

apex

scotland

KEEPING IT LOCAL

ANNUAL REPORT **2016**

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* Names used in case studies have been changed throughout this report.

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Keeping it Local

Hello, welcome to our Annual Report for 2015-16 which I very much hope will not only give you a snapshot of our performance and highlights over the past year, but will also reflect the changing face of Apex in response to what is a rapidly evolving environment.

I suspect most people, if asked what their involvement with justice-linked services was, would struggle to answer unless they had had some first-hand experience. For centuries our social systems have operated with Justice being the fence by which we define and govern our rules and therefore a subject which was somehow outside mainstream polite social conversation. When was the last time you sat down over a coffee and had a nice cosy chat about the state of our prisons or the workload of our courts? The impact of this marginalisation of all aspects of Justice to the shady side of our consciousness also impacts on how we see and what we think of those who find themselves on the 'wrong side', and even how we relate to those who seek to work with them. This can be easily evidenced by examining the likelihood of public funding or charitable funding going to such organisations as Apex in contrast, for example, to medical and children's charities, or even cats and dogs homes!

You may not have noticed however, that a sea change is coming in Scottish thinking on Justice, shown most obviously by the movement from Criminal Justice dominated thinking towards Community Justice as reflected in the wording of the Community Justice Scotland Act 2016. Far from being a hidden corner of public service activity, justice is becoming something which once more is the responsibility of and, to some extent, is defined by local communities and the many partners and stakeholders who go to define those communities. This is creating a new feeling across local areas which, when combined with significant pressures on public expenditure, requires us to consider very carefully what the best and most cost effective approaches to crime in our communities will be. Do we continue to assume that local authorities, already struggling to fulfil their core service needs, will keep giving money to projects simply because those projects look like good ideas or indeed because they have been there a long time? What does the move away from prison as a default punishment option mean to communities no longer able to expect that anyone who breaks the law will somehow be transported out of the community to become someone else's problem? The short answer is that we don't yet know, but Apex Scotland has for some years now been positioning itself to understand the needs of the communities we serve and to provide services which reflect the changing nature of justice in Scotland.

Our key service strengths in more rural areas are built on knowledge of those communities and the need for holistic and flexible approaches. This has required us to embed our services into those communities in what I believe is a successful and productive manner which, if you read on, will become very evident in the stories of service users, community members and staff in this report.

The last year has been every bit as confusing as we expected it to be and as we have gone about managing what has, at times, been a pretty chaotic world in order to deliver our core objectives namely: early stage intervention and preventive services, employability based programmes,



“Far from being a hidden corner of public service activity, justice is becoming something which once more is the responsibility of and, to some extent, is defined by local communities and the many partners and stakeholders who go to define those communities”.

ALAN STAFF
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

national rehabilitative and mentoring programmes and social enterprise based employment/employability training; so we have constantly to redefine what we do and how we do it in line with a rapidly changing social situation. As a result we have successfully developed our training arm so as to provide tangible benefit for those engaging with us, have developed significant work linked to foodbank provision and community development in the South-West, and developed innovative partnerships with the NHS in Highland to provide recovery-based activity which adds value to medical care and support. Our schools programmes have also significantly engaged with local community groups including producing a local film/documentary about their area and taking part in local activities and community improvement schemes.

As our first social enterprise All Cleaned Up becomes increasingly independent and effective, so we already plan some very exciting new social enterprise-based ventures which you will read about next year! These schemes do not rely on public funding to benefit our user group, but operate as trading arms and commercially viable projects. They provide real work experience, wages and training opportunities to those who, through the restrictions placed on them by the legal system or from simple prejudice, struggle to obtain meaningful employment and therefore the dignity and income which will help them move towards a more positive future. Apex is committed to finding the most effective models to address the causes and the effect of offending and, as such, fully embraces the recognition that crime in communities has multiple faces and emerges from many different situations.

We look forward to improving relationships with partners and community groups as we seek to work together to create a justice system which is fairer, less exclusive and which uses the assets already available within people to make offending less likely, and justice interventions more effective. The coming year will hold, as always, new challenges for Apex Scotland and will require innovative thinking and vision at a time when there is real concern about the ability of the third sector to survive the public sector funding drought. What keeps us going is the support and encouragement we get from the communities we work in, and from the recognition of the progress made by those who access our services.

Alan Staff
Chief Executive

“Apex is committed to finding the most effective models to address the causes and the effect of offending and, as such, fully embraces the recognition that crime in communities has multiple faces and emerges from many different situations”.

Over **5000** people worked with
by Apex Services during 2015/16

Finance

The primary purpose of Apex Scotland is to provide meaningful, progressive support to our service users in order to enable them to lead more fulfilling lives and be more effective contributors to society. Whilst other parts of this Annual Report highlight the worth, and effect, of the work that we carry out, it must be done in a manner which makes best use of our funders' money and the limits placed upon that.

Since 2008 Apex Scotland has, in common with many other third sector providers, suffered from the cut in public spending as a result of the financial crash of that time. This has undoubtedly impacted upon our ability to continue to provide those meaningful services, but we have endeavoured to do so wherever possible, often utilising our own reserves, whilst at the same time attempting to create an organisation which fits with its funding and is able to develop and look to the future with a clear vision.

This is an ongoing process and will never end but we have seen restructuring of the organisation, the introduction of our social enterprise subsidiary, All Cleaned Up, and investments in specific areas of work, most notably in early intervention, the further development of our social enterprise thinking and increased efforts to engage with social investment. All of these bode well for our future, but we also have to be very aware of the here and now.

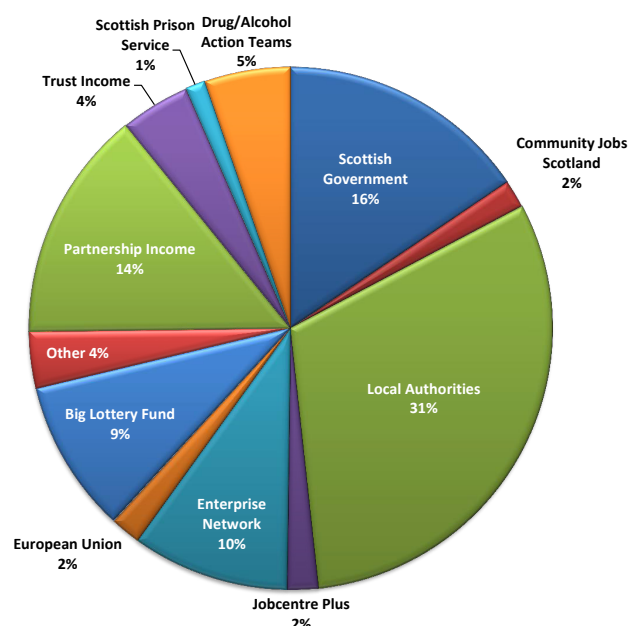
In 2015-16 income for the charity amounted to £2,544,047 with expenditure of £2,543,753 creating a small surplus of £294. Whilst income was down from that earned in 2014-15, we made a significant reduction in our expenditure. That, allied with the performance levels mentioned elsewhere and the positive impact we have had on the lives of more than 5,000 people is testament to the work, professionalism and commitment of all of our staff.

Our trading subsidiary, All Cleaned Up, posted a profit in 2015-16 in the sum of £36,270. This included a first repayment to Apex of a loan previously made to support the establishment of this entity.

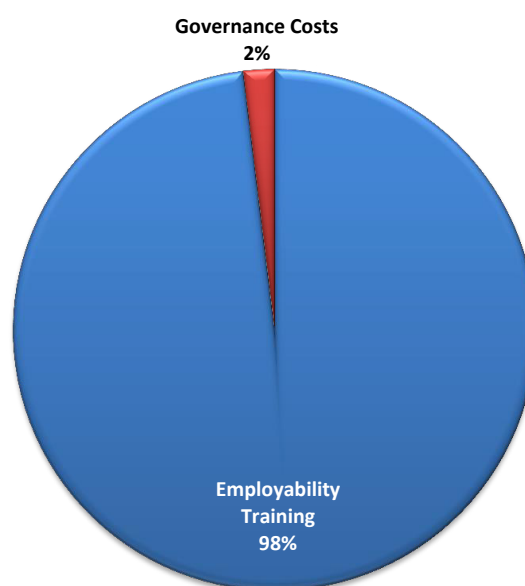
This positive picture contributes to the overall optimism within the organisation as to our ability to cope with the future funding challenges. We will ensure appropriate, efficient and effective use of our resources in an effort to continue providing high quality support to as many people as possible and to do so in a manner which informs public policy when considering the most effective means of engaging with our service user group. This will be achieved through utilisation of our ASSET management information tool and supported by effective governance at all levels across the organisation. We will also continue with our efforts to reduce our reliance on public sector funding and to broaden our funding base wherever possible.

Consolidated accounts detailing the performance of both the charity and our trading subsidiary can be found at Companies House.

Income



Expenditure



achievement:

something accomplished, especially by particular ability, special effort or great courage.

Making Sense of What We Are Achieving

Over 5,000 people were helped by Apex over the last year.

Good, but what exactly does that indicate? Just seeing people is not enough to define benefit, neither is completion of a course or even meeting the terms of a contract. This is a problem which agencies and governments struggle with endlessly when attempting to evaluate services or define value for money from the public purse. While we are involved with helping to find meaningful measurements for groups of people we remain committed to the belief that any useful interaction with an individual will be characterised by a number of value based approaches:

- » the intervention is based on an individual assessment of needs which is defined primarily by the person themselves and is designed around meeting those needs;
- » the intervention has a clear objective or set of objectives which can be defined and measured in some way;
- » outcomes are best measured and evaluated by the service user.

To ensure these values are upheld we have established the A Positive Future methodology which we apply to every service and which allows us to approach every person from an individual asset-based direction. Over this last year we have also been developing our data management systems which are going live in 2016 and which will enable more research-based analysis of the people we work with and the effectiveness of what we do with them.

Making sense of Apex

Perhaps the hardest part of understanding what Apex achieves comes from the wide range of services we provide across many areas of need from early intervention and school-based services right the way to prison throughcare and enterprise-based employment opportunities. Each service area has its own criteria for success so, for instance, anyone who thought that Apex was primarily about employment for people with offences might look at the headline figure of 208 individuals into sustained employment and think that is not very good as a percentage of 5000 seen!

Of course the answer to that is that the majority of services we provide do not have finding and sustaining jobs as their defined outcome. If we break this down – for example concentrating on the Secret Jobs programme run in conjunction with All Cleaned Up and funded by the DWP – we see that of 36 starters on the programme, 32 progressed to positive destinations, of which 20 were into employment with the remainder going into further education or training. These outcomes are clearly excellent and indicate an exceptional rate of success. Likewise, if you were to look at the schools work where, for example, in Dunfermline High School our Inclusion service achieved over 95% of the children seen showing positive destinations of varying types, none of those involved obtained full-time employment because that is not the desired objective.

We need to be realistic about how we approach defining how we have performed and not simply plaster headline success measures around which sound great but mean little, and we are indebted to Catherine Bissett of Justice Analytics for helping us work through the complexity of this. In the long run perhaps it is the tangible benefits which our service users have left us with which are our best headlines. We have moved increasingly over this year towards developing accredited training opportunities and real work opportunities for our users which can practically help them and improve their life chances. We have found that supporting people to change is important, but giving them the tools to do so is equally vital.

Making a difference

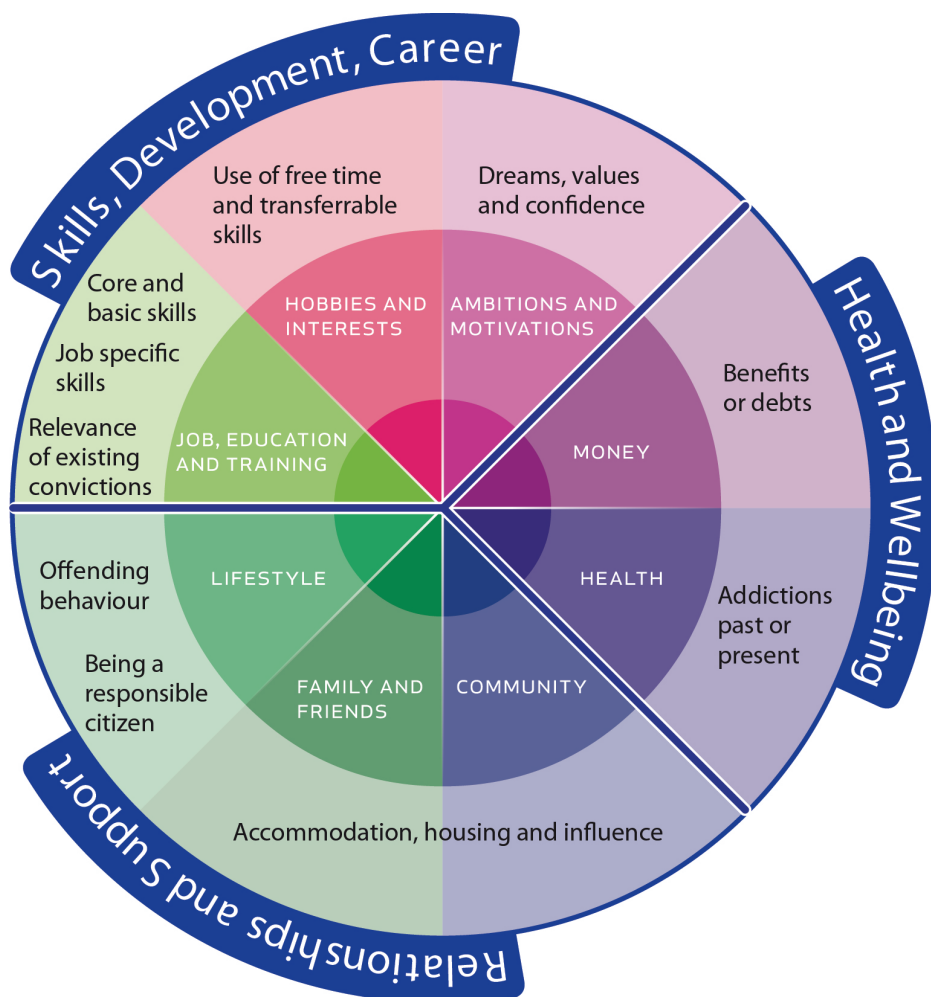
CSCS – clearly the most popular of our available courses, we delivered training which resulted in the award of 466 CSCS cards to work in the construction industry. This means that 466 people were equipped to obtain employment in the industry together with the additional value of Apex support around management of their conviction history. On a number of occasions Apex staff and volunteers with language skills were able to assist those with poor English language levels to access the training and meet the required test levels, and also support for those with dyslexia and learning barriers has been available and used.

Other courses have been delivered including rehabilitation and disclosure, food hygiene, health and safety, first aid as well as others. During the year Apex became an ASDAN centre of excellence, and 83 service users achieved the ASDAN qualification. In total over 800 service users gained some sort of qualification or training as part of their involvement with Apex, and a further 161 went on to further education.

In Dumfries and Galloway where levels of in-work poverty have been shown to be very high, our services have worked with Trussell Trust and the local communities to provide foodbank, learning and social support services to over 1000 people. This service is combining the practical aspect of helping families and individuals feed themselves and their families, with tools which will help them move out of food poverty and away from the pressures which can generate criminal activity. The communities have been incredibly supportive, as have local retailers and faith groups in embedding a genuine personalised service model.

Our partnership with the Celtic Foundation continues to show excellent results with almost 100% conversion of completing individuals moving on to some form of positive desired destination – most frequently paid employment. This is a small but very effective piece of work among some of the more disengaged and deprived young people in Glasgow.

Schools work has continued its goal of increasing the positive impact it has on the young people who are referred to us and, given that the majority of those we see have a significant history of school avoidance, non-attendance and exclusion, the rate of 93.8% attendance (up from 93 % last year) is pretty amazing and demonstrates the ability our staff have to engage with the young people and work with them utilising learning styles which suit them. The 95.3% of pupils reporting a positive outcome following their involvement with the Inclusion service is also up 3% on last year. We would like to acknowledge the work of our partners in the Dundee-based Inclusion Plus



programme, Includem and SkillForce, in ensuring that the already valuable Inclusion model delivers even more benefit through the addition of their skills and service provision.

We also want to acknowledge the success of All Cleaned Up, our social enterprise venture, in achieving impressive outcomes in partnership with DWP through the Secret Jobs programme. Out of 36 people starting this employment experience and training course 32 progressed to a positive destination including 20 job entries, 16 of which have been sustained. This is an excellent conversion rate for a client group who have a poor record of obtaining or sustaining employment.

There are many such examples which you will be able to pick out from the rest of this report, all of which demonstrate the ability of Apex Scotland not only to undertake and deliver excellent results through engaging with a sometimes very challenging client group, but to provide real practical assistance whether through a qualification, a word of advice or even something to put on the dining table when there was nothing. Our experience is that demands for something which will motivate young people into purposeful activity and away from crime, managing the rising tide of benefit sanction issues and giving hope, even when employment opportunities continue to become harder to obtain, is not going away. In fact it is getting ever more pressing in an environment where there is less available funding to deal with it. We are pleased that Apex is performing well where we can, but this in no way means we are complacent. There are always improvements to be made, lessons learned and new ways to work which we are committed to pursuing because we see the benefits to the communities we serve and the changes in the lives of those who take a grip on the chance for a more positive future.

Success Means Moving Forward



NEW ROUTES

The Reducing Reoffending Change Fund was created by the Scottish Government to provide offenders with substantial one-to-one support through evidence-based mentoring schemes and to promote strong, equal partnership working between third and public sector organisations. Apex is a partner in the two PSPs which were established in 2012 to provide national mentoring services, helping and supporting people to achieve their goals: New Routes, for prolific young male offenders and Shine, for women offenders

Here, Katrina Paton, one of our Personal Development Mentors who works with the Shine service in Aberdeen, explains how Apex helped one of the individuals she worked with.

Lucy* was referred to Shine via a community referral. She had been struggling to complete her unpaid work hours and needed some support to deal with the issues in her home life. Several years ago, Lucy had a breakdown and, despite trying to get help, she attempted suicide. As she was sole carer of her four children, it was agreed that the father would look after the children until she could get herself back on her feet.

Unfortunately, losing residency of her children made coping with her mental health issues even harder; she had nothing to get her out of bed in the morning. As her situation became increasingly difficult, Lucy began drinking and attempted suicide again.

Lucy had committed minor offences whilst she'd been drinking and, as a result, received a community payback order (CPO). She was willing to attend her one to one appointments with the social worker but found unpaid work too overwhelming. She was referred to Apex who took control of the challenges she faced with her CPO. Working with Apex, taking things one step at a time, Lucy began to turn things around. Apex then introduced Lucy to the Shine service and I was able to begin working with her on a one to one basis to help her with the other issues in her home life.



Katrina Paton with an Apex service user

We worked together so that she could create a stable home environment and address her debt. This included supporting Lucy at child planning meetings, where the children's situation was discussed alongside Education and Social Work. I continued to support Lucy as she grew in confidence and began to take control of her circumstances. Gradually contact with her children was increased, including overnight stays.

Lucy has completed her time with the Shine service and she now has joint custody of her children - Children and Families social work has closed her case. We referred her to Venture Trust's Next Steps course to encourage her to continue her journey, to discover new skills and strengths and develop her confidence further.

Having started a part-time job, Lucy has quickly realised that she wants more than a minimum wage occupation and so has applied to university for the forthcoming academic year. In the interim, Lucy is using her ILA to complete an online course in psychology.

Service User Experiences

Stuart's Story

Stuart* was referred to Apex Tayside in September 2014 after receiving a Community Payback Order. When I first met Stuart he was anxious and nervous and not in a very good place. He had lost his job due to his offence and also lost custody of his daughter. Finding employment was vital to Stuart as he had previously enjoyed a successful career with a well-known company which he had been with for 13 years.

I met with Stuart every Thursday for an hour to carry out a job search. Stuart applied for many jobs but was never given an interview. As time passed, Stuart began getting more and more dejected and I noticed a difference in him – he was quieter when I met and seemed very down. Apart from his social work appointments and seeing his daughter for one hour per week, Stuart lived a very solitary life and I tried talking with him about doing something more constructive with his time. However, he did not feel confident about engaging in volunteering or any type of classes.

His time being filled by doing something positive and constructive, and being in the company of others, meant he was happier.

We continued to work together and last year, Stuart was delighted to be told he had interview for two of the jobs he had applied for. His first interview went very well and, although he was unsuccessful, it gave him confidence to attend his second interview which was to be held the next day. When I spoke to him after his interview he told me that the person carrying out the interviews obviously knew of his conviction and told Stuart he would never be employed by his company and practically threw him out of the building. This incident had an extremely adverse effect on Stuart who was very upset at the way he had been treated.

I spoke with Stuart's social worker and we both knew we had to keep Stuart motivated and upbeat. I broached the subject of volunteering again with Stuart and told him about Westbank – a place in Perth that accepts volunteers with criminal records. After a few weeks Stuart eventually said that he would come with me to Westbank to see what was involved. He had a very successful chat with the volunteer co-ordinator and a starting date was agreed.

There was a significant change in Stuart over the next few weeks. His time being filled by doing something positive and constructive, and being in the company of others, meant he was happier. He was more talkative at his appointments and generally in a more positive frame of mind.

As we were having no luck with securing employment, we started exploring the idea of studying and going to college. Stuart said he had always been interested in cooking so together we investigated college options and applied for two cooking courses.

Stuart was delighted to be invited to an initial interview for college and he was asked back for a second interview for one of the courses. However, the lecturer interviewing him told him the college did not accept "people like him" and Stuart left the college feeling very down and embarrassed. I relayed this back to Stuart's social worker who immediately phoned the college. Fortunately, the college was apologetic and Stuart has since been offered a place on the course which he accepted.

Stuart is still volunteering and is very much looking forward to starting his cooking course after the summer. Things are also going well with his daughter and contact with her is being increased. Stuart said that when he began working with Apex he never saw his life improving, but now he is so much happier and appreciates the support he gets from Apex.

Over **700** qualifications gained, including **468** CSCS cards

Jack's Story

After a period of unemployment of around a year and four months, Jack* was referred to the Labyrinth service in Fife.

During my initial appointment with Jack I began to develop a better understanding of the barriers which he was facing. Jack had a sexual conviction for online crimes, for which he served four months of an eight month prison sentence. In addition to the sentence, Jack also had conditions placed upon him. Jack was relatively happy to engage with the service. Prior to his convictions, he had good working record, making the damage of the barriers to his employment all the more obvious. He attended all meetings well-presented and on time.

The action plan that Jack and I agreed to firstly involved looking at his employability skills, writing his cover letter and reworking his CV. Jack was keen to look into attending college to study computer game design however, while we agreed that further education would be a positive step for Jack, we decided to see if another route would be more viable to begin with because of the restrictions he was under. After making arrangements with Fife college, including my agreement to provide a supervisory role, Jack was able to partake in and complete IT Core Flex training.

When Jack had a job interview, together we created a disclosure letter and worked on interview preparation skills. To his credit, although he didn't get the job he still maintained motivation. Jack was then informed that he was to start the Work Programme. Because we were making progress on his action plan and training was already in place, I spoke to his work coach and we agreed that Jack's start date could be delayed for three months. Jack went on to complete a customer care training day that I arranged for him to attend through Fife Works. Since then Jack has successfully completed the first IT course and he has been registered to participate in fortnightly training sessions to complete ECDL using local library resources.

Jack was proactive from the start and readily engaged with the project, attending every meeting and completing every task. The hard work that he has put in has paid dividends for his progress and his confidence which, over the course of our interaction, improved immensely. Jack said that he was much happier with his CV and that he felt working with Apex helped him to gain more IT related qualifications. He was very satisfied with each aspect of our engagement.

Although I had to stop working directly with Jack once he started the Work Programme, the progress and work that we managed to accomplish over 6 months was amazing, truly exemplifying what can be achieved when a client fully engages with the process. Jack is now in the position that he has an updated CV, disclosure letter, more qualifications and up to date training, all of which will be beneficial when applying for jobs.

Sol's Story

Sol* was referred to Apex's AYE service in November 2015 from the Young Person's Team in Fife Social Work. Sol presented himself as a polite, well-mannered young man, albeit with a troubled past, being consistently involved in offending behaviour. It was both social work's and Apex's aim to give Sol the opportunity to engage in productive activities that would allow him to channel his energy into something positive, such as training or employment.

When I first started engaging with Sol to put a development plan in place, he was still offending regularly so it was important that we got him involved with something productive immediately. I sourced a local football team and we secured a trial for him. Although Sol didn't secure a place with the team, he did find another local league that he plays in every week. He thoroughly enjoys football and consistently attends training each week.

Sol was interested in joining the Royal Navy and so, at subsequent meetings, I supported him through his application process. However, because he had been in the army for a short period of time, we found it could take up to 12 weeks for them to process his medical forms which were too long for Sol to be unproductive. Because of this long waiting period, Sol expressed an interest in volunteering and it was arranged for him to attend Fife Voluntary Action for a meeting to discuss the opportunities available for him. However, before Sol could attend the meeting, he secured a job with Fife Creamery. To me, this showed an immense growth in maturity and confidence by being proactive and not relying on others to do work for him. He is currently still employed with them and is working hard every day.

Sol is still engaging with Apex and is doing well. We will continue to support him in the application process for the Royal Navy when the relevant documents become available - his work experience at Fife Creamery will increase his chances of being accepted in the future.

Sol's involvement with Apex has helped him to reduce his offending, engage in physical sporting activity 1-2 times per week, and increased his confidence and self-esteem so much that he was able to secure and retain employment.

Amanda's Story

Tayside service user, Amanda,* was referred to Apex by her social worker after receiving a Community Payback/Supervision Order and a Restriction of Liberty Order.

Having been a stay at home mother for nearly 10 years, her confidence in getting back into work was extremely low, however she felt that with some encouragement and guidance the time was right for her to take the first steps by engaging with the Apex service.

At our initial appointment it was clear Amanda believed that, due to the nature of her conviction, no potential employer would trust her and her offence presented a significant barrier for her to move forward. I explained what options were available to her and agreed I would help her create a CV, something she had never had before. I also advised Amanda how beneficial a disclosure letter would be for her to explain the circumstances surrounding her offence and we went on to write this together. I explained about her entitlement to an ILA to pay for training opportunities which we then applied for.

We discussed the benefits of volunteering as a positive step before applying for jobs and how it would show an employer that she can be trustworthy and able to work. Amanda was on a placement for her Community Payback Order at a local charity organisation so I suggested it would worthwhile asking if there was a volunteering position available once her order was completed. In no time at all, Amanda proved to be an asset on this placement and was not only taken on as a volunteer after enquiring but also offered a paid, part-time cleaning post. This considerably increased her confidence and over the next few weeks I assisted her in applying for various jobs and signposted her to Working for Families where she went on to successfully complete a Lifeskills Care Skills course.

Having completed the course, Amanda recently handed her CV and disclosure letter into a local care home and subsequently she received a telephone call inviting her to an interview for a carer's post. She felt a huge relief knowing that the employer was aware of her conviction and was basing the interview on her skills and experience. Amanda had shown such an improved, positive attitude and attended the interview with confidence. Happily, she had a successful interview and is now working towards a career she has always dreamed of as a Social Care Officer!

The transformation in confidence and self esteem in Amanda has been substantial. She said she is very grateful and appreciative of the support she has received from Apex but I am also proud of what she has achieved.

Alison's Story

Alison* was referred to Shine in Alloa by Clackmannanshire Criminal Justice Social Work while serving a Community Payback Order (CPO) which she had breached. Alison was also at risk of breaching her tenancy agreement as, due to alcohol use, it was being neglected and slipping into disrepair. Alison had a criminal history in excess of 20 convictions, all of which were alcohol related.

Alison was also subject to domestic abuse in a destructive relationship with her ex-partner and continually fled but always returned, not only to her partner but to alcohol. When I first met her, Alison was suffering badly from low self esteem and motivation and had strong feelings of guilt, particularly in relation to her children. Physically and mentally the effects of this, as well as alcohol misuse, were taking their toll.

Through receiving support from her Apex Shine mentor, Alison has really progressed. This support has involved weekly face to face and/or telephone contact, or supporting Alison to various appointments and advocating on her behalf with other agencies, such as housing. Alison was also referred to the Alliance Project to gain access to the Social Welfare Fund. This has enabled her to ensure all necessary repairs to her tenancy have been made, and she has benefitted from new carpets and other furnishing to make her house feel like a home.

Apex has also supported Alison to comply with her CPO and, collaboratively with Alison, liaised with her supervising officer to attend order reviews and to monitor progress. Alison has managed to bring her alcohol use under control, has committed no new offences and is making better decisions, in particular life choices regarding who she socialises with.

Alison has also completed the Venture Trust Next Steps programme - stepping out of her comfort zone was a huge achievement. She is now considering an application to a college course to develop her skills and improve her confidence. Overall, her mood and attitude are much more positive.

Apex Forth Valley employs Alison as a cleaner, one day per week, providing her with experience of a work environment that is still supportive. She has been keeping the office extremely well maintained and clean, but in addition she also engages well with all Apex workers and is seen as part of the team there, continuing to boost her confidence and belief in herself.

Making a SMART Recovery



Apex Highland service users, staff and friends at the Recovery Walk

Last September more than 2,000 recovery walkers took Glasgow by storm. Glasgow Recovery Walk Scotland 2015 was declared “thoroughly awesome” by the participants who started the day with a moving ceremony to honour those who have died from addiction. The group then went onto to publicly affirm their commitment to recovery from addiction with a two mile walk through the busy city centre.

This was the first year Highland Alcohol & Drugs Partnership and Apex Highland had taken part. 25 Apex service users and family members travelled to Glasgow in order to celebrate and participate from the very start with goody bags, bacon rolls and packed lunches, all generously donated by local businesses, NHS Highland and Highland Alcohol & Drugs Partnership.

One of the greatest moments for many of the walkers was passing through the iconic George Square to the sound of wave after wave of approving acknowledgement and applause from the crowd of spectators. The walk was followed by a recovery festival on Glasgow Green which was addressed by Paul Wheelhouse MSP, then the Minister for Community Safety and Legal Affairs. Mr Wheelhouse spoke of his personal respect for people in recovery and what they have to offer the community. He also affirmed the Scottish Government's ongoing commitment to providing the best opportunities for treatment for addictions in Scotland.

Our service users attend weekly community-based specialist interventions provided by Apex Highland, such as one to one support, SMART Recovery meetings, auricular

acupuncture and outdoor team building community challenges to enable and support individuals to maintain an alcohol/drug free lifestyle. We assist individuals to identify their individual needs and requirements and help them progress into training programmes, further education, employment or to participate in voluntary placements. We work alongside our partner agencies to support the individual moving on from treatment. In the past year 110 service users attended 50 group sessions. Sharon Holloway, Service Development Manager for the Highland Drug & Alcohol Partnership said, “The recovery journey is different for everyone and one size does not fit all. I feel that mutual aid plays a massive part in helping someone gain the support, encouragement and skills they need to recover and Apex's SMART service in particular can be adapted to suit any type of addictive behaviour. SMART therefore feels all inclusive and offers an opportunity for everyone to learn from each other. The tools SMART use can be transferred into our day to day lives to help us cope with life's ups and downs.”

Alcohol dependence is a relapsing condition which will require community based intervention and support. Our outdoor projects contribute tremendously to these interventions; they are shared journeys between our staff and service users – for some it may be the first time they have interacted socially in a group setting without the use of alcohol or drugs. Our intervention provides the opportunity to learn new skills, gain accredited qualifications, build confidence and contributes to the increased wellbeing of the individual and the community.

Apex Self-Development Award

Dylan Fawcett, aged 16, was the winner of the Apex Self-Development Award in Dunfermline High School, which was presented to him in absentia, by Craig Munro, Executive Director of Education and Children's Services, at the prize giving ceremony in June 2016. The award was given in recognition of the commitment to changes Dylan had made in his life in the academic year August 2015 to June 2016.



Apex's self-development award was presented in Dunfermline High School

Dylan was enrolled into the fold of the Challenge Programme whilst in his third year of schooling after concerns over maintenance of full-time curricular study as a result of poor attendance and behaviour. After admission to the Challenge Programme, Dylan undertook Maths and English, ASDAN and flexible curricular work to achieve a good balance of academic and wider achievement portfolios. Through his time with the Apex Inclusion service, Dylan worked hard to achieve his ASDAN qualification and was a participant in our in-house Focus on Your Future Programme. Dylan also completed a work placement and assisted with visits to Inclusion from external agencies and interested schools. It would be fair to say it was Dylan's big personality and sense of humour which made him influential amongst his peer group. Dylan was not only big in personality, but big in heart and was held affectionately by teachers and professionals who encountered him. To this end, he was given a position as a peer mentor, where he helped support and guide younger pupils who were indulging in risky behaviours and advising them on strategies to reduce harm and conflict. This ethic and determination prompted a collective decision from all parties that Dylan was the worthy winner of this year's Apex Award.

Dylan has now left school and is looking forward to starting college in August 2016.

Over 300 Hours Later...

The 25,000th John Muir Award was presented to Grace Moir this year by Aileen Macleod MSP, Scottish Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform.

Grace first came to Apex Highland in January 2012 as a client in the Delta project and has remained in recovery ever since. Becoming a peer mentor in March 2014, she now leads by example to other people who come to Apex looking for help towards their own success.

At the presentation, Ms Macleod paid tribute to Grace's voluntary work, which at the time exceeded 300 hours, and also recognised the contribution of Apex Scotland's partnership working with the John Muir Trust over the past 8 years.

So what does volunteering mean to Grace? She said, "Meeting new people, learning new skills, enhancing and improving skills I already have. Also listening to, and helping, others in similar situations that I was in previously has helped improve my self confidence and worth."



Grace Moir (centre) receives her John Muir Award

connection:

a relationship in which a person or thing is linked or associated with something else

Blue Flash Challenge



The UTurn team with the commemorative bench they made

This year the Apex Stranraer UTurn team was invited to participate in the Blue Flash Challenge. The Blue Flash Challenge is a series of community and fundraising events centred in the Highlands of Scotland and organised by veterans of the 4th Royal Tank Regiment. The events took place on the weekend of Armed Forces Day 2016 and supported Scotty's Little Soldiers, a charity assisting the children of members of HM Armed Forces who have lost their lives in active service during recent conflicts.

One of the events was a sponsored 96km hike across the Monadh Liath mountains from Roy Bridge to Inverness in under 24 hours. An Armed Forces day church service of dedication and remembrance at the Old High Kirk, Inverness was also held. After witnessing the skills of the team, as part of the event, the UTurn team was commissioned by the Blue Flash Challenge/Armed Forces Day to construct a commemorative bench which was presented to Raigmore Hospital for the new garden area of the children's unit. The team were proud to be involved in the event, which raised over £10,000 for the cause, and thoroughly enjoyed their trip to the other end of the country!

poppy 
scotland

Poppy Scotland

Apex Scotland is continuing to provide expert advice and guidance to former members of the armed forces who find that a criminal conviction is a barrier to finding employment.

In partnership with Poppy Scotland, Apex is assisting ex-service personnel who have a criminal conviction to compete more readily in the employment market and to try and reduce any risks associated with ex-offenders gaining employment.

After referral from Poppy Scotland, Apex's Personal Development Mentors meet with these veterans either in prison or in the community providing advice and guidance particularly on current employment legislation, disclosing convictions and conviction relevance.

Apex Scotland is delighted to be associated with supporting this client group and is grateful to Poppy Scotland for their ongoing support.

Food Health and Education

**Over 1500 people fed
and given community support
via foodbank activity**

Apex Grampian has partnered with Community Food Initiative North East (CFINE) as a FareShare distributor. Fresh, quality and in-date surplus food is donated by a range of food producers and retailers (such as Tesco, Nestlé, Marks and Spencer, Muller, etc.) that would otherwise go to waste. The deliveries vary from week to week but usually include staples such as yoghurt, milk, bread, fruit, vegetables and cheese, rather than the “dry” foods usually associated with foodbanks.

CFINE has obvious benefits for the environment by reducing food waste but, crucially, FareShare is open to everybody who needs it, helping to alleviate poverty for both unemployed and employed people who may be struggling financially but who do not qualify for help from traditional foodbanks. It has been particularly welcomed by those who use our virtual visits service who often find it difficult to manage when their partners are in prison.

“Food and cooking are excellent vehicles for engagement and development,” says Dave Simmers, Chief Executive Officer of CFINE. This comment is true of many services that Apex runs across the country. In addition to distributing FareShare to individuals in Aberdeen, the supplies we are given are used to deliver Confidence to Cook classes, teaching people to cook basic recipes which they will find easy to replicate at home with their families.



The Grampian team with food donations



Confidence to Cook classes

Foodbanks

Our foodbank service, in partnership with the Trussell Trust, is now firmly established in both Dumfries and Stranraer, providing a crisis service to people in need in local areas. Our staff lead a dedicated team of volunteers who organise the store, create food parcels, give IT guidance for internet searches and signpost to other Apex services or local agencies if the individual needs specific support.



We hold regular food collections, supported by local Tesco branches, churches, schools and businesses and have had generous contributions by people in the local community.

In Stranraer, the foodbank has been a natural complement to our Moving In service which provides starter packs for people on benefits or low incomes.

This year has also seen the opening of our soup kitchen in Stranraer which enhances the service further, giving our service users the opportunity to learn basic nutrition and cooking skills as well as providing a comfortable environment to meet together.

Elsewhere in the country, in Levenmouth, the young people from the Apex Inclusion service in Kirkland High School have organised collections of food and toiletries by staff and pupils which was donated to the local foodbank there. It is hoped that the pupils will be able to participate more fully by volunteering at the foodbank in the future.

Foodbank collections are always fun!

One School, One Community



One School, One Community project

Buckhaven Community Theatre hosted a great evening celebrating the work of young people from both Kirkland and Buckhaven High Schools in March this year. With the merging of the two schools to form the new Levenmouth Academy in August 2016, Apex Scotland undertook a piece of work that would help to dispel any fears of pupils coming together but which would also provide a social history of the schools and the local community.

Working with Strange Boat Productions, Apex secured funding from Diageo to enable this exciting project to go ahead. Work commenced in September 2015 and culminated in the event on 9 March.

The 80 people who attended the celebration event enjoyed an informative and entertaining social documentary featuring interviews with both former and current pupils and staff, as well as a potted history of the schools and area. The film footage also included a behind the scenes look at the making of the documentary and outtakes from the filming.

The young people, who were led by Apex Inclusion Co-ordinator, Linda Dunion, had obviously enjoyed their involvement in the project. As well as gaining new skills in terms of filming and editing, the pupils honed their research skills whilst working alongside students from the other school. All of this, we believe, will contribute to a more seamless transition from two schools into one. Huge thanks must go to the young people for their commitment and enthusiasm for this venture.

The documentary, entitled "One School, One Community" provided a great opportunity for the young people and has created a superb record of the history of the schools, whilst looking forward to an exciting new period in the development of the local area. You can find the video on the Apex Scotland website.



Baldragon pupils try a different fashion!

Feeling Good

Apex Inclusion continues to be involved in Museum2Go, run in partnership with the National Museum of Scotland. This year, four female pupils from the Inclusion service within Baldragon Academy were given an exciting opportunity to take part in the 'Feeling Good' project which aimed to explore fashion through the ages, the changing views of the 'perfect' body shape and the influence it has had on today's views of body image.

Over 6 weeks the pupils worked as a group through activity-based sessions in school to explore these issues and reflect on how this is relevant to them in their day to day lives as teenagers. The project also included visits to the McManus Galleries in Dundee to explore their local collections relating to body image and to the National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh for inspiration, where they created their own futuristic designs based on the collections in the museum.

1170 children at risk of
school exclusion worked with.

95% reporting positive
outcomes and destinations.

Apex Inclusion



Apex Inclusion works alongside schools to equip students with the motivation and skills required to engage in a formal learning environment, reduce exclusion, raise aspiration, tackle ingrained behaviour and increase attainment and attendance. The Apex Inclusion service has fundamental values and principles but allows a strong element of flexibility to tailor the service and create a bespoke package that best suits the needs of each school, curriculum or young person. This year Apex had a service running in seven schools across three different local authorities

We worked with 1,170 pupils over 2015-16 who participated in a number of interventions and projects across the country. 16 pupils achieved ASDAN Awards and 4 pupils at Harlaw Academy, Aberdeen achieved SCQF Level 4 in the Princes Trust Personal Development and Skills XL Programme.

After hearing of our award-winning model and its evaluated history of success from the University of Edinburgh, the Inclusion service had the pleasure of being visited by Social Work Manager, Jackie Anders from the Education Justice Initiative in Melbourne, Australia. Jackie visited our service in Kirkland High School as part of her Churchill Fellowship Award to travel to 3 countries to research models of good practice to inform an early and effective intervention strategy in Australia.



Finding inspiration for computer game sounds

Game Jam

The Community Engagement team at National Museums Scotland worked with Inclusion pupils from Craigie High School, Dundee and game developers Dundee Games Collective (DGC) on Game Jam, a game design project.

This project began with a visit to the museum where the pupils and game developers explored the building and learned about the museum's Art, Design and Fashion and Science and Technology galleries. This visit was followed by three sessions in the school where the pupils learned the basics of computer game design, leading on to development and the creation of visuals and sounds – including walking around the school grounds with a furry microphone! The pupils were encouraged at each session to work on designing their own games, characters and environments in small groups.

A final session in DGC's own office resulted in all their previous work coming together in two final game concepts, both of which were fun and creative and relevant.

Using all the design ideas generated by the pupils, the DGC team produced the final concept for the game and developed Dolly and the Atom Smasher. The concept for the game comes from ideas the pupils had in the very first workshop in school which they added to throughout the process. You can play the game on the National Museum of Scotland website!

Borders Connection



Our Borders clients celebrate their achievement

Last Christmas, Apex Shine Mentor, Sarah Bennett, hosted a celebration to recognise the achievements of the individuals who had completed courses in REHIS Elementary Food Preparation, and/or Community Learning and Development Awards for Personal Development and Introduction to Computer Skills.

This took the form of an awards ceremony, followed by nibbles and Christmas craft activities. The event was attended by representatives from Community Learning and Development and the Healthy Living Network, and was supported by the Women's Reconnect Service who sent their best wishes and some goody bags.

The recipients were all involved with Shine Women's Mentoring Service and the Reconnect Women's Service in the Scottish Borders and were supported by staff across these services to complete their chosen courses. The courses were all provided free of charge by CLD, Healthy Living Network and Hawick Library Staff for those who were eager to continue their learning journey.

Virtual Visits

Apex's 'virtual visits' service continues to be a welcome provision for those with loved ones in prison.

Our Apex Grampian office provides a virtual contact centre where friends and family of prisoners can chat via a secure video link to prisoners in Barlinnie, Perth, Polmont and Grampian.



Virtual visits provide connection with loved ones

Set in a comfortable room, the service is child-friendly and is available outwith office hours. Using a high specification video link, relatives can maintain that much-needed contact and retain strong family links, which is seen as a key factor in reducing reoffending.

Visitors have come from all over the north east and there has been lots of positive feedback around the easy access to the service and friendliness of the Apex staff. The most recent inspection report on inspection of HMP & YOI Grampian said that the service was a "welcome initiative" and "worthy of sharing".

This year 1537 adults and 266 children have used the facility over 1078 visits.

Seminars

Apex Inclusion and Apex Fife's AYE service co-facilitated at the 2015 Social Work Scotland Conference and Exhibition, delivering a seminar entitled 'We're All Human, Right?'

The theme of the Conference was 'Whose Right is it Anyway' with the topic of Human Rights central to learning outcomes. The session used the voices of young people excluded from school or care experienced to explore issues which may have an impact on their futures and how their human rights provide the scaffold for positive progression.

In February, Apex Inclusion delivered a seminar to delegates at the Aberdeen Learning Festival. The event, entitled Inspired by Diversity; Insisting on Equity; A Fairer Community had inclusive practice at its core with a focus on raising attainment and closing the attainment gap in Scottish education. It was open to all practitioners from Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire and Moray and featured key note speakers such as Angela Constance, the then Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning.

Our seminar entitled Let's Focus on Their Future was an opportunity for practitioners to learn about the early intervention work of Apex Scotland and how it increases the potential of young people through its interventions. The seminar was interactive, using the voices of our young people to deliver impact.

Over 1078 virtual visits facilitated to families of offenders

contribution:

the part played by a person or thing in bringing about a result or helping something to advance

Being Seen About Town

It is incredibly encouraging for Apex's staff and service users to be praised for their contribution to their local communities.

For us, volunteering not only offers a way for individuals to develop their skills and confidence, but helps to create a bond where everyone is working towards the same goal in one Apex team.

Trust is built whilst assembling stone dykes, or wooden bridges; pulling weeds, hammering nails or grooming horses. When standing back to assess a day's work, there is an element of pride in what has been achieved today, and what can be done tomorrow.

Derek Barry and Christopher Morton both volunteer with the U-Turn team in Stranraer:

"I have been volunteering for the past 16 months at Apex U-Turn. Before I started here I had no routine in my life; I was sitting in the house going nowhere.

"The things I get out of volunteering here are having a routine and structure having something to get up for in the mornings. I also like to go home feeling that I have done something positive and constructive with my time being part of a team. Being valued as part of the team is also a good thing for me, learning new skills on a daily basis - anything from working with tools or planning jobs.

"I feel that I am a more confident person since starting here and feel if I put my mind to things I can achieve anything that I want to do in my life."

Derek Barry



Keeping the town in bloom

"I have been volunteering for Apex U-Turn since the start of April. I feel like it has changed my life in the right direction. Before Apex I was in homeless accommodation doing nothing with my day and becoming seriously depressed, but since I have started volunteering I have structure to my day and feel better about myself. I have a good work group who have helped me through a lot and have been there for me if I have ever needed them.

"Apex has given me skills that I never had and has given me confidence about my own ability. I feel like it has put me in the right direction and gave me the boost that I needed and has given me motivation to do things and a feeling of achievement when we finish a job."

Christopher Morton

Our involvement is being recognised both by residents and other local organisations all over the country who are taking an interest in what we do because of how we are contributing to their town, their countryside and their communities.

This has the added benefit of changing people's attitudes towards those who have offended, which in turn makes it easier for those who have made poor decisions in the past to rediscover their role and value in their community. It benefits not just the people involved but the environment, the economy and society ... and it can be fun!

Over 6500 hours of voluntary work completed

SHAX

Joyce Harkness is the Social Enterprise Manager from SHAX, a charity which supplies minimal cost, crisis need, used furniture and white goods to people in Dumfries and the surrounding areas. She told us how she finds working with Apex volunteers.

"SHAX staff started in April 2014 and I was aware that Apex offered a team of their volunteers to help out. I got in touch with the Dumfries office and we took it from there. They have been a terrific help, tackling tasks as a team that our own volunteers don't have time for. This has included painting the walls (of our dilapidated building!), taking down an old brick wall and helping with major moves when we re-merchandise the warehouse.

Admittedly, we were originally a little unsure of what the Apex group would be like, or how they would interact with our staff and volunteers. But I can't praise your staff highly enough; we've worked with 3 different members of the Dumfries Apex team over the last 2 years and they all have shown excellent management and motivational skills.

Our own volunteers come from a wide range of backgrounds including ex-offenders, so we take everyone as we find them. We have never had any issues with the Apex team. Volunteering here provides practical experiences to improve health & wellbeing and increase an individual's chances of employment.



Apex volunteers at SHAX

Currently an Apex team comes to us every Thursday if Apex staff are available. They are a terrific help to us. We're delighted to be working with Apex. Not only has SHAX greatly benefited from support from the Apex teams, but some of the individuals have chosen to volunteer with us after their time with Apex to increase their experience."

Aldouran Wetland Garden

Jane Sloan is the Chair of the Trust for Aldouran Wetland Garden in Stranraer and describes herself as Lead Volunteer! The garden is freely accessible with various walks and trails which attracts around 6,000 visitors each year. We asked Jane to tell us how she had got involved with Apex.

How did you first meet Apex?

We had an incident last year when the railing on the boardwalk of the gardens was vandalised. I had put the story onto social media on Friday and thanks to Apex it was fixed by Monday! Jackie Rae (one of Apex Stranraer's Personal Development Mentors) contacted me through Facebook and then arranged for a local timber merchant to supply the materials required to repair the damage. The team arrived and got started first thing on Monday morning.

The team of volunteers is made up of individuals who access Apex's services, so how would you describe them?

They are a happy group who work together well and have a lot of fun. They also respect Jackie's authority. I was quite taken with them all. They seemed to be very interested in the whole project and offered to come and help with anything else that needed done. Since then they have returned to build composting bays which we've been wanting to do for a while and have constructed a new footbridge.

So, they continue to contribute to the local community then?

The Aldouran Wetland Garden is entirely managed by volunteers so it is very much a community feature. The Apex group fits in so well with their willingness and cheerfulness. It is wonderful to have a group that is so reliable to help when needed. I haven't spoken to Jackie about this yet but we are having some problems with the old boardwalk!



Building the new bridge

Mull of Galloway Trail

Opened in 2012, the Mull of Galloway Trail runs from the Mull to Stranraer and continues north as the Loch Ryan Coastal Path for a total distance of 35 miles to Glenapp in South Ayrshire where it links with the Ayrshire Coastal Path. The Rotary Club of Stranraer created and maintains the trail on an entirely voluntary basis. We spoke to Tom Stevenson about his experience of working with Apex teams.

How did Apex come to work on the Mull of Galloway Trail?

The rotary club has a mainly elderly membership and with the amount of maintenance and improvement that is required, although we do some work, we simply couldn't manage to do that ourselves on an ongoing basis. I knew the previous manager in Apex Stranraer, Gary Small, and he told me of the voluntary work that the Apex team does.

What has the U-Turn team done for you so far?

There is always maintenance to be carried out such as strimming and various repairs, and we are putting up way marker trails to assist walkers. The team are happy to carry out what needs done as and when required.

Are they a good group to work with?

I'm delighted with the team, very happy indeed with the work that they do. Jackie Rae is always very helpful and works well with the volunteers. I have been out with them and it's clear Jackie has a good relationship with all the volunteers. They are all conscious of any health and safety requirements that need to be considered. All the volunteers are keen and seem to enjoy their time working on the trail. It seems to be a win/win situation for all involved. We have presented certificates to all the volunteers to thank them for their efforts and to add to their CVs.



The Trail requires a lot of maintenance

Do you think the work that Apex does benefits your community?

The Mull of Galloway Trail was created and planned by the rotary and is an asset to the community, not only promoting healthy exercise but presents an opportunity for people to see parts of the local countryside they would otherwise not be able to. Stranraer is an area with low income families and so the trail promotes the area positively and encourages people to visit. The trail has now been recognised as one of Scotland's great trails.

.....
"All the volunteers are keen and seem to enjoy their time working on the trail. It seems to be a win/win situation for all involved".
.....

However, the trail doesn't have an income stream and without the Apex team the rotary would struggle; we simply could not afford to employ people to do what the Apex volunteers do. When Apex agreed to help, we initially bought some tools and a new brushcutter to help with the maintenance which we have donated to the team. And as a thank you for their continued hard work we donated fleeces which have both the Apex and Rotary logos on them.

There is no doubt that the training and experience that the volunteers get is of benefit and will help them in the future with their employment prospects. Some of the volunteers have been through difficult times but they clearly enjoy what they do and get some satisfaction from their volunteering. We certainly very much appreciate it.

Dumfries and Galloway Council

Wendy Jesson is the Principal Officer Partnership Support, in Dumfries and Galloway Council and is incredibly supportive of the work that Apex does in her local area. She explains:

"I had heard about the exceptional work which the Apex team had done in the local area and first met Jackie Rae and the team when they were revamping the YMCA/ Young Farmers Santa Float. The team has completed a large number of projects which have all been incredibly well received within the Wigtownshire area.

"Members of the public now speak to the service users when they are working and also when they see them on their own which must give a huge boost to their morale and will make them feel more accepted as members of their community".

"In terms of the U-Turn volunteering service, many benefits are brought to our local community. The perception of the Apex team has been changed by the work that has been carried out. To see the service users completing projects on behalf of the community which enhance our area and provide a high level of service in terms of giving back and helping other community projects has resulted in a change in the perception of people who have had challenging times in their lives.



"The fact that Apex ensures that the team can help and assist community projects who are in need has firmly embedded the fact that, with strong leadership, the service users can turn their lives around and made a positive contribution to other people's lives. Members of the public now speak to the service users when they are working and also when they see them on their own which must give a huge boost to their morale and will make them feel more accepted as members of their community.

"Also, the intergenerational benefits of the project to all age ranges is exceptional as I know that the project has repaired and installed play equipment for nurseries as well as helping at the Thorneycroft Nursing Home to both install equipment such as sheds and also help with the maintenance of their gardens. Again, the integration of the U-Turn team with these projects has led to greater understanding of the need to help to support service users to get their lives back on track and to change the public's perception of Apex's clients.

"I am sure, as well, that with Jackie's support, together with the rest of the Apex Stranraer team, the lives of all the people that they support will have greatly changed for the better."





So our communities seem happy with the volunteers – what about our staff?

Derek Richardson, a Personal Development Mentor in Dumfries said, "Often our service users have few skills or little experience which is a real cause of anxiety for them. This is compounded by low confidence and self-esteem so makes the thought of full time work or training very daunting."

"Often our service users have few skills or little experience which is a real cause of anxiety for them".

By getting involved with volunteering, service users can learn new skills and gain experience working with others in a low pressure, friendly environment.

As a PDM I have seen first-hand the improvement in confidence it makes, and for some of the people we work with it has provided the base from which they have gone on to gain CSCS cards and Machine Operative tickets enabling them to move forward into employment."



Horses in Clover

At the other end of the country, the Highland team has a long standing commitment with 'Horses in Clover' on the Black Isle, helping owners, Bill and Winona Wall, to repair and maintain the sanctuary and land as well as care for all the rescued animals who live there.

Thirty six service users in recovery spent a total of 1344 hours doing volunteering at Peddieston House from April 2015 until March 2016.

Highland volunteer, Darren Junor says, "Helping others helps me and gives me a good feeling; I am better member of society because of it and I am also giving back rather than taking."



Making friends at Horses in Clover

Always a Challenge, Never a Chore

Our Highland team have also created a Community Challenge team to tackle larger volunteering projects in their local area.

The Corbett Centre in Inverness is an NHS day centre for adults with learning disabilities. The community gardens in which the centre sits had become neglected and overgrown deterring staff and patients from using it safely. In October 2015 the Challenge Team started cleaning up litter, leaves, debris and commenced cutting back the overgrowth. Some team members have been learning on the job, doing landscaping and a bit of tree surgery, while others have professional skills and plenty of experience.

"I would rather be working for nothing, doing something useful and that I'm good at. It makes you feel part of the community" said John, one of the volunteers.



Working at the day centre

161 people into further education

Gary's Story

Gary is one of Highland's volunteers. He had been attending CSCS training and the SMART Inside Out programme co-facilitated by Apex Scotland in HMP Porterfield until his release in October 2015. Gary made good and insightful choices prior to his release, accepting support from HMP Throughcare Officers, including a decision not to his home town where his drinking continually got him into trouble.

Prison routine had kept Gary happy and he knew that structure to his days would keep him out of trouble. He immediately started attending SMART Recovery in the community with Apex every Friday, where his openness, honesty, difficulties and aspirations were appreciated by all the group members.

His physical strength and excellent work ethic were utilised on outdoor voluntary projects. He was an excellent team member at Peddieston House horse sanctuary, building fences, repairing stables and mucking out. The community gardens at the Corbett Centre in Inverness had become overgrown, neglected and our Challenge Team set about cutting back, pruning on a very large scale.

.....
“Getting support when I was released, having something to do with my time and being around people who were trying to stay clean and sober made all the difference this time”.

Gary, Apex service user and volunteer

.....

Working with Gary on a one to one basis we identified his lack of photographic ID, birth certificate and access to a bank account. These barriers often seem insurmountable but with the financial assistance of the DELTA programme, each was accessed within a month. Without the prospects of a bank account it is hard to imagine getting a job and getting paid.

Gary received a SMART 12 week attendance certificate and also John Muir Awards, Discovery & Explorer for his volunteering on the outdoor projects. Gary's determination to change was embedded in prison and it was no surprise that in February 2016 that he was offered a paid, permitted hours contract through a local social enterprise.



Volunteering made a difference to Gary

support:

give assistance and guidance

Training

Our Trainees

Employers will usually look for the most skilled, most experienced individual when they are looking for new employees, but they will also look for a good attitude and approach to the job.

We understand that to give our service users the best opportunity to succeed, as well as helping them to overcome any initial barriers they may present, we have to give them a chance to enhance their skillset and to understand how to present themselves to employers. By undertaking specific, certificated training, such as First Aid, Manual Handling, Health and Safety, they achieve a qualification which will improve their CV, but, arguably more importantly, they achieve increased confidence in their own capability. For some of the people who engage with us, it is the first time they will have achieved such a qualification or had their efforts acknowledged.

The training, however, is not limited to our own service users and this aspect of our work allows us to engage with those who are not traditionally referred to Apex. In particular, being a registered deliverer of CSCS training and assisting people to achieve their labourer's card has reinforced our strength as an all-round training provider and this is something we hope to build on in the future. The success of our delivery of this course has been particularly recognised across the Scottish Prison Service where we help prisoners to achieve this qualification, increasing their prospects of employment in the construction industry on their release. In Aberdeen, we have now delivered two CSCS courses specifically for women in HMP Grampian which has been well received.

Because of our expertise, delivering training to external organisations is also popular. This year we have delivered 61 training courses to 458 external participants.



Service users gain qualifications

61 training courses to **458**
external participants

Employability Fund

Apex delivers the Employability Fund programme, administered by Skills Development Scotland, engaging with individuals between the ages of 16 and 24.

Our staff work with these young people, using a variety of interventions to ensure that they become aware of their potential. They are given the opportunity to become involved in a number of projects to help them to discover new skills and interests that will broaden their ideas and improve their employment prospects. During this time the young people are helped to identify their own personal barriers to employment and our trained staff help them to address these issues and provide the relevant support to overcome them. The young people are encouraged to fully participate in all opportunities, including working towards an ASDAN qualification.

Throughout the month of February 2016, the Employability Fund group in Stranraer set up a pop-up charity shop with the aim of raising money for Wigtownshire Women's Aid. The young people received lots of donations of goods to stock the shop and managed to raise a total of £150. As well as raising the money for Women's Aid, the participants gained valuable work experience, including cash handling, and customer service skills.



Working at the pop-up charity shop



Paul Brannigan (front, centre), with our Alloa young people

At the end of their time with Apex, primarily on Stage 2 of the Employability Fund, it is intended that the young people will be able to move on to the next stage of the employability pipeline which may be further training, further education or employment. These photographs show the variety of projects that the young people get involved in.

As well as work experience, our PDMs continue to look for new ways to engage with their groups. The young people on the Employability Fund in Forth Valley particularly enjoyed a special visit in March from actor, Paul Brannigan who had recently starred in *The Angels' Share*. The group watched the film together and prepared questions for Paul's who visited later the same day. During his visit he was happy to speak about the film, taking plenty of time to answer questions about his career and spoke very openly about his own personal story, giving some sound advice to the young people. The group thoroughly enjoyed the visit and were extremely grateful to Paul for taking time out of his schedule to visit Alloa before he returned to filming in London the following day.



Centre of Excellence

Apex Scotland is delighted to have been awarded the title 'Centre of Excellence' in recognition of our outstanding practice in running ASDAN courses.

The nomination was made by Regional Managers at ASDAN and reflects commitment to celebrating success and rewarding achievement of both learners and those working with them. Apex's nomination was made specifically in relation to creative teaching and learning.

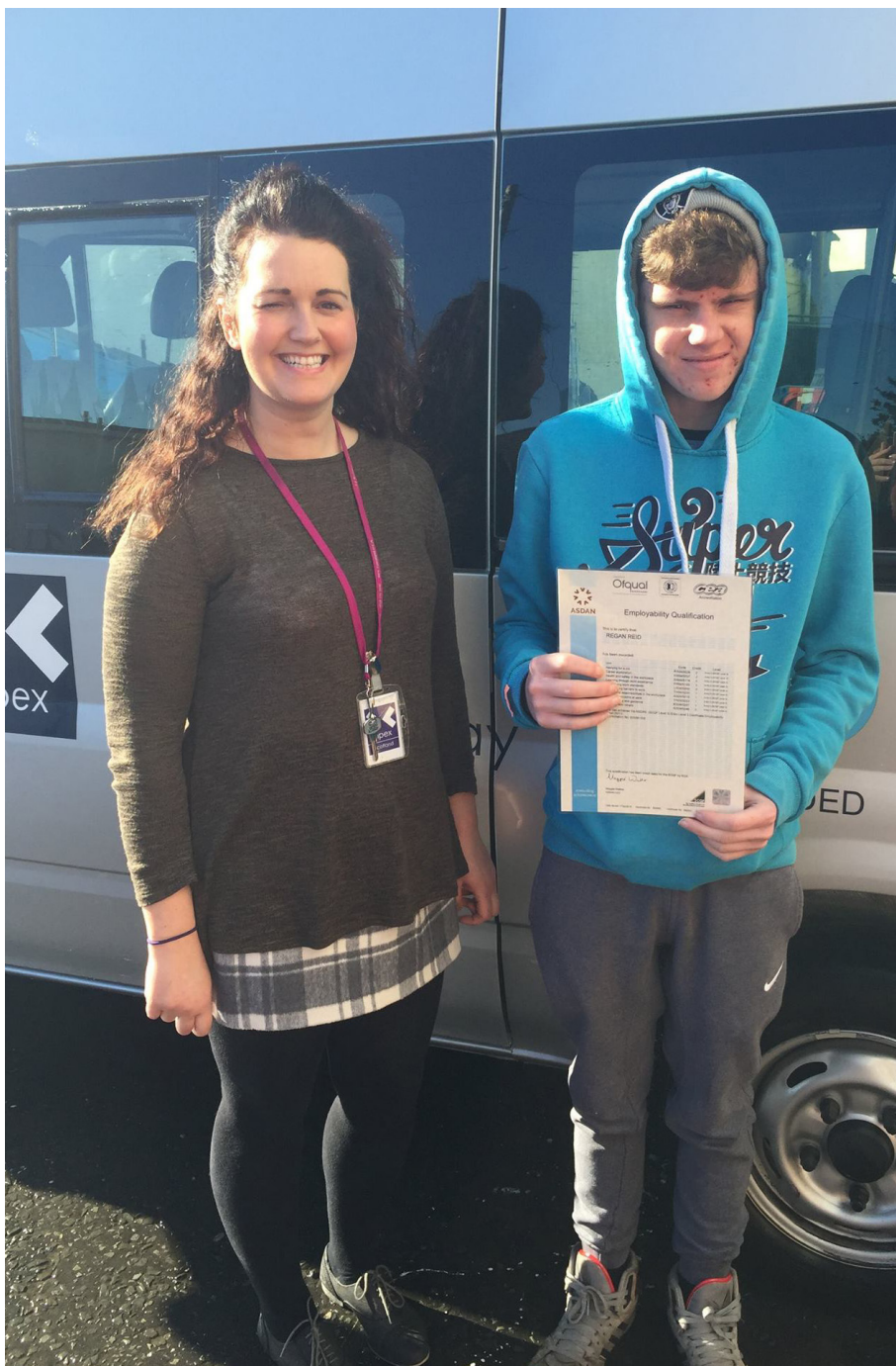
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"This award reflects the hard work and dedication of our staff, and demonstrates that Apex is committed to the provision of high quality services which help improve the life chances of those who engage with us".
.....

Apex Chief Executive, Alan Staff, said:
"While it is always nice to be recognised for what we do, it is especially pleasing to be acknowledged for how we do something and especially to be considered a Centre of Excellence. This award reflects the hard work and dedication of our staff, and demonstrates that Apex is committed to the provision of high quality services which help improve the life chances of those who engage with us.

"I hope that we can continue to develop our skills and expertise in this area and keep improving.

"It's lovely to be recognised but this award does not mean we have achieved everything we can and we will look to keep moving forward in excellence."

83 of our young people across Glasgow, Dumfries and Galloway, Forth Valley and the Borders have achieved ASDAN certificates in the past year.



Regan Reid receives his ASDAN qualification, with PDM Fiona Jamieson

83 ASDAN qualifications awarded

Our Staff

Apex has long understood that its most valuable asset is its staff. We have a responsibility therefore to mentor and train, not only our service users, but our own workforce.

By ensuring that Apex staff are extremely proficient in what they do, it creates an environment where service users can be confident in their engagement with us, but also where our trainees, peer mentors and placements can learn and

thrive, gaining valuable skills and experience to help them in their own employment journey.

38 staff courses took place this year, on subjects such as rehabilitation and disclosure, sex offender collusion, conflict resolution and personal safety. We have recently employed a second dedicated trainer to ensure we continue to provide our training services as effectively as possible.

38 staff training courses delivered

Student Placements

Our Aberdeen team enjoys a good relationship with the higher education establishments in their local area and often hosts student placements who are particularly keen to work within the criminal justice sector.

In the past year the team has hosted eight students from NC to postgraduate level, from Robert Gordon University and North East Scotland College whose courses range from Business and Management to Social Work. This year they also welcomed a criminology student under the Erasmus scheme from Novia University in Finland.

“Everyone is so happy and friendly and supportive. All work places should be like Apex”.

Ayshah Rossetti came to Apex from North East Scotland College as an HNC Social Care student work placement. She worked with clients on community sentences, delivering group activities in the Grampian office such as cooking, crafts and health promotion; and one-to-one sessions including job search and action planning.

She approached all tasks with an extraordinary amount of energy and developed positive relationships, often turning around the attitudes of some of the more challenging criminal justice service users.

Ayshah demonstrated a real commitment to reflective practice, impressing us with her determination to continually improve group work planning, reporting and admin skills. Such was her progress over the course of her placement, Apex worked with North East Scotland College to present her with a Special Achievement Award.

On completion of her HNC, Apex offered Ayshah sessional employment with our Intensive Support Service which involves working with some of the most challenging young



Ayshah Rossetti with Centre Co-ordinator, Gayle Kaufmann

people in Aberdeen. In addition to this she works as part of a service that supports young care leavers to reintegrate into the community, delivers Confidence to Cook for our criminal justice service users, as well as working with Sacro on their adult Intensive Support Service.

Ayshah says that Apex is her favourite place to work. “Everyone is so happy and friendly and supportive. All work places should be like Apex!”

Community Jobs Scotland

Launched in 2011, and brokered by SCVO, Community Jobs Scotland (CJS) is an employability programme aimed at supporting unemployed and vulnerable young people aged 16-29 into paid job training opportunities through the third sector.

Apex has been involved in this initiative since its inception and each year offers a number of full- and part-time trainee positions in our offices across the country, employed as administrators, client support workers or general assistants; this year 13 individuals have worked with us through CJS. Recently there has been a specific focus to provide

placements for care leavers, those with health needs or a disability, and young people with convictions who are new to the world of work.

Apex ensures that each CJS trainee receives the same opportunities as permanent members of staff, mentoring each young person while they receive on the job training as well as training for additional skills such as first aid and health and safety, ensuring they grow in confidence and experience which will take them forward on their own career path. We have been fortunate to be able to retain some of our young trainees as permanent members of Apex staff.



Harry Ward has been a real asset to our Highland team since he joined us through the CJS initiative 18 months ago.

What attracted you to Apex?

I went to Momentum Training after being referred by the Disability Officer at Jobcentre Plus in Inverness. They showed me the placements available and Apex seemed to be the most interesting. After an interview I was offered the position of administrator/receptionist. The staff seemed nice and welcoming and the description of the job fitted me perfectly. I agreed a start date and fitted in slowly but surely.

What sort of things have you been involved in at Apex and what experience have you had?

I was initially working in reception and general admin. I was given an induction into the different office systems and procedures. Through shadowing and support from members of the Highland team I was soon able to learn how to answer the phones correctly, do the jobs board, attendances, databases, letters, petty cash, reporting, statistics and assisting with bids. I was also involved in the outdoor project for a while, but due to my condition we felt it was more beneficial for me to remain in the office. Having said that I will still attend when needed, I also took part in the team's outdoor challenge which was fun and great team building.

What do you like about the team, the work you all do and the organisation as a whole?

Everyone in the Highland team has been very supportive and has welcomed me warmly. I was made to feel part of the team from the beginning and now feel like I have always been here. They have helped build my confidence and I am not the shy boy I was when I started. In fact sometimes they cannot shut me up when I am putting my thoughts across! They have also influenced and supported me when I flew the nest and moved into supported

accommodation on my own. I like having ownership and responsibility of different tasks, eg. petty cash, vehicles, database, etc. In fact I was a main contributor in the initial set up and progression of our new database through communication with Alan Staff and the supplier directly. I was also working with Alan on web conferencing for the whole organisation, which could potentially save us money on travelling. Alan also asks for my suggestions regarding IT.

How has your experience working with Apex benefitted you?

My confidence has soared. I have a pattern to my week; moving into accommodation on my own; I'm interested in Apex and its mission statement and have made some key contacts with some of our partnership agencies. I recently arranged a visit for outdoor staff to Cantraybridge College to see how polytunnels were maintained for a new project we are starting soon. I have now gained the confidence to attend Apex-related training and meetings across Scotland and am more than happy to make myself heard, which was an impossibility before.

What do you plan to do next?

I have been successful in an interview with Apex Highland for the position of Finance Admin under the ESF/Highland Council/NHS Apex Ascend Project. This will be a new chapter which I am approaching with confidence, ability, knowledge and ownership. I am extremely thankful to CJS and Momentum Skills for giving me this opportunity. Also I cannot thank Apex and the Highland Team enough for believing in me, supporting me, coaching me and giving me the chance to prove myself. I will give 100% to my new role and am so happy to be continuing with Apex. I also think Tina is brilliant and I couldn't have done any of this without her.

It has been our pleasure to work with some enthusiastic and talented young people over the years and to assist them with experience and training. Here is what some of our current CJS employees have to say.



"I am aiming to support the young people as best as I can and learn how to interact with the pupils in a helpful and effective way."

Callum Edmonston,
Apex Inclusion



"My time with Apex has been great! I really wish I could stay here for longer than the 6 months! Working here has really opened my eyes to the amount of people that really need support and depend on Apex for help. All the staff have been very welcoming to me, and I will be very sad to go."

Claire McCrorie, Apex Stranraer



"I have gained so many more skills than I thought I would by not only working in the office but participating in Apex community projects. I now feel a lot more confident when I think about future job prospects in this role and believe that Apex has given me the experience and skills to apply for a wide range of available jobs and progress my career."

Jason Gilchrist, Apex Highland



"This is my first job since leaving college where I did an HNC in Computing. I am responsible for the administration of our training courses, reception and answering the phones as well as helping with any IT problems. I enjoy coming in to Apex, in addition to learning work skills it has helped me get into a healthy routine and improve my social skills."

Dylan Cunningham, Apex Grampian

"I've really enjoyed my experience at Apex and the staff have helped me out a lot and they are all really nice to get along with. During a short space of time I've already completed my Heart Start Training, Child Protection Level 1, Naloxone training and I've also completed my GIRFEC training as well."

Kelly Gordon, Apex Grampian

217 people into further training

responsibility:

something that it is your job or duty to deal with

All Cleaned Up

Over the past 12 months All Cleaned Up (ACU) has continued to deliver on its targeted outcomes for the Secret Jobs programme while undergoing a transitional period. With a new Project Development Officer joining the management team we are now in a position to improve Employer Engagement and, ultimately, secure employment for our programme participants.

We are currently in the second year of our Challenge Fund contract managed by Capital City Partnership. We have overcome a difficult first year and are recognised now as a provider that achieves results with a difficult target group.

ACU has made significant progress in developing new partnerships with third sector organisations and in establishing good relations with other referral sources. Currently we are working closely with Shaw Trust which is the prime contractor for Scotland in delivering Work Choice for DWP. In becoming a statutory referral organisation for them, we have established a pipeline where, upon completion of our programme, participants with eligibility for Work Choice are referred to Shaw Trust for support and are funded to become paid members of ACU staff. This relationship has been established in Edinburgh and Glasgow where we have recently sustained two of their funded business places.

ACU has made significant progress in developing new partnerships with third sector organisations and in establishing good relations with other referral sources.

We are now discussing with Shaw Trust the potential of working with its specialist employment service which offers support to individuals furthest removed from the job market and in becoming a host employer for a pilot scheme recently run in HMP Low Moss.

Further to this we have forged strong links with Edinburgh's VOW project, working alongside them and the community payback team, where participants can use their time on the programme to count towards their payback orders. Through this we have begun to develop stronger links with Criminal Justice, Community Renewal teams, Criminal Justice Social Work and Venture Trust, while continuing to have a steady stream of referrals from Jobcentre Plus.

208 individuals into
sustained employment



**We take the stress,
out of your mess!**



Secret Jobs

Over the last year, in partnership with our social enterprise, All Cleaned Up (ACU), Apex has been running a mentoring and job placement programme in Edinburgh and the Lothians called Secret Jobs. In the next year ACU will be taking sole ownership of this programme under the leadership of ACU's Employability & Project Development Officer, Ally Scott.

The focus of each 8 week programme is to work with individuals aged 25 and over who have a history of offending with the aim of moving them into permanent employment. Industrial cleaning is used as a conduit to access sustainable employment within the local cleaning industry, linking in with local employers. The course is a mixture of classroom and on the job training activities with ACU with the final 2 weeks spent on work placement.

.....
With his confidence growing, Graeme has set himself targets of achieving his CSCS card and commencing driving lessons within the next 6 months.
.....

As well as work placement activities, trainees are offered a formal UKCPAS Cleaning Foundation Certificate and a Construction Skills qualification level 1 or 2. Individuals are also given the opportunity to take part in additional training with a view to obtaining their CSCS card as well as other related certificated training such as First Aid. These qualifications, along with the key skills development, are attractive additions to a CV.

Ally explains the journey of one of the trainees.



All Cleaned Up is running the Secret Jobs programme

Graeme* was referred to the Secret Jobs programme in October of last year through Jobcentre Plus and The Action Group. At the start of the programme he was short on confidence, with little or no motivation, and had recently become a father. As well as this, Graeme also has an offending background and mild learning difficulties, including quite severe dyslexia.

Previously, Graeme had engaged with a number of third sector organisations and programmes, including The Princes Trust, Enable Scotland and The Action Group. Although he had participated in valuable personal development opportunities, these never progressed into paid employment - something he had never experienced.

Motivated to "get out the house and do something" and to be more responsible Graeme engaged extremely positively during his time on the programme, impressing his peers and ACU staff with his work ethic and desire to improve his situation.

He has now been granted a further 6 month extension to his contract and Graeme continues to be extremely proactive, progressing the necessary paperwork towards the achievement of his CSCS certification and he has identified his need to improve his literacy skills in recent support and supervision reviews. ACU is supporting Graeme to undertake adult literacy classes and helping him to access other services which will be of benefit.

With his confidence growing, Graeme has set himself targets of achieving his CSCS card and commencing driving lessons within the next 6 months. He is also keen to improve his literacy skills sufficiently to allow him to identify future opportunities.

Annual Lecture 2015

In September, we were delighted to welcome the Cabinet Secretary for Justice, Michael Matheson MSP, to deliver Apex Scotland's Annual Lecture 2015, entitled Fairer Justice: A Vision for Scotland.

We were pleasantly surprised by the response we received. The fact that we were inundated by requests to attend therefore says something not only about the speaker but also about the times we live in. At a period of unprecedented change in the justice sector the chance to hear the vision for the future from the man who is responsible for taking it forward clearly touched a nerve across many disciplines and interest groups, and a packed Signet Library gave evidence to this.

In his address Mr Matheson talked about the scope of his vision for a fairer and more progressive justice system in Scotland, one that we can feel proud of and which is based on evidence and good practice. In a wide-ranging discourse he looked at everything from rethinking custody to redefining offending and spoke of reframing the debate, especially around public perceptions and historical approaches. Starting from a position which compares unfavourably with our international neighbours insofar as our imprisonment rates go, he described a pathway to change which offers a new and more person-centred community and criminal justice approach. The address was followed by a question and answer session where Mr Matheson took questions from the floor.



Michael Matheson MSP

Apex's Annual Lecture is now a key date in the justice calendar and we were pleased that Mr Matheson's thoughts fit well with our desire to promote forward thinking and fresh discussion in the Scottish Justice field.

A recording and transcription of the lecture can be viewed on our website.

Dumfries Young People Plan To Go Into Business



The young people from Apex Dumfries' Employability Fund service this year entered and won a competition with Santander Bank.

Personal Development Mentor, Louise Handley, and her young participants entered for a grant award of £5,000 so that the group could start up a small, non-profit removal and litter picking business. The project will be integrated with the Employability Fund service as part of work experience hours.

Louise and her participants are very excited about the project and have been making plans to take it forward.

Louise and the young people collect their winnings

A Final Word

We have now been in the grip of the austerity agenda for so long it seems that this is the age of austerity and we need to get used to it.

The entire third sector has had to run twice as fast to achieve half as much progress as before. We see the real impacts of the cuts on our local authority partners and are experiencing the chill arising from this. There was a time when some projects that perhaps were not as well founded as others inevitably went to the wall as financial stringencies hit home, but now some well-established initiatives are having to close or reduce because Councils are not funded to deal with helping offenders or those at risk of offending. There is a danger that by moving away from local authorities and partners like Apex, Government policy might end up turning its back on communities. It is here where victims live and perpetrators must return, and if sizable parts of that equation - local communities - are disengaged then the opportunity to embed rehabilitation will be lost to an institutional response that cannot provide the same ethos.

It is not all doom and gloom, however, because the pressure on old alliances has led Apex to seek new partners and our new social enterprise has the potential to do something that is new and local in Midlothian. As an organisation we have had to alter and reduce our structure but we believe we have reached the final point in that fairly long drawn out, and quite painful, process and we have now stabilized and plan to develop other new initiatives. We need to recognise that the way we organised our bidding and sought partners 10 years ago may not produce the same results, but by sharpening our business development and moving in a different direction then Apex can continue to have a positive impact on reducing offending.



We do need to look at ourselves as an organisation much more critically; this is something we have begun to do and, as a result, we will become even more effective. There is a massive challenge for Apex Scotland staff, but particularly our senior managers, in addressing this challenge. I am confident they will rise to it.

There have been changes this year in our Board of Trustees: Brian Cole, a valued colleague and long-serving and previous Vice Chair, has stepped down; as has Moly MacMillan, who made a significant contribution to All Cleaned Up; my thanks to them both. Gordon Samson formerly of Police Scotland and Central Scotland Police has stepped into role of Vice Chair and has already begun to make his presence felt.

Finally, I want to thank our partners, funders, volunteers and, of course, our wonderful staff for all they have contributed to Apex Scotland over the past twelve months.

Brian Fearon
Chair

“We do need to look at ourselves as an organisation much more critically; this is something we have begun to do and, as a result, we will become even more effective. There is a massive challenge for Apex Scotland staff, but particularly our senior managers, in addressing this challenge. I am confident they will rise to it”.

BRIAN FEARON
APEX CHAIR

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