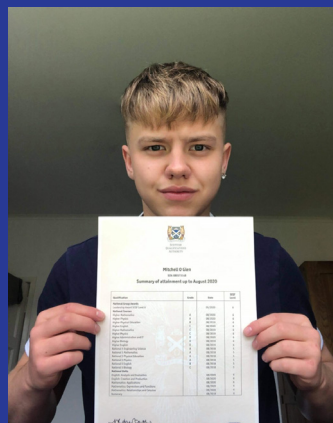



 apex
 scotland
 Annual Report 2020

being part of the story



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Apex Scotland Board

Brian Fearon, **Chair** *(retired December 2019)*
 Gordon Samson, **Vice Chair** *(Chair from December 2019)*
 Sheriff Frank Crowe *(retired December 2019)*
 David Asher
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 Jim Hunter
 Giles Robinson
 Michael Dickson
 Ann Landels
 Karen Kelly
 Fiona Taylor

Patron

The Rt Hon Lord Campbell
 of Pittenweem CH CBE QC

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EUROPE & SCOTLAND
 European Social Fund
 Investing in a Smart, Sustainable and Inclusive Future

Welcome

Having been a member of the Board of Apex Scotland for over six years, I was extremely honoured to assume the role of Chair as from December 2019, having observed and learnt from my predecessor, Brian Fearon, who had been heavily involved with Apex for over ten years. Albeit a further year on, I feel I should express my personal thanks to Brian for his safe and progressive stewardship of the Board and wider organisation over his tenure, during which I learnt a lot about Board management for which I am extremely grateful.

My six years on the Board of Apex, initially as a member and subsequently as Vice Chair and Chair of the finance and audit sub committee, has been extremely interesting, enlightening and challenging, but not always necessarily in that order!

My professional background is policing, thirty years service with Central Scotland Police and Police Scotland, in a variety of roles and supervisory positions, which has allowed me to experience first hand the challenges facing our client group at Apex and how they are engaged with and managed through the wider Criminal Justice system within Scotland. Our current Board is an eclectic mix of individuals with diverse backgrounds covering business areas such as finance, law, criminal and community justice, business management, public accounting, education and homelessness, all of which have a relevance to the challenges we face, as an organisation, at some point or another. We have several relatively new members on our Board and I am pleased to say that the energy brought by new faces and perspectives is always welcomed and I am encouraged by the drive, desire and challenge of these members to continue the oversight and strategic management of Apex.

We may all come from differing professional and personal backgrounds but through our induction processes and wide discussion amongst Board



Gordon Samson, Chair of Apex Scotland Board

members around Apex core values, we all have a strong, shared appreciation and agreement about our purpose and priorities. We have a full understanding of the challenges faced by our client group, where they have come from, the difficulties of 'change', the support they require and the tools, education and experience needed to redirect their

futures in a positive manner. As a Board member, it has been extremely important to understand and appreciate the 'grass roots' of the service that Apex delivers; who the client group is, who our staff are and how they interact with each other. From this, what has overwhelmed me over the past six years is how much the Board, and perhaps more importantly,

We cannot lose sight of the fact that we are very good at what we do, we have a highly capable and dedicated staff who are committed to achieving as much as possible for their clients to the benefit of the individual and wider society.

the staff of Apex, from the Corporate Management Team through to the personal managers and service deliverers spread across the country, care about our clients and believe in their ability to change. Quite often this belief and caring can be the catalyst for positive change.

The past year 2019-20 has continued to be a very challenging business environment for the entire third sector, and Apex has felt this keenly. At times, significant confusion around changing funding models and our relationship with public sector, most notably Scottish Government, which is increasingly conducted at 'arms length' through third parties, has arisen. This often led to a lack of clarity around what is expected of Apex and their third sector partners in respect of evidencing requirements for payment and a sense, from our perspective, that the goalposts are constantly moving. With a significant proportion of our funding having moved towards a 'payment by results' model over recent years, based upon shorter term contracts that have been subject to delays and deferrals, it has meant considerable financial uncertainty, making it extremely difficult to budget even a year in advance. Nevertheless, I am extremely pleased and proud to say that, on every occasion, Apex's senior management team has consistently risen to all of the challenges encountered, charting a way through periods of uncertainty with creativity and sound advice, which in turn allowed the Board to plan and approve a course of action that has successfully seen us negotiate this period.

During this time, all operational staff across the third sector felt acute uncertainty, knowing the impact that it could have on their own contracts and job security and Apex has not been immune to this either. This is only going to become even more challenging as access to European funding dwindles with the advent of Brexit and uncertainty remains around what, if anything, will replace it. However, despite all of this, the performance and commitment of Apex's operational staff, to their clients and the organisation, has remained outstanding and is greatly appreciated.

From the foregoing it can be seen that the Board has two areas of practical interest and concern, which will be expanded on throughout this year's report, namely, the experience/ perspective of our clients and that of our staff, an interdependency that is at the crux of all we do.

As the business year drew to a close we also had to address the unprecedented and significant challenge of the pandemic covid-19, the full extent of which has still to be ascertained, but will undoubtedly impact very significantly. The Board continues to have oversight of the Corporate Management Team's approach to this, and the far-reaching implications on our staff, clients and service delivery.

Apex has always been recognised for its innovative approaches and the introduction of two Board-sanctioned social enterprises over recent years is evidence of our attempts to diversify to meet the needs of our client group,

with the added possibility of creating an independent funding stream. Over the past year, I am pleased to say that one such enterprise, the commercial cleaning company, All Cleaned Up, is showing positive signs of financial stability, and indeed growth, whilst employing a significant number of client group members. An excellent turnaround which is hopefully the basis for future success.

More broadly, as we move forwards, it is the Board's priority to continue to support Apex's engagement with Scottish Government and our other partners, emphasising our undoubted strengths and expertise within the criminal justice arena, both independently and together with some of our other third sector colleagues. We cannot lose sight of the fact that we are very good at what we do, we have a highly capable and dedicated staff who are committed to achieving as much as possible for their clients to the benefit of the individual and wider society. As some Board members come to the end of their tenure we need to continue to attract new members with the necessary skills and drive to meet the ongoing and developing challenges, this will be a priority for the forthcoming year.

It is only appropriate that I recognise and thank all staff within Apex, most notably the Corporate Management Team and their direct support within head office, who have worked tirelessly in the face of an everchanging and challenging financial environment and consistently managed to deliver within demanding timescales. Similarly, our staff based throughout the country in regional offices are recognised for their understanding and unswerving commitment to Apex, leading to their significant achievements in respect of clients.

On behalf of all Board members I express our sincere gratitude.

Gordon Samson
Chair of Apex Scotland Board

Who's Writing the Story?

Well there is no escaping the fact that I had never envisaged writing an Annual Report under such extraordinary circumstances, nor the feeling that this has truly been a bit of an annus horribilis. The last year started with a complete upheaval as we, along with many other third sector bodies, faced the prospect of losing European funding due to problems at Governmental/ European level. No sooner had we successfully negotiated that crisis than further problems appeared with access to training funds, and of course the whole Brexit thing and continuing lack of clarity about what happens post December 2020. Our fledgling social enterprise at Newtongrange submerged under flooding caused by faulty drains and we were unable to continue trading after a promising start, and finally, to cap it all, a global pandemic comes along and we suddenly have to completely change the way we operate.

I confess my head has not stopped spinning with the constant challenges we have faced up to, and I can only state publicly my admiration for, and thanks to, all of my colleagues who have borne this all with stoicism, good humour, professionalism and adaptability. Despite all the uncertainties Apex continues to act out of compassion for those we seek to assist, to develop activities and approaches which are relevant and geared towards progress regardless of barriers, and to see this commitment to the mission of Apex rewarded through the evidence of achievement and in particular the stories of those we work with, some of which you will read about in this report.

The last year was characterised by a far greater emphasis on the provision of skills based training and structured progression as we encouraged service users to aim higher in their aspirations, to behave differently where needed to enable progress and to change their future, not only in terms of reducing offending behavior but in sustainable



Alan Staff, Chief Executive

life changing actions, because at Apex we never believe that anyone is defined by their past or their criminal history. Everyone can change their story if they choose to do so, and we are proud to be part of some of those stories, even if it is just for a chapter. Being part of the story is an interesting concept. Whose story?

The reality is that we are all part of each other's story regardless of where we come from or what we have done or achieved, but the justice system we work with often has little room for really treating people as individuals. Certain actions have certain punishments and whether that punishment is in any way helpful in preventing a repeat of the offence is often of less importance than doing things by the book. It is encouraging therefore that

we have been able to work closely with court services, Scottish Government, Community Justice Scotland, police and social work among others, in trying to re-imagine how a modern and effective justice system might look.

Apex has long championed the merits of restorative and reparative justice models, supervised educational and behavioral approaches and alternatives to prison. We understand the negative aspect of depriving people of the opportunity to regain dignity and change their lifestyles by models which effectively remove responsibility from the individual through custodial methods. We know that change is far more likely if people are encouraged to find meaningful employment and to take proper responsibility for their actions

The reality is that we are all part of each other's story regardless of where we come from or what we have done or achieved, but the justice system we work with often has little room for really treating people as individuals.

without abdicating things like having to provide for a family. Over this last year we have seen changes in legislation which show a clear direction towards this more enlightened attitude but there are still many questions to be answered. If we use prisons less, then where are the services to supply the sort of community engagement needed to make this a better option? Where will we see any transfer of resources, because without that how can we hope to make the good intentions prosper? What about victims and their desire for fairness and justice?

When we start to unpick all of this it can get very messy, and often what results is numerous little projects and pilot schemes because no one really has the nerve to adopt a scheme and make it work, whilst at the same time saying to other inefficient areas of the justice environment, I am sorry that model just does not work so we won't be funding it. It will take courage that is for sure, but that is what brings me back to our theme for this year. Being part of the story of our service users and their families means that we hear and see what actually works and the impact of those things which do not.

There is much talk about hearing from people with lived experience at policy

level which is good, but always brings a wry smile to my face when I hear it. We spend most of our time listening to those stories and adapting our actions to reflect the needs we observe. I think deep down most of us know what works and why, the harder thing is what do you do about the historical sacred cows which struggle to accept any idea of progressive justice and continue to maintain concepts like a war on crime? If we want good endings for our stories in Scotland, we will not get them by waging war on our own citizens, or anyone else for that matter, nor can we have the arrogance to write their stories for them. We will get them by putting pen and paper in the hands of those who feel, for whatever reason, excluded or rejected by society and helping them start to write their own tales.

I really hope that in reading this Annual Report you will not only get an overview of how we have been doing despite all the adversity, but that you will start to see the ethos of the organisation, the underlying compassion which translates into intensely practical activity. Whatever we can achieve is a product of that ethos and the way in which those we serve respond to that.

Alan Staff
Chief Executive

“Well my experience with Apex Scotland has been amazing. They have helped me through so much and have brought me out my shell, which I really didn't think would be possible! They have got me to a new comfort level where I'm able to try/do new things! It's always a one to one meeting they never judge you with anything always giving you the best advice. I really don't think there is anything else to be truthful. Apex Scotland is doing amazing!”

JC, service user

We worked with
over **3,500** people



11% were women

33% were under 21



1,796 people used virtual
visits service, **418** of
which were children

53 clients met at
the prison gate



76 people engaged
in SMART Recovery

881 qualifications
attained over **200**
training courses



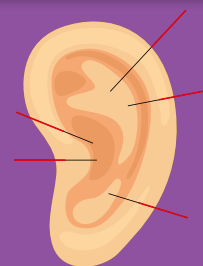
3,360 hours working with
RSOs/MAPPA clients

Almost **6,300** volunteering
hours completed



Our foodbanks fed **3,948**
people, **20%** of whom
were children

461 acupuncture attendances



RE:SET school services
prevented **2,795** days
being lost to exclusion

Being part of

Our Story

“Storytelling is the most powerful way to put ideas into the world today.”

Robert McKee
Screenwriter

Annual Lecture

Apex Scotland's 2019 Annual Lecture saw a move from our traditional home of the Signet Library. Having taken on board comments from those who have attended the Lecture in recent years about the need for easier access, we found an ideal spot to relocate our event just across the road: the beautiful setting of Edinburgh's City Chambers.

Our objective in putting on what has become one of the highlights in the Justice calendar is to invite speakers who are influential thinkers in today's Justice dialogue, and to offer an agenda which promotes new and innovative ideas, research or insight into the issues which are most topical as we aspire to a modern and progressive justice system in Scotland.

As Chair of the Sentencing Commission and the first woman ever to hold the position of Lord Justice Clerk, we were delighted to welcome The Rt. Hon. Lady Dorrian as our speaker. Coming just the day after the publication of an IPSOS MORI poll commissioned by the Sentencing Council on public perceptions

of justice, Lady Dorrian's lecture, titled *Sentencing Guidelines: Challenges and Opportunities*, was both timely and insightful. Her comments about the challenges of conveying progressive ideas on justice and inconsistent provision of community services and alternative sentencing options prompted some interesting questions from the floor. We were heartened to hear that Lady Dorrian's commitment to the justice agenda includes utilising the resources which the third sector can bring as part of a multi-sectoral community based approach.

A video of the event and a transcript of the lecture can be found on our website.



Our Lecture's new home

Strategic Contribution

With Apex's experience and knowledge of the justice sector, particularly in relation to our client group, we are often consulted to advise and give guidance to Government, the public sector, the media and community groups.

This year we contributed to a number of strategic groups and forums both through our membership and by invitation. Of particular note is advisory and working group activity with Community Justice Scotland including prevention, alternatives to custody and commissioning as well as different meetings with Scottish Government Ministers for Justice and Employment. We were even asked to speak at the House of Lords launch of the new social mobility pledge headed up by Aberdeen Standard Life which encourages employers to sign up to employing people with convictions.

We have led on responses to consultations from Scottish Government, Police Scotland, Sentencing Council, NHS, Scottish Prison Service and Social Work Scotland on matters such as Employability strategy, Management of Offenders, Presumption Against Short Sentences, changes to the parole guidelines, victim awareness and the use of electronic monitoring.

Our Chief Executive has been asked for media comment on several occasions, giving interviews on BBC radio and television around presumption against short sentences, conditions in prisons and reducing prison populations. He has also been delighted to be asked to give lectures at Napier University, Royal High School, Edinburgh and the CJVSF conference.

What We Do

Apex Scotland was founded over 30 years ago to address the employment and training needs of ex-offenders in the community and those at pre-release stage of a custodial sentence.

Working with those who have offended remains our primary area of expertise, but since that initial strategy was instigated, our services have developed into a more comprehensive range of activity which demonstrates a commitment to mentor, support and encourage people who need to change their behaviour, are at risk of offending and are furthest away from the job market, as well as our teams being active in their local communities.

Our approach is tailored to each individual we work with. Using our A Positive Future assessment tool, and with the support of their Personal Development Mentor, our service users are helped to create an action plan based on our ABC model (Aim higher, Behave Differently, Change your future) which addresses their priorities and effects positive change. We remember that every person has different needs, which may change week to week, but we also know that each person is capable of more than they first believe; our goal is to ensure that our clients see that for themselves too.

In 2019-20 we worked with more than 3,500 individuals over our key services including:

- » Steps
- » Smart Recovery
- » Challenge Team
- » Rehab & Disclosure
- » RAFT
- » CSCS Training
- » Volunteering
- » AYE
- » Foodbank
- » Moving In
- » Shine
- » New Routes
- » RE:SET
- » Virtual Visits
- » Employability Fund

Those who engage in our services often have multiple barriers such as an offending background, including sexual offences; substance abuse; leaving prison; homelessness; leaving care; school exclusion; young people on social work orders; mental health concerns and poverty. The diversity of our services is designed to reflect our purpose, in particular to promote desistance (using early intervention where possible), encourage engagement and give our service users the tools they need to work towards a positive future.

With a strong ethos of ensuring everyone we work with takes their own journey, we adhere to a core set of values that inform all our activities: Equality, Diversity, Integrity, Quality, Innovation and Dignity.

With a strong ethos of ensuring everyone we work with takes their own journey, we adhere to a core set of values that inform all our activities: Equality, Diversity, Integrity, Quality, Innovation and Dignity. You can read more about our values and services on our website.

Apex staff are supportive and pragmatic, creative and engaging with a real desire to help people realise their potential. They walk each step of the journey with their clients and celebrate each achievement because they appreciate the effort each step can take. Our people are the heart of our organisation.

aim higher

Because you can be more than you imagine

behave differently

Because you can do more than you think

change your future

Because you are worth more than you believe

Joanna's Story

"I first started coming to Apex Dumfries in October 2017 after a bereavement. I felt that I needed to stay busy and was looking for a good cause where I could help. I started volunteering with Dumfriesshire Foodbank two days a week and immediately loved the position and felt that I was helping other people that were in crisis. Volunteering really helped me work on my anxiety and boosted my confidence which was at an all-time low after losing my longtime partner.

"After volunteering for a few months I was offered a sessional staff position and I was extremely grateful for the opportunity. Working in the new role increased my confidence further as I was made very welcome by everyone and I started to feel like myself again, thanks to every staff member that took the time to show me how everything worked.

"The team I work with at Apex Dumfries are amazing and I cannot thank them all enough for what they have done for me. My manager, Fiona Dalgleish, has been an amazing mentor she helped me believe in myself again and has taken the time to train me in admin skills as I had no previous experience in this area.

"I have now been here for nearly three years and have learned so much over this time. Sadly at the moment we are all going through this covid-19 crisis, but during this time I was offered a semi-permanent position as long as there is funding to support it. I was so overwhelmed when I was offered this that, yes, I did shed a tear or two! I feel like the team I work with are like my family now. Apex Dumfries pretty much re-built me and for this I will be forever grateful. Not everyone can say they love their job, but I can!"



Joanna Waterson

School Pupils Give Apex a Big Win

This year Apex Grampian was chosen by a group of students from Inverurie Academy to highlight the work we do and how it benefits our community. Having spent time learning about Apex and our services, they presented to the Youth and Philanthropy Initiative judging panel on the issues our clients face, the barriers that can prevent them from moving forward and the prejudices they encounter in their community.

Facing strong competition from another six groups, we were incredibly proud when it was announced that our group had won! £3,000 was awarded to Apex Grampian which is being used to develop our IT for training delivery and to further support our young people engaging in Apex services. Team Leader, Rioghnach Armstrong, commented that "The experience has been very rewarding, from meeting the students, seeing the video they made and achieving this award for our team. We were absolutely delighted and appreciative of the win."



Apex Grampian and students are presented with their win

Ladies Who Lunch

On 2 February 2020 the Dumfries team held its Ladies who Lunch charity event at Casa Mia in Dumfries which was a complete sell out, attended by 180 ladies.

Fundraising volunteer, Jacqui Matheson, set herself a challenge to put on an event to raise as much as she could, splitting the funds between Apex and local breast cancer services. Shops in the community were asked to donate raffle prizes and businesses from the area sponsored a table for £20. Attendees were treated to an amazing two course meal, shortbread favours and flower pins containing information about breast cancer. A survivor of the disease gave an inspiring speech and our team took the opportunity to speak about the fantastic work being done at our foodbanks. The event ended with some bingo fun and a grand total of £3,254 was raised. A fantastic day was had by all!



Ladies who lunch

Powering Through a Pandemic

Phrases such as “unprecedented” and “difficult times” are now commonplace, but we are proud that the ingenuity and flexibility of our management and staff have been supremely evident throughout the covid-19 outbreak in order to see our clients through the worst of times.

As many organisations have had to do, we have made technology work for us in a new way, making sure that our service users could stay in touch with their mentors and access as much online support as possible.

We conducted a brief client survey during lockdown which told us that nearly 60% of our client group felt that their mental health had been impacted. And while many of these individuals do have access to technology, nearly 30% didn't and, of those who did, nearly 50% struggled to keep credit in their phones.

With this in mind, we were delighted to be a recipient of The Wellbeing Fund. This grant allowed us to purchase a number of tablets, phones and data packages for those service users who did not have ready access to technology. Personal development mentors immediately switched to regular supportive phone calls, face time, whatsapp, and other applications to maintain contact with individuals who were at risk of becoming more vulnerable, and some even amended their working hours to ensure that they were available when they would be most needed.

As many organisations have had to do, we have made technology work for us in a new way, making sure that our service users could stay in touch with their mentors and access as much online support as possible.

For the majority of our service users, the path they had been on had taken a sudden swerve and our staff instinctively knew that their focus had to change. In services where our primary attention would have been supporting people towards and into employment, mental health needs and isolation saw our mentors become a lifeline for many individuals whose support networks were no longer available and ensuring people were healthy and well became more important.

Our new online training portal (STACC) was opened to our client group as well as staff, delivering relaxation and meditation sessions for those who were at risk of addictions or anxiety and this has been well received.

STACC has now been developed further, giving our service users online access to training materials and courses which can be completed remotely. This keeps individuals engaged in activity that would otherwise be difficult due to social distancing and health reasons, so that they can continue to achieve qualifications and improve their skills which will ultimately help them find employment as well as increase confidence. The benefits of remote learning with mentor support for our client group is of increasing interest to a number of our partner agencies and we are excited about the new opportunities that our STACC facility could bring.

As this report goes to press the doors that the pandemic slammed shut are starting to reopen, but the full impact on our client group is still to be revealed. We work with people whose personal challenges require grit and effort to overcome and which can keep many employers at arms length. Our hope is that, even in these extraordinary circumstances, by increasing our accessibility and theirs, and with improved learning opportunities through STACC, together with the support and expertise of our mentors, our service users will continue to succeed with positive outcomes in employment, further education and personal achievement.

“Actually never thought they would be able to help me get a job. Now I have certificates and part time work. Apex has helped me a lot.” DC, service user

Apex and Chill

Lauren McDonald explains how she has adapted service provision in recent months.

"I have been practising acupuncture from an early age and became a fully qualified acupuncturist at the age of 16; the youngest in Scotland. I am the Lead Acupuncturist and Assessor in the Apex Highland Unit working alongside five other qualified acupuncturists there.

"Each week we offer five clinics across our Apex unit in Inverness, the County Community Hospital, Invergordon, and Osprey House in Inverness. Our acupuncture groups are very popular with a total of 87 people benefiting in the last 12 months with 461 attendances and 922 hours. Our sessions are often also attended by social work, CPNs and key workers. As part of the session we play relaxation music and carry out the five finger Qi Gong to release tension and increase the flow of energy throughout the body.

"Due to the coronavirus lockdown, and the start of home working, we could no longer continue with our acupuncture groups and service users told us they were struggling with anxiety and mental health. I started to think about how to provide the service in a new way, researching meditation tapes that I thought would be beneficial, selecting the best for our service users.

"This led to virtual relaxation and meditation sessions which are offered three times a week online and are going some way to alleviate the absence of acupuncture. Before each session begins I have brief consultation with each client. Throughout the session I continue to guide them through the five finger Qi Gong and we have an informal chat after the session has ended, making sure that everyone is well.

"Many of our service users have challenges that have become heightened during the pandemic. These online sessions not only provide a healthy way to relax and cope with anxiety, but it helps us to keep in contact and connect with our service users, showing them we are still here to support them as much as we can."



Lauren (back centre) and our Highland acupuncture team

Added Value Service

Kim Haines is part of our Highland team and offers one to one counselling every Thursday. Here she explains the added value of offering this service.

"I have a diploma in Integrative Counselling and a second diploma in Person Centred Counselling. In order to gain this second qualification, I was required to complete 100 hours of counselling individuals, face to face, using the person centred approach.

"To enable me to do this, I reached out to Apex Highland for a voluntary placement. In return for my time and knowledge, I was provided with a comfortable room in which to do the work, appropriate referrals, support of the entire team and a general sense of being welcome and included.

"My practice is trauma informed and I hold a deep belief that individuals are the experts in their own lives and will naturally strive to be the best that they can be. Since joining the team I have had the honour of supporting many individuals on their recovery journey. Without exception, trauma has been present at some point in their lives and other deep-rooted issues such as guilt, shame, anger, regret and fear have then developed as a direct consequence. Taking the time to explore these emotions in a safe environment is a significant part of my role and requires great trust. The relationship between us plays a vital role in the healing process.

"During the last two years at Apex, clients have described the counselling sessions as *life changing, invaluable* and *something I've never experienced before*. One woman described the impact of the sessions on her wider family, stating that *It means I'm able to be a better mother to my kids and they don't have to see me crying anymore*.

"Offering counselling sessions is part of the holistic approach individuals receive at Apex. Supporting people to grow in all areas of their lives can help them to see that recovery is not only possible, but also sustainable. I look forward to continuing my work at Apex. It is a privilege to be invited into the private lives of individuals and an honour to be a part of their recovery journey."

Training

We regularly assess how our services work and if our clients are getting the best from them. We are continually looking at how to improve circumstances for our service users, to make their journey from A to B a bit easier, and provide them with as many opportunities to aim higher, behave differently, and change their future in line with our ABC model.

The training opportunities that we provide to our clients mean that they can achieve accredited qualifications which broaden personal achievement and increase employment opportunities. Courses such as the CSCS green labourer's card and PAT Testing offer qualifications to those we work with

that give them a competitive edge in the labour market while our digital literacy qualification improves their confidence in their technical abilities. This year we have added an SQA accredited Employability qualification to our portfolio which is proving popular with our client group. In 2019-20, 881 qualifications were attained over 200 training courses. Our courses are offered to the general public and other organisations as well as our client group with many of our trainees finding us through word of mouth recommendations.

Apex Scotland is an approved training centre for SQA and Highfield, an ASDAN centre of excellence and an ITA approved training provider.



Trainees receive their certificates

"Karen, I just wanted to thank you for all your assistance and say how much I enjoyed the course. Del was extremely informative and helpful. He was enthusiastic and clear with all his instruction so once again thank you for all your assistance." **RS, PAT Testing Trainee**

Creating an Online Presence

Teams across the country have made it a priority to increase Apex's social media presence over the past year. This has primarily been with the purpose to more directly access our service user group, to share relevant, instant information on platforms that are accessible and familiar to them.

All of our teams now have a Facebook page, some have Instagram and Twitter accounts. The teams have been using their pages in creative ways to connect with service users and partners. Posts such as 'Meet the Team' can help to remove initial barriers when people arrive for their first Apex appointment because they are met by a familiar face, reassuring them that we are "normal", non-judgemental and have a genuine motive for wanting to help them.

We have also been using our pages to share details of the services we offer, and that of local partner organisations, relating perhaps to a training opportunity, to a recovery group or to information about free school meals.



Information about how we were continuing to operate and support clients during lockdown was shared widely across different networks by the creation of an online video by one of our team leaders, with input from seven different Apex teams across the country. The video received positive feedback from funders and our services were added to local directories of organisations supporting people during lockdown as a result.

We hope to continue to grow our social media presence over the coming year, with the priority being to build and strengthen our service user community so they know where we are and that we're ready to help.

Staff Development

We value our staff highly and know that they are key to Apex being the best it can be. We understand the commitment and determination they have to not only assist our service users to overcome their barriers and move towards a brighter future, but also to work to change the opinions of those who cannot see past a conviction, irrespective of circumstance or time.

Investing in our staff to ensure that they feel confident and equipped to manage their activity and to best assist those they work with has been our practice since our beginning. This year, we have increased our training capacity by appointing

another member of staff with a particular focus on workforce development who is reviewing our training modules, assessing where our staff have potential to grow further and helping them upskill.

An exciting development has been the creation of our virtual training site, STACC (STaff And Clients Connected). With generous support through the Wellbeing Fund we have been able to develop an online e-learning platform to build a secure training tool which gives staff access to training sessions and materials in a modern and practical way. The site has been used to deliver live training events but there is also a library of useful

videos which serve as refreshers and guides as necessary. STACC will also allow us to reduce our staff travel thereby reducing our carbon footprint.

We were also granted funding to be able to ensure all frontline staff are supplied with either a laptop or smartphone. As our frontline workers often meet our clients on outreach locations, it is vital that they are able to access our secure client database and have access to systems while on the move. In the next year we intend to continue on this path of improvement by upgrading our file management system.

An Unusual Start

While the effects and implications of covid-19 were starting to reach far and wide across the country, we continued to ensure our teams were staffed and prepared to meet the demands of the client group with the particular challenges they have. Here, Eilidh Deakin explains her unique introduction to working with Apex.

"I joined Apex Highland as a personal development mentor (PDM) at the beginning of March 2020 which turned out to be a strange time to be starting a new job.

"I come from a healthcare background but I felt I never saw a patient's whole journey. In Apex, clients are very often vulnerable or come from troubled backgrounds and they are helped to grow and improve their future. I enjoy knowing that I can help give someone the tools and confidence to lead a more fulfilling life.

"I was only in the office for three weeks before lockdown was initiated. Those weeks were jam-packed; I left the office every day with my brain buzzing with information! I started training straight away and provision has been made for this to continue through lockdown so I have managed to complete a number of courses including Basic Disclosure, ASIST Suicide Prevention and SMART Facilitator Training.

"My role as an Apex PDM is mainly focused on covering DWP referrals in Inverness, Dingwall and Invergordon, and developing new partnerships with the community mental health teams. I have been working alongside another PDM to help compile the SQA Employability Award and will be assisting in the presentation of that. Once lockdown restrictions ease, I will be co-facilitating the FLORA outdoor group specifically for women in Highland.

"Although this has been an odd start to a job, Apex Highland has been a great team to work with. Their drive to find ways to work around restrictions while maintaining staff and client safety has been so evident in the way the team has rallied together to ensure all clients are being helped through this difficult time to the best of our abilities. This only goes to show the power of teamwork and believing in the services Apex provides."



Eilidh Deakin

Community Jobs Scotland

Partnering with SCVO to offer Community Jobs Scotland (CJS) placements within Apex has been a privilege of ours since the initiative's commencement. Each year across our different locations we employ young people through the programme to give them up to two years of experience and training which will open up more opportunities for them in the future – for some this has included securing a full-time position with Apex. The initiative has developed over the years to more readily support young people with specific

needs and barriers to employment and who are most disadvantaged in the labour market. We are committed to ensuring that our CJS placements benefit from working alongside our more experienced staff and have been recognised by SCVO for the skills, training, encouragement and diversity of opportunities we give to our young people. Here, Amy and Kelly tell us how they are finding their time with us and Jack's colleague's, Caitlin and Brian, share his journey.

Amy's Story

"I moved from Birmingham back to Dumfries in March 2019 and I started volunteering in the Dumfriesshire foodbank in August to keep me busy. Both Fiona and Joanna showed me how the foodbank worked and I really enjoyed what I was doing.

"After a few months of volunteering a CJS post became available in October 2019, so I applied and I got an interview. Fiona decided to take me on and first of all showed me the basics of what the job entailed. I was excited to start my new job as Fiona made me feel part of the Apex family. I was also very excited about helping other people as, once I was told about the nature of the service users that engaged with Apex, it made me realise that there are a lot of people who need our services.

"Fiona's training makes things easy and clear for me to understand. I have already learned so much from working here and that has influenced my decision in finding a job to help others in the same way that Apex does.

"Working here at Apex has made me more confident in both my working and personal life. Fiona has helped me a lot as I was unsure of my future when I moved back from Birmingham; she made me realise that I can do anything if I put my mind to it. If it wasn't for this job I don't think I would be in such a good place mentally. I can't thank Fiona enough, she is an amazing person and an amazing boss."

Dumfries Centre Co-ordinator, Fiona Dalgleish, comments, "Amy has come a long way since she started with us. Her confidence has increased and the ability to use her own initiative has grown immensely. She is a joy to have around and is well liked by staff and service users alike. She definitely has the potential to grow further professionally and personally with the right guidance and support."



Amy Macdonald

Kelly's Story

"In 2013 I had just left school and didn't really know my next step in life. At the time I was four months pregnant with my son and I knew my chances of finding a job would be very slim. I was referred to Apex Scotland to do Employability Fund Stage 2 for young people where I met my personal development mentor, Silvana Watson. After being on the course my confidence went from a 2/10 to a 9/10! The staff at Apex made me feel very welcome and made sure my time there was spent learning new things. I did tasks such as CV workshops, interview techniques, team building and IT skills. My time at Apex was the best and it gave me the opportunity to learn, build my confidence up and, most importantly, make new friends.

The things I have learned will stick with me forever.

"Six years later and, being a single parent, I was out of work for a very long time. As soon as my son went into primary one I had time to find a job. I was fortunate to be offered a volunteering position at a charitable café which gave me the opportunity to move into the work place. Then a Community Job Scotland opportunity came up at Apex. I applied and was offered the post. I couldn't believe my luck that I was getting to return back to the place I once loved being at.

"My time at Apex is spent at the front desk taking phone calls, doing various administration tasks and making sure everyone that comes through the door is made to feel at ease. My favourite thing about my job is making the food parcels ready for our service users or anyone who is struggling with benefits or on a low income to pick up. I will forever be thankful for my time in 2013 and my time just now at Apex Scotland in Stranraer for taking me on and giving me a chance to work at a place I love and enjoy. The

things I have learned will stick with me forever and one day I hope a full time job comes up at Apex or, with the experience I have now, that I will be able to apply for the same type of job somewhere else."

Service Development Manager, Mhairi Ross, says: "I remember Kelly as an Employability Fund participant where she was a hard worker, was never off and she whizzed through her Asdan qualification. Kelly gave an excellent interview for her CJS role so we were delighted to be able to offer her the job. She has fitted in brilliantly with the team and is fantastic with the service users. Kelly has undertaken many training opportunities and attended SCVO's The Gathering in Glasgow in February. She is now starting to work on her SQA Employability Award and is being supported in this by John Brownlie, PDM in Ayrshire."



Kelly Whorlow

Jack's Story

As told by his colleagues, Caitlin and Brian.

Jack started engaging with Apex services in Inverness as a client serving his community service hours. Using alcohol and drugs, which often led to fighting and violence, was the way Jack dealt with any problems in his life. From his initial meeting Jack was willing to work with Apex and had a brilliant attitude towards his mentors in the Challenge Team. He attended the team challenge outdoor projects four times a week. He also achieved his John Muir awards during this time. To help address his problematic substance misuse and mental health, he attended Smart Recovery Groups every Friday and also attended acupuncture sessions which he found really helped. He passed his CSCS training with flying colours and achieved his Emergency First Aid in the Workplace certificate. For Jack this was a huge success and motivation to continue on this track.

Jack was fortunate to secure a post with Apex through CJS as a General Assistant/Stores person for 18 months. Jack's attendance in his new role had a rocky start but his motivation soon increased as he was praised for jobs and tasks he had completed and realised he was part of the team. His role has been primarily with the outdoor Challenge Team, having been taught how to use professional gardening equipment, joinery and painting.

Jack has attended various open days and conferences with the team. He was a real asset to the team and was happy to engage with members of other organisations and the public in a very polite and professional manner. Whilst attending a recent conference he was reminded of just how far he has come when he met his former social worker and key worker, they were amazed to see the change in Jack and spoke to him about his journey with Apex. Jack was "buzzing" when we left and full of pride and confidence. A video clip of his journey through CJS was shown at the recent SCVO conference.

Jack has developed into a charming young man who is respectful and polite. He will be first to offer assistance to the team and, given a task, he gets the job done. He really has turned a corner.



Jack with Apex colleague Emma Wilson

"I have only been working with Apex for short period of time but feel my key worker is helpful and has good knowledge of what Apex does and has a plan of action in place for me. I feel confident in the plan and she is easy to chat to as well." **RR, service user**

Partnerships

Your ideal partnership may follow the business acumen of Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak, or you may prefer a more creative duo such as Lennon and McCartney. Whatever your ideal scenario, such partnerships can arguably attest to the idea that working together brings greater results than going it alone.

Apex has long subscribed to the notion that, while our expertise will take our clients far, some people will benefit from comprehensive support which can be found through partnering like-minded organisations, sharing their knowledge to bring added value. Similarly, we are happy to bring our skillset to partner agencies, thereby offering a degree of diversity and a tailored approach to enhance overall service provision. You can read about the positive effects of such partnerships within this report.

We are excited about a new partnership with Police Scotland in the coming year for a new arrest referral service. Inspector Laura Burns from Criminal Justice Services Division commented, "We recognise that the people coming through police custody often have very complex lives with significant personal and social challenges. By introducing local preventative approaches and building effective partnerships with organisations such as Apex Scotland and the Steps service, this gives individuals the opportunity and support they need to change their lives."

As can be seen from the list here, Apex's partnerships are wide and varied. We would like to give our heartfelt thanks to each of our partners in 2019-20 who have assisted us with their time, experience or financial support and look forward to continued successful collaborations in the coming year.

Our partners in 2019-2020 were:

- » Aberdeen Standard through Power Up Scotland
- » ACOSVO
- » Alcohol and Drug Recovery Partnerships
- » Archaeology Scotland
- » Asda Fight Hunger Fund
- » ASDAN
- » BRAG
- » Calton Community Fire Station
- » CCPS
- » CJVSF
- » Citizens Advice Scotland (Highland)
- » Clackmannanshire Works
- » Community Justice Scotland
- » Community Planning Partnerships
- » Community Safety Partnerships
- » Crossreach
- » Custody Link Project Highland
- » Diageo
- » DWP
- » European Social Fund
- » Fair Start Providers
- » Families Outside
- » Fedcap
- » Fife Voluntary Action
- » Forestry Commission
- » Highfield
- » Highland Third Sector Interface
- » Lennox Partnership
- » Local Authorities Criminal Justice Social Work and Education Departments
- » Morrison Construction Partnership Project
- » Multi agency re-integration team within HMP Dumfries
- » Napier University
- » Navigator
- » New Routes (led by Wise Group) – national PSP partners
- » NHS and Health Partners
- » Open Gates
- » Police Scotland
- » Project Scotland
- » RAFT consortium
- » RE:SET High Schools in Fife and Edinburgh and those who have contributed to the RE:SET service
- » Recovery Network
- » Remploy
- » Resilience Learning Partnership
- » Robertson Construction
- » Scottish Canals
- » Scottish Government
- » Scottish Prison Service
- » SCVO
- » Shine (led by Sacro) – national PSP partners
- » Skills Development Scotland
- » Social Enterprise Scotland
- » Social Investment Scotland
- » SQA
- » STAF
- » Street Soccer
- » Supported Employment Service
- » Tesco
- » The Big Lottery
- » The Holywood Trust
- » The Prince's Trust
- » The Robertson Trust
- » Track2Train funders and supporters
- » Trussell Trust and those who support the foodbanks in Dumfries, Wigtownshire and Levenmouth
- » Turning Point Scotland
- » Venture Trust
- » Volunteer Scotland
- » YPeople

Local Partnership Development

Citizens Advice Scotland

One of our new partnerships this year has been Citizens Advice Scotland, with CAS Advisor, Martin Ross, setting aside phone appointments for Highland unit clients one day a week.

Having a regular CAS contact has been valuable with Martin able to assist service users quickly on a range of issues, but in particular with benefit advice and helping clients make claims to the Scottish Welfare Fund.

Response from our service users has been very positive with one saying “Martin has helped me sort out my benefit issues and money worries which has been difficult to deal with, but it’s good too that these worries are now behind me.”

The logo for Citizens Advice Scotland is a blue circle containing the text 'citizens advice scotland' in a yellow, sans-serif font. A vertical yellow line is positioned to the left of the text.

**citizens
advice
scotland**

MACRIB

In December 2018 an innovative group based at HMP Dumfries was formed which Apex was asked to be part of. The MACRIB (Multi Agency Community Re-integration Board) was created to improve the transition of those being released from prison and returning to Dumfries and Galloway.

The idea came from Stuart Pomfret, Head of Offender Outcomes, at HMP Dumfries. In a previous SPS role Stuart had been impressed with the Case Management Board at HMP Grampian and had promoted the idea widely. On his move to HMP Dumfries he found that the Throughcare Support Officers had introduced a mini Case Management Board. There was the desire to support anyone being liberated back into D&G from any custodial facility and, on this basis, the MACRIB was founded. This group is made up of organisations from third sector including Apex Scotland, Aberlour, and New Routes as well as Housing, DWP, addiction services in the community, Criminal Justice Social Work and SPS staff.

Prisoners give their consent to be discussed at the MACRIB monthly meetings and relevant information is disseminated to the group. The meetings give the opportunity to have a conversation about the circumstances of each individual and assess the support they need. The partners share if referrals for those being released have already been received and any additional support needs can be identified.

We have found the MACRIB to be an excellent way to build relationships with SPS and other local organisations, and the partnership has definitely improved the transition for prisoners. Knowing who is being released means that, if and when they attend any of our other services in the area, such as the foodbank or soup kitchen, we can check how the individuals are and ensure they are accessing the appropriate support.

“Since coming to IMPACT [Apex service], I have learned to control everyday life and find solutions to daily problems.” *Apex service user*

The Women's Group

The Women's Group is a partnership between Apex and Criminal Justice in Dingwall and has been an ongoing success with referrals made through CJSW and NHS. Participants vary from 3 to 6 service users each week and take part in practical team activities.

New projects have seen the women diversify into beach cleaning at Invergordon, gardening at Saltburn Community Woodland and a new project at Contin Woods, a five-acre community woodland which requires path maintenance, including resolving drainage issues to stop the paths flooding, improving the entrance to the woods, thinning and removal of sycamore and pine trees, thinning of bushes and the restoration of the pond. The women will gain John Muir Awards throughout their time with the project.

Those in the women's group also participate in Decider sessions, which they all enjoy, run by two mental health nurses who introduce CBT/DBT skills using visual prompts, demonstration and music.



Successful beach cleaning by the Women's Group

“Thanks to Apex I was able to build confidence in myself, which in turn transferred into promoting myself on my CV and also at any interview I attended. The service and follow up was second to none. Thanks for all your help.” J. Forth Valley service user

All Cleaned Up



All Cleaned Up (ACU) has achieved significant progress during 2019-20, experiencing a 41% growth in income, while taking huge strides towards sustainability. At this point, ACU employs 46 staff throughout Scotland, in a variety of full-time, part-time and sessional roles. 67% of individuals employed with ACU come from the criminal justice system or have experienced mental health issues, addiction, the care system, homelessness or another recognised barrier to employment and support is provided where necessary.

The business has a current portfolio of 29 active clients, an increase of nearly 50% in the last financial year, the diversity of which demonstrates the attractiveness of working with a social enterprise and the benefits it brings. These new clients include Social Bite, Link Housing Association, Clackmannanshire Council, Alloa First, Mary Kings Close, YPeople and several large construction firms working on prestigious contracts.

Indicative of ACU's growing reputation and testament to the standards set by the staff, the first annual review for GeoAmey's prisoner transportation contract resulted in ACU being asked if it would consider expanding operations to include England and Wales. At the time of lockdown the team was assessing the logistical and financial merits of this.

Another positive throughout the year was the addition of two new vans which has been key in allowing ACU to expand its operations and turnover. This expansion has included diversifying into house clearances and basic gardening works, a line of work that has been instrumental in ACU's growth. These vans were kindly gifted to ACU through support developed in partnership with Aberdeen Standard Investment.

Despite covid-19, ACU has launched a new partnership with Alloa First and the local third sector interface, looking after the planted areas within the town centre. From its developing relationship with Clackmannanshire Council, the ACU team is hopeful of helping Apex create new opportunities for local people.

Pleasingly, 2019-20 has been the best year yet for ACU and, while there remains work to be done to achieve its long term goals, it is in a better place than ever to do so.



New ACU vans on the road



ACU at work in Alloa town centre

Memorial Awards

Each year we award two different awards to our staff. It is always incredibly difficult to choose teams or individuals as winners, but we are incredibly proud of what these teams, and all our staff, achieved throughout 2019-20.

The Sam Dow memorial award is given to the team or service that is excelling at what it is contracted to do, or going the extra mile based on the contract parameters. This year the Sam Dow shield was awarded to the Glasgow team for its excellent performance delivering our Steps service, overcoming particularly difficult circumstances as well as developing partnerships in the area.

The Betty Crawford memorial award is for innovation and creativity that achieves results for our clients, the unit or the organisation as a whole. This year the Betty Crawford cup was awarded to our ESF Compliance Team. This team has worked under tremendous pressure with daily challenges to navigate all the rules which this fund demands and interpret them for staff, creating bespoke internal systems and procedures, travelling the country where and when it was needed to provide training and support, all the while staying motivated and approachable.

Our congratulations to both teams for their amazing efforts.



Compliance Team with their Betty Crawford Award



Apex Glasgow with their Sam Dow award, alongside Apex board members

Finance

The primary purpose of Apex Scotland remains the provision of meaningful, progressive support to our service users in order to enable them to lead more fulfilling lives and to be more effective contributors to society.

Other parts of this Annual Report will evidence the worth, and effect, of the work that we carry out but here provides detailed analysis of the manner in which we have performed financially in an effort to give comfort to our funders as to the effective and appropriate use of those funds.

We have continued, as all agencies have, to face the challenge of the ongoing spending constraints, which have occurred at a time when there is an increased awareness of the support required and demand for our services. Undoubtedly over the recent years we have suffered from the financial impact of those funding constraints whilst attempting to provide effective, high quality, services to our service users and retaining the necessary infrastructure to support that. During those years we have restructured and also explored alternative means of financing our work. Whilst we will continue to explore new ways of working and innovative means of funding our work, we have made significant efforts to diversify our income base and to add value to the services we provide. Most notably this was done through the continued development of our ESF funded Steps service which occurred in many parts of the country. Our understanding of the complexities and constraints of ESF funding has enabled us to smoothly transition from one form of funding to another. We have continued to develop our training provision despite the stop/start nature of ITA funding and thanks are due to both staff and our service users for their forbearance in this area. We have also developed bespoke services for a number of funders to more specifically respond to their needs. We continue to develop stronger strategic links with other partners in an effort to provide the most comprehensive and cost effective solution to purchasers of our services.

These efforts meant that we were of the view that we could move forward with confidence and a belief in our ability to continue providing services to those in need, whilst recognising the volatility of our environment and the need to constantly monitor performance, value and effectiveness. And then the covid-19 pandemic hit.

Whilst this Annual Report is more concerned with our performance during financial year 2019-20 it would be naïve to ignore the impact of the pandemic which placed everyone in lockdown at the end of March 2020. Whilst this has had little impact on the financial performance for that year we will undoubtedly have to be aware of the potential changes we will have to make in the coming months and years to reflect the changed circumstances. Thanks are due to our staff for their fortitude during this period and their willingness and ability to continue to offer support to our service users. Thanks are also due to the Scottish Government for the funding support which

was made available to all third sector agencies and from which Apex has benefitted and has enabled us to protect staff and services.

A result of the pandemic has been that our year end financial audit was delayed for understandable reasons. Normally those year end accounts would be audited and approved at the June Board meeting. Whilst the audit has taken place, the formal approval of those accounts is now scheduled to take place in September 2020. As such, the figures contained in this section of the Annual Report are “draft” as formal approval has yet to be granted. We do not anticipate any changes from those presented.

Given the comments immediately above, our draft accounts for 2019-20 show a surplus of £15,459 for the charity alone. This was achieved against income generated of £2,724,047 (an increase of 4.63% in comparison to the previous year) and expenditure incurred of £2,708,558 (an increase of 5.27% in comparison to the previous year). This is obviously pleasing and is testament to the determination, commitment and loyalty of our staff. As in previous years the vast majority of our funding was either expenditure reimbursement or set figure. However the world in which we operate is constantly changing and, increasingly, we are being faced with service opportunities, and the associated payments, being linked to performance. Whilst this can be challenging we recognise the need for public sector funders to ensure that the work they are paying for is making an evidence based difference. We are confident in our ability to survive and thrive in this changing environment but there is, without doubt, a transition period both in terms of financing the organisation and in the service culture of staff members. This emerging method of funding places greater pressure on cashflow due to funding being received well in arrears from the date of delivery and the developing requirements of funders in relation to acceptable evidence of success. We are yet to see what impact covid-19 will have on future years’ funding for all of the public and third sector but we have been able to protect a significant element of our income in 2020-21 which gives a significant degree of reassurance.

Our trading subsidiary, All Cleaned Up, posted a draft loss of £27,962 in financial year 2019-20. Whilst this is disappointing, it evidences a marked improvement from the deficit of £65,225 posted in 2018-19. We retain a real belief that this initiative, which creates real jobs for our service users, will continue to build upon the efforts made to strengthen that organisation. We saw a significant growth in the number of contracts during 2019-20 and the effect of covid-19 has led to a further increase in contracts as more organisations recognise the value and necessity of deep cleans. All Cleaned Up remains an important part of the overall Apex strategy. Thanks must be given to the support from the Big Invest and Social Investment Scotland which has helped us to develop a more robust entity.

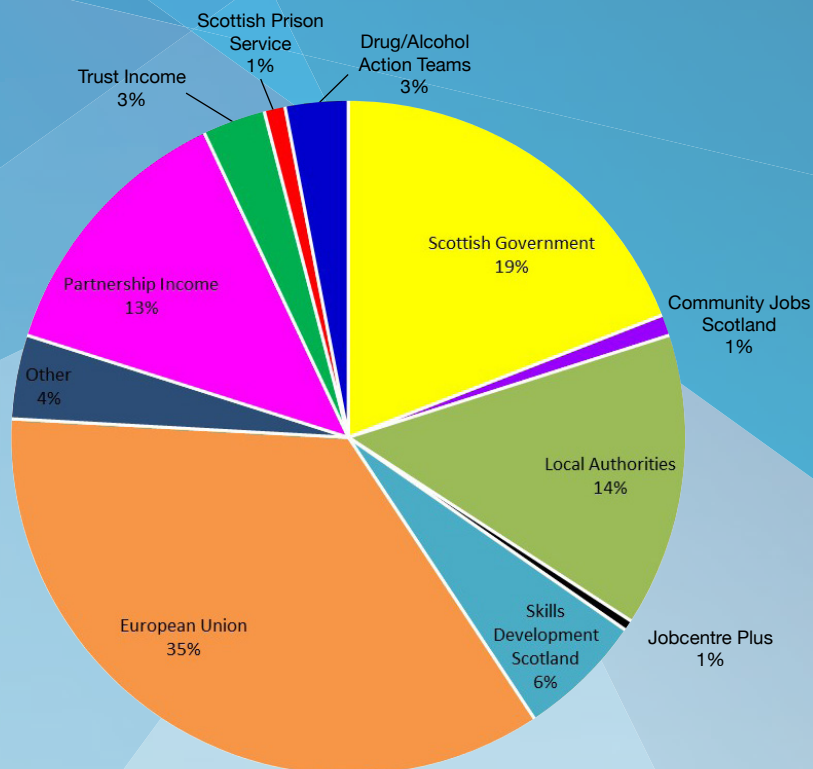
2019-20 witnessed the commencement of trading of a further social enterprise, Track2Train. This separate legal entity was created to provide training and job opportunities for disadvantaged individuals within Midlothian and had close ties with Apex. Sadly, external drainage problems outwith the control of that entity forced its closure at the end of September 2019. Covid-19 has resulted in that entity remaining closed.

As is the case with all entities we are in a period of great uncertainty as a result of the covid-19 pandemic, with little or no knowledge of when things may return to something like normal. Apex has continued to deliver services to individuals in need throughout the pandemic, albeit on a different basis than before and we intend to do that for as long as is necessary and to increase our service provision when possible. The surpluses we have created in previous years give us a small degree of leeway to cater for unexpected events and we remain determined to strengthen our services and infrastructure to support ongoing development of the organisation, ultimately for the benefit of our service users. However, we do so with an awareness of the volatility of the funding environment within which we operate and a recognition of the potential impact of the current political and economic climate. We expect to face ongoing funding challenges which means that the ability to reduce our reliance on public sector funding becomes all the more critical. As part of this we will continue to ensure appropriate, efficient and effective use of our resources in an effort to provide high quality support to our service users and to our funders. At the same time this will be done in a manner which enables us to inform public policy in relation to our service user group. This will continue to be achieved through the utilisation of our ASSET management information tool and supported by effective governance at all levels across the organisation.

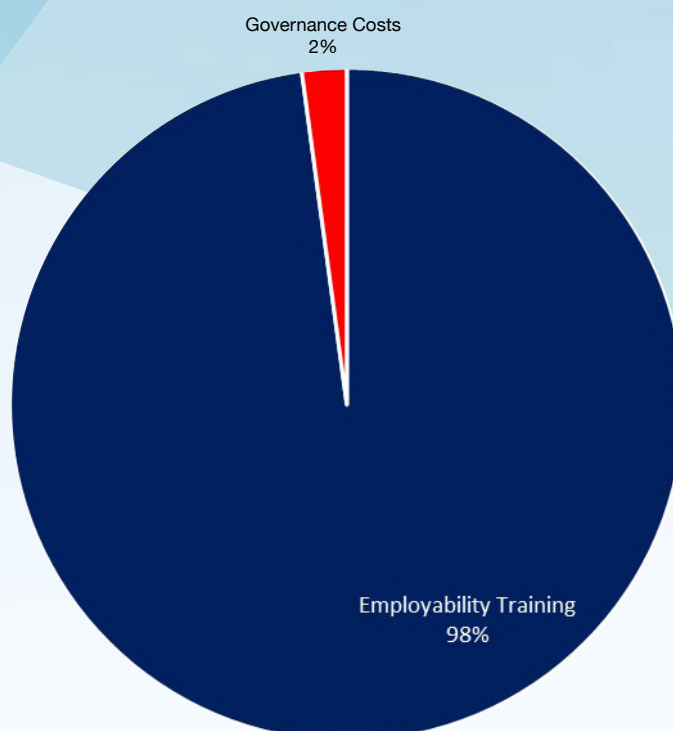
Consolidated accounts detailing the performance of both the charity and our trading subsidiary will be available at Companies House.

Philip Dunion
Director of Finance
and Corporate Development

Income



Expenditure



“The story of your life has many chapters. One bad chapter doesn’t mean it’s the end of the book.”

Unknown

Being part of

Their Story

Taking Positive Steps

Steps is our ESF funded employability service which assists people across Scotland who have multiple barriers to employment or who are long term unemployed. Personal development mentors (PDMs) work with individuals on a one to one basis, creating an action plan and supporting them to achieve agreed goals, primarily towards stage 3 of local authority pipelines and in some cases into employment. However, for many, overcoming their barriers is the most important part of their journey and our PDMs work with our clients to address issues which are holding them back from fulfilling their potential.

Personal development mentors (PDMs) work with individuals on a one to one basis, creating an action plan and supporting them to achieve agreed goals.

Although usually a face to face service, Steps did not cease during lockdown – we simply moved to meeting people online through their own electronic devices where possible, or by phone. The following are some examples of how we have assisted people on the Steps service over the year.

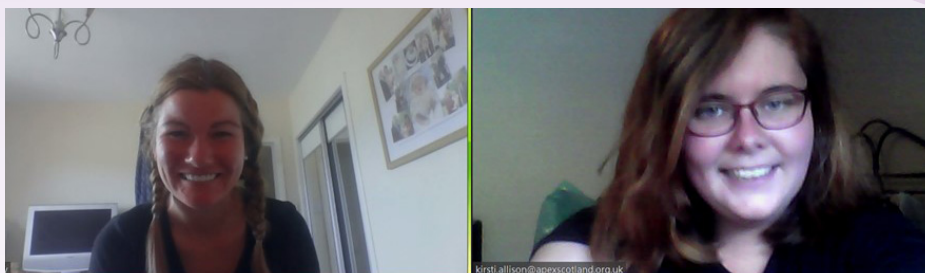


Kelly's Story

Kelly engaged with Apex Forth Valley in February 2020 after being referred by Criminal Justice Social Work after her first and only conviction earlier in the year. She was supported by PDM, Kirsti Allison. Kelly told us:

"Before starting with Apex I felt anxious, had no confidence and low self-esteem and felt I had no direction. I had no idea what to do with myself after stopping being self-employed. From the beginning I have felt welcomed at Apex and supported. With Apex's help I now have an excellent CV which I know I couldn't have done alone. Having someone to chat to, who believes in me and is willing to give me a chance has really helped me.

Everyone that I've met at Apex has been easy going, caring and enthusiastic. After working with Apex for a few months I feel secure, positive and believe in myself. I can see now that there is a way forward for me. Apex has helped me to separate my conviction from myself, turn everything around and feel more human again. When I was convicted I was suffering from stress and not thinking clearly, and I feel that Apex has always looked at me as a person and made me believe in what I can achieve next."



Kelly (left) was supported by Kirsti even through lockdown

Fraser's Story

Fraser* was a client of John Main who works in our Tayside unit. Fraser was referred to the Steps service by the local Youth Employability Team which is part of Dundee City Council's Discover Opportunities employability provision. John takes up the story.

"During 2017 Fraser had been charged with assault and he lost his job because of his conviction. He appealed his dismissal but he was told he would not be reinstated because of the severity of his crime. This confused Fraser, as in his opinion, his crime was of a very minor nature arising from a domestic argument that got out of control, for which he received a community payback order and supervision. At the time he applied for his subject access request and was stunned to find that what was stated was untrue and assumed that was the information that led to his sacking.

"Having discussed Fraser's situation with him at length I applied for another subject access request on his behalf and the information had since been revised. On this basis I wrote a letter of disclosure for Fraser to use and re-worked his CV into a more professional and presentable format. Having this assistance and being able to see a way forward had a profound effect on Fraser and boosted his confidence dramatically.

.....
Having this assistance and being able to see a way forward had a profound effect on Fraser and boosted his confidence dramatically.
.....

"I continued to meet with Fraser before lockdown and helped him to apply for several jobs, printing off CVs so that he could hand them in to bars, restaurants and shops. Due to his experience one bar responded to him quite quickly and offered him a start as soon as they were allowed to open again.

"During a routine follow up phone call, he told me he had been offered full time employment as a night shift cleaner working for an agency; this suits him as it works in well with his domestic and childcare arrangements. Armed with his new subject access request information, he is now considering appealing his initial dismissal again."

Bobby's Story

John Brownlie is a PDM in our Steps service in Ayrshire. Here he shares the story of one of his clients.

"Bobby* was referred to Apex as he was long term unemployed. This was due to having substance abuse issues but within the last year this had changed and Bobby was now deemed to be fit and ready to work. Bobby's confidence was low, exacerbated by poor internet skills which was affecting his ability to search for work. He was also concerned about the gap in his CV and how to explain this to an employer.

"To begin with I felt that Bobby would benefit from longer appointments so that we could begin to address the barriers that he had. Bobby had been on a methadone programme for a good few years but had reached the point that he

did not need to take it at all which was a huge achievement. His lack of IT skills was one of Bobby's biggest concerns as he was unsure how to go about applying for jobs and where to start. We first worked together on updating his CV and created accounts on job vacancy websites and I taught him how to use them. We set tasks for Bobby to complete in between appointments so that he had mini goals to aim for.

"Once his confidence began to increase I enrolled Bobby in a basic IT skills course. He was slightly nervous to begin with but managed to complete it which further improved his confidence and he started to look at other opportunities. I encouraged him to go to a jobs fair so that he could see what was potentially available to him.

"In the past Bobby had worked with his Dad in the family business which involved him driving all over the country. He was interested in doing Class 2 licence training so we spoke to his work coach and, due to him being unemployed for so long, he had the chance to get the training funded for him, depending on successful interview as there were limited places available. Together we worked through an interview techniques workshop which he felt was beneficial and went to interview with increased confidence. He achieved his place on the course and attended the training over a couple of months.

"Bobby passed the course with flying colours and now feels that the barriers he had have been addressed. He is looking forward to a brighter future."

Shine and New Routes

Since their creation in 2013, Apex has been an active partner in the public social partnerships, Shine and New Routes. Shine and New Routes offer one to one support and mentoring to women, and men under 25 respectively, with support first offered up to six months before their release from prison which continues as individuals reintegrate into their communities.

The support is intensive with our mentors often having to rely on their flexibility and ingenuity to meet some very specific needs for people who are often in crisis or have chaotic lifestyles.

The support is intensive with our mentors often having to rely on their flexibility and ingenuity to meet some very specific needs for people who are often in crisis or have chaotic lifestyles. This is particularly true when meeting people 'at the gate' and our staff often go above and beyond their job role to ensure their clients are safe and settled on their first day of release. Most recently, our Shine and New Routes mentors continued to provide a frontline service to those being released during lockdown, providing specially curated liberation packs to meet immediate needs.



"I did a long sentence for my first offence – it was a bad one. Ann at Apex was the first person apart from my family that treated me like a person and helped me get back on a road I wanted to be on. Got my CSCS card and have been working for nearly a year. Thanks for everything." CM, service user

A New Chapter in Jamie's Story

Amy Batchelor works with our Tayside team and started working with Jamie, who was referred to the New Routes service, in November 2019 whilst he was in prison. She explains how his positive attitude has taken him from strength to strength.

"Jamie and I met each month whilst he was in prison. Jamie had been convicted of selling drugs which he did because of the money it made him. Having discussed the recurrent issues which led him to prison, we discussed future plans and goals and how he could use the skills he had to make money legally and how much better off he would be. I encouraged him to attend any classes in prison he could and take advantage of any learning opportunities. He gained several qualifications in barbering and worked full time within the barbers' work party which gave him a lot of confidence and the idea of owning his own business started to germinate.

Jamie is doing exceptionally well and continuing to pursue his dreams at 100mph.

"As he was keen to make other changes to his lifestyle, we spoke about how he could get healthier and fitter. He joined the gym, changed his eating habits and lost two stone. He also completed addiction support meetings to gain better understanding of the damage substance abuse causes to the body, mental health, and relationships.

"Shortly prior to his release at the beginning of March 2020 I set up Jamie's universal credit claim and a community care grant for clothing, gas, electric, etc. On the day he was released we re-registered him with a GP, organised a repayment plan for his existing debt with the council, and for gas and electricity. We started housing applications and I introduced him to the Rock Solid programme to help him with his money



Jamie promoting his new sweet box business

management as this was a critical area of learning for Jamie, and to teach him how to cook healthily for himself.

"Upon his release we put a lot of work into a very detailed business plan to help him become a self-employed barber and I put him in touch with the New Enterprise Allowance for funding opportunities. We registered him with job search websites and created his CV as he planned to have a job whilst still working towards setting up his own business. Jamie then took on full time employment at a covid-19 testing station. Having been homeless on his release, he put his first wage towards a deposit on his new flat. He has now moved in and enlisted the help of local companies to help him decorate and is in the process of creating a barbering station within his house which he can use for stage one of his business setup.

"Jamie went on to produce a second business plan to sell sweet boxes, which went live on 24 June and received media coverage. He is planning to use this extra income to undertake driving lessons and put towards his main business venture. With the testing station now closed, Jamie has been offered a position with the mobile testing unit within the Scottish Ambulance Service and has already saved a small amount of money to go towards his barbering business.

"Jamie is doing exceptionally well and continuing to pursue his dreams at 100mph. When safe to do so, we have arranged to hold a day of free haircuts at our local community centre as Jamie feels quite passionate about giving back to the community and helping those who live with difficult circumstances."

Melissa's Story

Susan Di Lorenzo is our Shine mentor in the Scottish Borders. Here she tells the story of Melissa, 24, who was referred to the service in 2019 because she was having difficulty satisfying the terms of a two year long supervision order due to travel implications.

"Melissa's parents separated when she was in her early teens. Having a strained relationship with her mum, she chose to stay with her dad. Melissa went through her teenage years feeling very angry about a lot of things but not managing to express herself in any other way than by using recreational drugs and alcohol and this was how she picked up her supervision order. She clearly recognised that substance misuse and anger were an ugly combination, however she felt incapable of changing her behaviour.

"We agreed to begin work by looking at her anger issues and trying to provide her with some positive coping mechanisms when she began to feel angry or stressed. Armed with these tools she stopped using drugs and drinking and immediately felt the benefits of this. Her mental health issues were still present, but she felt more in control.

"A long term abusive relationship had ended a year prior to me meeting Melissa but she explained that found it very difficult to "get over him", the feeling worsened having suffered a hugely traumatic miscarriage which she found especially difficult to deal with. We spent a lot of time looking at her relationships with partners, friends and family. In particular, Melissa has experienced a number of traumas within her family including sexual assault and walking in on her dad's attempted suicide. Having had input from the Community Mental Health Team in the past, it was agreed to re-refer her for specific support.

"She attended sessions with mental health workers and completed her Re:Connect programme. She obtained a place to study hairdressing in September 2019 and was all set to do this but a new relationship saw her move far away from the area. She asked if I could keep her referral open for a little while for phone contact should she require it and I agreed.

"I heard from Melissa a couple of times, she had a new job and all was well. I then received a call from her on Christmas Eve to say that she was back living with her dad as her relationship had ended. I arranged to meet her again in January 2020.

"When we met, she said she was so glad that I was still there for her as everyone else had virtually disowned her. She was at a very low point. I accompanied her to the GP where she recommenced medication and gradually started to improve in mood. She was still refraining from drinking and using drugs and had had no further criminal involvement.

"Melissa had always been very used to managing her own life but said being able to ask for guidance and support was invaluable to her. She got herself a job cleaning the local



Melissa happy in her new job

jobcentre after hours, 5 nights per week. She was delighted with this and said she was also going to reapply to college. However, when the pandemic hit in March Melissa lost her job and struggled with lockdown initially. Unfortunately relations also broke down with her dad and I helped her with her homeless application while she stayed with a friend.

"We maintained contact through weekly phone calls and she always said she felt better after talking and was continuing to apply for jobs. She has now secured a temporary full-time job in a call centre as part of the covid-19 Test and Protect scheme and is very excited about it.

"Melissa is a remarkable young woman who has faced more trauma and stress in her short years than most people face in an entire lifetime. She is always engaging and honest with me, we have built up a very trusting relationship in the time we have been working together and I have nothing but admiration and respect for her and how hard she works to overcome her difficulties. She was delighted to be asked for a picture of herself at work and when I explained what it was for, she specifically asked me to tell how much she has valued her Shine support and to say that if it weren't for Shine, she would not be here today."

Smart Recovery

SMART (Self-Management and Recovery Training) is a powerful tool in helping individuals change their addictive and problematic behaviours. It highlights four areas of approach in recovery as well as a focus on a peer support element. Although the majority of our participants have issues with either alcohol or drug use, other addictive behaviours are supported.



UK SMART Recovery®
Self-Management and Recovery Training

Apex SMART groups have been running successfully for several years. This year Apex Highland has recorded a total of 76 separate individuals attending SMART Recovery groups in Inverness and Ross-shire with 694 attendances in total and an impressive 1,388 hours spent by clients, enjoying the power of recovery. With the covid-19 restrictions cancelling face to face meetings we have been working hard to get our client group linked in and connected to online services like SMART via portable devices.

I don't know where I would be without SMART recovery. I look back on the past three years of my life and it strikes me how much my pattern of thought has changed.

We understand that familiarity and structure are an imperative part of maintaining abstinence from addictive behaviours and play a vital role within the SMART Recovery programme. This is why it became crucial to keep our client base informed as to what

services were available to them during lockdown and how best they could access them. Members of our team researched online recovery meeting times and websites, then converted this data into flyer format and delivered these to our active client group and partner agencies. We maintained regular telephone contact with service users to check in with and advise on their current situations and in many cases PDM's even delivered SMART tools over the phone in 1-1 personal development sessions. Stakeholders were contacted regularly also with information packs and posters being handed out detailing the entire range of services the Highland Unit had on offer to current and potential clients.

Lapse and relapse is a common part of most recovery journeys and, for some, is hard enough to maintain at the best of times. It is understandable then with the current climate that, to date, there are a reported 14 individuals on the Highland system having made a return to their addictive behaviours. We are happy to report that, of these 14, eight individuals have managed to pull themselves back on track. Sadly, five are still suffering and one, having breached license conditions, has made a return to prison.

It is with these stats in mind that Apex Highland attempted to increase the support available to our client group by delivering an Apex-led virtual SMART programme. Highland PDMs attended training sessions on the software platform that SMART utilise and, after just one pilot, began rolling these groups out. Although individuals have the opportunity to make use of numerous other online meetings being delivered across the country, the barrier of anxiety makes this an unrealistic proposition for most. We felt a familiar setting with familiar faces would bring some semblance of normality back to our client group during these extraordinary times.

Here is what one of our SMART service users had to say. "I don't know where I would be without SMART recovery. I look back on the past three years of my life and it strikes me how much my pattern of thought has changed. The SMART tools have taught me about self-control and how to balance my life effectively. I struggled and battled with my addiction for years and years not knowing how to help myself or what it was that I truly wanted. SMART recovery really opened my eyes to the power of change and from the moment I stepped through the door at my first meeting I felt a sense of belonging and when I left, I knew that I had found what I'd been looking for."

"I've found Apex to be really supportive, even after more than one relapse."
Apex service user

Val's Story

People who attend Smart recovery often have difficult journeys. Val is one of them.

Currently a support teacher in a local school, Val* lives with her husband, but the situation between them is very uncomfortable and hostile. Val said she has "always been a drinker" but began to abuse alcohol more due to this situation and soon became reliant on it, struggling to get up to go to work. When at work she could not wait to get home. Her husband, also a heavy drinker, was making her life miserable and she knew her drinking was becoming unmanageable. The respect and trust that she had with her children and grandchildren was damaged. Drinking was the only way she could escape her personal problems and life in general.

Once referred to Smart Recovery, her personal development mentor (PDM) carried out her initial interview and

got to know Val. Prior to lockdown Val underwent a medical for a home detox as she had applied through her CPN to attend rehabilitation. The waiting list was extensive and she knew she may have to wait a while. Her medical was cleared and she was delighted when she got a call to say she would be going in on the two week course in the Easter holidays. During the wait she continued to drink every day and phoned her PDM a lot, affected by alcohol, very emotional, talking about ending her life. One day she told her PDM that her rehab placement had been cancelled because the venue had closed. We called her CPN to stress our concerns, explained Val's circumstances, and asked if she would be able to do her programme elsewhere. Following her PDM's request, it was agreed that Val could go into rehabilitation the following week. Val was absolutely delighted and very emotional. Her PDM kept daily contact with her throughout her stay.

Val feels confident that she will continue her journey in recovery and is very grateful to Apex for the continued support.

Val completed her two week programme and is now at home, alcohol free, with access to our SMART recovery meetings and a SMART handbook which we delivered to her. She said she is feeling better physically, emotionally and mentally. Her children and grandchildren are back in contact and she feels more confident in herself. Val feels confident that she will continue her journey in recovery and is very grateful to Apex for the continued support.

"Apex absolute brilliant service, best help I have had job hunting in Clacks since returning and under normal circumstances (no lockdown) I would probs have a job." AS, service user

RAFT

One of the most difficult decisions when compiling our annual report is to know which stories to leave out as every one is distinctive, valued and affecting. Our RAFT service, working in partnership with other organisations such as Barnardo's, Social Work and Police Scotland in Aberdeen, is an intense mentoring service for young people involved in offending or concerning behaviour and who all have specific needs. Each personal story submitted from teenagers we have worked with over the past year revealed multiple challenges concerning difficult circumstances and behavioural responses, but all were equally inspiring and remarkable in their perseverance, progress and how they are sustaining their improved situation. This is just one example from a 16 year old.

"I was referred to RAFT due to police concern reports of being found with cannabis and then running from the police. We started work on employment as I had decided to leave school due to not getting the classes I wanted. I was also sign posted to Alcohol and Drugs Action due to asking for help with my drug use. Very quickly I decided I needed to leave home and my Apex worker, Rebecca, found me accommodation, supported me through the homeless interview, and got me a food parcel, setting me up with all I needed and spent the whole day with me.

At Apex I felt respected, listened to, safe, like I could trust my worker and being at Apex turned my life around.

"When I entered the accommodation things quickly spiralled out of control. I had no relationship with my parents - we were arguing all the time, becoming physical with each other. I was very depressed and having suicidal thoughts. I relied heavily on Rebecca a lot and she was available to me and my parents day and night. We had meetings where I felt that the only person who listened to me and understood me was my Apex worker. Becca had a way of explaining things to me and showing me everyone's side that made me listen and understand. My usual temperament with everyone else was to react quickly, loudly and aggressively.

"Rebecca tried for a long time to get support for my mum and eventually my mum had her own worker too. I then entered my own tenancy and things seemed better. I was in a relationship, my relationship with my parents was improving, I was motivated and focused on getting a job and feeling great, but this was short lived due to my excessive drug use and debts.

"Rebecca supported me in asking my GP for mental health support. She sorted housing support, she gave me training opportunities such as the CSCS course, took me to Skills Development Scotland, helped me make a CV, did job applications with me, mediated for me and my parents, helped me leave a controlling relationship and gain employment.

"At Apex I felt respected, listened to, safe, like I could trust my worker and being at Apex turned my life around. I am now in full-time employment and have a much better relationship with my parents and am no longer using drugs."



Our RAFT personal development mentor, Rebecca, has spent the last few months finding new ways of being able to stay in contact with the young people she supports. One popular way has been hosting online cooking classes. Here is another one of her young people, Tyler, with his yummy looking cake!

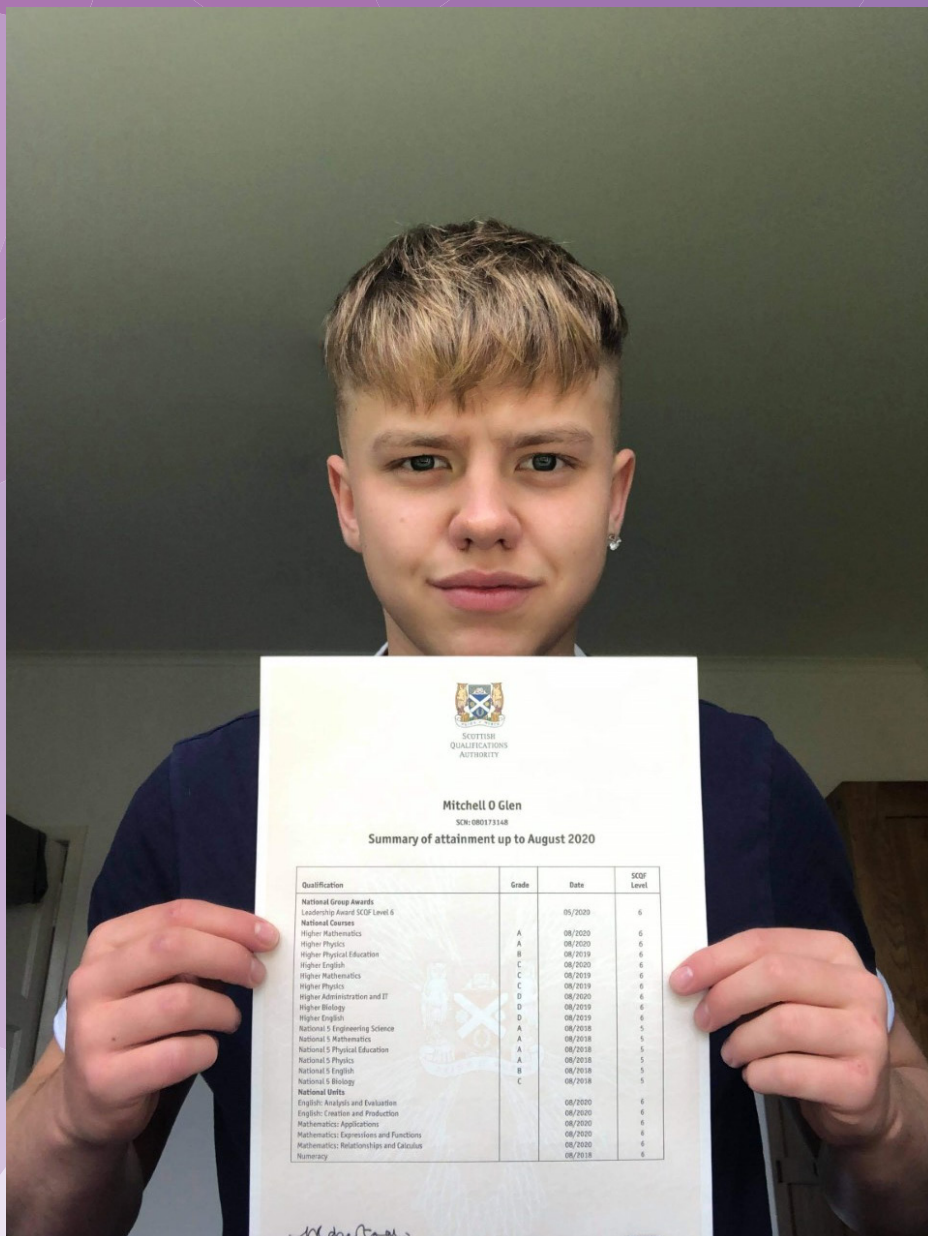
Mitchell's Story

Mitchell was also referred to our RAFT service and has come a long way. He explains:

"Back in 2018 when I was 15 years old, I started misbehaving and disobeying the rules, I snuck out almost every night to meet my mates. My mum would wake up in the middle of the night unable to sleep as she was always worrying about me and she would find my room empty with my window wide open leading onto a main road. Both my parents would try and tell me how unsafe my choices were and how they saw me going down the wrong path. I chose not to listen to them and kept on making bad choices, which included shoplifting, dabbling in drugs and staying out for days on end, not worrying about anybody but myself. I was messing about in school, wasn't listening in class, and that year I did not get good exam results.

"Due to all this my parents had enough and couldn't cope with me leaving the house at risk when they had a baby to take care of, so they shipped me to my grandparents where I lived for half a year. During that time the juvenile system sent Rebecca from Apex to school to meet me every week and from there she listened when I spoke, I listened when she was giving me advice. Seeing my exam results that year made me realise that I was going downhill as they were very bad and the year before that I was getting straight A's.

"I then stayed on for sixth year, attended all my classes and listened in class too. I moved back in with my parents as we came to a compromise. The work that Rebecca did with me made me realise I wanted a better life than the one I was carving out for myself. All my teachers motivated me as they saw a tremendous change in my behaviour and effort in school. Now I've got my exam results and I've been accepted into all 5 universities that I applied for across Scotland, although I have chosen to go to college for my first two years and finish my last two years at Aberdeen University.



Mitchell has been accepted to five universities

"I've stopped running away and let my parents know where I am, I haven't touched drugs or had any trouble with the police since I stopped seeing Rebecca my support worker, and I'm happy I'm on the right path to a good future. My mum now trusts me and I look after my sister when my parents are working or when my mum goes to work until my stepdad gets home."

"Rebecca says, "Mitchell was always polite and fully engaged in sessions weekly. He always did the work and took on board what we were talking about regarding offending, empathy, honesty and communication skills. These were all traits that Mitchell had, he just needed to put them to use. He worked hard in sessions and then continued that work after he was signed off from the service, and I am so proud of him."

Apex Youth Elite (AYE)

Apex's AYE service in Fife mentors care leavers and young people in care, supporting them to address any barriers they have, helping them overcome challenges, and supporting them towards further education or employment. The service has links with other agencies such as The Prince's Trust and Skills Development Scotland which offer training courses and work placements. Here, PDM Caroline Donaldson shares the story of Katie, one of her clients.

Katie's Story

Katie* was referred to Apex from social work earlier this year. She was unsure what the future held for her and what she wanted to do with her life.

I had met with her several times prior to lockdown and we had decided to apply for a place with The Prince's Trust to get her used to a college environment and see how she settled in. The course was due to start in May however the start date was then postponed until September 2020. I kept in touch with Katie once lockdown was announced and checked in with her regularly.

We are continuing to work on the plan to start college once lock down has been lifted.

Katie had her own tenancy however she felt anxious staying by herself once the covid-19 outbreak happened and had been living between family and friends. Katie eventually found herself staying at her dad's house as there was a problem with her own flat and she couldn't continue to stay there. One day in April I texted Katie to ask how she was and how she was coping, she replied she wasn't coping at all.

I immediately called Katie to see if I could help. She told me that her dad was refusing to feed her as he had too many children at home and he didn't have enough money to feed her too. I asked if she had spoken to her social worker, she advised she had, however her social worker hadn't been able to help due to the time (at this point it was after 5pm).

I asked for Katie's dad's address and told her I would take her enough food to last her the weekend and we would contact her social worker on Monday morning.

Due to social distancing I arranged to meet Katie at her dad's property but had to drop the bag of food at the door. I contacted Katie over the weekend just to make sure she was ok and reminded her about the importance of contacting her social worker on the Monday morning. Katie was very grateful for the bag of food, as it was all she had to feed herself with over the weekend.

I am still in regular contact with Katie. She is now no longer at her dad's and staying at another family member's property. We are continuing to work on the plan to start college once lock down has been lifted.

"Regular and good feedback ensuring I am up to date with what is happening with my clients and their progress. A fantastic service."

Social work staff

Apex's RE:SET schools service tackles exclusion and challenging behaviour through full-time early intervention. Based in schools in Fife and Edinburgh, our RE:SET mentors work within the schools and in regular consultation with teaching staff to ensure that each pupil accessing the service continues to remain integrated within the education system and continues with the curriculum.

Through discussion workshops with staff and peers, and participation in practical exercises, they learn coping mechanisms and how to make positive choices.

The RE:SET team works creatively, utilising our specially developed modules, to engage with pupils in a non threatening environment where they can explore their responses, their attitudes and their perceptions, addressing how negative behaviour is part of a destructive cycle and the consequences it can have on their future. Through discussion workshops with staff and peers, and participation in practical exercises, they learn coping mechanisms and how to make positive choices. This is facilitated through a variety of interventions in agreement with each school, but always with the aim of achieving our vision of the service: that every young person fulfils their potential. Below is a small selection of the activities that our RE:SET team has been involved in this year.

Sally's Story

When referred to RE:SET Sally* was vulnerable within the community and at risk of sexual exploitation. She enjoyed male attention and was very promiscuous. She didn't always know the males she would meet so was putting herself in vulnerable and potentially dangerous situations. Sally was open about her recreational use of alcohol and drugs, factors which contributed to her anti-social behaviours within the community and reckless actions. Her school attendance was extremely low which meant her literacy and numerous skills were below average for her age.

Her attendance in RE:SET was as a member of the SHANARRI girls' group and she also used the service as a drop-in for when she needed additional support or nurture. She always put effort into contributing within the group and offered support and advice to the other girls. Sally benefitted from having positive female role models within the service. Through her attendance at RE:SET, Sally's confidence has blossomed and she is now able to self-reflect. When asked what things she has learned during her time in RE:SET she said 'That I need to stop thinking the worst of myself, that I do look out for other folk and that I am not as stupid as I think.'

Having the safe space available as a drop in for Sally meant she was able to have additional support with her curricular activities and do them at her own pace. This increased her school attendance to the highest it had ever been. Sally has now been accepted to college to continue her education and feels she is able to do so with confidence.

I need to stop thinking the worst of myself, that I do look out for other folk and that I am not as stupid as I think.

During mental health awareness week, RE:SET put together a 'kindness bingo' which involved completing 15 tasks that aimed to have positive outcomes for the young person or another person. Sally won this challenge and thanked her RE:SET mentor for arranging this activity as it helped to keep her mind from being focused on negative things. She said it also improved her wellbeing by getting her addicted to the Joe Wicks workouts on Youtube!

"RE:SET has helped me catch up with my class work, now I am going to college because my attendance has improved. Being in RE:SET has also helped me through a lot of things." S4 pupil

The Prince's Trust

An S1 group completed The Prince's Trust programme which focuses on personal development, social and self-management skills. It is designed specifically for pupils who need extra support in developing their skills to help them succeed in education and any future aspirations.

During the team building section the boys took part in a variety of different tasks. One favourite was taking on the spaghetti and marshmallow challenge to construct the tallest tower.

The pupils were issued with their certificates on Planning for Personal Development at level 3/SCQF.

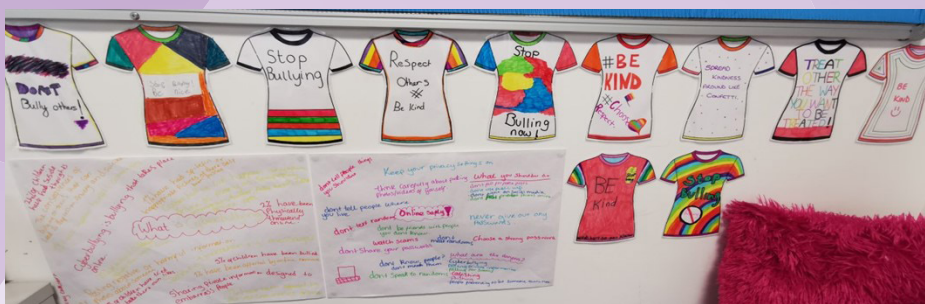


Utilising problem solving skills

Mental Health

Following various media campaigns, pupils have been particularly interested in mental health this year and our mental health awareness boards have been consistently popular for sharing information and discussion. The young people feel that bringing awareness to mental health is really important and being able to access resources and information while in RE:SET is really helpful.

One pupil who is timetabled into RE:SET wanted to make posters on the subjects of online safety, cyber-bullying and anti-bullying. These were very powerful and were displayed with the rest of the anti-bullying wall display. Coupled with this, as part of our #BeKind and #Antibullying display the young people made t-shirts with statements and positive messages which prompted a lot of free discussion about their thoughts on bullying in school.



Positive statements from RE:SET pupils

We were fortunate that Sheila and Debs, who are both trained volunteers from the Samaritans, visited Levenmouth Academy to give a talk to some of the young people. Working together, the young people created a “teenager named Sam” who had faced several challenges in his young life and was finding it difficult to cope. Sheila and Debs used “Sam” to explain the emotional health and what the Samaritans can offer. They spoke to the young people about the value of listening and the importance of accessing support. The young people asked lots of questions and thoroughly enjoyed talking to Sheila and Debs.

Finally, after the news of Caroline Flack in February, the young people thought it would be appropriate to make a wall display to encourage using social media more positively which led to a discussion about the pros and cons of social media, how we can keep safe online and why cyber bullying is just as important to tackle as face to face bullying.

Nurture Group

A small nurture group for S1 pupils ran in term three for pupils who were still struggling with the transition to secondary school. It involved arts and craft activities, group discussions, developing friendships and increasing confidence in a safe and secure environment.



Nurture Group pupils at work

Pupils' Prison Visit

During the past year five S1/S2 boys from Dunfermline High School were taken to HMP Perth as part of a piece of work on reducing offending behaviour and involvement with the police.

On arrival they were shown the process of visitors entering the prison, where family visits take place, a holding cell and booking in area. They were shown the segregation unit and the area where prisoners have their daily exercise.

One of the most interesting points of the day was being taken to one of the blocks where the pupils were given the opportunity to speak to two prisoners who shared their experiences and gave the boys advice about making positive choices. The tour ended with some wise words from the prison officers.

The visit seemed to have an impact on the boys who were shocked that prison is not what they had seen on TV.



Pupils on their visit to HMP Perth

Responding to the Hunger Crisis

Our foodbanks fed just under 4,000 people in 2019-20.

Our foodbanks in Dumfries and Stranraer have been fixtures in their local communities for the last five years, assisting those experiencing food poverty and offering additional support to those in crisis. The foodbanks are located in the Apex units and are operated by Apex volunteers, including existing and previous service users, and managed by Apex staff. The ventures are in partnership with The Trussell Trust and we have had generous support locally, primarily from Tesco but also Morrisons and Lidl, as well as a number of welcome donations from local organisations, schools and churches and, most recently, British Gas. The Woodfield Co-op in Dumfries has been especially supportive with regular financial contributions. However, the general public is always the foodbank's biggest supporter with staff regularly receiving generous donations from those living in their community.

There is always lots of interest in what we are doing and our staff in Dumfries often give talks and raise awareness to colleges, schools, churches and other organisations about foodbanks and the work of Trussell Trust and Apex's part in that.

In Stranraer we have expanded the service to include a soup kitchen, with fresh vegetables donated by a local farmer, and charity shop which are also run by volunteers and managed by our staff. Our younger service users are particularly fond of helping in the charity shop which has now raised over £8,000 to directly fund the soup kitchen and support the foodbank. For many of our

volunteers, this environment is the first time that they have been entrusted with such responsibility, such as cash handling or opening up the premises and the pride that they take in these tasks is evident. The company, sense of purpose and pleasure that they get from working with us, particularly for those who could be more socially isolated, means that they often continue to volunteer with us, sometimes for years, even helping out with other activities such as the cooking group or craft group.

We are incredibly proud of our staff and volunteers who have continued to work on the front line through the pandemic to deliver an essential foodbank service, adapting to the safety challenges, to ensure those in need are provided for.



Volunteers Lizzy and Ian working in the foodbank

Volunteering

John Ruskin said, “The highest reward for a person’s work is not what they get for it, but what they become because of it.”

Apex has always encouraged an attitude of volunteering because we understand the value of it. In fact, we have built services around it. By encouraging our service users, and our staff, to offer some time in their community, their eyes are lifted for a while from their own, sometimes challenging, situations to make a difference to the circumstances of others. There are considerable added benefits of course which are not always immediately apparent to the lay volunteer, but our staff understand that by engaging our service users in a group activity that, on the face of it, is to make their town look better, or to restore something that is damaged, or make up food parcels, they uncover new aptitudes and interests.

Suddenly, gardening isn’t just weeding and building a wall isn’t just lugging stones and bricks. Their hands are dirty but their eyes are gleaming and you can hear comments like “Look what I did”! People who a few weeks ago who were anxious about leaving the house now look forward to the next time they’ll see their new friends, their team. Their stamina improves; they stand a little taller; they smile more. This may sound trite, but in our experience, when a person is still attached to a life that led them to Apex in the first place, it matters. Of course, our volunteering services are always run in conjunction with our core mentoring support which forms part of our holistic approach. But for some, the skills, confidence and characteristics they develop when they volunteer is what can make the difference between one chapter of their story and the next.

Crafty Volunteering

In 2019 Shumela Ahmed, Managing Director of the Resilience Learning Partnership (RLP) was looking for suitable clients to become trainee trainers with lived experience of trauma. Our team in Forth Valley recommended two Apex service users who were keen to become involved. After a meeting with Shumela to discuss the course, their training commenced in July 2019.

One client suffered with high levels of anxiety and on the first day of the programme called her PDM, Ann Mathieson, to say she did not think she could attend. Ann collected her from home and accompanied her to the venue so she was able to continue with the course. On another occasion she was outside the Alloa Town Hall for an event and again her anxiety was making it difficult for her to even get through the door. Ann went to support her and the service user felt able to stay for the entire event.

Inspired by her own children’s creativity, Shumela applied for a grant during lockdown to create craft boxes for children whose families can’t afford craft materials, and the Crafty Kids Survival Box initiative was launched. Our clients involved with RLP were keen to support the initiative and volunteered to put the materials together and deliver the

boxes. Even our staff got involved as substitute drivers to make sure the crafty kids got the boxes! Over the course of lockdown more than 1,400 boxes have been delivered around Clackmannanshire and as far as Glasgow. Both of these volunteers, who continue to be supported by Apex, will receive Level 6 Community Award Certificates for their efforts.



Apex clients making sure crafty kids get their boxes

Rising to the Challenge

The Highland team established a Community Challenge Team of volunteers, made up of service users and staff, a few years ago to undertake meaningful projects in the local area, making a difference to the people who live there. As well as one-off challenges, long term partnerships are formed with local organisations to ensure that the team can build relationships and take ownership of the work being done.

Over the last couple of years the team has established and maintained the gardens at New Craigs Hospital on the outskirts of Inverness. As well as working on the large amount of bushes, trees and paths, the team also cares for the dementia garden which is a safe haven for patients. The team took time to research what colours have positive reflexes with patients and have planted with this in mind.

Donkey Brae and the Viewpoint in Inverness city centre have been ongoing projects over the past few years and the Challenge Team have regularly maintained the grounds for public use and to protect and enhance these areas for wildlife. This project demands many hours to keep the area free of rubbish and prevent overgrown plants/trees.

A new project for the Challenge Team this year was a Civic Trust site - King Duncan's Well. The well had become very overgrown in recent years and unsightly. The volunteers cleared this area, with a walkway access to enable local history groups, the general public and schools to visit the site. Whilst completing this project the team were shown appreciation by numerous members of the public who were grateful to see the vast improvement and thanked the team on their work, commenting "It's been a very long time coming!"

Tomatin Distillery is a supporter of the Challenge Team's projects. Recently the team received a donation of 12 whisky barrels which allowed the volunteers to show their inventive side, creating various designs and ideas for the barrels. These included rocking seats, display cabinets, garden planters and a tribute to Celtic Football Club with hidden cabinet!



Working at King Duncan's Well

"Great help to me. Still working, jobs all good, thanks again for everything"
JS, service user



Tending the gardens at New Craigs Hospital *(above and right)*



Relax in a whisky barrel!

“My client was delighted with the input and found it a positive experience.”
Social work staff

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