

New Women Offenders Group

Inside this issue:

Women's Group	1/2
Board Meeting	3
Aron's story	4
Abriachan Forest	5
Outdoor Projects	6/7
Service User Updates	8/9
SMART	10
Service Development	10
Acupuncture	11
Other news	12

As recommended through the recent Angiolini report on Women Offenders, we have developed in partnership with Criminal Justice Social Work an 8 week rolling programme to support those who are on community based orders and our first group started in August 2013. We have in place a dedicated female Personal Development Mentor to support the women all day every Tuesday and Thursday, along with a separate female acupuncture group on Wednesday's. Through this partnership we have in place "taster sessions" where outside agencies give presentations to the group including Women's Aid; Jobcentre Plus; housing and Citizen's Advice. Our own "taster sessions" include: Budgeting (obtaining id, opening bank accounts, making informed choices when shopping); Heart Start and Rehab and Disclosure.

Even at this early stage, we have had positive feedback from both Social Work and the women where the group has gelled together well at Abriachan Forest Trust. Through team work/building there has been an increase in self-esteem and motivation. A greater awareness of the environment through conservation work and using the forest for walks and cycling. To enjoy everything outdoors, such as cooking on the camp fire, using tools to make small stools and bird hides and to have the women's social worker involved with the group, has allowed there to be a clear line of communication.

First course of 8 completed 23rd October, with further ongoing support in the community.



For more information
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New Women Offenders Group

A message from Women's Social Worker

It has been a very humbling and moving experience for me to have taken part in the First Women's Abriachan Group. Prior to the women starting this new approach, many had reservations about attending a 'group out in the wild'. Moreover, their biggest fear was meeting new people in a different environment and stepping out of their comfort zone.

Many women have been diagnosed with mental health issues, addiction and have come from a fractured background where abuse and domestic violence has been evident in their lives. Stepping out of their comfort zone was a major hurdle to overcome.

From the onset, the women gelled very quickly and it was clear, a peer support group was forming. Taking them out of area and involving them in therapeutic activities which involved team building and thinking out of the box has been invaluable. A different environment has encouraged the women to reflect, discuss and challenge their experiences in a safe place. More importantly, it has empowered them to be motivated to make and sustain positive changes in their lives. It has also increased their self-confidence and self worth. The women have expressed a wish to take 'control' of their lives.

It is amazing in such a short space of time that the women have learned new skills and developed different strategies to coping with challenging situations. The women have expressed '*the Courts should have done this a long time ago*'. They do not feel judged nor do they judge others. All women developed empathy with each other and offered advice and support to each other. All feel that the staff involved have been '*non judgemental*' and '*genuinely cared about them*'. Phrases such as, inspired, enlightened, chilled and happy have been described at the end of a day.

The Women in this programme have expressed an interest in attending Abriachan on a regular basis either voluntary or being part of their Order. It has given them structure and routine to which previously has been either a chaotic lifestyle or an isolated one.

Yvonne MacDonald, Criminal Justice Social Work



'Feel stronger, like there is no one there. I am not looking over my shoulder. Ready to gain life again, slowly but surely, ready to start up again and gain my life back'.

'Helped me move on with my life and enjoyed working as a team'.

'Helped me regain strength after a head trauma. Taught me how to work as a team.'

'Interesting and worthwhile taking part. Lots of FUN'.

Apex Scotland Board Meeting



Apex Scotland, Highland Unit hosted our first Board Meeting in October 2013. Service Users and Peer Mentors were able to meet our Board and Corporate Management Team where they freely discussed their past and how our services are currently supporting them. Service Users were presented with John Muir and Heartstart certificates, along with those individuals who had successfully passed their Construction Skills Certification Scheme test. We received positive feedback from our Board about the work we offer and they thoroughly enjoyed spending time with our Service Users where they are ordinarily unable to do this due to other commitments.



Pictured (l-r)
Brian Cole (Board), Gemma Robertson, Tammy Kernahan, Alistair McDonald (Service Development Manager), Anne Pinkman (Board) and Alan Staff (Chief Executive).



Presented with their John Muir Awards for Conservation (l-r)
Alistair McDonald (Service Development Manager), Anne Pinkman (Board), Rachel Parkin, Mike McCarron (Chairman), Colin Johnson, Alistair Martin and Gemma Robertson



Service Users, Peer Mentors and Board Members (l-r)
Colin Johnson, Alistair Martin, James McDade, Mike McCarron (Chairman), Caleb Bain, Craig MacLeod and Brian Fearon (Board)



Aron's story

I moved from Glasgow to Inverness and started work with Apex Scotland in February 2013 through Community Jobs Scotland as an Administrator on a 6 month placement. Eight months ago I had virtually no work experience whatsoever. Working with the team in Inverness, I quickly increased my knowledge while gaining experience and confidence in my role. Through this I earned myself a full-time position as an Administration Assistant/ Personal Development Mentor. I am currently being trained to provide one-to-one interventions for service users.

I have taken over the Construction Skills Certification Scheme group training and job search sessions for service users who need assistance when searching online or need time to do their job search. I have also recently been accepted for a free place on the Young Scotland Programme to which I will write an argument for presentation while being coached through alongside being taught other communication techniques over a period of four days in late October 2013.

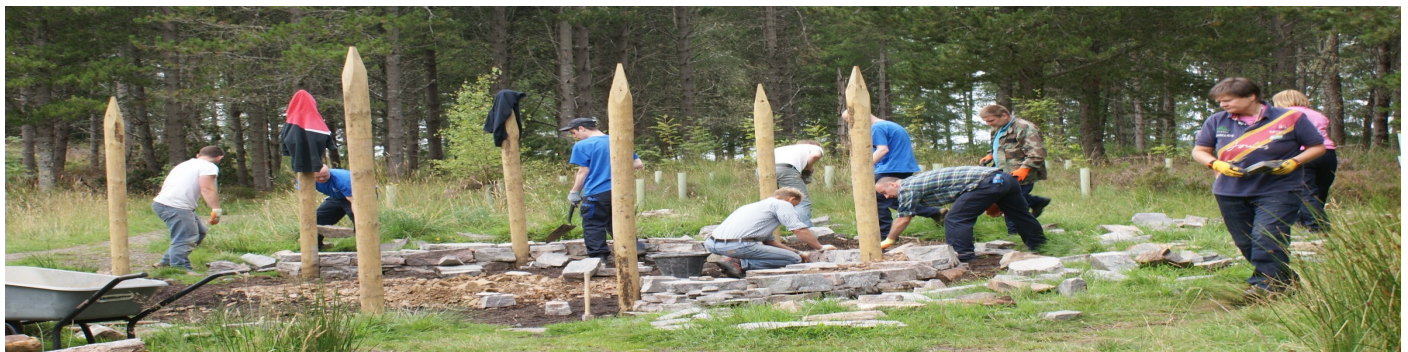
Through Apex I have completed training such as Heart Start and Emergency First Aid at Work where I feel this has given me relevant experience, confidence and knowledge to act in emergency situations. I have also passed my CSCS training. As I have gone through the process of training, sitting and passing the CSCS test, this gives me an added insight to support my learners. Other relevant training I have done is working with sex offenders, so I now know how to act, react and what to be aware of when I work in two-to-one interviews with a more experienced member of staff. I attended the SAPHIR employability course which I feel is great experience with regards to working with service users on employability and guidance. Looking to the future I would like to further support the team and train to be an auricular acupuncturist to assist in the delivery of our acupuncture sessions. I think the amount of care, value and training that Apex puts into their employees directly mirrors the amount they put into their service users, which clearly displays how the organisation treats everyone equally.

Whilst carrying out my main roles with Apex, when I can, I like to help out my colleagues in their roles if they need it, for example with the outdoor activities and travelling to other units.

Working with Apex over the last 8 months has given me many new skills and I have established excellent working relationships with my colleagues and service users. I am preparing a 1,000 word presentation as part of a sponsored place on the residential Young Scot Programme, Edinburgh—update in next newsletter.



Abriachan Forest



At Abriachan work began in early summer to dismantle and remove the old Bronze Age hut in preparation of the new one being built. The original hut had been built 15 years before and was desperately needing replaced. Since its removal, the ground has been levelled off, new roof supports have been buried in the ground and the drystone dyke completed. Over the next few weeks, our service users and volunteers will benefit from learning how to thatch the roof of the new hut.



Outdoor Projects

The Community Challenge outdoor projects within Inverness and surrounding area are continuing each Tuesday with a group of dedicated service users. Some of these service users have Community Payback Orders enabling them to reduce their hours, but also to be seen to be doing their unpaid work and putting something back into their community.

Over the last few months our outdoor project has cleared up areas including Kingsmills; Raigmore Estate; Millburn Road and Kinlocheil, Fort William.

While at Raigmore an area was located that was used by intravenous drug users and cleared of discarded needles. Overgrown branches blocking street lights were also removed allowing paths to be illuminated, making it safer for residents to use these areas during hours of darkness. A pedestrian path leading from the Estate was also cleared of overgrown trees, bushes and brambles again allowing pedestrians greater access to this area.

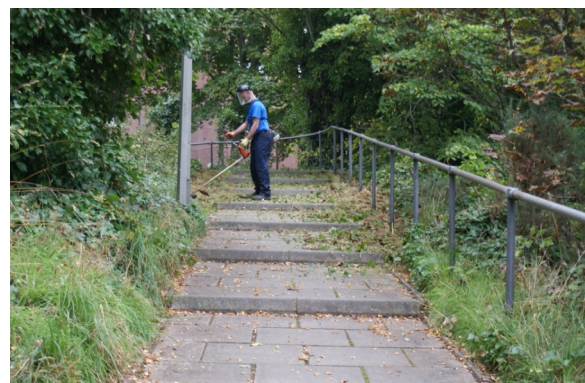
2 years ago the Challenge Team cleared the Escarpment in Millburn Road and over the last few weeks the Team has again returned to clear overgrown areas there and have a general tidy up including discarded rubbish. This will be an ongoing task.

At a recent meeting with Highland Council Convener and some Ward Manager's it was agreed that the work carried out by the Challenge Team during the last couple of years had greatly improved the visual effect of these areas and that they wished this to continue.

Ward Managers within Inverness are to identify new pieces of work where the Challenge Team can benefit the community now and in the future.

These outdoor projects have had a positive effect on our service users, which has been useful and challenging. One such service user had stated that in future he will dispose of his rubbish in the appropriate bins.

The team are looking for any other ideas of challenges over the winter months November-March. Please contact David McNulty if anything comes to mind or you feel the team could support a worthy cause.



Pictured: Raigmore Estate, Inverness



Outdoor Projects

Our Challenge Team was approached to help with outdoor maintenance work at the Kinlochleil Outdoor Centre, just outside Fort William. This was to cut back overgrown bushes and shrubs as well as cutting the grass areas surrounding the outdoor centre.

During July one member of staff accompanied by 5 peer mentors travelled to the outdoor centre, along with relevant tools and equipment for the task in hand.

The weather was dry and hot and the initial areas surrounding the centre were cut back and strimmed. This included pruning overhanging branches and bushes from the driveway, clearing weeds and strimming around the whole building.

In August we again travelled to Kinlochleil where the clearing of the driveway was completed and the front grass area cut with the mower. The side and back area was again strimmed leaving the outdoor centre looking a lot better than when we had first attended there.

This was a good exercise for the Challenge Team as they were able to visit the outdoor centre and see the stunning views in Lochaber. In exchange for our labour we have been offered 3 days free accommodation at Badaguish.





Service User Updates

Dimitri was referred to us while on his Structured Deferred Sentence by Criminal Justice Social Work. A native of Poland, speaking no English and only understanding a little, initially it sounded like quite a challenge. We quickly engaged the assistance of a translator and to minimise cost, planned a short intervention.

All his documents and qualifications were translated and it transpired that he was a qualified welder/engineer and had his own business in Poland. While in Scotland he worked in fish factory after fish factory.

He turned up early and attended every appointment at 9.00am. We made a CV, created an e-mail address, uploaded it to every recruitment site we could, including one specifically for Polish workers in the United Kingdom. He attended his Construction Skills Certification Scheme Training with Polish voice over, while also attending English classes at a local church free of charge. Within one month from initial referral, job offers started rolling in and he accepted a position as an Agricultural Engineer on a local estate. *Dimitri*, his expectant wife and 2 children were over the moon and overwhelmed by the enthusiastic and generous help they had received.

In November 2012 *Martin* was referred via the Addiction Team at HMP Inverness. He wanted our service to help him with re-training, employability and get back into work.

During his time in custody he attended regularly with Apex for acupuncture and Construction Skills Certification Scheme Training. He completed 6 weeks of training and was ready to sit his CSCS test within the prison. *Martin* enjoyed acupuncture as it helped him relax - especially as he had his CSCS test coming up.

He successfully passed his CSCS test and was now eligible to apply for work on a construction site. He was released from prison in June 2013 where he continued working with Apex and received help with creating a CV and applying for jobs.

In mid July, *Martin* was successful with an application he had applied for as a roofer on a building site. With having his CSCS card and the benefit of his driving licence he was able to accept the job. He is currently still employed with the same company and is enjoying life.



Alexander was on a Community Payback Order with 150 hours of unpaid work for Breach of the Peace while about town one night—it was always Alexander that got into bother, never his friends.

His Criminal Justice Social Worker referred him to Apex in July. Alexander signed up for employability training, our Smart and acupuncture group and the Outdoor Project Team. Through attending our outdoor project at Arbrichtan Forest Trust provided Alexander with many new skills, including: working as part of a team; learning how forestry worked and the pleasure of being involved in a sustainable community project which benefited all those involved. Inspiring creativity and knowledge, Alexander turned up for every opportunity Apex engaged him in and over the weeks, encouraged and helped by Apex Peer Mentors and staff he attended an open day at Inverness College. Having his doubts and fears alleviated, he applied for a course in Conservation at The Scottish School of Forestry. His age, inexperience and criminal convictions counted for nothing against his enthusiasm and determination to access an environment he never thought possible after his day in court. Last seen, Alexander was successful in his application and is enjoying learning through his college course.

Martyn was referred to us in June 2013. He was looking to go back to work, but there were some barriers to him gaining this.

After his initial appointment Martyn brought in his CV to be updated. Once he was happy with the final draft, we discussed his relevant offences and wrote a letter of disclosure for him. Ensuring that it was concise and to the point.

After completing Martyn's CV and letter of disclosure he was more confident in his job search and starting apply for work.

From the jobs he applied for online, he had not heard back from any of the employers. Martyn was quite disheartened and his self-esteem was gradually being chipped away. Through word-of-mouth he had heard of a job, applied and was successful in gaining work in the manufacturing sector.



The only SMART choice is Apex

Apex has been running the only SMART (Self Management and Recovery Training) community group in Inverness for over one year now. Taking place on a Wednesday afternoon, it is a lively and positive resource for service users to discuss their continuing recovery from addictions and negative habits, empowering them to change their behaviours and goals. The group inspires and encourages motivation and challenges its members to broaden their horizons and outlook on themselves and the opportunities available throughout Inverness. Encouraging learning, participants are able to sign up to the free online course "Get Smart" and become group facilitators themselves and go out into the wider community and extend their recovery. Topics included for discussion are: building and maintaining motivation; coping with urges and managing thoughts, feelings and behaviours.

A few noticeable group participants of late have been Programme Officer's from HMP Inverness who are on a fact finding and skill sharing mission before starting a SMART group for their prisoners month. This will be delivered in partnership with Scottish Prison Service, Criminal Justice Social Work and Apex. Agnes Sangster, Social Work, has agreed to support SPS staff to develop the Inside Out programme. Apex have sponsored the initial batch of workbooks via the ASCEND ESF programme.

Service Development Update

Since October 2012, our PACE (Prison Addressing Criminality and Employability) worker has achieved the following:

90 prisoners have had initial interview (self assessment/action plan)

Heartstart	76 completed
CSCS test	31 with 26 successful outcomes
Jobs	6

There have been 58 sessions of acupuncture with 51 prisoners attending over that period.

We have been successful in our bid to deliver CSCS coaching and testing through ILA Scotland. With our 2 pilots we have been over subscribed and this will enable greater flexibility for future courses.

Apex have a new worker through PSP Shine initiative—Katrina Paton—working with harder to reach female offenders 6 weeks prior to liberation and thereafter supporting in the community. Her catchment area is Highland region and Aberdeen City South taking referrals from the new Grampian prison and HMP Inverness.



Auricular Acupuncture

As mentioned earlier in our newsletter, we have set up a women's only group while continuing to offer a mixed group. Through this group, once they have completed their 8 sessions, they can move onto the mixed group.

The sessions have been ongoing since mid August and with it being a new group there has been a period of adjustment to work this into their schedules with Social Work. The majority of women suffer from mental health and addiction issues and feedback so far has been positive.

Each service user attending our acupuncture has weekly sessions over 6-8 week period. They can opt in/out dependant on their health/wellbeing and what benefit they have had from the treatment.

Although we deliver our acupuncture sessions primarily for stress release, anxiety and relaxation, our service users have seen marked improvements within their lives, such as:

- ◆ Reduced withdrawal symptoms from drug and alcohol use
- ◆ Deeper and better sleeping
- ◆ Reduced craving
- ◆ Reduced stress, anxiety and irritation
- ◆ Improved appetite, sense and smell

Positive feedback we have had include:

"I slept better, felt more rested and relaxed and staff at the unit commented on how 'chilled' out I was"

"Today I felt I was more positive and happier due to doing the five finger qi gong relaxation technique. After my first session I had a great weekend, now I'm looking forward to being even more de-stressed after my second"

"New experiences often cause nerves, but can bring a sense of well-being when achieved"

"As always I thought the session was brilliant. It is a real highlight of my week"

We currently have 5 staff qualified to deliver acupuncture and a number of volunteers who assist both in the prison and community.

Apex have funded further places for Criminal Justice Social Work staff and have shared practice delivery.



Other News.....

Over the last 6 months we have achieved the following outcomes through our team:

- ◆ Number of participants who have received support: **72**
- ◆ Number of participants entering employment: **9**
- ◆ Number of participants engaging in voluntary work: **5**
- ◆ Number of participants entering education or training: **6**
- ◆ Number of participants gaining John Muir Award: **13**
- ◆ Number of participants gaining Heartstart certificate: **11**
- ◆ In addition voluntary throughcare via ESF ASCEND project **59**

Area of **Employment** gained: construction; conservation; self-employment; gardener; retail and manufacturing. **Voluntary positions** with Newstart, Road to Recovery, at a local radio station and a local garden maintenance charity.

Further education courses include: School of Forestry; Nigg training course; Training and Guidance; bricklaying and IOSH—Working Safely training.

High **training outputs** as mentioned include Heartstart First Aid qualification 11 and 13 John Muir Award.

