

Living Wild: Chance for Change

2014 Referrer Survey: Key messages

venturetrust

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Referrer Survey 2014: Key Messages

The survey was sent to 889 recipients from social work teams and third sector referral partners across all 32 of Scotland's local authorities. It was also circulated to all Sheriffs in Scotland by one of the Sheriffs themselves (for which we are extremely grateful). We received a total of 95 responses from 26 local authorities; from Social Work Teams (73); Courts (5); Third Sector Partners (14); Prisons (1); Youth Services (1); and Employability Services (1).

The key findings include the following:

1. There is high demand for the service, with 96% of respondents indicating that there would be a "gap in provision available" if Venture Trust's criminal justice programmes did not exist. Only 6% of respondents felt that there was "adequate alternative personal development provision that achieves similar outcomes" to whom they could refer individuals in the absence of Venture Trust provision. Written feedback also strongly supported these findings (see below).

2. Referral partners use Venture Trust programmes to achieve a wide variety of outcomes and address a range of criminogenic needs. The most commonly cited reasons for referral to the Living Wild programme (each identified by 80% or more of respondents) included enabling participants to:

- Reduce their risk of reoffending/change offending behaviours
- Develop better coping strategies to deal with difficult situations/pressure
- Improve their ability to develop positive relationships with others
- Improve confidence
- Broaden their aspirations of what they can achieve in life

The top cited reason for referral by 93% of respondents was helping participants to improve their confidence.

3. Referral partners value the combination of long-term, community-based support with the intensive, challenging wilderness journey and value the distinct Venture Trust approach to personal development. Every single aspect of the programme listed in the survey was identified as "important" or "very important" by at least 83% of respondents. Interestingly 99% of referrers emphasised the importance of the holistic nature of the programme by identifying that "a combination of all of these" was important or very important.

- **The Distinct Venture Trust approach to personal development**

The top three most commonly cited elements contributing to the programme's impact on participants (each identified as "important" or "very important" by at least 98% of respondents) were:

- The chance to achieve goals and have them recognised and celebrated (99%);
- The distinct Venture Trust approach to personal development (98%); and
- The quality/approach of Venture Trust staff. (98%)

- **Wilderness Journey**

Respondents also highlighted the importance of the wilderness journey experience as an essential element of Venture Trust's work and the inherent catalyst for change.

Over 90% of respondents said it was important or very important for participants to have:

- The chance to have time and space away from the pressures of day-to-day life; to experience the sense of taking a journey, both physically and emotionally; and to have the opportunity to experience periods of solitude and reflection .
- The chance to live and work in a group setting; to function without alcohol and street drugs/substances and to access the intensive support provided 24 hours per day.

Over 80% of respondents also said it was important or very important for participants to :

- Have the opportunity to face the inherent challenges posed by living and journeying in the wilderness and the challenges posed by outdoor activity sessions;
- Face the challenges posed by the development and review sessions.

- Long term community based support

Over 90% of respondents said it was important or very important for participants to have :

- The chance to access an extended period of support, advice, and guidance offered by a 12-14 month programme and to access 1:to:1 support within the local community .

Over 80% of respondents said it was important or very important for participants to have :

- Encouragement and signposting to identify and access support provided by other agencies, programmes, and services; and support to access and identify local employment, training, education, and voluntary services.

4. Written comments (from 53 respondents) were overwhelmingly positive, with the majority citing the achievements of participants, the impact of the programme on reducing (re-) offending, and requesting the continuation of the programme. Examples include:

- *'All my clients who have completed the programme have returned more confident and with goals that they have set. This seems to be reflected in their subsequent behaviour as there seems to be a noticeable reduction in their offending.'*
- *'I have found that clients who have participated and engaged with the Venture trust programmes have returned with more self confidence and motivation to change and this impacts on their ability to desist from offending.'*
- *'The Venture Trust allows the Young People we work with to address their attitudes to their offending. It provides the young people with an alternative to custody, and offers them the skills to make positive life choices for their future. There are no such services similar to this within the area and I fear, without this, many of our young people, particularly the first time offenders who have made poor choices, will end up in custody or following a pro-criminal lifestyle.'*
- *'I have worked with a number of young people who have been well served by the Venture Trust 'Living Wild' programme in particular one young person who has made numerous positive changes directly as a result of the venture trust intervention. He came back from the 10-day programme a more confident, well-rounded individual and was able to make more positive decisions which have been evidenced by a reduction in frequency of his offending, numerous job interviews and a move away from offending peers. This individual appears to be making*

important steps towards a more positive future and it is my view that the Venture Trust was a vital part of this process.'

- *'It provides opportunities to those within the criminal justice system who would not otherwise be offered this type of support. It allows people time to recognise what they can contribute to society, how they can change their lives, and how they can find alternative ways of dealing with the issues they face and causes behind their offending in a non-judgemental way.'*
- *'From my experience, Venture Trust provides challenging opportunities for young people which can provide so much in terms of promoting confidence, communication skills, group work skills and supporting individuals to see that there are real and positive alternatives to the lives they have been leading. I believe that it is a very valuable resource.'*
- *'Venture Trust forms an important part of the toolkit available to those working with young people involved in offending, it provides a unique service and offers challenges and opportunities for young people in terms of group living, practical skills and personal reflection that is unavailable elsewhere.'*
- *'The services offered by Venture Trust are highly valued by community criminal justice social work services. I have seen the benefits participation in the course have brought to the lives of young people; who have gained in confidence and made substantial, lasting changes to their lives upon their return. I think the location of Venture Trust is also crucial. There is something symbolic about driving over the highest road in the UK in one frame of mind and returning with a changed outlook! I would be concerned if the work of the Trust was at risk as a valuable, cost effective support service would be lost to some of our most vulnerable young people.'*

Respondents also identified particular operational queries or areas for improvement; feedback which Venture Trust management consider extremely valuable and which is already influencing operational developments in the context of resources currently available. This included requests and comments which identified the need for similar programmes for those aged 30+. Some further guidance and advice in response to specific queries about post journey support will also be taken forwards. All individual responses have of course been treated in the strictest of confidence and anonymity.

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'The impact of Venture Trust upon the lives of young people who are 'ready' is a truly incredible thing to have witnessed. The programmes offer a powerful way to support individuals to experience a potential in themselves that perhaps they never knew existed and to help them genuinely move forward.'

'This is a unique & innovative programme in Scotland & the outcome data is tangible evidence it delivers successfully. Central funding & the national provision of the programme are key to its future success & development.'