



# venturetrust

## Impact Report 2023/24



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**Note: All participant stories in this Impact Report have had their name changed to protect their privacy.**

# venturetrust

## 2023/2024

**694**

individuals engaged across our services

**462**

on our personal development programmes

**77**

in our employability service

**141**

clients in our Outdoor Therapy service

**39**

had worked across multiple services



ONE DAY AT A TIME

**94%**

saw an improvement in their 'core life skills'

**81%**

improved their mental wellbeing

**84%**

increased their confidence

**85%**

heightened their self-belief

**75%**

improved their attitude to offending

**113**

participants have already moved into a positive destination

**39**

employment

**28**

education / training

**24**

volunteering

**39**

positive onward referrals





# CEO Message

Reflecting on the past year, I am proud of the progress Venture Trust has made in fulfilling our mission. Our work has never felt more important and remains firmly rooted in a trauma-informed, therapeutic approach, providing individuals the support needed to make positive, lasting changes in their lives.

We know that adverse experiences for children, young people and adults significantly impact mental health and wellbeing, creating barriers to personal growth. By providing a space for healing, reflection, and recovery, we equip our participants with the tools to move forward confidently.

At the heart of our approach is the outdoors, where nature becomes a therapeutic space for transformative journeys. In 2023/24, we enhanced participants' confidence, wellbeing, and mental health through our trauma-informed programmes. While this year brought success, it also posed significant challenges, particularly in securing funding. Nevertheless, we remained steadfast, thanks to the invaluable support of donors, and funders, such as the Scottish Government. Their commitment has been instrumental in enabling us to continue delivering life-changing programmes.

This year, we introduced a new operating model to ensure agility and responsiveness in a rapidly evolving environment. This structure allows us to better meet participants' needs, optimise resources, and deliver programmes sustainably. Flexibility and adaptability remain crucial as we navigate the uncertainties ahead.

Looking forward, we will be focussing on delivering services that evidence the impact of our approach. We aim to expand our reach and continue to develop critical partnerships and funding relationships. These steps will ensure we remain robust and capable of empowering more individuals to thrive.

I want to extend my heartfelt thanks to our dedicated staff, leaders, volunteers, trustees, and participants for their passion and commitment. To all our supporters, funders, and partners, thank you for your unwavering dedication. I am optimistic about the year ahead and confident that, with your support, we will continue to make a lasting difference in the lives of children, young people and adults in Scotland.

With Thanks,

**Jenny Paterson, CEO**

# About Us

**venturetrust** is dedicated to helping people facing challenging life circumstances, including trauma, poverty, involvement in the justice system, homelessness, and mental health issues. Through outdoor-based programmes, therapeutic support, and personal development opportunities, we empower individuals to build confidence, develop resilience, and make positive, lasting changes in their lives.

## Our vision

Everyone, irrespective of their past, can achieve their potential for a healthy, happy and fulfilling life. We aspire that more people, ready for change, build the foundations to thrive and succeed for the long term.

## Our mission

To help people to realise their potential by providing life-changing personal development. By offering intensive learning and development in communities and the Scottish wilderness, we support people to gain life skills, stability and confidence. Our work aims to end cycles of disadvantage and adversity for individuals, their families and in communities.

## Our values

### **Courage:**

in our thinking, our decisions and our actions - even when things feel difficult

### **Curiosity:**

we are always learning and growing

### **Care:**

for the people we work with, ourselves, and our planet

### **Collaboration:**

we believe in the power of partnerships to drive real change

### **Connection:**

to the people we work with, our colleagues, our communities, and to nature

# What We Do

Venture Trust harnesses the transformative power of the outdoors to help people who have experienced trauma, adversity, and disadvantage, move forward with confidence, self-belief and the tools they need to thrive. Participants are given the time and space to unlock their potential, develop new skills, and discover a more positive future.

Our work focuses on building a path to a brighter future while recognising and addressing the experiences that have shaped each person's journey. By placing individual circumstances and needs at the heart of our approach, we provide tailored support that acknowledges the profound impact of trauma, inequality, and adversity.

Through this personalised, strength-based approach, we equip people with the tools to create lasting change, empowering them to overcome barriers and build meaningful lives. Together, we work to address the inequality and complex needs that often leave individuals on the margins of society, helping them take confident steps toward a more hopeful future.

**Our work comes under three branches:**

## Personal Development

At the heart of Venture Trust's work is the delivery of intensive personal development programmes for people who face significant challenges. These include involvement in the justice system, long-term unemployment, addiction recovery, homelessness or the risk of homelessness, isolation, and histories of trauma or harm.

Our programmes focus on three key themes: **Community Justice**, **Next Steps** (our women-only programme), and **Young People**. Using the outdoors as a powerful catalyst for change, we work within local communities and Scotland's wild landscapes to help participants achieve meaningful improvements in their mental, emotional, and physical wellbeing, relationships, and engagement with local support services.

Each programme offers wraparound community support, featuring regular one-to-one meetings or group outdoor activities in local green spaces. At the centre of this support is a wilderness journey, lasting up to 10 days, set in Scotland's breath-taking landscapes. Participants take part in activities such as hiking, canoeing, camping, and walking, alongside structured personal development sessions and opportunities to learn practical and transferable skills.

This immersive experience, free from the distractions of technology and the pressures of daily life, allows participants the space to reflect, rebuild, and refocus. Many return to their communities with increased self-worth, enhanced confidence, and improved wellbeing, better equipped to overcome challenges and make positive, lasting changes in their lives.

## Employability

Our employability courses provide transformative support across Scotland, helping individuals facing barriers to employment, education, or training to build the skills, confidence, and motivation needed to thrive. By delivering training, coaching, and accredited qualifications, our employability service equips participants to access further learning or mainstream support, be job-ready, and secure and sustain employment. Our programmes are tailored for young people and adults experiencing long-term unemployment, disadvantage, or are at risk of offending. This year saw the beginning of two new employability offers:

Our **CashBack Green Futures** programme empowered young people by combining employability training, personal development, and experiential learning. Through personalised support, group activities, and skills workshops in CV writing, interview techniques, and IT, participants gained critical tools for success. Outdoor activities like rock climbing, kayaking, and conservation fostered teamwork, resilience, and confidence, while ongoing support ensured a smooth transition into education, training, or employment.

**Forward for Families** focused on parents in Fife facing employment barriers. This flexible programme accommodated childcare responsibilities and blended outdoor activities such as kayaking and bushcraft with workshops on employability skills, including CV writing and IT proficiency. Participants built confidence and explored activities they could later share with their families.

Both programmes empowered participants, enabling them to achieve lasting personal and professional growth.

## Outdoor Therapy

Our Outdoor Therapy service offers unique benefits that set it apart from traditional indoor counselling. The natural environment fosters calm, openness, and reduced formality, helping clients feel at ease while lowering stress, boosting mood, and encouraging mindfulness—an ideal setting for reflection and growth. Movement during outdoor sessions aids emotional processing, and the expansive surroundings make therapy feel less intense, especially for those who find indoor spaces overwhelming. By combining professional support with the therapeutic power of nature, Outdoor Therapy provides a transformative space for healing and personal development.





**694**

**individuals engaged  
across our services**

# The Story of Our Year

**20**

**wilderness journeys  
delivered**

**89%**

**of individuals were  
facing issues with their  
mental health**

**44%**

**increase in number of  
clients in our Outdoor  
Therapy service**

**7**

**employability courses  
delivered**

**2**

**new employability  
projects launched**

*This year has been one of growth and transformation for Venture Trust. We have refined our approach to ensure that those who turn to us for support receive the right help at the right time. From structural changes within our teams to an expansion of our services, we have strengthened our ability to deliver meaningful, person-centred support. With more people than ever facing challenges related to mental health, employment, and personal development, our work has never been more vital.*

To enhance the way we support participants, we made key adjustments to our staffing structure, fostering closer collaboration between programmes. This has allowed for a more integrated approach, enabling our teams to share expertise and resources more effectively. Alongside this, we refined the way we deliver our



courses, ensuring that individuals are placed on the journey that best suits them, increasing the likelihood of long-term, positive change.

A major area of growth has been our Outdoor Therapy service, which has seen a 44% increase in clients. With 89% of the people we worked with facing mental health challenges, the need for accessible and effective mental health support has never been greater. Our outdoor-based approach continues to demonstrate its value in helping people build resilience, manage their wellbeing, and find a way forward. We have also continued to provide Outdoor Therapy training to professionals, broadening the reach of this vital work.

Our commitment to employability has also strengthened with the launch of our new CashBack Green Futures and Forward for Families projects. These initiatives provide tailored opportunities for people to gain skills, confidence, and experience, helping them move towards sustainable employment. Over the year, we ran seven employability courses, giving participants the tools they need to take their next steps.

Throughout the year, 694 people engaged with Venture Trust. We facilitated 20 transformative wilderness journeys, using Scotland's remote landscapes to offer participants a unique space for reflection and personal growth. These experiences provide the opportunity to step away from daily pressures, build confidence, and develop the skills needed to move forward in life.

As we continue to evolve, our focus remains clear: to support people facing challenging life circumstances and help them build brighter futures. By adapting and expanding our services, we are ensuring that those who need us most receive the support, encouragement, and opportunities they deserve.

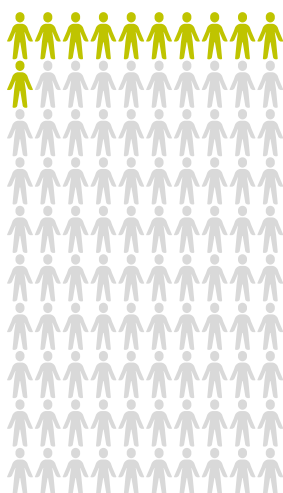
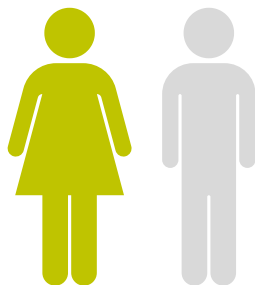
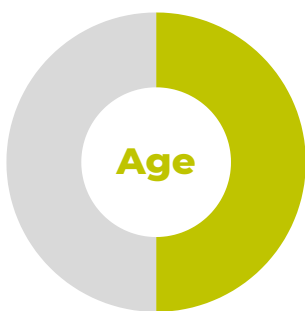




# Who we worked with

Venture Trust supports a diverse range of individuals across our three core programmes, each designed to meet the specific needs of those facing significant challenges. While our programmes have distinct eligibility criteria, all those who take part share a common experience of adversity and the barriers that limit their opportunities and life choices.

Below is an overview of the backgrounds of those we have supported over the past year. We gather this information to better understand their needs and provide person-centred, trauma-informed support, ensuring they receive the right help at the right time.



**50% 16-24**  
**50% 25+**

**36% Female**  
**59% Male**  
**4% Another Term**

**11% identified as LGBTQ+**

## Mental Health Issues



## Current/Previous Justice Involvement



## Substance Issues



## Homeless/at Risk



From 20% most deprived areas of Scotland



## No or Limited Work Experience



## Care Experienced



## Caring Responsibilities



**3+**

**67% had 3 or more of the above barriers**



**462**

**participants engaged**

# Personal Development

**148**

**went on a wilderness journey**

**36**

**group work sessions delivered in local communities**

**85**

**moved onto a positive destination**

**86%**

**reported an increase in their mental wellbeing**

**84%**

**increased their confidence**

*Our Personal Development Programme provides life-changing support for people facing significant challenges, helping them build confidence, resilience, and the skills to move forward. Delivered through our three core themes: Community Justice; Next Steps (our women-only programme); and Young People - the programme offers tailored, person-centred support to create lasting change.*

Over the past year, 462 individuals engaged with the programme, with 148 joining a transformative wilderness journey giving them the space to reflect, set goals, and develop essential life skills. We delivered 36 group work sessions, fostering peer support and shared learning. The impact is clear: 86% reported improved mental wellbeing, 84% increased their confidence, and at least 85 moved into a positive destination such as employment, education, or training.





**69%**

of participants  
were involved in  
the justice system

**86%**

enhanced their  
ability to deal with  
challenge

**77%**

improved their  
attitude to  
offending

**45**

went into a  
positive  
destination

# Community Justice

Our Community Justice programme, Living Wild, supported individuals aged 16 and over involved in the Scottish justice system. By addressing the root causes of offending, our aim is to reduce reoffending, promote rehabilitation, and contribute to safer communities.

Over the year, we worked with 320 individuals, 87% on orders such as Community Payback or Drug Treatment and Testing Orders. Many faced significant challenges, with 86% experiencing mental health issues, 66% struggling with substance use, and most dealing with multiple barriers — factors which often drive offending and instability in communities.

In partnership with local authorities, social work teams, and courts, we delivered personal development programmes combining outdoor activities with structured one-to-one and group support. Central to the programmes was a wilderness journey of up to ten days, offering participants a chance to step away from harmful environments and reflect on their lives. The challenges of the outdoors built confidence, resilience, and a sense of achievement, while time in nature reduced stress and improved wellbeing. Tasks such as cooking and setting up camp instilled responsibility and purpose, while team-based activities encouraged trust, collaboration, and communication — key skills for reintegration into society.

By developing practical and interpersonal skills, participants gained direction and ownership over their actions. As a result, 77% reported improved attitudes towards offending, 85% reported better mental wellbeing, 86% enhanced their ability to deal with challenges, and at least 45 achieved a positive outcome — helping break cycles of reoffending and fostering safer, more resilient communities.

***“It hasn’t been worthwhile...it’s been lifesaving!”***



silverloch

Palma

SPB

# Brian's Story

Brian came into contact with Venture Trust through his community justice social worker after being placed on a Community Payback Order. As the youngest of nine children in a travelling family, Brian did not attend high school, leaving him without formal education and limited social connections. Years spent in a troubling relationship had further isolated him, contributing to significant mental health challenges.

At the time of his referral, Brian was struggling with severe social anxiety and poor mental health, leaving him unable to attend meetings without his mother for support. He found it difficult to endure even short interactions without becoming overwhelmed. Before beginning his work with Venture Trust, he was not engaged with any other support services. However, his involvement marked the start of a significant transformation.

Brian's mental health was the primary focus of the early stages of his journey. Over the first three months, he progressed from needing his mother's presence at every meeting to independently meeting his caseworker in a busy café. This was a significant step for someone whose social anxiety had previously confined him to his home, preventing him from socialising, pursuing education, or seeking employment.







Through Venture Trust's preparation group, Brian began to rebuild his confidence in a safe and non-judgmental environment. This newfound self-assurance culminated in his participation in an eight-day wilderness journey, a feat he had not believed possible just a few months earlier. On the trip, Brian emerged as a standout participant—motivated, positive, and a natural leader. He returned describing the experience as one of the best of his life and noting that his mental health had not been this stable in years.

Inspired by the progress he made, Brian set clear goals to continue improving his mental health, pursue education, and eventually secure employment. He began working with Better Than Well, a service providing counselling to support his mental health. He also took steps toward enrolling at college to gain the basic qualifications he lacked.

Brian's confidence, self-esteem, and motivation grew remarkably during his time with Venture Trust. Reflecting on his journey, Brian expressed gratitude, stating that the experience proved he was capable of far more than he believed. His progress demonstrates the life-changing potential of perseverance and the right support.





# Andrew's Story

Andrew was referred to Venture Trust through Justice Social Work and the Drug Test and Treatment Order (DTTO) service. Following his release from prison four months earlier, he had struggled to find stable accommodation and spent time sleeping rough. Uncertain of where to turn, he found it difficult to access the support he needed. This experience left him disillusioned and vulnerable to the pull of drugs, which had previously provided a sense of escape. However, he resisted, eventually finding temporary refuge with his father before being placed on a DTTO and connected with Venture Trust.

Andrew's history of addiction began in his teenage years, with substances like heroin, crack cocaine, and diazepam playing a significant role in his life. This dependency led to multiple prison sentences, perpetuating a cycle of trauma, addiction, crime, incarceration, and eventual release. Determined to break this pattern, Andrew sought support from Venture Trust to help him change his life.

During his work with his Outreach and Support Worker, it became clear that Andrew had experienced long periods without meaningful support between prison sentences. He disclosed symptoms consistent with PTSD, for which he had never been assessed or treated. Together, they developed a plan to connect Andrew with services such as Turnaround residential rehabilitation and community support groups. They also set goals around recovery and employment, including obtaining a CSCS card to work as a labourer for his cousin's company. Andrew approached his wilderness journey as a pivotal moment for transformation.

The ten-day wilderness journey included paddling down the River Spey and lowland walking near Pitlochry. Andrew faced challenges, including maintaining patience during group interactions and managing mild withdrawal symptoms due to intense physical activity. Despite this, he engaged positively, remained constructive, and completed the course with a renewed sense of purpose.

Upon his return, Andrew's transformation was evident. He shared stories from the journey with enthusiasm and pride, showing off his action plan for achieving his goals. His self-perception had shifted dramatically, with a newfound sense of control over his life and decisions.

Six weeks later, Andrew had transitioned from methadone to monthly Buvidal injections, a significant step toward greater stability. He began working as a labourer for his cousin and was building a sustainable future. Reflecting on his progress, Andrew described the impact of Venture Trust, saying, *"The ten days away gave me my fire back."* His story highlights the potential for meaningful change when met with the right support and opportunities.

***"After Venture Trust my life has improved dramatically. I have my own furnished house, I'm about to have my final date at court on Wednesday, and next week I'm away to do 3 weeks of roofing work on the Isle of Islay. I'm off all maintained prescriptions as well so life is good! The ten days away gave me my fire back, thank you."***





**114**

engaged in the programme

**88%**

improved in their mental wellbeing

**40**

attended a women's-only course

**85%**

felt better placed to form positive relationships

## Next Steps (women's-only programme)

The Next Steps programme provides a safe, supportive space for women, many of whom face challenging life circumstances such as homelessness, substance misuse, gender-based violence, trauma, or involvement in the justice system. These complex experiences often impact their wellbeing and relationships, creating barriers to personal growth and stability.

The programme includes a five-day women-only wilderness residential designed to help participants build resilience, navigate challenges, and develop a sense of self-worth. Using the grounding power of nature, these wilderness journeys offer calm and stability. This process empowers women to develop healthier coping strategies, reducing the risk of (re)offending or engaging in harmful activities, and forming more positive relationships. With a mixed-gender staff team, the programme also challenges gender stereotypes, promotes pro-social modelling, and fosters healthy, respectful interactions.

Next Steps addresses the root causes of participants' challenges, including trauma and gender-based violence, while supporting women to connect with opportunities in education, employment, training, or volunteering. This enables them to create safer and more fulfilling lives.

This year, 114 women engaged with the programme, and 40 attended a wilderness residential. Among participants, 96% reported experiencing mental health issues, 57% had criminal convictions, and 64% faced substance use challenges. Through the programme, 88% reported improved mental wellbeing, 88% noted increased confidence, and 85% felt better placed to form positive relationships. Additionally, at least 25 participants progressed into positive outcomes such as education, training, or employment.

***"I wasn't looking forward to the future, but now I am."***



# Ashley's Story

Ashley faced significant challenges before engaging with Venture Trust. Her hometown, while a popular commuter area, offered limited career opportunities, leaving many vulnerable to isolation and a prominent recreational drugs scene. For years, Ashley was a regular cocaine user, which led to the loss of several jobs and strained her personal life. Following an incident, her son was placed in the care of her parents, with Ashley granted controlled access through social work. This situation deeply impacted her confidence and left her isolated, rarely venturing outside and struggling with peer pressure.

Although Ashley's family supported her, they found it difficult to understand her drug use and sometimes criticised her, which exacerbated her feelings of isolation. Through social work, she was referred to The Ridge, a local charity that understood the unique challenges of her community. At The Ridge, Ashley began attending a recovery group and participating in one-on-one sessions with a support worker, which helped her reduce her drug use despite occasional relapses during stressful periods.

In the summer of 2023, Ashley was referred to Venture Trust and quickly expressed an interest in participating in our outdoor-based programme. She was excited about the opportunity to leave her hometown, escape negative influences, and build her confidence through group activities. She met with her outreach worker every two weeks, engaging actively and punctually while continuing to receive support from The Ridge, including volunteer training.



In October 2023, Ashley attended a five-day Next Steps wilderness residential, which proved transformative. She excelled at rock climbing, gained confidence, and became an active participant in group discussions, even taking on the role of group photographer (some of her photos are used throughout this report). Feedback from peers and staff highlighted her progress, noting her growing self-assurance and leadership within the group.

Since completing the course, Ashley has maintained regular meetings with her outreach worker and taken part in group activity days. She has become a key figure at The Ridge, hosting recovery group meetings and organising community initiatives, such as their Christmas party and toy and food hamper distribution. Ashley also participated in a Stirling University research project on green space therapy, where she spoke candidly about her experiences and the impact of the course.

Her confidence has continued to grow. She has remained drug-free since just before the wilderness residential, demonstrating assertiveness when offered drugs. Ashley also improved her home life by asking her former boyfriend to move out of her flat, recognising his negative influence. Additionally, she has strengthened her relationships with her family, explaining her journey and what support she needed from them. This has fostered a more understanding and supportive dynamic.

Ashley has embraced outdoor activities, investing in a paddleboard and arranging surfing lessons for her son to create meaningful experiences together. She has just started a paid employment role at local charity, recognising her value to the organisation, and has applied for work at a local outdoor activity centre. She is also exploring personal development opportunities with other charities to continue her recovery journey and build on her growing confidence and skills.





**40%**

of participants  
were aged 16-24

**59**

went on a  
wilderness journey

**78%**

gained a  
heightened sense  
of hope/aspiration

**83%**

reported seeing an  
increase in their  
confidence

# Young People

Venture Trust provides transformative support for young people facing complex challenges such as disengagement from education or employment, family breakdown, trauma, and involvement in the justice system. Many young participants also overlap with our other focus areas, including justice and women's-only courses, highlighting the interconnected nature of their experiences.

This year, we delivered four courses specifically for young people, including one tailored to a Fife-based group. Additionally, many young people participated in our programmes under the community justice and women-only themes. All courses combined community-based outreach with outdoor experiences, offering a safe space for reflection, resilience-building, and life skill development. Wilderness journeys, a cornerstone of our approach, took participants into Scotland's wild landscapes, fostering self-awareness, confidence, and a sense of achievement.

By challenging limiting beliefs, encouraging pro-social behaviours, and promoting self-reliance, we empowered young people to overcome barriers and make positive choices for their future. Whether reconnecting with education, training, employment, or volunteering, our work helped them unlock their potential and build a foundation for long-term success within their communities.

This year, we engaged 186 young people, with 59 participating in wilderness journeys. Among them, 70% were homeless or at risk of homelessness, 79% faced mental health challenges, 58% had criminal convictions, 17% had caring responsibilities, and 34% were care experienced. Outcomes included 83% reporting increased confidence, 78% gaining a heightened sense of hope and aspiration, and 80% improving self-care. At least 39 participants progressed into positive outcomes.

***"His friends and family have noticed a really big difference in him, especially when it comes to confidence and self-worth. He no longer beats himself up when something negative happens in his life, rather he is able to take this and turn it into a positive."***





# Rosie's Story

Growing up, Rosie experienced consistent gender-based violence and coercive behaviour within her family home. Witnessing violence against her mother, she developed survival strategies to protect her, such as staying quiet, avoiding conflict, and putting herself last. While these behaviours helped her cope as a child, they evolved into people-pleasing tendencies and a struggle to prioritise her own needs as an adult. Rosie often found it difficult to identify her own likes, dislikes, and passions due to a lack of opportunity to explore them.

In 2018, Rosie and her mother moved away from the abusive household and settled in a new area, where they pursued legal action against her stepfather. During this time, Rosie enrolled in a Criminology course. However, the weight of her experiences and the demands of her new environment impacted her mental health. Rosie sought therapy over medication to process her trauma. This therapeutic approach proved effective, and as her mental health improved, her social prescriber, referred her to Venture Trust. Rosie was looking for ways to expand her social circle, gain confidence, and discover her sense of self.

Rosie joined Venture Trust with the aim of stepping out of her comfort zone, particularly by building trust with others, including men, a challenge given her history. She participated in a ten-day wilderness journey, which she described as life changing. The experience tested her resilience through activities such as canoeing and trekking while carrying heavy gear. A pivotal moment for Rosie was a conversation with the team leader, where she coined the phrase



*'a healthy struggle'* to describe the rewarding process of pushing through challenges. For the first time, she reframed struggles as opportunities for growth, contrasting with the negativity of past hardships.

During the journey, Rosie built strong bonds with her peers and felt comfortable expressing her true self. She embraced the development sessions, noting how they provided practical tools she could apply to her daily life. Rosie also discovered a newfound joy in cooking and gained confidence in decision-making, learning to put her needs first.

***“I learned to be me on that trip. I didn’t have to think about anyone else, and I just had to be me.”***

Since completing the wilderness journey, Rosie has made significant strides. Her family has commented on the positive changes they see in her, and Rosie herself acknowledges her growth. She now prioritises her wellbeing, sets healthy boundaries in relationships, and feels more equipped to trust herself and others. Spending time outdoors has become a regular part of her routine, helping her manage stress and maintain positivity. She has also resumed her university studies, feeling more confident in balancing her commitments and goals.

Looking ahead, Rosie is determined to continue building on her newfound confidence and skills. She plans to expand her cooking abilities, explore new outdoor challenges, and maintain the focus on her personal and academic growth. Rosie’s journey reflects her resilience and determination to create a fulfilling and self-directed life.





**77**

**participants engaged**

# Employability

**49**

**attended one of our  
employability courses**

**10**

**attended one of our  
CashBack Booster  
Sessions**

**85%**

**reported an increase in  
their confidence**

**87%**

**gained a heightened  
sense of hope and  
aspiration**

**82%**

**felt an improved  
connection to their  
local community**

*Our employability programmes support people facing barriers to work, education, or training, helping them build skills, confidence, and a sense of purpose. Through outdoor-based learning, hands-on experience, and personal development, we empower individuals to take control of their futures. This year, we expanded our employability support with the launch of CashBack Green Futures and Forward for Families, providing tailored opportunities for young people and parents to develop pathways towards sustainable employment.*

CashBack Green Futures operates in the travel-to-work areas of Glasgow and Edinburgh, supporting young people with an interest in outdoor-based careers. Forward For Families, delivered in Fife, focuses on helping parents and caregivers gain the skills and confidence needed to improve their employment prospects.

Over the past year, 77 people engaged with our employability programmes, with 49 attending a course involving outdoor learning, practical skills training, and personal development. The impact has been significant, with 87% reporting a greater sense of hope and aspiration, 85% increasing their confidence, and 82% experiencing improved mental wellbeing.

Recognising that different people require different levels of support, we also introduced CashBack Booster Sessions for those who had not attended a full course but would benefit from focused, shorter-term employability support. Ten participants took part, gaining insights, motivation, and practical advice to help them take their next steps.

Our employability work continues to reach a diverse range of people, with 74% of participants aged 16-24 and 20% identifying as LGBTQI+, reflecting our commitment to supporting young people and marginalised communities. Beyond skills development, the programme helps participants feel more connected, with 82% reporting a stronger sense of belonging in their local community.

By combining practical skills training with personal development and outdoor learning, our employability programmes are equipping individuals with the tools and confidence to build lasting, positive change in their lives.

***“It’s a good chance to meet friends with a similar personality or who are going through a similar path with you, you know you’re not alone and there’s groups of people going through what you’ve gone through, that really gives you confidence.”***





## Keir's Story

Before working with Venture Trust, Keir was on a tag and a compensation order for an offence committed in 2018. He said that he took the tag over going to prison because he wanted to make something of his life. After leaving school in S3 he struggled due to his ADHD, and he said his average day was sitting inside smoking weed. Once he was old enough to work, he began working at a scaffolding company but decided to leave because his colleagues were taking drugs at work and encouraging him to do the same. He said that his friendships and social connections were ruined after his offence, as he decided to stay on the right side of the law and others didn't like this.

Keir was exceptional when on course. Despite needing to get a train and bus to Bridgend (90 minutes in total) he attended everyday bar once when he had a job interview. This was a huge achievement, as his mum told me said that he had never left his local town on his own before. He said of the travelling *"the more I kept going I felt better."*

Keir said that two of his favourite activities from the course was going to Dynamic Earth and The National Museum, both of which he had never been to before. Seeing his face light up when we walked into the museum was magical, and he even phoned his worker midway through the day to ask if we could spend more time there. He is now going to take his mum and younger brother there on a day out.

Keir says that he is in a better position to secure employment now he has done the course. He is very proud of himself saying *“I think I done brilliant”* and *“I’m proud of myself.”* He reflected on where he might be if he had not worked with Venture Trust *“Venture Trust helped me get my life together, if I wasn’t going out of trips, I’d be in jail for selling drugs.”*

Keir said he was proud of himself for writing a CV, this was a particular challenge, but throughout his time with Venture Trust, when he put his mind to it, he could produce excellent written work.

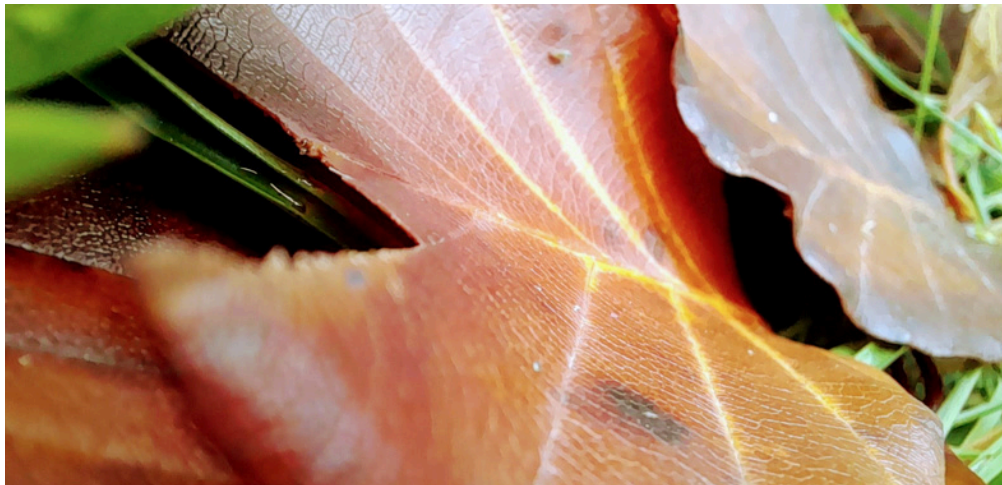
He commented as well on positive relationships he had made with staff members *“All the staff were good with me, the way they spoke to me was decent...usually I keep things secret, but I don’t mind telling you.”*

He said that Venture Trust was key in his decision to not sell drugs *“you understand me, you understand who I am...you actually speak to me about my issues...I always feel listened to when I am with you...I’ve not gotten into any trouble since coming back.”* Keir impressed in his commitment to making positive social relationships while on the course. He made good friends with one young man in particular who was a very good positive role model.

Now Keir aspires to get a job and he knows that he needs to work for it. Lastly, he had this to say:

***“It takes people’s mind off of stuff, I came here raging wanting to scrap people and that, now I want to get a job. You change people’s lives.”***





**122**

**clients accessing the service**

# Outdoor Therapy

**1,025**

**one-to-one therapy sessions delivered**

**100%**

**of clients would recommend the service to others**

**73%**

**saw an improvement in their mental health**

**25**

**group therapy sessions delivered**

**71%**

**of clients were aged 16-24**

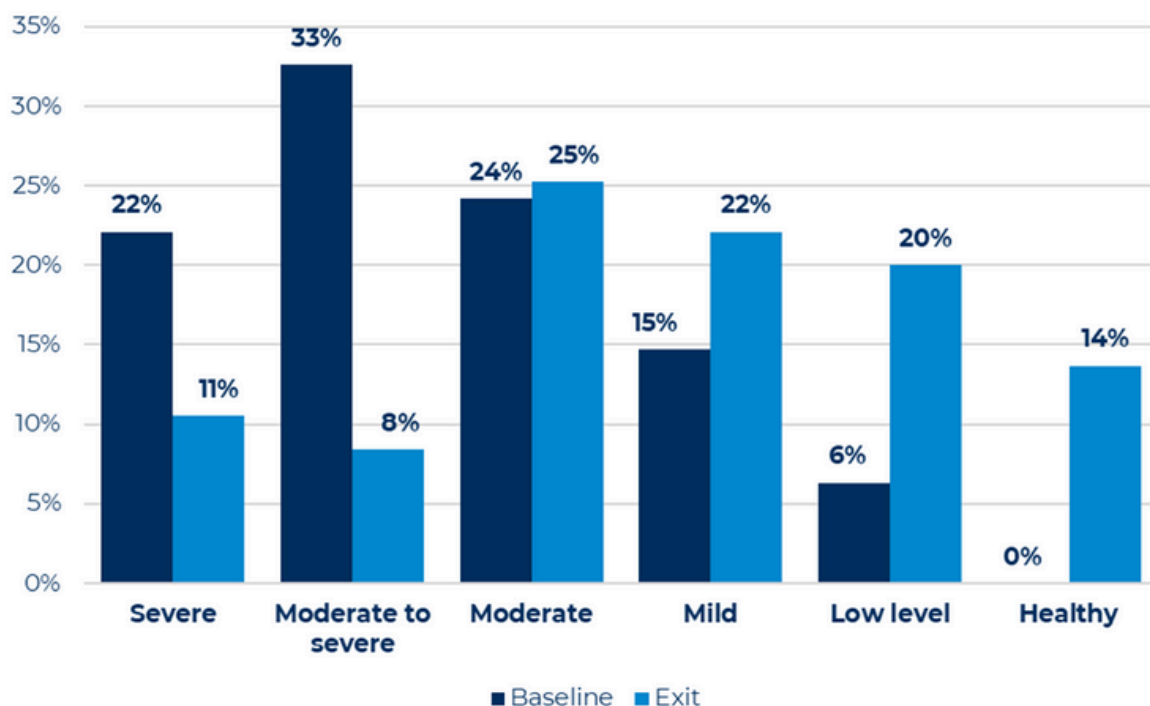
*Over the year, our Outdoor Therapy service supported 122 clients, with an additional 19 clients attending only an initial assessment. A total of 1,025 one-to-one therapy sessions and 25 group therapy sessions were delivered in urban outdoor spaces within clients' local communities. These settings included parks, community gardens, waterways, woodlands, beaches, and hills, offering natural environments that foster therapeutic engagement. We also delivered two Outdoor Therapy training courses to fellow professionals.*

The geographical reach of our service expanded slightly this year. Seventy percent of clients were based in Edinburgh, the Lothians, or Fife, 27% came from Glasgow and North Lanarkshire, and the remaining 3% were from other areas. Young people made up the majority of our clients, accounting for 71% of those supported.



Feedback and outcomes from the service demonstrate its positive impact. At the end of therapy, 66% of clients said they intended to spend more time outdoors, 100% rated their relationship with their therapist as very good or excellent, and 100% would recommend the service to others. The service was rated 9.1 out of 10 for helpfulness, and 79% of clients said they would return to the locations where their sessions took place. On average, clients who completed their time in the service in 2023/24 received 12.9 one-to-one sessions with their Outdoor Therapist.

Clinical outcomes also highlight the effectiveness of the service. The CORE-OM tool, which measures psychological distress, revealed significant improvements for clients who attended at least four therapy sessions. Of these clients, 72.6% experienced an improvement in their scores, with 56.8% achieving a 'meaningful' reduction in distress. At the start of therapy, 54% of clients presented with moderate to severe or severe psychological distress. By the time they exited the service, this number had dropped to 19%. Similarly, the proportion of clients with low-level or healthy distress scores rose from 6% at baseline to 33% at the end of therapy.



The service continually evaluates its impact using clinical measures, client feedback, and insights from referrers. Anonymous feedback gathered at the end of therapy provides valuable insights into what clients find helpful. Common themes include the sense of space and ease provided by nature, the opportunity for movement during sessions, and the reduced pressure for eye contact. Referrers have consistently praised the service, particularly for its suitability in engaging clients who have been reluctant to access other mental health services.

***“Therapy helped me in ways I didn’t think it could. I opened up more than I thought I would, to walk in nature week-in and week-out really helped my mental state, it allowed me to realise and set my boundaries which was my main goal when I got into therapy... I found that walking outdoors while speaking about my problems helped me as it didn’t feel like a therapy session as such and more like taking a walk and speaking out naturally, it came with less social anxiety.”***



# Charlotte's Story

*This composite case study highlights the impact of outdoor therapy for a 19-year-old client over six months.*

Referred by a social worker, Charlotte was facing challenges in managing her relationships and taking risks in her behaviour. Adopted as a toddler after her biological parents struggled with substance abuse, her relationship with her adoptive family had become strained during her teenage years. By the time she started therapy, she was living in homeless accommodation and feeling isolated. She wanted to explore her relationships and better understand herself.

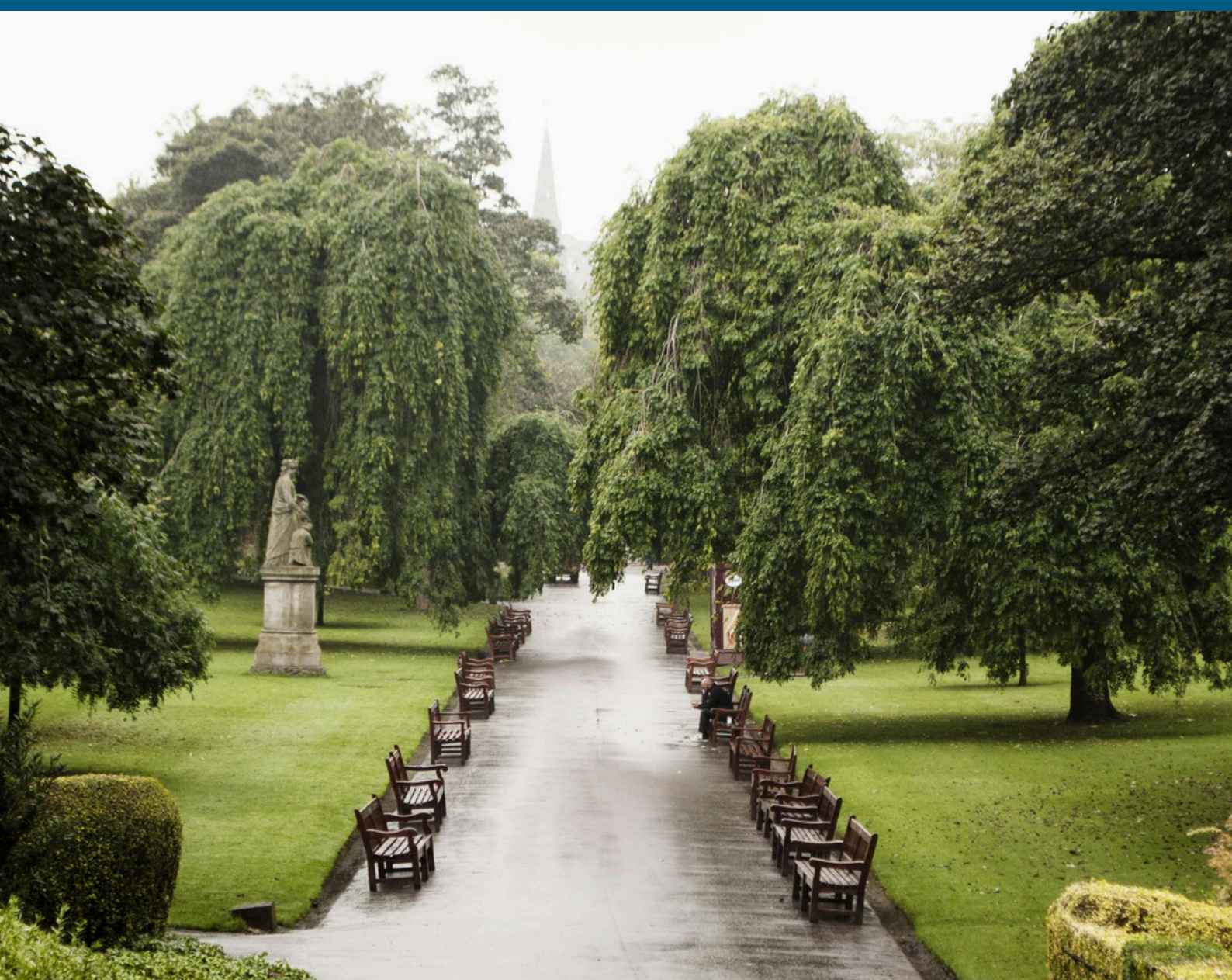
The sessions took place in a peaceful walled garden near Edinburgh, where the therapist and Charlotte used natural materials like leaves, twigs, and soil to create art. Charlotte decided where to work each week, and her creations often reflected her feelings and experiences. Conversations about the artworks helped her understand her emotions and relationships more clearly.

At first, the focus was on helping the Charlotte feel safe and comfortable. She appeared tense and kept some distance from the therapist, showing how hard it was for her to trust. Her early artworks featured damaged objects like broken twigs and torn leaves, which she said represented parts of herself. These items were photographed at the end of each session, a process that became important to her. She would then carefully place the objects in a "safe" area, symbolising her need to protect and care for her inner self.

As the therapy progressed, Charlotte started working at the same spot each week under a large chestnut tree. This tree became a powerful symbol for her. One week, she created a “nest” using natural and man-made materials like branches, grass, plastic, and metal. She explained that the nest represented her support network, including her biological mother, partner, and friends. However, the nest appeared fragile and unstable, which led to discussions about how some relationships felt supportive, but others felt heavy or harmful. For instance, she described her mother as “metal” – strong but sometimes damaging. These conversations helped her see the complexities of her relationships and think about what she needed to feel more balanced.

By the later sessions, the chestnut tree had come to represent comfort and care. Charlotte described it as being like a kind grandmother – steady, protective, and giving. Together, she and the therapist reflected on how the tree symbolised what she had been missing in her life but was beginning to imagine for herself. She also started to open up about her adoptive family, which had been a difficult topic for her to discuss earlier.

The Outdoor Therapy service helped Charlotte explore her feelings and relationships in a way that felt safe and meaningful. Working with nature and art gave her a new way to think about herself and her place in the world, helping her grow in confidence and understanding.



# Thank You

We would like to sincerely thank all those who have funded and supported our work over the past year - we really couldn't do this without you!

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We would also like to say a massive thank you to our board and all our members of staff for their care, courage, curiosity, collaboration, and connection they have shown throughout the year. **THANK YOU!**







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