perceived sense of time and space magnifies the sense of solitude and promotes clarity of thought and reflection.
- “Sense of distance” – the wilderness, and activities within it, highlight the distance that an individual can travel, has travelled, and is targeting to travel. Physical journeys help individuals recognise personal development journeys.
- Intensity – time in the wilderness provides continual challenges, genuine risks and the potential for real danger/drama. There is no respite in the wilderness – one “eats, sleeps and breathes” personal development 24 hours a day in that environment.
- Self reliance – the wilderness demands and reveals self-reliance.
- Discovery – the wilderness naturally encourages discovery and the sense of achievement.

APPENDIX 2: OUR PROGRAMMES

They generally comprise three broad phases:


Phase 1 – Outreach involves referral, assessment, preparation and initial 1-to-1 personal development work. In some cases, Venture Trust outreach workers take referrals directly from social work teams, the courts and other third sector partners, and provide 3-6 months of preparatory work in participants' local communities. The outreach worker meets with the participant and his/her support worker on a number of occasions; assesses their suitability for the programme; identifies immediate support needs to help the participant stabilise life circumstances sufficiently to embark on Phase 2 in the wilderness; introduces the individual to group work activities; and works with the participant to identify the aspects of their choices, actions or behaviours they need to change in order to develop a more sustainable lifestyle.

In other cases, partner agencies have already helped participants to stabilise their lifestyles, but have recognised that they require the boost in confidence, motivation and core life skills development that Venture Trust offers. In these circumstances, the outreach worker's role is to help referral partners identify appropriate candidates for the Venture Trust programme, assess their readiness and identify development needs, and then to make logistical arrangements to enable the individual to take part in the wilderness phase.

Phase 2 – wilderness personal development journey is essentially designed to challenge attitudes and behaviours – catalysing change in participants' thinking and actions, whilst engendering new skills to sustain these. It is both a physical journey and an emotional journey set in the outstanding wilderness environments of northwest Scotland. Through a series of activities, expeditions and ongoing discussion, participants learn about, develop and reinforce concepts and core life skills such as establishing trust; safe spaces; personal boundaries; problem solving; consequential thinking; dealing with challenging situations; responsibility and accountability; barriers to change; setting, reviewing and revising goals; giving and receiving feedback; action planning and motivation to move forward. Every aspect of the wilderness journey is designed with the introduction and development of these concepts in mind, ensuring that the focus remains on personal development in a wilderness setting rather than simply the enjoyment of outdoor activities.

Participants begin by making their own independent journey to an agreed meeting point. Many participants have never left their home community before; making their own journey provides another confirmation of a participant's own commitment to change, and begins the emotional journey of leaving previous choices, behaviours and influences behind. Having been met by Venture Trust's experienced wilderness field teams, participants and staff collectively and openly commit to a "Social Contract" of behaviour, commitment and learning. This immediately enables staff to introduce the concept of "boundaries" and "safe space", essential in gradually enabling individuals to feel sufficiently at ease to open up about themselves and their choices, actions and behaviours as the personal development journey progresses.

Each participant is assigned a dedicated 1-to-1 Venture Trust wilderness field staff member at the outset of the journey. The 1-to-1 worker acts as mentor, reviewer, sounding board, key-worker and confidant throughout Phase 2, reinforcing and praising examples of participants' positive choices and actions during the day, helping participants' recognise actions and strategies which resulted in negative consequences and identifying the specific developmental areas upon which the participant will focus during the next activity or the next day. The "Plan-do-review" mantra underpins the 1-to-1 relationship.



Wilderness expeditions offer demanding physical, emotional and social challenges and an opportunity for intensive learning, testing life skills in a very immediate and practical way. Each person is expected to take responsibility for looking after themselves (developing skills such as cooking and nutrition, hygiene, self-care and personal boundaries) and making the most of the learning opportunities provided (including keeping the group together, time-management and navigation).

Phase 3 – Community Links concentrates upon enabling participants to translate learning from Phase 2 into positive life changes in home environments. As in phase 1, the role of Venture Trust outreach staff varies according to the role of partner agencies. In some cases, outreach staff have responsibility for helping participants by reviewing and developing action plans; facilitating entry to services and programmes offered by other agencies; supporting into positive destinations (employment, training, education, voluntary work) including practical advice such as CV writing, interview skills or how to disclose convictions; arranging peer support groups and activities in local areas; and generally acting as sounding board, mentor, advisor and cajoler. In other cases, where Venture Trust’s wilderness journey is acting as a ‘catalyst for change’ within a wider programme of support offered by one or more partner agency, the outreach team’s role is more focused upon supporting referring staff to recognise and take forward the learning identified in participants’ action plans, and providing advice on a more informal basis.

In all cases, the outreach team are also responsible for catching up with participants and referrers at least every three months for up to a year, in order to monitor participants’ achievements. Data from this periodic monitoring are gathered in accordance with Venture Trust’s widely endorsed monitoring and evaluation framework, thereby generating systematic evidence of the outcomes achieved by participants as well as providing a valuable source of learning for the organisation itself.