

**venturetrust**

**Impact  
Report  
2021-22**





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# Introduction

Venture Trust believes no one should be left behind struggling with adversity, harm and vulnerability. We support people to gain the life skills, stability and confidence needed for a positive future.

Emerging from the pandemic, we have all developed a greater appreciation for the outdoors and the positive influence it can have on our mental wellbeing.

At Venture Trust we have been using the outdoors as our office for 40 years. After the experience of the last two years, we are even more convinced in our approach to working with people facing multiple and complex challenges in their lives. Working with people in their local communities and harnessing the outdoors as a means for therapeutic development has become even more vital in supporting our participants to improve their mental wellbeing and to gain the life skills, stability and confidence they need to move forward in their lives.

This impact report tells the story of 2021-22 for Venture Trust and our participants. What we did to successfully navigate our way through the changing landscape of Covid restrictions. How we went about adapting our delivery, re-establishing our traditional programmes and launching new services to support the needs of our participants. How we have brought our approach to new audiences both here in Scotland and across Europe. And telling the story of how our work has impacted on the lives of our participants.

- **What we do**  
Intensive long-term personal development for people, at any stage in their life, struggling with complex life issues

- **The difference we make**  
Robust data and evidence to demonstrate life changing impact



- **Where we work**  
In communities and the outdoors, harnessing the benefits of green and outdoor spaces for wellbeing

- **Who we work with**  
Those who experience significant adversity and are furthest from opportunity



# Story of our year

This year has, again, been a story of how we have had to adapt as an organisation. Adapt our approach to working with participants, from primarily working 'online', to meeting face-to-face and moving back to full outdoor delivery. Adapting our programmes, from Local Authority-based daily activities, to full 5–10-day journeys in Scotland's wilder places. Adapt the services we offer, from 'online' Hubs to re-establishing our programmes, plus launching brand new services. These changes all took place on a gradual basis, adjusting our approach based on the easing of Covid restrictions throughout the year.

We started the year delivering a blended model of digital and face-to-face activity, alongside a blended programme where, rather than a wilderness journey, mixed-cohorts of participants took part in a four-day programme of daily activities and personal development delivered in their Local Authority area.

With the easing of restrictions, we began to deliver short (4-day) wilderness journeys on an East/West basis before restarting full wilderness journeys in summer 2021, at this time we also transition back into our 'traditional' programmes of delivery.

March 2021 saw the launch of our new Outdoor Therapy service, taking what we have learned from our previous experience in delivering therapeutic wilderness journeys and our work developed through our Wellbeing Hub which was delivered during lockdown. This year saw its first full year of delivery.

Our Change Cycle employability programme saw a return to full delivery this year, and we developed a new project with Princes Trust for school pupils from Dundee at risk of exclusion. This year also saw the end of our 3.5-year European project FOLM (From Outdoors to Labour Market) which exported our model across Europe.

Over the last 12 months, we are proud to have provided support to 656 individuals across our programmes and services, delivering 37 'wilderness' journeys, 5 Change Cycle courses and 5 Dundee school courses.

**656**  
**participants**  
**supported this year**

**37**  
**'wilderness' journeys**  
**delivered**





# Our programmes

Over the year we successfully re-introduced our previous programmes, as well as offering 2 new programmes for our participants:

**Living Wild** - For men and women across Scotland on Community Payback and other criminal justice orders who want to move away from offending. We support individuals to address behaviour leading to offending and help with rehabilitation.

**Next Steps** - A programme for women across Scotland involved in, or at risk of involvement in, the criminal justice system. Most are experiencing homelessness, drug or alcohol misuse and/or social isolation which may impact on their mental health, employment and relationships.

**Inspiring Young Futures** - For young people aged 16-25 in Scotland struggling with youth unemployment, involvement in offending, anti-social behaviour, history of substance misuse and homelessness.

**Positive Futures** - For ex-servicemen and women across Scotland who are finding it difficult to transition fully into civilian life. The programme supports veterans involved in the criminal justice system, experiencing homelessness, drug or alcohol misuse and social isolation.

**Change Cycle** - An employability service for young people in Scotland struggling with long-term unemployment. Our service is tackling youth unemployment by building aspiration, motivation and self-confidence while developing key employability skills.

**Outdoor Therapy** - The service aims to support people by combining the full range of benefits from time in nature and the outdoors with professional therapy to improve mental health and wellbeing. This is a free, confidential service for 16–25-year-olds and ex-service personnel.

**Dundee School Partnership: Venture Trust/Princes Trust** – Dundee-based school project for 16-year-olds at deemed risk of exclusion. Delivered as a 4-day course of personal development activities to help develop positive behaviours.



# Our participants

Venture Trust works with a wide variety of participants across our programmes, each of which comes with certain eligibility criteria (e.g., must be on a criminal justice order, women’s-only, ex-service people, young people). What our participants do have in common, is that they have all experienced adversity and face barriers which impact on their life choices and chances.

We gather information on who we work with at all stages of our engagement, from initial assessment to people moving on. This allows us to understand the range of issues our participants are dealing with, ensure our support is person-centred and helps us monitor the impact we can make. This year each of our participants faced on average more than 7 barriers in their lives. These range from involvement in the criminal justice system to histories of substance abuse, from living at risk of homelessness (or being in the homelessness system) to long-term unemployment. *Below*, shows an overview of some of the barriers the participants we worked with over the year have faced:

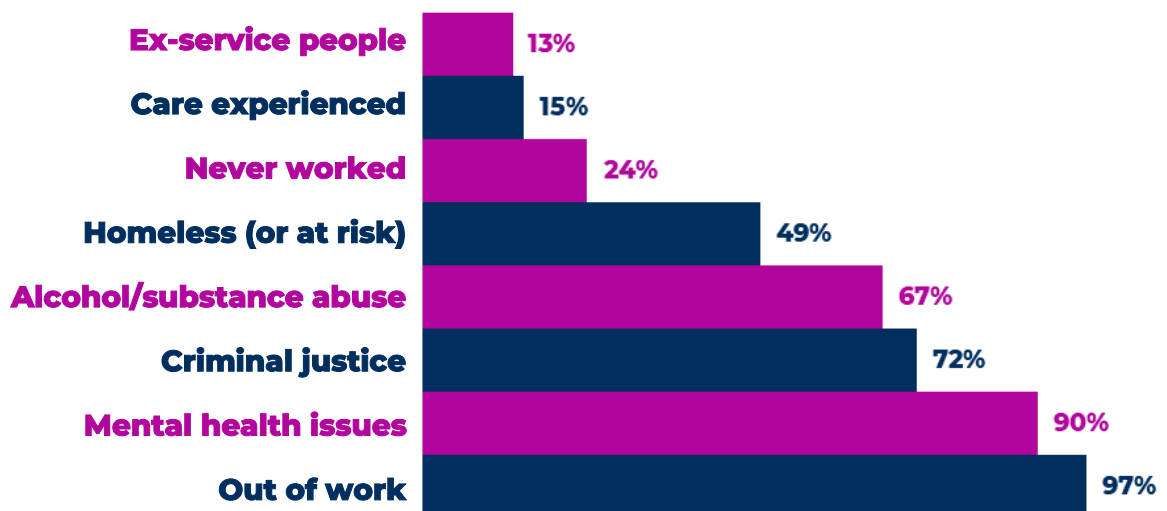
**7**

**average number of barriers faced by participants**

**90%**

**reported facing a mental health issue**

## Barriers our participants face



The most notable change we have seen over the past year is the significant increase in the proportion of our participants who are presenting with mental health issues. In 2020/21, this figure was 69%, this year it has risen to 90%. The Mental Health Foundation for Scotland has reported the mental health and wellbeing impacts of Covid-19 are likely to last much longer than the physical impacts of the pandemic. This is a trend we believe we are witnessing.

**50%**

are aged 16-24

**72%**

were male

**27%**

were female

**8%**

identified as  
LGBT+

The demographic make-up of our participants in 2021/22 shows that half of our participants are within the 16-24 age range with the other half being older (our oldest participant last year was 68). This split is partly due to three of our programmes being focused on young people (Inspiring Young Futures, Change Cycle and the Dundee Schools Partnership). We also see around 20% of participants on our other programmes being from this age group.

The majority of our participants identify as male (72%) with 27% identifying as female and 1% identify using another term. 8% of our participants identify as LGBT+.

## **48% of our participants come from the 20% most deprived areas in Scotland**



We work primarily with participants who live in areas identified as most deprived in the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) – 48% of our participants come from the 20% most deprived areas in Scotland, 76% come from the 50% most deprived areas. On a local authority basis, we worked with participants from 27 different local authorities, the largest proportion living in Glasgow City (18%) followed by City of Edinburgh (15%) and North Lanarkshire (9%). Our services reach all the way from rural Aberdeenshire to Dumfries and Galloway, the only areas we do not currently operate in are Moray and in the Highlands and Islands.

**27**

number of local authorities  
we have operated in

**Glasgow**

where the highest  
proportion of our  
participants are from (18%)





# Our impact

The most rewarding part of what we do is seeing the change in our participants. The change in their outlook, the change in the confidence they have in themselves and the change in their aspirations for a better future.

We report this change through the statistics and monitoring which takes place during our participants time with us, gathering data on metrics such as: mental wellbeing, the ability to set goals and work towards them, confidence, self-care and the positive outcomes they achieve (employment/training/education/volunteering/positive onward referral).

However, the most powerful way we can showcase our impact is through the personal stories of our participants.

## Chloe's\* story

Chloe was introduced to Venture Trust through involvement in the criminal justice system. She described her life at that point as at rock bottom. A survivor of domestic abuse and sexual violence, she had experienced suicidal thoughts and turned to substance misuse to help her cope with everyday life.

Standing in a police station, she finally recognised how the choices she was making were having a negative impact on her life and the lives of those around her. This was not the first time she was in this situation, but she was determined to make it the last. Ready for help to get out of this harmful cycle, she asked her supporter worker to sign her up for Venture Trust's Next Steps programme.



"I didn't want to face my drug addiction. I didn't want to face the fact it was helping me get up in the morning and helping me function. I've got a tear in my eye thinking about in now because it's just so emotional. I could have been lying in the jail because that's what was next for me."

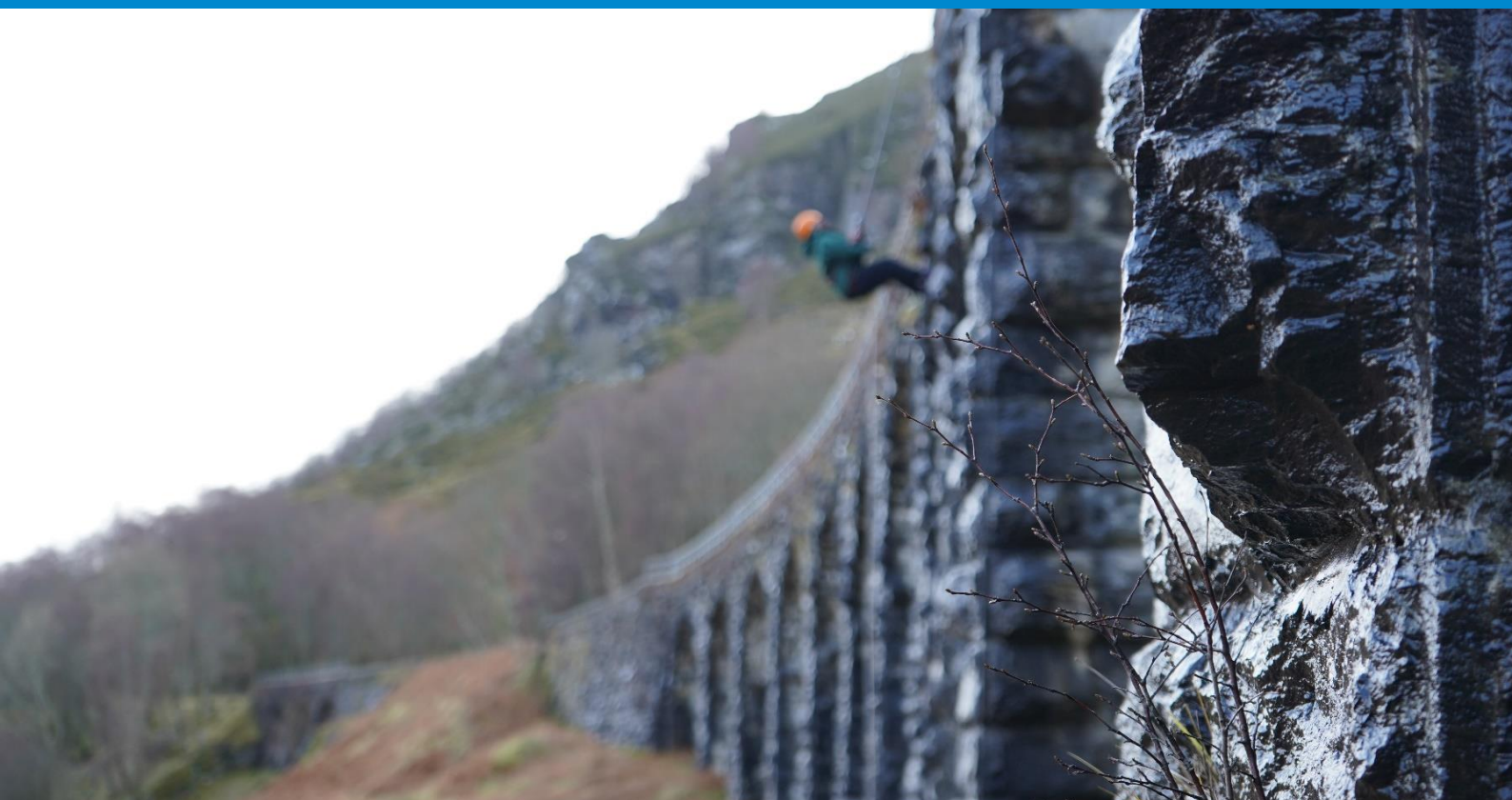
\*Chloe's name has been anonymised for confidentiality



Next Steps allowed Chloe to step out of her comfort zones and experience a very different set of challenges in the outdoors, fostering resilience and prolonged confidence in herself and in others. As part of the Next Steps programme, women have an open space to reflect on their environment back home and share their experiences with the group. The programme supports women to identify areas causing harm in their lives and identify steps to make positive change. Chloe says she appreciated the time in nature to focus on herself, away from any distractions and external influences. Many outdoor activities were out of her comfort zone, but she gave it her all.

“When meeting other women on Next Steps I didn’t realise how many people were going through the stuff I was going through. Different scenarios but the same kind of stories. I liked that because nobody was different to anyone else, and nobody treated each other differently.”

“I’m not one for walking or abseiling or anything like that. But abseiling was such an amazing day. It was phenomenal. I was worried about my size and if I would get stuck but going down was the best feeling.”



Chloe felt ready to change her life, and Venture Trust was there to give her the tools she needed to make that happen. Diagnosed with dyslexia, Chloe had difficulty taking in written information and verbalising herself which went unnoticed growing up, adding a further barrier to finding long-term employment. But now, Chloe looks forward to a brighter future.

“It was so rewarding to go on a programme like that. It opens your eyes up to where you are and where you’re going. I had nothing to focus on before. I didn’t know what I was living for. I had no academics or job prospects. I never thought I was going to work.

[Now] I’m working at... college as Student President then I’m going to further my studies. I want to work within mental health and the prison service, or to work with young people that haven’t had a good start in life. I’m going to start mentoring young people involved in criminal justice through college as well. We have to show young people it’s not the right road.”



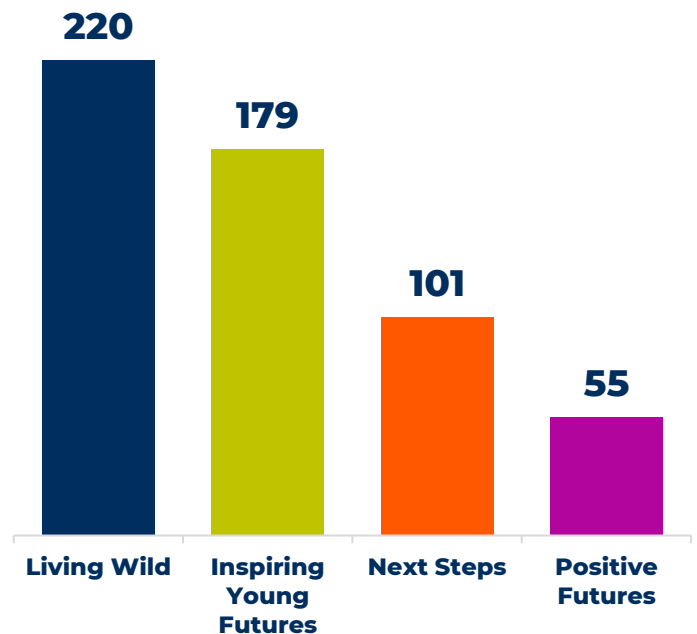
# Personal development programmes

Our personal development programmes support people in their local communities and through a journey in the Scotland's wilder places. Over the course of the year, we worked with 555 individuals across these four programmes (the split of these across programmes is found to the right). 408 of these participants were newly referred to Venture Trust this year.

We delivered 37 'wilderness' journeys – 14 blended community, 4 short wilderness journeys and 19 full wilderness journeys. 204 individuals were supported onto at least one of these 'wilderness' journeys, and we saw an 80% completion rate.

This year we saw 99 participants move into a positive outcome, for some, this meant moving into a 'positive destination' in either employment (29), training (8), education (11) or volunteering (3), for others, it meant a positive onward referral or becoming actively engaged with another service. For these participants, these all represented a big step towards a happier, healthier life.

## Participants engaged in personal development programmes



**555**  
engaged on our personal development programmes

**204**  
attended a 'wilderness' journey

**82%**  
improved skills which impact their stability

**99**  
moved into a positive outcome



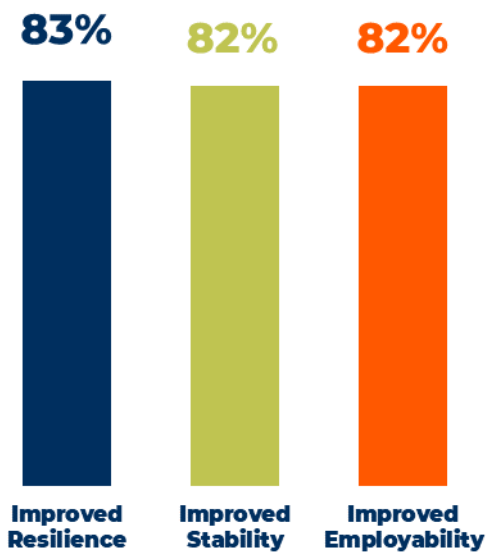
For the majority of our participants, a positive result of working with Venture Trust is the development of 'core life skills' as well as positive behavioural change.

Of those who participated in our personal development programmes, 83% saw an improvement in their resilience, 82% made improvements in measures which show increased stability and 82% made improvements to their soft skills related to employability\*. These all make a massive difference to our participants prospects moving forward in life and can have a profound impact.

Our work focuses on three main areas of development: mental health and wellbeing, community justice and employability – what follows is a brief description of what we aim to achieve in each area alongside some key statistics in each area.

\*this is based on the proportion of our participants who completed monitoring with us

## Monitoring Outcomes



## Mental wellbeing

We work to improve wellbeing and a sense of belonging. A crucial element is to improve mental health long term. With support our participants can tackle social isolation, the underlying causes of alcohol or drug misuse or the stress of escaping from poor quality housing. The people we support show positive self-confidence, improved relationships and stability.

**90%**

**of participants presented with mental health issues**

**79%**

**improved their mental wellbeing**

# 72%

**of participants have been involved in the criminal justice system**

# 86%

**improved soft skills associated with reducing their risk of (re)offending**

## Community justice

We work in the community to divert people from the justice system and to help address re-offending. By addressing hidden pressures and seeing the potential in everyone we can help build safer communities. Living with the constant pressure of inequality, life in care, or in traumatic circumstances can have a negative influence on people's lives. It often leaves them isolated from their communities, pulled towards crime and feeling unable to take part in society. Reducing crime in the community helps draw people back into society.



## Employability

Getting into employment can feel like a very distant prospect for many of the people coming to us. Lack of qualifications and low skills, a history of offending and little experience of role models in permanent work can be significant barriers to people seeking permanent employment in their future. We work with people in the early stages of the employability pipeline to build the fundamental skills of employability, to gain qualifications and support in the creation of CVs.

# 100%

**of participants faced barriers to employment**

# 82%

**improved their employability skills**



# Change Cycle

Change Cycle is a hands-on employability programme (focused at Stage 2 of the Employability Pipeline) offering recognised qualifications in bicycle mechanics, SQA (Scottish Qualifications Authority) awards and workplace training such as manual handling and fire awareness. It is a 3-week course which combines workshop elements, during which the participants build their own bike (which they get to keep), and tailored employability support to help move them towards their next steps in life.

This year saw us run 5 Change Cycle courses which were delivered in Edinburgh, Glasgow and Livingston. Over the five courses, which had a total capacity of 50 learners, 41 participants started the course with 35 completing – a completion rate of 85%.

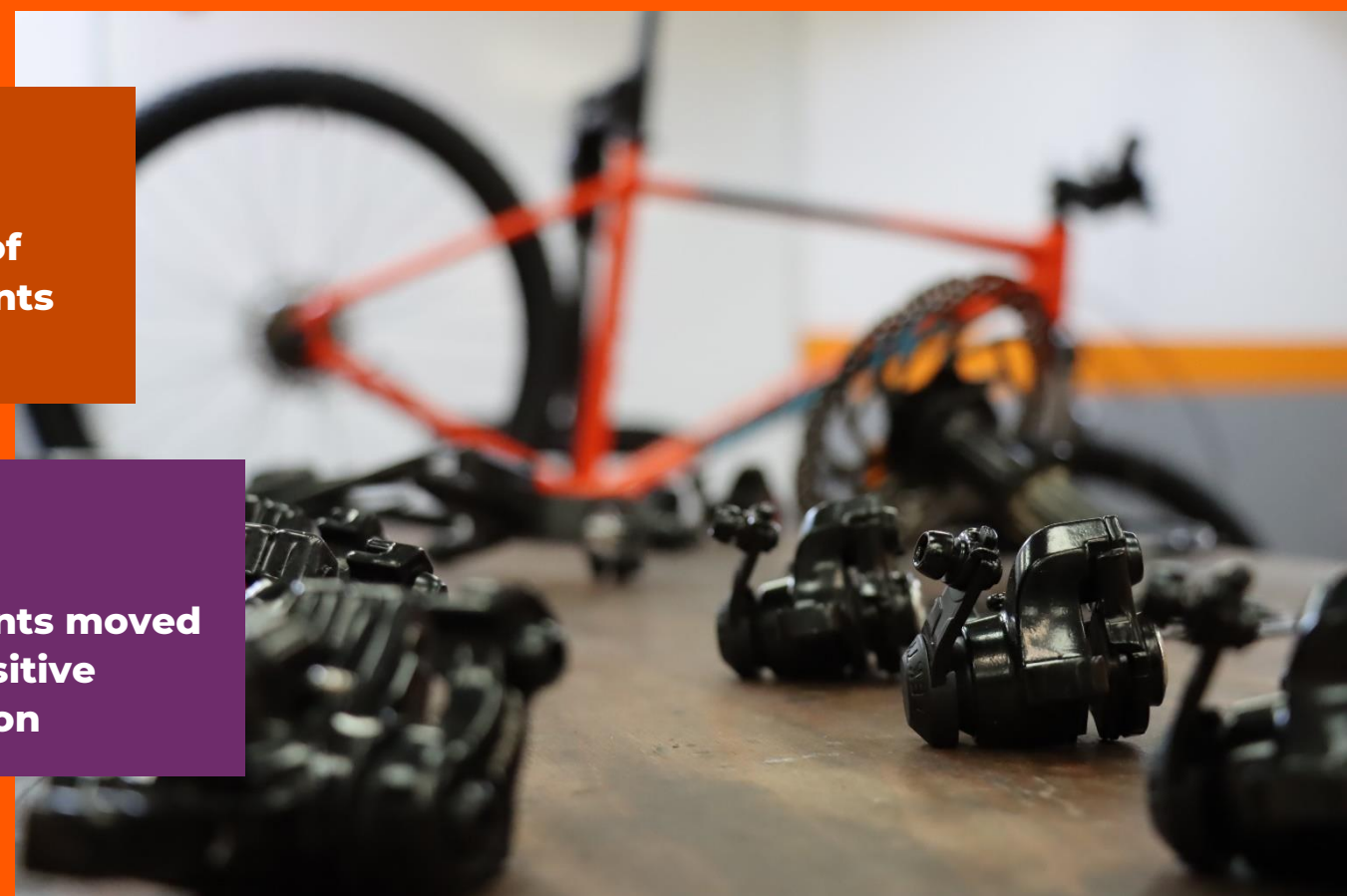
Including those who recently completed a Change Cycle course in 20/21, this year saw 24 participants move into at least one positive destination with 16 entering employment, 7 starting further education and 2 moving into training by the end of March 2022.

**41**

**number of  
participants  
engaged**

**24**

**participants moved  
into a positive  
destination**



# Outdoor Therapy

We successfully launched our Outdoor Therapy service, initially focused on, young people (16-25) and those with a history of service in the armed forces, in March 2021.

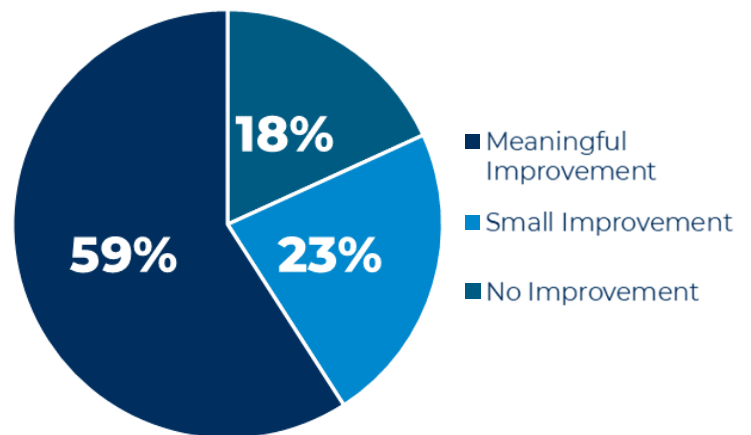
The service is delivered by our team of dedicated and qualified therapists (including trainee therapists where appropriate), and it takes place in urban outdoor spaces such as parks, community gardens, waterways, woodlands, beaches, or local hills.

In 2021-22, we worked with 63 clients delivering a total of 690 one-to-one therapy sessions. This equates to an average of 11 sessions per client over the course of the year. We also ran an outdoor therapy group in conjunction with this, which clients of the outdoor therapy service could access. Most of our clients had a meaningful level of engagement with the service, 86% (54 clients) had at least 4 sessions with one of our therapists. This level of engagement is important as we feel this is where clients could begin to see the impact of the service on their mental health.

Early results on the change the service is making to our participants is very encouraging, with 82% of participants who have successfully left the service after receiving at least 4 therapy sessions reporting an improvement in their Core-OM score – this measures the level of an individual’s psychological distress – with 59% seeing a ‘meaningful’ improvement to their score.

**[See our Outdoor Therapy Report 2021-22 HERE](#)**

## Level of change in CORE-OM score for those completing Outdoor Therapy (after a min. 4 sessions)



**63**

**number of clients we worked with**

**82%**

**of clients saw an improvement in their mental health**



# Our impact in Europe:

## From Outdoors to Labour Market (FOLM)

Over the past 3.5 years, Venture Trust has been an expert partner in 'From Outdoors to Labour Market' (FOLM), a European project with the aim to establish outdoor learning as a method to re-engage out of work young people (18-29 year olds) with the labour market.

The project used the 'Edinburgh Model', our three-phase approach to personal development, to support partner organisations to launch outdoor learning in Ireland, Spain and Poland – countries (unlike Scotland) with no real history of using the outdoors as a place for growth.

Venture Trust provided our European partners with logistical support and provided training to over 50 staff to implement the project. We hosted trainers in Scotland to attend our wilderness journeys, Venture Trust staff visited each country to deliver training and to review the implementation of our partners 'courses' and we also provided online training as the Covid crisis impacted our original plans.

The project culminated in February 2022 in an online event sharing our learning with attendees from a wide range of practice and academic backgrounds (this can be viewed [HERE](#)).

**We exported our model to:**

**Ireland,  
Poland &  
Spain**

**50+**

**trainers supported  
by Venture Trust  
and UoE**



Over the course of the project, our partners worked with 990 participants, 83% of which moved into employment or further education – further showing the impact our approach can have on individuals.

We hope the legacy of the project will be the continued use of the model by our European partners. This is something we are already seeing with additional training currently being planned for our Polish partners at the Center for Innovative Education, and we have also had conversations over the potential to work with a new partner in Spain. This shows the level of belief put into our approach in utilising the outdoors to bring about real change in people, and how this can be translated across Europe.

[Click here to view more about the FOLM project.](#)

## Where the project took place and our partners:



Ireland: Mid-West Region

Partner: Technological University of the Shannon (formerly Limerick Institute of Technology)



Poland: Warmia and Masuria

Partners: Center for Innovative Education & Food Bank in Olsztyn



Spain: Cantabria region

Partners: Cantabrian Regional Government & Femxa



THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH

We worked as expert partners on the project alongside The University of Edinburgh.

990

participants engaged on the FOLM project

83%

moved into employment or education

3.5 years

length of time the project ran for







# Dundee School Partnership: Venture Trust / Princes Trust

This year we were excited to partner with Princes Trust to deliver a community-based personal development course for 16 year-olds from Dundee at risk of exclusion from school. Funded by Youthlink Scotland (YLS), the course included individual one-to-one sessions (delivered by Princes Trust) as well as group activity days in a variety of locations (delivered by Venture Trust). The outcomes of the courses were based around improved health and wellbeing, improved engagement with education and development of skills including interpersonal skills.

Venture Trust’s group activity courses were each 4 days in length and took place over the course of a single week during school time. Each day, the pupils were taken out of their school environment and provided a range of outdoor learning opportunities that were used as vehicles for experiential learning.

Over the 5 courses delivered by Venture Trust, we worked with a total of 20 pupils who successfully completed the course.



## Other achievements



### Arc'teryx #ClimbLakeDistrict Weekend

As part of our ongoing partnership with Arc'teryx, four Venture Trust participants and two of our Development Team members were invited to the Arc'teryx Academy Climb Lake District event in Great Langdale. The event took place over the weekend of September 25<sup>th</sup>-26<sup>th</sup>, offering opportunities to learn outdoor skills and connect with fellow nature lovers. The event was a great success, with our team thoroughly enjoying their time in the Lake District. Over the weekend, they took part in activities such as mountain climbing, wild swimming, scrambling, bouldering, rock climbing and mindfulness sessions.

### Fort William Mountain Festival

In February 2022, Venture Trust and some of our participants were invited to the Fort William Mountain Festival to share our experiences and the impact of our work. The event allowed us to premiere our Island of Dreams film – filmed and edited by one of our Development Trainers, Sasha Doyle.

Island of Dreams traced the journeys undertaken by four participant groups led by Venture Trust in and through the Scottish wilderness. It charts the impact that the wilderness and outdoor therapeutic interventions can have on people’s lives. We were extremely proud of the participants who came to share their experiences – some of which had appeared in the film – they were incredible speakers and provided a great representation for the people of Venture Trust. You can find the link to Island of Dreams **HERE**.



# Feedback from participants



**"I'm so grateful to have been led by this extraordinary group of people."**

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**"I can't thank Venture Trust enough for helping me come out my shell more and how much they helped build my confidence and if I could convince anyone to do a wilderness journey I would because you have really helped my push for a better life."**

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**"I loved the experience from start to finish it was such a learning curve for me. Everything about it was brilliant from the food, one-to-one support to building relationships."**

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**"It was such a wonderful experience and enjoyment. I achieved goals I never thought I'd be able to achieve, and I never would have had the opportunity in my everyday life. I learned to love myself and believe in myself. Something I never believed in before. THIS IS ME!"**

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**"This was like my counselling I cannot thank the staff enough I thoroughly enjoyed and gained from the whole experience, and it is a worthwhile cause I wish I could have done this twenty years ago."**

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**"The outdoor therapy helped me establish a healthy routine, and it also got me outside and more comfortable spending time in nature."**

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**"Working with Venture Trust in the outdoors gave me back a lot about myself that I'd lost. It gave me an enjoyment that I hadn't felt in a long, long time. Now I spend all my time in the outdoors. It's completely changed my outlook and perspective on life. I couldn't ask for more. It's been life changing."**



# Thank You

We would like to sincerely thank all those who have funded and supported our work over the last year - you are vital to the work we do.

Thank you to our funders, these include: The Scottish Government, Libor, Impetus, Souter Charitable Trust, European Social Fund, EEA and Norway Grants, Dunlossit and Islay Community Trust, Comic Relief, Glasgow Communities Fund, Fidelity UK Foundation, Inspiring Scotland, SDS: Employability Fund, Goldsmiths' Company, Gannochy Trust, UCB Community Health Fund, UK Community Renewal Fund, Armed Forces Covenant, Garfield Weston, Hugh Fraser Foundation, Mathew Trust, The MacRobert Trust, , The Veterans Foundation, West Lothian Council, Cycling Scotland, Arc'teryx, Whirlwind Charitable Trust, National Lottery Community Fund, The Pixel Fund, Foundation Scotland, Youthlink Scotland, and every single one of our other funders and individual supporters.

Thank you to our delivery partners, these include: Bike for Good, Bike Station, Cantabrian Regional Government (Spain), Centre for Innovative Education (Poland), Femxa (Spain), Food Bank in Olsztyn (Poland), Princes Trust, Technological University of the Shannon (Ireland), University of Edinburgh, West Lothian Bike Library, and all the freelance staff who have worked with us over the year.

Also, we would like to say a massive thank you to our board and all our members of staff for their care, courage, curiosity and collaboration throughout the year.





## For more information, please:

**Visit our website:**

**[venturetrust.org.uk](http://venturetrust.org.uk)**

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**To make a referral, please complete our webform: [Venture Trust Referral Form](#)**

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