


venturetrust



**Impact Report
2022-23**



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Thank You!

Introduction

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

The aim of this report is to give an idea of what we do and the impact of our work over the past year. Seeing the positive changes in our participants is the most rewarding part of what we do. The change in their outlook, the change in their confidence, and the change in their aspirations for a better future.

We report this using various statistics which come from the monitoring we do with our participants as they progress through our programmes. However, we believe the impact of our work is best described through the stories of our participants, where they have come from, what they have been up against, and what they have achieved during their time with us.

This year's impact report draws on a wide range of these experiences and tries to bring to life the work of Venture Trust and the lives of those who have worked with us.

- **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



2022-23 has seen our first full year of 'business as usual' outdoor delivery since the start of the Covid pandemic. Our wilderness journeys are fully back up and running (each lasting between 5 and 10 days) delivered in Scotland's wilder places, we have seen the growth and development of our Outdoor Therapy service and we have continued with delivery of our Change Cycle employability programme.

Over the last 12 months, we have provided support to 688 individuals across our programmes and services, delivering 26 wilderness journeys, 5 Change Cycle courses and an increased level of support in our Outdoor Therapy service.

688
participants
supported

26
Wilderness
journeys delivered

Our programmes

Personal development programmes:

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 their 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.

Employability:

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.

Therapy:

Outdoor Therapy - The service aims to support people by combining the full range of benefits gained from time spent 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.







Our participants

92%

reported facing a mental health issue

Venture Trust works with a wide variety of participants across our various programmes. Although each programme has certain eligibility criteria (e.g., must be involved in the justice system, women-only, ex-service people, young people), all of our participants have one thing in common, they have all experienced adversity and face barriers which impact on their life choices and chances.

As part of our assessment and engagement work, we gather information on who we work with at all stages of their time with us, from initial assessment to their moving on from Venture Trust. This allows us to understand the range of issues our participants are dealing with, ensure our support is person-centred and trauma-informed, and helps us to monitor the impact we make.

This year, some of the main presenting issues facing our participants were:

- 92% reported facing a mental health issue – this shows an increase on last year (90%) and a marked increase on 2020/21 (69%).
- 64% were dealing with an alcohol/substance related issue.
- 56% were either in homeless or deemed to be at risk of homelessness.
- 47% were currently involved in the justice system – the majority of our personal development work is centered on those involved in the Scottish justice system.
- 20% were care experienced.
- Over 97% of our participants were out of work when they were referred to Venture Trust.

47%

were currently involved in the justice system

The demographic make-up of our participants in 2022/23 shows that half of our participants are within the 16-24 age range with the other half aged 25+ (our oldest participant last year was 68). This split is partly due to two of our programmes being focused on young people (Inspiring Young Futures and Change Cycle). We also saw around 20% of participants on our other programmes being from this younger age group.

The majority of our participants identify as male (65%) with 34% identifying as female and 1% identify using another term. This represents a slight narrowing of the male/female gap compared to last year when the breakdown was 72%/27%/1%, which is due to an increase in our female-only courses this year.

10.5% of our participants identify as LGBT+ which is above the national average and also shows an increase on last year (8%). We believe this is down to more people feeling open enough to share this with us and also due to more reliable recording of this data in our database. In 2022/23, 2.2% of our participants were from an ethnic minority.

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, with 76% coming 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.



45%
aged 16-24

65%
identified as male

34%
identified as female

2.2%
were from an ethnic minority

10.5%
identified as LGBT+

Our impact



Personal development programmes

Our personal development programmes support people in their local communities and through a wilderness journey lasting between 5 and 10 days in Scotland's wilder places. This year, we worked with 549 individuals across our four programmes with 402 of these participants being newly referred to Venture Trust this year.

172 participants took part in one of our 26 wilderness journeys this year, spending a combined 1,191 nights under the stars. Our completion rate for the year was 88%, which is higher than we have seen in previous years.

The impact of these programmes is measured in different ways, through the positive outcomes they achieve, the improvements they make in their core life skills and through the stories of our participants.



207

engaged on the
Living Wild
programme

155

engaged on the
Inspiring Young
Futures
programme

143

engaged on the
Next Steps
programme

44

engaged on the
Positive Futures
programme

172

attended a
wilderness
journey



Over 2022-23, we saw 91 participants from our personal development programmes achieve at least one positive outcome. These included entering employment (33), education (17), training (5), volunteering (16), taking on work experience (2), a positive onward referral to other organisations (18) and referral into another Venture Trust service (15), such as our Outdoor Therapy or Employability programmes. Others also achieved something more personal to them such as joining a local football team, gaining access to their children, attending a weekly art group, spending more time in nature (further boosting their self-esteem and their mental and physical wellbeing).

For the majority of our participants, a positive result of working with Venture Trust is the development of their 'core life skills' and positive behavioural change. We have seen fantastic levels of personal development and growth over the year, captured through our bespoke monitoring system and our wilderness journey course reports. Some of the highlights from the year include: 85% reported an increase in their confidence, 79% saw their skills in dealing with challenge improve, 78% showed improved mental wellbeing and 78% also reported an increase in their ability to maintain positive relationships.

These all make a massive difference to our participants prospects moving forward in life and can have a profound impact on both themselves and the wider community.

91

**participants
achieved at least
one positive
outcome**

85%

**reported an
increase in their
confidence**

78%

**increased their
ability to maintain
positive
relationships**

79%

**improved their
skills in dealing
with challenge**

78%

**showed improved
mental wellbeing**

15

**participants went
on to engage with
another Venture
Trust service**



“Why do we go away? So that we can come back”

Ian's Development Trainer Diaries

Ian Gray is one of Venture Trust's Development Trainers – the members of our team by the side of our participants as they face the challenges that the wilder places of Scotland present. A qualified expert and venerated member of our field team with over 13 years of experience in outdoors personal development, Ian reflects on the impact of Venture Trust's wilderness journeys...

“Coffee will get you through times of no hope, but hope will not get you through times of no coffee!” - one of life's wisdoms shared around the fire somewhere in the wilds of Scotland, probably a damp one.

Rewind to before I worked for Venture Trust and doing personal development courses on expeditions. My driving instructor's lasting wisdom stuck, “I can teach you but after you pass then you learn how to drive.”

I admit I don't have their answers, but I have learnt to listen and ask good questions. Everyone is their own life's expert and by investing in themselves they achieve a new perspective, discover strengths and go home confident and motivated to overcome barriers and take things from their time in the wilderness and transfer experiences to help their lives.



I paraphrase an inspiring man who reached millions as an outdoor educator, Mors Kochanski; The wilderness is neutral, it is neither for nor against me. My comfort depends on what I can do for myself and how much I know about using the resources around me. Life is like that too.

Life's most powerful lessons need little instruction- get people in the right place and nature provides. We are often captives in cages of our own design.

We need to be prepared to fail and accept never reaching perfection. We need to show vulnerability and step out of our comfort zone if we're ever to grow. Learning to adapt and explore plan B, building a can-do attitude, breaking down self-limiting habits and building a new narrative through nurturing self-esteem, achieving small successes and fostering aspirations are all important. They're all things we make space for and encourage through our journeys. Both in the outdoors and on participants' longer journey with us across the span of months.

Let me tell you a story.

On an unspoiled island, I'm tying up hammocks amongst the Scots pines having waded through chest high moss and heather. The group are cooking in the shelter of a battered tarp. I open my waterproof and wring out my saturated mid-layer, it was one heck of a storm.

Smiling faces meet me, appreciation for the tarp and hot drinks and a few nervous smiles acknowledging the hilarity of the situation bubble up from the group. The Blitz spirit is alive and well on Loch Maree.

The group previously tested their mettle in the mountains, hiking and then wading through a river up to their thighs. The rain had lashed down on an idyllic valley with more waterfalls than I have ever seen. A lesson in patience soon came. A normally small burn became a roaring torrent. We contemplated retreat, but decided we could not afford to wait for it to drop and made the crossing. The hardships were rewarded with a breath-taking sunset whose memory overshadowed the misery.

It was an amazing journey, but it would be no more than a memory or a dusty certificate if the time away was not used to make a tangible difference in the participants' lives back home. The work's privilege is the relationships; sharing the inner journey with people and helping build people up to achieve their potential, learning to empower themselves.

To answer the question, "why do we go away?" I'll quote Terry Pratchett- "So that you can come back. So that you can see the place you came from with new eyes and extra colours. And the people there see you differently, too. Coming back to where you started is not the same as never leaving."







Taylor's* story

What impact do Venture Trust journeys have on young people who find themselves in the justice system?

“My time on the Venture Trust wilderness journey was very good – I had a lot of fun with everyone who was there. I got a lot out of it, improving my social skills and learning that it’s worth it to keep going and push through harder situations.”

Taylor was living in a rural village with his parents when he began using heroin, and as a result had his first brush with the criminal justice system. After being issued a Restriction of Liberty Order and a curfew, Taylor had begun to feel increasingly isolated and anxious around others. He began to deteriorate mentally, started smoking weed and engaging in criminal behaviour.

Taylor’s Criminal Justice support worker told him about Venture Trust and how we could help him work out his goals and support him in taking steps towards realising them through our Living Wild programme.

Taylor had many reasons for wanting to engage with Venture Trust. With experience in working as a landscape gardener, he knew that the outdoors could have a positive impact on his physical and mental wellbeing. He was seeking structure, positive ways to use his time and a physical and mental challenge. He wanted to take part in something different from his day to day, build up his confidence and get back into work.

At first, Taylor found the idea of beginning his journey with Venture Trust daunting. Struggling with feelings of anxiety and low self-confidence, Taylor was initially shy and withdrawn in group work sessions held prior to his 8-day journey. But once Taylor got talking to other participants his anxiety started to ease. He started opening up at sessions and sharing his anxieties with other participants and started to show eagerness to absorb new experiences.

Taylor's wilderness journey was a real challenge – the weather was wet and windy, and he considered giving up more than once. For the first few days Taylor was reluctant to accept help with his tent, choosing to sleep in it despite it being unstable, rather than ask for help.

But soon Taylor's perspective and attitude started to change. He persevered despite the challenges and started to become aware of his strengths, communicating more openly with everyone experiencing the journey along with him. His confidence gradually grew, and he started to show a deeper awareness of what he needed to change to move forwards with his life back home.

After his journey, Taylor landed a new landscaping job and began walking in and around his home village. He also started setting goals with his Outreach Worker, that could help lead him to a brighter future. He knew that his tag and the destructive behaviours that had led him astray in the past would be tough obstacles to overcome, but he felt confident and determined. He knew that he had a way to go in overcoming bad influences and temptations, but he felt more certain than ever that he could change and succeed. Taylor realised he needed to steer clear of the harmful relationships and things that had been a negative influence in his life.

Taylor then spent time talking openly with his Outreach Worker about his future and setting goals – a process which is a key part of all the journeys our participants take with Venture Trust. Taylor decided that he wanted to work with plants and would either volunteer or work in a garden centre or environmental group or begin studying at college. He decided he'd work with his Outreach Worker to find local outdoor activities that he could take part in regularly to keep active and healthy. He also decided to work towards getting a driving license so that he could get around and make the most of more far afield job opportunities.

Taylor has come a long way since first getting in touch with Venture Trust and beginning his Living Wild journey – and we know there's a brighter future on the horizon for him yet.





Charlie's* story

Learning how to 'be' in the world

Charlie came to Venture Trust having faced a lot of adversity in their young life, including being care experienced, a history of childhood trauma, facing social isolation and until recently, had been homeless. They referred themselves to Venture Trust with a desire to improve their routines, confidence and employability skills to help them make the next step in their life.

On meeting Charlie for the very first time, our Outreach Worker noted immediately that Charlie was an effective communicator, whilst simultaneously being self-reflective and able to acknowledge things they would like to work on. These included: building and maintaining relationships; widening social circles; following their passions of outdoor sports and activities; engaging with the wider world; building routine to help improve mental health; building skills such as empathy- learning about other people and how to "be" in the world. It was clear right away that they were a good fit for our Inspiring Young Futures programme.



During Charlie's wilderness journey preparation work, an opportunity to take part in some activity days with one of our partners, the Scottish Seabird Centre, arose. Although initially feeling quite nervous and socially anxious, as it involved travelling from Perth to East Lothian (where the activity days were taking place) and meeting other people they did not know, Charlie became very keen to attend. This turnaround was achieved through discussion with their Outreach Worker, which helped them recognise that this would be a good challenge and something they have to try and take advantage of if they want to progress in life.

They attended both days with the Scottish Seabird Centre and enjoyed the sessions, but it also highlighted some areas of challenge they may face when going on the wilderness journey – such as how their anxiety makes them act when in a group situation. Charlie agreed to work with their Outreach Worker on some of these issues before going away.

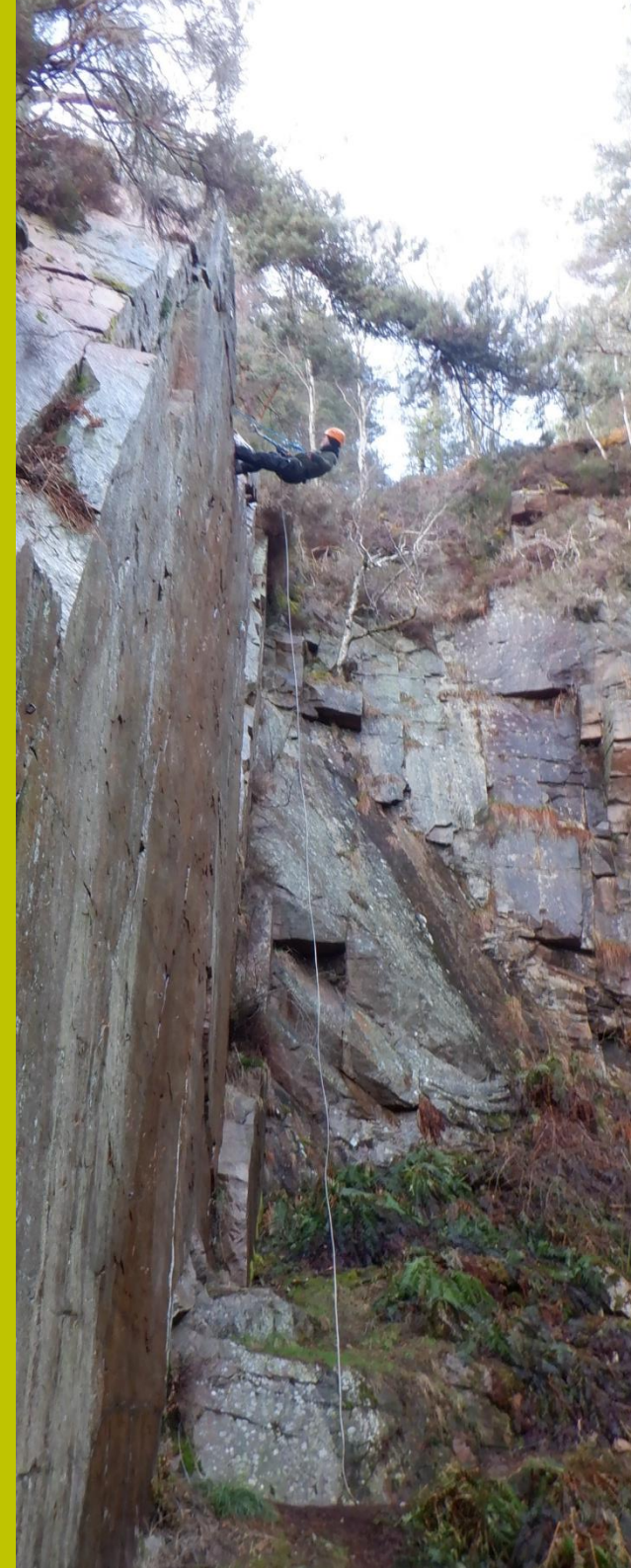
After some more preparation work with their Outreach Worker, Charlie went on an 8-day wilderness journey with 9 other young people from across Scotland. The journey took them to the Cairngorms where they spent time wild camping, abseiling, walking and climbing alongside working with the Venture Trust Field Team on a variety of personal development sessions including dealing with change and action planning.

On their return from the journey, Charlie spoke glowingly about the whole experience, stating that their faith in humanity had been restored as it was such a nice, caring group of people. Charlie clearly benefitted a lot from having a safe space environment whilst on the wilderness journey. They spoke about becoming more independent and learning new skills for socialising and talking within a group. They also said that they would try to keep up with the routine from the journey, such as getting up and eating breakfast early in the day so as to give themselves fuel for the day.

Over the journey, Charlie made very positive progress towards the goals they had set with their Outreach Worker prior to going away, such as building healthy relationships and interacting within groups – which they did very successfully. They were able to use the time and space away to reflect on their isolation at home and the challenges they face building positive relationships. Within the safe space of the course, Charlie was able to effectively build positive relationships with other participants and appeared to really enjoy being part of the group.

Now back in their community, Charlie and their Outreach Worker discussed what they wanted to do next, to build on the progress they had made on the wilderness journey. They had identified that they wanted to access group activities and build on their socialising skills, this had been a major focus for Charlie ever since they started working with Venture Trust.

By the end of Charlie's time with Venture Trust, they had managed to find a badminton club at their local Leisure Centre, which they are enjoying getting involved with, alongside the socialising involved and being active. Charlie said things are going well, better than in the past. They stated that some of the positives from the wilderness journey, such as routine, eating breakfast, not drinking coffee later in the day, are all helping them with their daily life. We also reflected on the progress Charlie had made over the past 6 months- showing great resilience and building confidence whilst on their wilderness journey and in their home life. They were now looking forward to progressing into the next step of their life.





Scott's* story

“I’ve gotten more out of this 10-day journey than I did years spent in prison.”

For a long time, Scott had struggled with substance and alcohol abuse, picking up several charges as a result, including a custodial sentence. After his latest charge, he found himself on a community payback order and wanted to make changes to start using his time positively, looking to bring structure and meaning to his everyday life. With an affinity for the outdoors, he wanted to find a way to manage and move on from the problems he faced in the past, alleviating the trapped feeling he was experiencing through his living conditions.

Ready to build confidence and work on his social anxiety, he was referred to Venture Trust through his Support Worker at Sacro, a Scottish community justice organisation. With this referral, Scott was ready and eager to be signed up to take part in our Living Wild programme, which he successfully completed earlier this year. The journey came at just the right time, allowing him to learn and absorb new ideas and experiences.

Living Wild is our ten-day programme which supports people on Community Payback and other criminal justice orders who want to make positive and sustained life changes. Being outdoors in the wilder parts of Scotland offers everyone who goes on the journey both challenges and the opportunity to reflect, learn and adapt in a new environment. Our services provide support for up to 9 months – helping people make and keep connections to services, training, education, or community volunteering opportunities.

The time Scott spent away on the Living Wild programme gave him space, a sense of clarity and a new perspective on his life, helping him realise how he wanted to move forwards. Before his journey, Scott shared that he struggled with anxiety, resulting in him over-thinking situations which would often lead into a downward spiral of negative self-talk. The space and time away helped Scott feel more grounded, and better understand how to manage his emotions when confronted with triggering situations.



He had known for a while what changes he could make but hadn't had the confidence or sense of certainty to make them yet. Before his journey, thinking of his own needs was something Scott seemed unfamiliar with, and he would often put the needs of others before his own. Through working with Venture Trust, he realised he had to prioritise his own wellbeing too, and in his final development session he shared that he was *“excited to go and do things for myself, enjoy myself again, and even reward myself.”*

Throughout his journey Scott rediscovered that he was capable of taking on challenges and overcoming them. He rediscovered that he could confidently jump in and take part, and that he could make changes in his life – setting goals and defining the actions to get him there.

Scott's Living Wild group could see the difference in him by the end of the ten days. As the journey progressed, he visually became brighter faced, happier and his confidence improved, which was noticed by staff, his fellow participants and Scott himself. Throughout the course, Scott's enthusiasm grew, and he built positive relationships with others, serving as a brilliant role model. By the final days he was volunteering himself first for activities, and confidently delivering presentations to his group.

“I enjoyed every minute of my time on the course, the instructors were amazing people and they felt more like friends by the end of our journey. The physical aspect of the course and the scenery was fantastic. What I loved most was our one-on-one time, I've learned to remember how to enjoy myself again without the use of alcohol, and my self-worth has increased 100%. I came away a new man.”


Scott's story with us doesn't end with his Living Wild experience. He's gone on to make brilliant changes in his life and continued to work with Venture Trust. Following his journey Scott was keen to explore his creative side and has since taken up drawing again. He has also started volunteering at his local gardening project and joined some other Venture Trust participants and staff at the Arc'teryx Climbing Academy weekend in the Lake District.

“To anyone thinking of taking part in Venture Trust, I would say jump straight in and don't think twice! It was the most beneficial thing I have ever done for myself. I am a stronger, better, and more confident person. Ready to take on any challenge. I'm so grateful to the whole team.”



'Friendship'

by Alexander Edgar
(who participated on our Living Wild programme)

A photograph of three men standing on a beach, seen from behind. They are wearing dark clothing and have their arms around each other's shoulders, suggesting a close bond. The background shows a calm sea and a clear sky. The text is overlaid on the image in white, bold font.

My VT Course began on a rainy day in Stirling,
By the time I got there, my poor wee head was swirling.
I met a lot of strangers and so the trip began,
I really began to wish, that I had turned and ran.
So sat there with these people, we all began to talk...
It didn't take very long, to see how similarly we all thought.
We set off as strangers, to walk through hills and glens,
Never did I think I would make these so-called strangers into lifelong friends.
So, as we bring this journey to an end,
I just want you all to know, you will always be my friend.

Listen to 'Friendship' read by Alexander, featuring footage of our Living Wild programme [HERE](#)



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 15-day course, run over either 3-weeks or 5-weeks, 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 in partnership with Bike Station (Edinburgh), Bike for Good (Glasgow) and Bike Library (Livingston). Over the five courses, 41 participants started the course with 38 completing – a completion rate of 93%.

41

**number of
participants on
course**

35

**achieved at least
one certified
award**

38

**received a bike at
the end of the
course**

23

**moved into a
positive
destination**

95%

**increased their
ability to set goals
and work towards
them**

This year saw 23 participants move into at least one positive destination, with 11 entering employment, 2 starting further education, 2 moving into training, and 4 starting a voluntary role by the end of March 2023.

Of those who took part in a course in 2022/23, 35 achieved at least one certified award. This included 30 achieving a bike mechanics award (either a Bike Library Mechanics Award, City & Guilds Award or a Velotech Award) and 27 achieving an SQA Employability Award (14 at Level 3 and 13 at Level 4). All 38 participants who completed the course also got to keep their bike, helping them to keep active and giving them a means of transport.

Alongside these achievements, our participants also saw improvements in their core life skills, many of which are employability related. Some highlights of these include: 95% increased their ability to set goals and work towards them, 92% saw an improvement in their mental wellbeing and 90% increased their confidence.



Nichole's story

“Every day is still a struggle, but I want to offer hope to other people.”

Recently, Nichole, who completed our Inspiring Young Futures and Change Cycle programmes, was interviewed by the Greenock Telegraph describing how she has turned her life around and is now wanting to offer hope to others who may be in a similar situation to what she was in.

Much of the following has been taken from the article published by the Greenock Telegraph, which can be viewed [HERE](#).

Nichole came to Venture Trust after years of suffering in a vicious cycle of alcohol, heroin, and cocaine abuse, which led to her losing her job and a prosecution for drug driving.

Looking back Nichole says she was vulnerable to addiction: *"I guess it all started at school, you went drinking, then tried drugs and I couldn't stop. My friend's kind of left me and I was on my own."* But it was losing her gran that was the catalyst for sending her into a downward spiral: *"I love my family, but I suppose we were a dysfunctional one... I was brought up by my gran... When she died, I was so full of grief, it was like losing everything. I couldn't find my way back from it."*

From there, things got worse and worse for Nichole: *"I had mental health illnesses but all they could see was the drug addict. I couldn't get the services I needed, and so it was a vicious circle... I tried to take my own life I don't know how many times; I have even jumped in front of cars... It was bad, really bad. Everything had spiralled and I had no way out. I was involved in things I didn't want to be involved in... But a year ago I had had enough. I was in court for drugs and driving. That was my lowest point. This time I wanted to be clean, but for me this time... Before I was trying to stop for everyone else. But this time I wanted to be clean, I wanted a life... The help is there but you need to know where to go and you need to want to do it for yourself."*





Nichole was referred to Venture Trust by Moving On Inverclyde, who alongside Your Voice, were vital to Nicole starting her journey towards recovery: *"They were not judgemental, it was all about recovery."* Now she was in a position where she could focus on her personal development, with an aim to build her self-esteem, confidence and resilience.

After Nichole's initial assessment with her Venture Trust Outreach Worker, it was decided that she would be prepared to attend one of our 8-day Inspiring Young Futures wilderness journeys. As part of the preparation for her journey, Nichole took part in a groupwork activity session which involved putting herself out of her comfort zone and meeting new people. Nichole came to the session prepared to push herself and learn new skills. She fully engaged in the rock-climbing activity, worked well with everyone within the group including the climbing instructors and stated she couldn't wait to take part in other activities and the journey.

The 8-day wilderness journey took Nicole and several fellow participants to the Highlands, where they spent the majority of their time around the Ben Cruachan and Loch Awe area. There, they climbed the 918m Munro (Meall Cuanail), canoed along Loch Awe and spent time wild camping – towards the end of the journey they also took part in rock climbing at Creag na h-Eighe. Alongside this, the Venture Trust Field Team delivered personal development sessions which allowed Nichole and her fellow participants to explore themes such as safe spaces, building effective relationships, dealing with change, and understanding your needs. Through these sessions the group began to realise what they needed in their lives and what could be missing if they weren't able to access these needs they so desired.

Throughout the journey, it was noted that Nichole displayed a positive, can-do attitude and although she did encounter some difficult moments on the journey, she recognised that each time she picked herself up she was a little stronger. Nichole was able to reflect on her achievements, recognising that the little achievements built to allow larger successes. She was determined to take what she had learned back with her when she returned to her community.

Once back from her journey, Nichole engaged with her Outreach Worker and continued to engage with her workers at Moving On Inverclyde, where she started to explore opportunities to progress. Nichole was introduced to our employability team, and she was given a place on our Change Cycle programme which gave her the opportunity to work on her employability skills (through the SQA Employability Award), the chance to build her own bike (which she gained a qualification and got to keep) and take part in cycling activities in Pollok Country Park (facilitated by Bike for Good). Nichole also got to experience visits to local employers, such as a Peter Vardy garage, where the group were given a tour and got to hear about the experiences of some of their staff. Nichole left the course inspired and ready to take up some exciting opportunities which had arisen for her.

Nichole's life is now unrecognisable to how it was just a few years ago, she sits on a Corra Foundation panel as a member with lived experience to help determine funding for lifeline services. She volunteers at the Your Voice recovery hub and has support from places like the Celtic Foundation employability scheme and Stepwell. She is very proud of recently passing a Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction Diploma with distinction and she has also been on a charity mission to Romania, where she worked with adults with disabilities who had been placed in orphanages as children.

"I even got the chance to dip in the Black Sea. It was life changing and I felt how far I'd come...Every day is a still be a struggle, but I want to offer hope to other people."

Nichole is very passionate about her experience with Venture Trust and has stated a determination to work with us one day if/when the opportunity allows.



Outdoor Therapy

85

**number of
clients we
worked with**

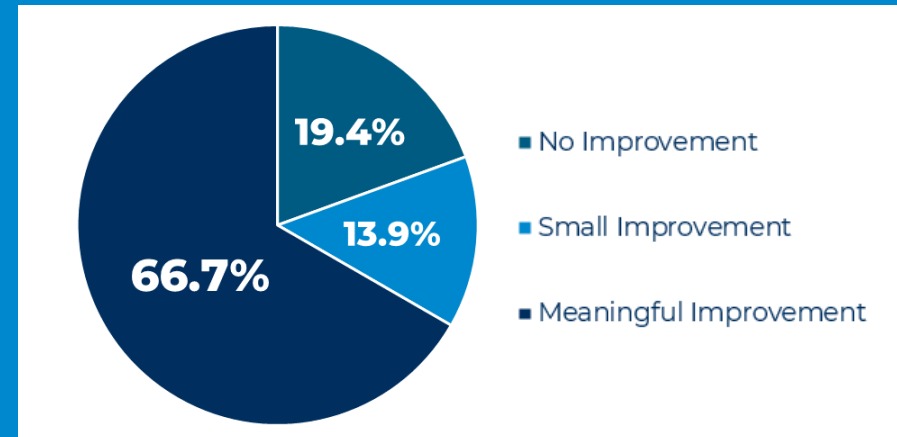
Building on its successful launch in March 2021, our Outdoor Therapy service has continued to grow over the last year. The service offers weekly 1:1 sessions with a counsellor or therapist (including trainee therapists where appropriate) in an outdoor space that is local to our clients. These clients fell into one of two groups we worked with over the year: young people aged 16 to 25 years old (82.4%) and veterans of any age (17.6%). We also put a focus on those from areas identified as deprived in the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation.

Much of our work has taken place in the east of the country, with the majority of our clients (39.4%) coming from Edinburgh, followed by Fife (27.3%), West Lothian (11.1%) and East Lothian (10.1%), with the remaining coming from Aberdeenshire, Clackmannanshire, Stirling and a small number from the west of Scotland (Glasgow and Renfrewshire).

Over the year, we worked with 85 clients (also seeing an additional 13 clients who only had an initial assessment), delivering 832 one-to-one therapy sessions in urban outdoor spaces in client’s local communities. These spaces included local parks, community gardens, waterways, woodlands, beaches, and local hills.

Levels of engagement with our clients have been strong over the year with 80% of our clients having at least 4 sessions with one of our therapists. Of those who completed their time in the service in 2022/23, each client had received an average of 12.7 one-to-one sessions with their Outdoor Therapist, and of those who completed and had at least 4 sessions, their average was 17.3 during their time working with Venture Trust.

Level of change in CORE-OM score for those completing Outdoor Therapy



832
one-to-one
sessions delivered

82.4%
of clients were
aged 16-25

17.6%
of clients were ex-
service personnel

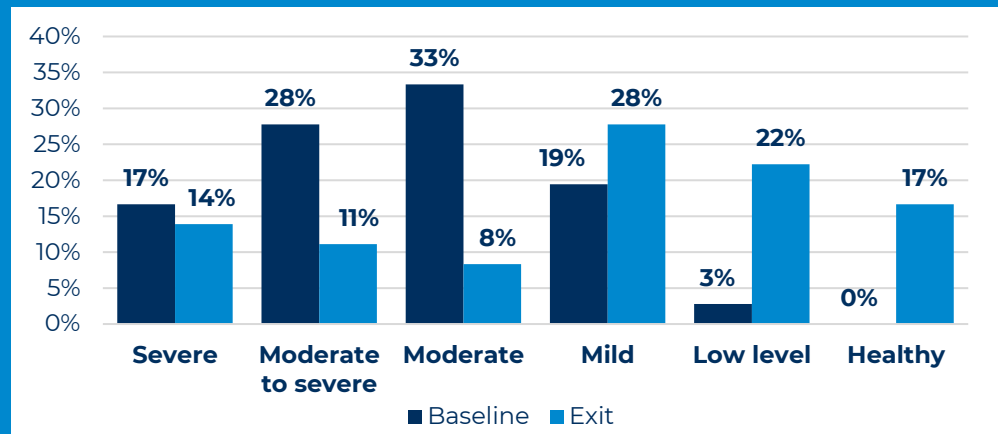
77.8%
of clients saw an
improvement in
their mental
health

12.7
average number
of sessions of
those completing
in 2022/23

We have continued to see positive results on the extent to which our clients CORE-OM scores have improved during their time with the service – Core-OM measures the level of an individual’s psychological distress. The graph to the *top-right* shows that 80.6% of participants who exited the service after receiving at least 4 therapy sessions reporting an improvement in their Core-OM score, with 66.7% seeing a ‘meaningful’ improvement to their score.

The graph to the *bottom-right* shows the changes made in client’s level of psychological distress between their baseline score (completed during their assessment) and when they exited the service. The graph shows that, at baseline, 78% of clients were between moderate and severe when they began engaging with the service. After our intervention, this number reduced to 33% (when they came to exit the service).

Baseline CORE-OM score vs Exit score for those completing Outdoor Therapy





Jamie's* story

“When I got home I felt uplifted and honestly feel I got more inner work done in one session than fifty of my previous counselling sessions.”

We asked one of our Outdoor Therapy clients, Jamie, to share their thoughts on our service and how they have felt since starting therapy with Venture Trust.

“Being outside in the open air helped me to feel calmer. Getting out, speaking to someone that is not related to you to find ways of coping and dealing with personal and difficult situations, past events, traumatic life changes. It’s a breath of fresh air.

Being outdoors felt less intimidating and less clinical. It made for a more relaxed approach to the sessions. We could also move around the space to different areas depending on how I was feeling and that made me feel safer.

It was a back-and-forth conversation surrounded by nature, it felt like a stroll with a pal. The conversations were insightful, strength-based and being by the beach was great as I struggle with balance so it was a physiotherapy session too, In the past all therapy sessions were under fluorescent lights usually run by people who bring you down whereas the outdoor therapy I feel went deeper into self-reflection but didn’t leave you there, when I got home I felt uplifted and honestly feel I got more inner work done in one session than fifty of my previous counselling sessions.

I have had a lot of counselling and therapy sessions since my traumatic brain injury, I can honestly say that I wasn't looking forward to more. My partner organised it for me as they were planning on ending the relationship and had met someone else unknown to me. The sessions were a breath of fresh air and not only helped me through the breakup but gave me the self-esteem and confidence that I wasn't going to push the inner self-destruct button. Now nearly a year later I have a family on the way, haven't taken a step back in my recovery and indeed made huge leaps in my mental health and feel confident that I'm on the right path and mentally equipped to handle life's ups and downs.

The therapist was so kind and friendly. They understood my problems and what I was going through. I felt so welcomed and supported. I felt like I was important. Me and them had a very good therapy relationship.

My therapist was the first professional I've worked with who has made me feel truly listened to and heard. They helped by validating my feelings. I've gained so many things from the therapy including things such as how to set boundaries and that setting boundaries is okay, healthy and important! It made me realise how much being outside and nature helps my mental state and how grounding I find being in green space. Being in nature feels like my home now.

I thank everyone for the opportunity of participating in this particular area of therapy. I truly benefited from it greatly. It was so great to see a friendly face of someone who I knew would be non-judgmental and who would listen to me and let me get things off my chest, all whilst helping me put together the various strands of thought I was having at the time and helping me make some sense of what I was going through.

This has been an amazing journey and rollercoaster and I just want to thank my therapist for allowing me to gain confidence and boost my self-esteem that I didn't have beforehand. And I also regained a lot of my own self back from this so thank you again for everything. I would do it again in a heartbeat if given the opportunity.

My therapist really helped me to open up thanks to their calm presence. I never thought that I would ever speak to anyone about the things going on let alone in the short amount of time I've had these sessions, and I'd say my therapist has been a huge reason behind that. I really appreciate Venture Trust for helping me out during these times and I'll be taking away a lot from this experience."



Our other achievements

Alongside our 'core' delivery work across our Personal Development and Employability programmes and our Outdoor Therapy service, we would like to recognise some of our other achievements over the year which showcase some of the wider impact of our work.



Social Work student placements

Social workers are the main source of participant referrals to Venture Trust. This year, at least 43% of our referrals were made by Local Authority social workers.

Every year Venture Trust welcomes new student social workers onto placements to work alongside our Outreach Workers. They get to work with our participants in the community and join them in going on one of our wilderness journeys alongside our Field Team.

Our student social workers are the social workers of tomorrow, and the experience they gain with us is an important part of that journey. Working in this way on placement helps to shape and inform their future qualified social work practice, while we get to welcome new and brilliant people onto our team each year.

This year, we welcomed 7 students to work with Venture Trust, for between 15 and 20 weeks. The social work students we have supported on placement in the last year have all enjoyed working with participants and seeing the positive potential realised.

"It's been great to see the benefits of the outdoors first-hand, and how practitioners use it to really help facilitate personal development..."

7

**social work
students worked
with Venture Trust**

By providing placements to the next generation of qualified social workers, we are helping to develop a workforce informed by person-centred and trauma-informed approaches to their practice. In return, students who have enjoyed placements with us here at Venture Trust always remember their experience and the people they have worked with on placement. Which means they make referrals and support and promote our work in Local Authorities across Scotland, once qualified.

"[Venture Trust's work] is very relevant to my dissertation which is based on eco-therapy and the benefits it would have on women who have experienced domestic abuse... I'm really grateful that I was placed here because it's given me some really good insight into the whole experience of the women who have been on these journeys."

For more information and interviews with some of our students, click [HERE](#).





Kickstarter Scheme – Nicole’s story

As part of the UK Government’s Kickstarter Scheme, aimed to create work placements for young people, we at Venture Trust offered several positions in different areas of the charity, providing opportunities to gain experience and develop working skills.

One of our ‘Kickstarters’, Nicole, came to Venture Trust with a background in care. Having been out of work for a few years due to the birth of her son, she was keen to try something different and that’s when she saw the Kickstart opportunity with Venture Trust. Enjoying the ability to help others and make a difference in people’s day at her previous job, she was keen to get involved with the Venture Trust team and the work involved.

At first nervous to re-enter the workplace and meet new people, Nicole commented that she was instantly made to feel welcome by not just her team but the whole organisation, saying everyone was *“really helpful, and really encouraging.”* She felt happy asking questions, and saw her own self-confidence grow during her time at Venture Trust, stating:

“I feel so much more confident in myself. I feel comfortable when I’m speaking – I used to get really embarrassed and go really red and I used to hate speaking to people that I didn’t know, but now I absolutely love it, I feel like I could talk to anyone.”

Getting involved straight away with the Outreach team, Nicole was given a caseload of four participants, and managed to get three of them onto wilderness journeys. She was happy to have this opportunity – *“I think the fact that they give you your own caseload makes you feel that little bit more independent which was really good.”* She mentioned that with the shadowing, meeting different participants and her team, it meant that every day was different *“which is another bonus. You’re not going to have the same day, and it’s not always in the office, you’re out and about... you learn so much through watching other people.”*

Her manager, commented that after only a few weeks Nicole became confident in her role, saying:

“Everyone thought Nicole was a full-time worker for Venture Trust, no one ever thought she was a trainee as she was a natural at the job.”

Alongside supporting the team with both pre- and post-journey group work, she also had the opportunity to attend the final day of a wilderness journey, meeting some of the participants she had referred onto the course. Seeing these participants at the end of their 8 days, Nicole reflected that it was lovely to witness the difference from when they left, to when they completed their journey, and noted that they had all grown in confidence and built new relationships.

Now that her Kickstart position has come to an end, Nicole has secured a job with Quarriers and is looking forward to the next step in her career, ready to *“welcome it with open arms.”* Thinking about her time with Venture Trust, she mentioned that the experience was *“more challenging, but in a good way, it definitely helped me believe in myself... Venture Trust has been a really happy place, even though there was work it was so much fun... It’s probably the best I’ve ever felt in myself from working with a group of people and learning every day... What an experience.”* When asked if she would return to Venture Trust in the future, her reply was a very enthusiastic *“110%!”*



Arc'teryx Academy: Climb Lake District

Continuing our successful partnership with Arc'teryx, a group of our participants were invited to the latest Arc'teryx Academy weekend in the Lake District. There, along with some of our staff, they spent the weekend hiking, scrambling, climbing and attending various film screenings and workshops.

Arc'teryx Academies take place in different locations across the world (including Chamonix-Mont-Blanc, France and Squamish, Canada), with the aim to allow people to learn, connect and deepen their experience with the outdoors. The workshops, clinics, seminars and socials that are part of the weekend are designed to give attendees a safe and supportive space to advance technical skills, boost confidence, and learn from the best in the field, while connecting with people who have a shared passion for the outdoors.

All our participants and staff who attended had a fantastic time and we can't wait until the next event!



Working with the Scottish Seabird Centre

In February, a group of Venture Trust staff and participants linked up with the Scottish Seabird Centre to get outdoors and learn about local conservation and cleanup efforts. At Venture Trust, we know being outside and appreciating the outdoors can be as good for us as it is for the environment.

On Day 1, the fantastic Charlotte of the Scottish Seabird Centre taught the group about the local bird life and environment and led a beach clean along Musselburgh beach. Day 2, saw the group spend time learning about Scotland's marine wildlife and diversity, both in the centre's learning hub and in the rock pools of North Berwick.



Working with FourSquare

Since 2019, we have partnered with FourSquare, an Edinburgh charity who have been working for more than 40 years to prevent homelessness and promote inclusion, to deliver the 'Springboard' programme – an 8-week Employability & Personal Development course for anyone over the ages of 25, living in Edinburgh or the Lothians.

The aims of the programme are to help those who have been long-term unemployed and/or face multiple barriers to gaining employment to recognise and develop their skills and attributes. Springboard culminates in a 3-day residential stay hosted and delivered by Venture Trust. This involves a trip to the Highlands where a variety of personal development topics are incorporated into activities such as hill-walking and abseiling.

This year we delivered 3 residential courses for 13 of their participants on the Springboard programme.

Venture Trust's 40th Birthday

October 2022 marked an important milestone for Venture Trust – our 40th birthday! Over the years, we've helped thousands of people to make positive changes in their lives and to celebrate, we held a special Staff Gathering at our Stirling National Participant Centre in May 2022, bringing our full staff team together for the first time since the Covid Pandemic.

From Sir Richard Attenborough to Malawi to ponies on programmes, we've certainly done a lot since we first opened our doors. If you would like to read more about the history of Venture Trust and the journey we've been on as an organisation, please click [HERE](#).



So why are we here?

- The journey begins with each of you but the wilderness starts here
- It was way cheaper than Lochgoilhead 😊
- Because of the people we are here to support....

.... Shaun



Feedback from participants and referral partners

“Highlight of my life doing Venture Trust met a lot of nice people on the way... I’d do it all over again.” - Participant

“Venture Trust helped me to put my life back together again. They put me back in touch with nature and let me experience outdoor activities that I would never normally have tried.” - Participant

“Through this I met new people and started to get my confidence back. I’m now much more positive about the future. I will never forget this experience.” - Participant

“I felt really looked after throughout Venture Trust - and having support afterwards. Made me feel valued and that my voice was being heard. Please give me more!” - Participant

“My trip with Venture Trust gave me hope that there are solutions for people from backgrounds like mine and perhaps these kinds of trips will continue to evolve and help people find new ways to heal and live and enjoy life that doesn't involve simply being prescribed pills and trying to struggle just to survive.” - Participant

**“Venture Trust are excellent & well versed at what they do, and I trust them to deliver these experiences with the correct managed risk.”
- 3rd Sector Partner**

“All my clients had a great experience [with] Venture Trust. This has improved their confidence significantly and helped to build more positive relationships with others.” - Social Worker

**“The Living Wild and Next Steps services have had a huge impact on the women from our group who attended. The opportunity to connect with nature reduced their stress and anxiety, and the ability to navigate a physical challenge was a big boost to their self-esteem.”
- 3rd Sector Partner**

“I think it is a fantastic opportunity for people to reconsider who they are and what is important to them, even when they have not completed the programme, they have begun to positively change who they see themselves as and widen their expectations of themselves and their future.” - Social Worker

“[Venture Trust] have been a great service and excellent support to service users... [one of my recent participants] had a very positive experience with Venture Trust and he still engages with them after completing the Wilderness course. He states that engaging with Venture Trust was one of the most positive experiences he has had” - Social Worker

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, European Social Fund, UK Community Renewal Fund, Armed Forces Covenant, Inspiring Scotland, City of Edinburgh Council, Fife Council, Glasgow City Council, North Lanarkshire Council, West Lothian Council, Souter Charitable Trust, National Lottery, Scottish Children's Lottery, Arc'teryx, Benzie's Foundation, Crerar Hotels Trust, Cycling Scotland, Dunlossit and Islay Community Trust, Gannochy Trust, Garfield Weston, Goldsmiths' Company, Hugh Fraser Foundation, Mathew Trust, The MacRobert Trust, The Pilgrim Trust, The Pixel Fund, Scottish Mountaineering Trust, Swire Charitable Trust, The Veterans Foundation, Whirlwind Charitable Trust, 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, West Lothian Bike Library, Enable Scotland, FourSquare, the Shine Partnership, Scottish Seabird Centre 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

Contact:
info@venturetrust.org.uk




To make a referral, please visit:
[Venture Trust Referral](#)

Unit 6 Block 1,
Manor Farm Business Park,
Stirling
FK9 5QD

T: 01786 447 637

venturetrust

www.venturetrust.org.uk
hello@venturetrust.org.uk

 @venturetrust
 /venturetrust
 @venturetrust

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Registered Office: 10 Orange Street, Haymarket, London,
WC2H 7DQ