



scotland

Annual Report 2021

Contents

Apex Scotland Board

Gordon Samson, **Chair** (retired March 2021)
 Ann Landels, **Vice Chair** (Chair from March 2021)
 David Asher
 Michael Dickson (retired December 2020)
 Pamela Dobson
 Jim Hunter (retired October 2020)
 Karen Kelly
 Peter Kennedy
 Kathrine Mackie
 Karen Pryde
 Giles Robinson
 Vahaab Sajid
 Fiona Taylor (retired September 2020)

Patron

The Rt Hon Lord Campbell
 of Pittenweem CH CBE QC

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Welcome: A Very Different Year

By definition an Annual Report is a time to look back and reflect on the past year whilst also sharing aspirations and plans for the future. However, as someone who only assumed the role of Chair of Apex Scotland in March 2021 I will start by introducing myself. I am Ann Landels and I have been an Apex Board member since the start of 2019. Having been appointed Vice Chair in December 2019, I was very honoured to be confirmed as Chair elect of Apex Scotland at the end of 2020. I have 'big boots' to fill. Gordon Samson, our previous Chair, had been actively involved with Apex for seven years, both as Vice Chair and Chair. He brought compassion, understanding and ambition to his roles in Apex and I hope I can continue to uphold the values that he demonstrated.

My background is learning and community development and, unlike some other Apex Board members, I don't have direct experience of the criminal justice system, so perhaps not an obvious 'fit' for membership of the Apex Board. However, I do have considerable direct experience of working with those who are often seen as being at the margins of society, and my goal has always been to support and enable people to reach their full potential and to challenge and break down the myths and stereotypes that are held about people often seen as 'not quite part of society'. After completing a History degree at Edinburgh University I qualified at Aberdeen College of Education in what was then known as Youth and Community Work and is now Community Learning and Development. I spent 30 years working in the north east of Scotland, both in rural and urban areas. My final post with Aberdeen City Council was as a Head of Service managing the delivery of education and community services to some of the most disadvantaged areas in the city. After I left Aberdeen City Council I lived in France for a couple of years before returning to Edinburgh.



Ann Landels, Chair of Apex Scotland Board

I'm afraid retirement didn't suit me and I returned to work, this time for the UK homelessness charity, Crisis. I established its learning and support services in Edinburgh and East Lothian and liaised with partner organisations across Scotland. The work and values of Crisis are very similar to Apex, and in fact many of the people that I worked with whilst at Crisis had had first hand experience of the criminal justice system and of the prejudice that comes with this, and some were also supported by Apex.

When I retired a second time it felt like a natural progression to become involved with Apex, an organisation where all the staff see the people they are working with as individuals, not part of an anonymous group, and value and celebrate that individuality. And there is synergy between Apex and another part of my life as I remain involved in education as a member of the Board of Edinburgh College and, for the past year, Interim Chair.

The year this report covers, 2020/21, has probably been the most memorable that any of us have experienced. We have all completely changed the way we live, work, and relate to other people. We have all seen our normal way of life curtailed to some extent and have had to develop new skills, new terminology ("you're on mute" must be one of the most heard phrases of the year) and new ways of coping with life. As Dr Hannah Graham said whilst giving Apex's Annual Lecture in September 2020, "The Covid-19 pandemic is a landmark by which time will be marked as 'before' and 'after'; a time of rapid change... It has been hard, yet there has been camaraderie and a capacity for problem solving and grace under pressure that we can be proud of." This definitely describes the response of Apex staff to the pandemic.

In March 2020 we all entered a virtual world and that virtual environment has continued. The Apex teams have shown themselves to be remarkably resilient

The Apex teams have shown themselves to be remarkably resilient and inventive as they moved to working from home and engaging with our clients using a video conferencing method such as Zoom or on the phone.

and inventive as they moved to working from home and engaging with our clients using a video conferencing method such as Zoom or on the phone. Like many other organisations, Apex's plans for upgrading and developing its IT systems were catapulted forward and, with assistance with the Scottish Government's pandemic funding, we were able to complete work that in normal times may have taken years. We could also address some of the digital poverty that Covid-19 has exposed amongst many of our clients who previously did not have easy, or any, access to digital devices. These developments will stand us in good stead in years to come and it is possible that some of the pre-pandemic ways of doing things will not return.

Politically it has been a challenging year as the focus and priorities of both the UK and Scottish Governments pivoted overnight to dealing with the pandemic. Inevitably this meant that opportunities to engage with Government Ministers and officials were limited as the usual channels were affected by the restrictions. Towards the end of the year the focus changed again as the Scottish Government came towards the end of its parliamentary term and the slightly delayed 2021 election became the priority for all political parties. Covid-19 also brought its own pressures for the criminal justice system. Unfortunately some of the positive by-products of the pandemic have not been reflected in its day to day operation. The stated aim to lower the risk of infection by reducing the prison population through early release was not fulfilled and more pressures were exerted by the curtailment of family visits for much of the year. Elsewhere, social distancing meant that courts were unable to sit and the backlog of cases has grown. All of this has increased the challenges faced by Apex staff as they continue to support the mental and physical wellbeing of our clients impacted by these events.

Covid-19 has also meant that 2020/21 has been a year of 'firsts'. In September 2020 we held our first virtual Annual Lecture and the lack of opportunities for direct networking with

colleagues and partners was offset by the fact that we were able to reach a wider and larger audience. That was followed by our first virtual staff conference which was a triumph of participation, ingenuity and organisation and, again, although we missed out on the face to face contact between Board members and staff, the imaginative presentations put together by the teams from each locality gave a good overview of Apex's work and achievements across Scotland.

And for the Board it has also been a year of change and of more firsts. We said 'goodbye' to three of our longest serving members, Jim Hunter, Michael Dickson and of course Gordon Samson. One of our newer members, Fiona Taylor, also resigned due to pressure of work, mainly brought about by Covid-19. We appointed new Board members after an open recruitment process with interviews held virtually for the first time and we were delighted to welcome Kathrine Mackie, Peter Kennedy, Vahaab Sajid, Pamela Dobson and Karen Pryde as new Trustees. This continued refreshing of the Board is to be welcomed as new members not only bring new and differing experience and knowledge, but also a fresh perspective on the work of Apex and, indeed, now a perspective from a wider geographical area across Scotland. All our meetings in 2020/21, including the Board strategy day, have been held virtually, which has in fact facilitated greater participation by Board members as travel across the country between local authority areas and meeting in groups are two of the things we have been unable to do this year. However, we are looking forward to meeting one another face to face in the not too distant future.

We ended the year having learned much about the resilience of the organisation and its ability to be flexible and adapt quickly to change. We know that many of the challenges that Covid-19 has brought us will continue into 2021/22 but I have no doubt that Apex is in a good place to meet these challenges. We have a committed and enthusiastic Board and we have a staff team who continue to prioritise the highest standards of engagement and personal achievement with the people that we support. On behalf of the Board I would like to thank all Apex staff for their continued hard work, for the initiative that they have shown throughout the last year and for their continued good humour and positive outlook on life, despite all the personal and professional challenges that individually they have had to face.

Ann Landels
Chair, Apex Scotland Board

Resilience, Wellbeing and the Covid Experience

Welcome again to our Annual Report, and thank you for taking an interest in the work of Apex Scotland. This time last year we were six months or so into a pandemic which we thought might actually be receding as things relaxed over the summer and numbers were reducing. It feels horribly like Groundhog Day as I write this in the light of rising Covid case numbers, relaxing restrictions and a profound hope that this time we can find a way of living with the virus in some sort of normality. As the year progressed, we developed increasingly advanced models of operating in an online world and my thanks go to all our staff who worked so patiently and innovatively to maintain services for our client group in a risk managed environment. But it would be doing everyone a disservice if I tried to pretend that it has not placed a strain on everyone and everything we have done; and it is this fact which has me reflecting on two important terms which shape Apex's ethos and service models, but which apply as much to ourselves and our own lives: resilience and wellbeing.

Resilience is something we try to develop and encourage in those we work with because how a person manages setbacks and adversity is fundamental to how they cope in the world, and indeed how they perceive it. It is obvious when you think about it that we all have ways of dealing with trauma or disappointment or even boredom, and equally obvious that we are all different in how we do this. Some coping methods are more successful than others, and sometimes things that seem to work for the individual are, in fact, damaging to them. Our service users typically have considerable experience of setbacks and trauma of one form or another, and many of them have found themselves at our door simply because the ways in which they have sought to manage pain have turned out to be at odds with society's expectations of 'normal' or 'good' behaviour. More extreme coping methods can include chemical abuse,



Alan Staff, Chief Executive

self-harm, suicide, or violent acting out behaviour which demonstrates what a critical matter this becomes. Resilience fires the determination to move forward despite the odds; it recognises the need to love yourself even when others seek to bring you down; and it strengthens you to resist becoming crippled by the memories of past failures, trauma or abuse. Resilience is at the centre of Apex's first element of our mantra 'Aim Higher, Behave Differently, Change Your Future', and brings me to the second of these important terms – wellbeing.

Wellbeing as a concept is very fashionable now and appears in various guises from the Scottish Government's commitment to pursue a wellbeing economy, through personal wellness and meaningfulness courses, and even

turns up increasingly in school curricula. What we are talking about here is recognising that happiness and a sense of satisfaction cannot be prescribed by others, no matter how well-meaning; it is more personal than that. Wellbeing is distinct to each individual and is the sum of experience, environment, predisposition and expectation which is defined by the person, not some statistical or scientific means. Any process committed to wellbeing has to start with the needs, desires and experiences of the individual which does not look to mould them into a clone of normalness, but sees them as a unique and valued part of our community - whoever they are, wherever they have come from and whatever they might have done. This is not some trendy, liberal

When we treat our service users as equals, give them power to make their own decisions and define their own futures, we constantly see better results in terms of more rounded and content people walking their own recovery path and with a sense of optimism about moving forward.

pipe dream championed by do-gooders and idealists; it actually works. When we treat our service users as equals, give them power to make their own decisions and define their own futures, we constantly see better results in terms of more rounded and content people walking their own recovery path and with a sense of optimism about moving forward.

Just imagine if there was no way forward around the pandemic. Imagine the vaccine wasn't working and every time we made any progress we just slipped straight back so that the only future envisaged was one of permanent lockdown with the odd spell of freedom just to remind yourself of what you are missing. I wonder how we would cope? Have you considered that may be pretty much how some people see the world, even pre-pandemic? That many of the people we work with, when we meet them have no hope of change, just a monotonous repetition of failure and low expectation? Think again of an alternative pandemic scenario: I wonder how resilient you would be after a few years and how many of us would have begun to rely on less than positive coping methods?

If we are serious about making a real change for the better, I think we are going to need to make a real attempt to become sensitive to the traumas experienced by those we work with and understand the impact this may have on how they respond and what is most likely to allow them to prosper. This means moving away from rigid ideas of crime and punishment, good guys and bad guys and so on, and towards a justice system which looks to reduce the incentives for crime and increase the incentives for positive behaviour patterns. It also means

abandoning our pretensions of superiority and otherness in favour of adopting a beneficial partnership with each person seeking our assistance. We have always said that relationships are at the heart of every bit of progress made, and this remains the case. We are, however, needing to examine on what basis those relationships are formed and maintained and move away from adult/child controlling or coercive activity towards a truly adult collaboration which allows growth, respect and communication.

The justice system historically tends to remove responsibility from people as a form of punishment or even, bizarrely, as some sort of paternal approach 'for their own good'. Being deprived of responsibility for one's own actions is one of the most debilitating things that can happen to anyone, and however short the path to restoring confidence, the will to take back control of things — which may be problematic when someone else has been looking after them for you — is often weak. If we are to see a more progressive approach, we will need to see resilience building from an early age, greater efforts to identify and reduce trauma, especially in children, joined up approaches to reducing the drivers for crime in communities, and a wellness orientated economy of which the justice system is simply a part.

I think we have greater recognition of the issues and what is needed than at any time I can remember, whilst at the same time seeing a huge impact from the Covid epidemic, which is forcing a number of changes in approach, many of them extremely positive. Curiously, this could just be the moment when 'needs must' drives a very positive change and helps Scotland towards a fairer and more productive and healthy relationship with justice based on a wellbeing-for-all vision.

We are continuing to take small steps ourselves where we can and, as others do the same, I think we will see some big changes in the coming months. I am glad so many have committed to working with us at Apex to make these dreams realities and, as you will see by the contents of this report, just because a dream is big does not mean it cannot happen if you are prepared to work at it.

Alan Staff
Chief Executive, Apex Scotland

"Thank you for all your help. People like you are making such a difference to people's lives like myself. Although we haven't been in contact long, I have enjoyed our small interactions."

Edinburgh client

We worked with
over **2,000** people



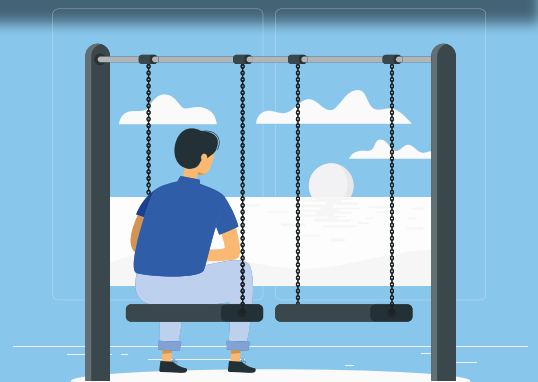
24% were under 25

67% had a criminal
conviction



15% had convictions
of a sexual nature

31% reported having
mental health issues





2,489 CPO hours completed

583 qualifications attained



Our foodbanks fed 2,636 people, 27% of whom were children

36 clients achieved a job outcome



RE:SET school services prevented 61 days being lost to exclusion

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.

Apex teams currently operate from Highland, Grampian, Tayside, Fife, Forth Valley, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Borders, Dumfries, Stranraer and Ayrshire but reach clients all over Scotland.

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 2020/21 we worked with over 2,000 individuals over our key services including:

Steps	CSCS Training	Shine
Smart Recovery	Volunteering	New Routes
Challenge Team	AYE	RE:SET
Rehab & Disclosure	Foodbank	Community Payback Orders
RAFT	Moving In	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. 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

Nicole's Story

Nicole Slavin has very recently completed a placement with Apex as part of the Scottish Drug Forum's Addiction Worker Trainee Programme. She explained how she found herself back at Apex after a long absence and we celebrate her wonderful success.

"I came to Apex as a service user after going through a rough time in my life, using substances and being in a toxic relationship. Apex was one of the main foodbanks in Stranraer and sometimes I would use this service and also staff would check up on me to see how I was doing, but at the time I wasn't ready to change my life. I started working with Apex after being referred to Shine which was an amazing support service and helped me so much to get me to where I am today.

"After getting out of my situation, my Shine support worker gave me appointments every day at Apex, meaning I had a daily focus early on in my journey. Being able to go to Apex every day kept me busy, and with all staff being kind, caring and non-judgemental it made it enjoyable to be there. Whilst being supported with Shine, I then went on to do the Employability Fund with Apex where I was learning new things and meeting new people. Joining the Employability Fund course gave me what I realised was a responsibility to keep to my days and times to be able to complete the qualification. Doing the course with Apex helped build my confidence back up, build a CV and get me back into employment as well as getting back into daily life.

"Four years on, after not spending as much time at Apex, but knowing if I needed any help or support the door was always open, I got in touch with one of the staff to find out what my convictions were for a job I was applying for. All the staff were so pleased to see me and welcoming after such a long time. That was me four years free from substance misuse and doing really well in life.

"Whilst being back at Apex, Mhairi and Mark told me about a job opportunity coming up training to be an addiction support worker and also gaining a SVQ2 in social services and health care. With this being such an amazing opportunity, I applied for the job, got it, and got my first placement at Apex. I have absolutely loved being able to return to Apex, seeing things as a member of staff and helping service users.

"Apex is a great place in supporting people in every aspect of daily life. If you want to change or better yourself, the support and help is there to help you along the way."



Nicole Slavin

An Organisation of Influence

One of Apex's priorities is to be an organisation of influence; to inspire other agencies to follow our examples of successful engagement and partnership, and to work with our partners to promote social, economic and political change which will provide better outcomes both for our service users and the wider community. We are proud that our expertise and experience is often called upon by others to assist with improving current systems and to provide the skills and knowledge needed to implement positive change.

Principally this year we have been working as a partner with the Scottish Government in delivering on the twin objectives of improving employment opportunities for people with an offending background and reducing offending throughout Scotland as part of the Justice Strategy. Apex has played a key role in providing advice, expertise and service delivery across these principal areas. As valued partners we have been particularly involved in providing evidence to the Justice Committee and to the various justice related departments through attendance at working groups, consultations and meetings especially those concerning community sentencing, prevention and prison throughcare.

Our Chief Executive, Alan Staff was re-elected for a second term as Deputy Chair of the Criminal Justice Voluntary Sector Forum (CJVSF) which has been particularly busy this year providing evidence and third sector perspectives on many policy issues in the Justice agenda. He has been nominated by the forum to represent the third sector at the Scottish

Government's Justice Funding Group, established to address many of the issues which we have been raising for a long time such as use of Section 27, short term funding cycles, delays in commissioning and the inefficiencies of current procurement models.

The UK Shared Prosperity Fund Group is an ERSAsponsored working group looking at how the replacement for the European Social Fund will be implemented across the UK and providing advice and evidence to the UK Government on the impact of its decisions about this. Apex is a significant contributor to a number of influential groups in Scotland and the UK working for an effective, transparent and client centred approach to this crucial funding stream. It has been vital that we work with others across the UK to try to ensure that the decisions made do not adversely impact the sector and our client base.

Other significant areas of influence throughout 2020/21 have been through Scottish Government/Community Justice Scotland's Outcomes Performance and Improvement revision and the Scottish Government's Justice Funding Framework working group. Our Director of Operations was elected to the Third Sector Employability Forum Executive Group and is a Board Member of Release Scotland which is supporting employers to employ people with criminal convictions.

Apex continues to provide input to a number of consultations, which this year included CJVSF's consultation on the SPS women in custody strategic needs assessment.

Apex Scotland Annual Lecture

The inaugural Apex Scotland Annual Lecture took place in 1998 with the then Minister for Home Affairs and Devolution, Henry McLeish, taking to the lectern. This started the ball rolling on what was to become a respected principal event in the Justice calendar and we have been delighted to continue to attract a calibre of speaker year on year who is not only a leader in their field, but who is eager to join with Apex in stimulating debate on topical issues and challenging the status quo when there is a clear need for fresh thinking.

We were delighted when Dr Hannah Graham, Senior Lecturer in Criminology at SCCJR, at the University of Stirling agreed to be our speaker last year, and she adapted with aplomb with the need to move to a digital platform when it became apparent that meeting in groups was not going to be an option for a while. Dr Graham's lecture, titled "Courage of Convictions: progressive visions and allies in uncertain times", was a



Dr Hannah Graham gives Apex's first virtual lecture

calmly delivered but passionate call for us to be courageous in our words and actions to create a better and fairer future in Scotland, particularly within Justice. The lecture certainly struck a chord with many who participated in social media throughout and created some points for discussion during the live online question and answer session afterwards.

A copy of the lecture, both in video and in print, is available on our website.

Are We Saying It Right?

In 2021 we are hit by influencers in every direction. Social media is saturated with people who try to inspire, encourage, or cajole their followers to a way of thinking that they project into the virtual world. Pings and tweets can dominate our attention and, whether for amusement or validation, the number of followers you attract (and who they are), particularly as a business, is relevant. It is an element of modern life that is constant and consistently changing. Getting on with the job is not enough anymore, you need to be able to shout, wave, tweet, link-in, 'gram, tiktok and all sorts to reassure your tribe that you matter.

Having upped our game in the social media stakes in 2019, encouraging individual teams to create an online presence particularly to engage locally, we were aware there was more to be done. In July 2020 we took the opportunity to look again at communication on a wider scale which would start to create a new rolling strategy to ensure that we had a clear direction for our aims and objectives and that we would promote ourselves in the best way we could. Our thanks to our colleagues at PeopleKnowHow who were a valuable guide and sounding board in these first weeks as we started to speak about and plot what we wanted to achieve. We now have a working communications strategy which has been approved by the board and will continue to be developed into the coming year.



As the strategy was still being developed we decided to strike while the iron was hot. With Apex already being asked to give opinion and provide expertise to a wide audience through consultation, conference speaking and media, we decided to utilise this demand and create a regular blog through our website, primarily written by our Chief Executive, which started in November 2020. We have been delighted with the positive response and look forward to welcoming guest bloggers soon. To build on initial interest in the blog, Service Development Manager, Paul Belton, took the reins of our social media shortly afterwards, at which time we witnessed our tweet impressions rise by 964% and profile visits rise by 561% during the next 28 days, which was a nice surprise!

Communication is an ongoing development, it doesn't stand still. We will continue to press forward, review our strategy and improve where we need to. But our main objectives continue to be to give our organisation and service users a voice and to showcase the best of what we do.

“Again, thank you very much for all your help, Elsie. I have found the past years very difficult. Due to the nature of my offence and apocryphal reporting, I almost saw this as a situation that I would never escape from. Thank you for all the work you are putting in for me. I genuinely appreciate the time you are giving me. You have already helped me more than any other support service I have accessed and I have been in touch with a lot!”

Edinburgh client

Recognising Our Impact

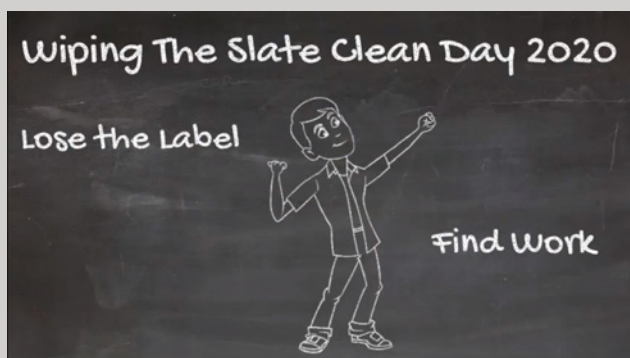
While getting on with the job at hand we are always humbled to be acknowledged by others in our communities as making a difference and a positive contribution. We have been privileged this year to be recognised by different people and partners across the country, some of whom have asked us to bring our contribution to their own media projects, all of which is helping to highlight social wellbeing at a local level.

- » Team Leader, Andy Kimmett, from our Glasgow team created a short video at home during lockdown, sharing his own experiences of the justice system and explaining the benefits of our Steps service which was shown on Barlinnie TV.
youtu.be/GDbhvtzmtM



Andy Kimmett

- » Apex Forth Valley, The Resilience Learning Partnership and Recruit with Conviction created a video for Wipe The Slate Clean Day 2020 informing people about their disclosure rights.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=69H5PBd2RVU>



- » Following changes to the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act in November 2020, we were asked to co-host an online Employers Conference to advise employers on the amendments. We used some new technology which told client stories in an animated format, explaining the challenges they face and how we can help.

“I was teaching in France last week to probation officers and explaining to them changes in the criminal records disclosure periods and comparing this to France. Big thanks to Apex for that one!”

**John Sturgeon, Lecturer in Social Work,
The University of the West of Scotland**

- » Just before Christmas 2020 we were blown away by the generosity of the Dunlop family in Dumfries who rallied friends and neighbours to raise awareness of our Dumfriesshire foodbank and donated over 1,000 items, publicised in the Daily Record and online news pages.



A generous foodbank collection

Recognising Our Impact

- » Community Justice Scotland created a video which was shared widely across social media platforms, celebrating some remarkable stories of compassion and goodwill during such a difficult year. We were delighted that they chose to highlight Apex Stranraer with their 'Little Box of Kindness' project and the voluntary work undertaken by our Highland Challenge team.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gO30Ch7DXCw>



- » A full page feature on All Cleaned Up appeared in Clackmannanshire's Love Local Magazine sharing the purpose of our social enterprise and all the good work that the company has been doing in the local area.



- » Apex Forth Valley has been partnering the Resilience Learning Partnership in its Crafty Kids Boxes project through the pandemic and took part in the live film screening in November 2020, "Crafty Kids Boxes: The Story So Far..."



Highland Third Sector Interface Awards

We are very proud of our Highland team who in January 2021 won the Community Justice Partnership Excellence category in the HTSI Awards, having been nominated by James Maybee from Highland Council. In his nomination video James said of the team “Their can-do spirit and solution focused approach is nothing short of inspirational. Everyone who walks through their door is treated as an equal, with respect and all have an opportunity to fulfil their potential.” This comment resonated across the organisation as it is something we all endeavour to do and is a great testament to how Apex’s work impacts communities.

The ceremony was held digitally on 28 January and, at that time still unable to gather together, Apex Highland Service Development Manager, Alistair McDonald, accepted the award on behalf of the team.



Alistair McDonald with the Highland team's award

Sarah's Story

As mentioned elsewhere in this report, the last year has seen our personal development mentors have to adapt their usual focus of supporting people into employment when priorities for our service users quickly changed as a result of the pandemic. One Edinburgh PDM explains how her support changed for a client she was working with.

“Sarah* was made redundant following an incident in her previous job where she unfortunately made a fundamental mistake involving food. Sarah suffers with her mental health and has a mild form of Asperger’s. The incident at work had a big effect on her confidence and her anxiety increased substantially. She did not feel like she could sell herself in a job interview and was anxious about employers asking her why she left her last job.

“Sarah had registered with the Steps service and we were just starting to complete a good amount of work towards looking for work when lockdown happened. I contacted Sarah and explained that we could still work together remotely and we have continued to keep in touch through telephone, text messages and emails.

“The lockdown situation resulted in two of Sarah’s housemates moving away from Edinburgh which left her feeling very isolated and lonely which was affecting her mental health a lot. She was also struggling financially with her benefits and has had to resort to using food banks. This led me to re-assess Sarah’s action plan and how Apex can help her with her current needs which are financial security and her mental wellbeing.

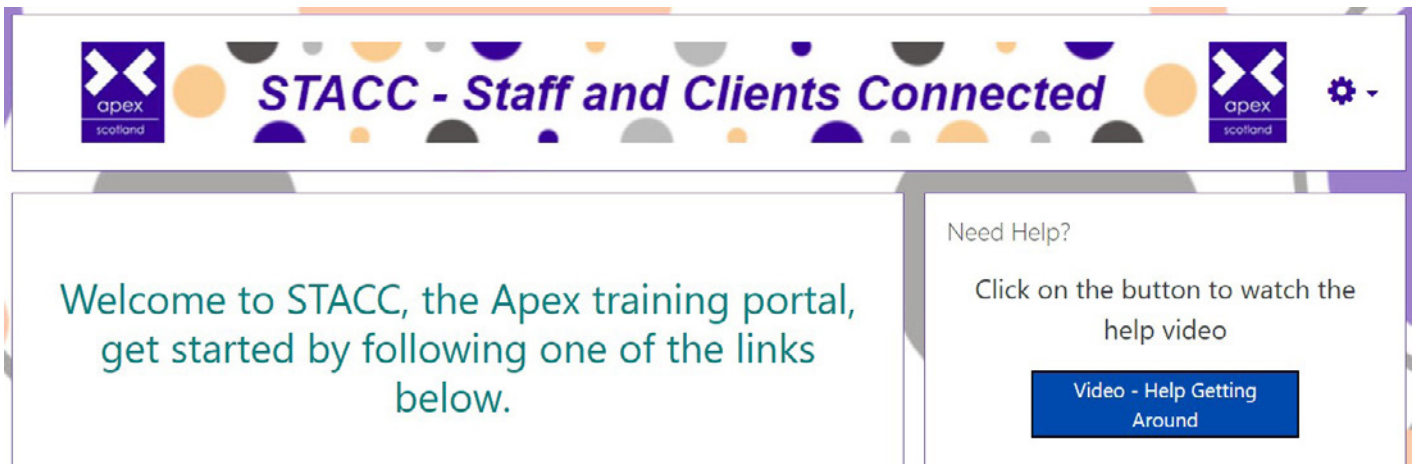
“To address Sarah’s financial situation we completed an application for a grant for living costs on the telephone together. Sarah emailed all the relevant documents to me and I submitted the whole application on her behalf. There was some additional information needed and, again, we went through the process together to ensure that the organisation had all the information required. Sarah’s application was successful and she was awarded a one off grant of £500.

“Admitting that she needs help with budgeting, I created a help list for Sarah which I sent to her and we discussed how she can implement these simple actions into her life to improve her budgeting skills.

“To address Sarah’s mental health we agreed that I would phone her once a week for a chat to see how she is doing, although I think I will increase this to twice a week as I believe this will be of benefit to her. I did some research for online mental health resources and sent Sarah an email with links to how to look after your mental health specifically during this pandemic. I am continuing to send her any resources that I come across that I think will be helpful for her. I am also texting her daily reminders to try to motivate her to get out for a walk once a day.

“Sarah was very grateful for the financial help but also very grateful that Apex could still help with issues she was experiencing what were not directly employment related. She said that the telephone calls are helpful, and she often feels positive and motivated after them. She said that she is extremely grateful to have someone supporting her and she is looking forward to continuing her job search with Apex when things return to normal.”

STACC



STACC – Apex's Online Training Portal

What is always impressive about the Apex workforce is how they rise to a challenge. The last 18 months has seen the need for our personal development mentors in particular to change their focus and instinctively respond to the needs of their clients which, for many, changed immediately in March 2020. 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 our main focus.

Last year we reported that we were delighted recipients of The Wellbeing Fund which allowed us to purchase a number of tablets, phones and data packages for our service users who did not have access to technology, and which allowed us to maintain contact with them.

The Fund also allowed us to develop and implement, in a matter of a few weeks, an online training portal for the purpose of being able to deliver online training and modules to help keep service users motivated. At the time, this training portal (known as STACC) was in its infancy. Over the past year our talented team of staff have created a comprehensive tool which can be used remotely by staff and clients alike, keeping individuals engaged in activity that would otherwise have been 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.

This feat has been even more remarkable because Apex does not have a dedicated in-house IT team. What has been particularly exciting for the management team is discovering the wealth of talent from among our own colleagues which is taking STACC from strength to strength. Personal Development Mentors, whose primary role is to engage with our service users and help them progress, have taken their additional skills and experience, offering their time, design, flair and creativity to produce a dynamic online tool which is easy to use and houses original, creative modules which are engaging, informative and useful. Trainees can now learn about disclosure of convictions alongside healthy eating and nutrition; money management can be taught before learning about how to deal with stress and anxiety. At the time of writing, 247 short courses have been completed. As well as remote, personal learning, clients and/or staff can log on to real-time training for an interactive group session. New elements are being added regularly. Our staff's commitment and enthusiasm to make STACC the best it can be for their service users and for their colleagues is to be applauded, and we are grateful to them.

The development of STACC has led to two particular developments which have made a significant difference this year and which are of increasing interest to potential partners: the introduction of a new SQA Employability qualification for our clients which can be delivered entirely remotely, and the reduction of CPO hours by utilising online delivery.

"I cannot thank you enough for the support and help you have provided me.
Truly appreciated."
Glasgow client

SQA Employability Award

The Employability Award was developed in response to a need to ensure our clients remained focused and active once it became clear that the Covid-19 pandemic would impede our face to face support. The qualification ties together all the practical elements of preparing for work through to what happens after you have secured a job and started working. A number of specific modules are completed online with support from the client's Personal Development Mentor (PDM) who uses accompanying resources to give direction and enhance individual learning. The trainee must pass a test at the end of each module to ensure that they can achieve the full qualification.

This was an ambitious trial for us to start during a pandemic when many of our clients became too disillusioned to think about employment. However, we are incredibly proud that 28 of our service users completed their award between September 2020 and March 2021, a remarkable number under the circumstances, and the course has grown in popularity in recent months.

“Thank you, John, for all you have done. I can look forward to seeing a better future for myself and my son. I have enjoyed completing the SQA Employability Award and it has helped me gain new skills such as video interview techniques. It has helped me increase my confidence.”

Ayrshire client

John Is First to Achieve Employability Award

In September 2020 we were delighted to congratulate John Oliver who was the first person to complete our new SQA accredited Employability Award.

John was referred to Apex by his work coach at Irvine jobcentre due to being long term unemployed. His assigned PDM, John Brownlie, met with him a few times before lockdown, mentioning the award and suggesting it could improve his chances of employment as well as helping to improve his confidence.

When face to face appointments were suspended, John decided to pursue the online qualification, which took him around 10-12 hours to complete while being supported by his PDM via video call.

John commented at the time that completing the qualification helped to confirm the goals that he has in relation to finding work in landscaping or labouring, where he has previous experience, and his confidence had improved thanks to the regular support he gets from Apex.



John Oliver with his Employability certificate

Reducing the CPO Backlog

Innovative ideas are not something Apex is short of. What can be more challenging is sourcing funding or freeing resources to turn the idea into reality. Development of STACC gave us a prime opportunity to look again at how we could work with those on community payback orders (CPOs) in a different way. Over the years we have been involved with the delivery of CPO hours in various guises from training in a classroom environment to our current arrangement in Highland where those serving CPOs work with our Challenge team to complete community projects in the local area, in 2020/21 completing just shy of 500 hours.

But over the past year, as the CPO backlog soared and with no idea when life would return to normal, we wanted to attempt something different.

At the end of 2019, with the news of the significant impact Covid was having on local authorities' ability to meet their commitment to deliver community payback orders, we approached Edinburgh City Council with the idea of piloting remote completion of CPO hours using STACC.

From January 2021, the pilot saw our Edinburgh Steps team work closely with the Edinburgh Unpaid Work team, first of all



to deliver tablets to allow the trainees access to the online learning, and then facilitating the learning and training sessions through STACC. Between January 2021 to May 2021 there were 1578 CPO hours completed through STACC, with all learners supported by their own dedicated PDM from our Steps team. 65% of those hours were completed through tutored activity, 35% of hours were achieved by the service user's own learning using STACC non-tutored activity and online learning resources.

23% of those completing their orders decided to continue working with Apex's Steps service and are on their way to achieving even more!

Our success in Edinburgh attracted attention from Clackmannanshire and we are now running a similar CPO service there, with 431 hours completed there in four months. Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and Argyll and Bute have also contracted an online CPO service recently and we are delivering an online CPO service on behalf of the Wise Group in separate areas.

In order to further reduce the CPO backlog, we are confident that our STACC facility can provide a feasible solution for local authorities across Scotland.

Creating Opportunities

When our service users first start to work with us, they know that, depending on what their needs are and what their starting point is, we will be helping and encouraging each person to Aim Higher, Behave Differently and Change Their Future. There is no one-size-fits-all prescription, but we know that, in order to progress, action is required. We are always considering how best to improve what we can offer those who come to us for help, and there are two things which continually demonstrate giant leaps in confidence and purpose: achieving a certificate or qualification and the chance to work as part of a team.

Giving a service user the opportunity to learn something new, whether in a classroom environment or in a practical way, and acknowledging achievement is

something we enjoy doing in Apex – we like to celebrate success! We now have a number of training opportunities we can offer through our secure online system, STACC, mentioned earlier in this report. This sits comfortably along with other qualifications such as SQA Employability, CSCS, PAT Testing and digital literacy. In 2020/21, close to 600 qualifications were attained through Apex. 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



A number of training courses are offered

What's In It For Me?

When we consider social wellbeing, it could be suggested that volunteering creates its own cycle of wellbeing, increasing the benefits to the individual and the communities that they volunteer in.

Volunteering has been a staple activity within Apex for many years, in particular for the benefit of our service users. As Chris, one of our volunteers, said "I was sitting in the house going nowhere. By volunteering I have a routine and structure and something to get up for in the mornings. I also like to go home feeling that I have done something positive and constructive with my time. Being part of a team and being valued as part of the team is also a good thing for me, and learning new skills on a daily basis. I feel that I am a more confident person since starting here and feel if I put my mind to things I can achieve anything that I want to do in my life." For someone who has had little in the way of direction, or comes from a chaotic background, or perhaps a with a criminal record, we understand that having such a positive experience can be life changing.

We are in the privileged position of seeing the transformation of individuals who start with very little confidence discover leadership qualities. We watch skills develop and attitudes mature as a direct consequence of expectation and accountability. But this is not just true for our service users. We are fortunate to be able to train and develop individuals who come to us from all walks of life including students, people with spare time, or maybe those who need a bit more confidence before applying for a job. Across the country we currently have volunteers working in our foodbanks, IT programming, assisting group work delivery, researching and administrative support as well as working with our outdoor teams. Their effort is wonderful, their energy contagious, and the commitment and passion they have to work alongside our teams is priceless. We thank them all wholeheartedly.

"In the four months I've been volunteering with Apex Scotland as a web developer, I've learned a lot when it comes to programming. Being mentored by Doug Yule, I've progressively built upon skills I learned in my own time and during university giving me much greater confidence in my abilities and overall, as a person. There is still an amount to learn but I'm enjoying the experience and I'm confident it will be a major stepping stone leading to a promising future career in web development."

Paul Walker, web developer volunteer



"I have been volunteering for Apex Scotland for a couple of months now and I'm really enjoying it. I have learned so much already and can't wait for restrictions to ease to help others and get hands on experience on what Apex does. Andy has been really supportive and Louise has been a great mentor. She has been so helpful in teaching me everything I need to know and making me feel welcome. Overall I am enjoying my time as a volunteer and can't wait for what the future brings."

Mairiann Docherty, Glasgow volunteer

Some of our wonderful volunteers!



**Sophie and Naomi,
Edinburgh team**



**Lizzie and Ian,
Stranraer Foodbank**



**Elspeth Henderson,
Dumfries Foodbank**



**Jacqui Matheson,
Dumfries Foodbank**



**Niall Jackson,
Dumfries Foodbank**

“I’ve luckily secured a job. I want to say how much I’ll miss you all and how I think you are all such amazing, beautiful souls and I’m so grateful for my time at the food bank because it really boosted my confidence to work so much. You are all so kind and I feel so honoured to be part of the food bank family. I had so many laughs and felt so good coming to help each day. I’m so grateful to have met you all.”

**Fergus, Food bank
volunteer**

“Volunteering with Apex Scotland has given me the confidence to move on with my life and use the experiences and skills it has given me to apply to my new job role and career. Throughout my time with Apex I have been supported and encouraged to fulfil my potential in all avenues of my life. Even as a volunteer I had a direct input into Apex’s delivery that directly affected service users. By doing this I gained a vital understanding of organisational matters and compliance, which in turned gave me the confidence to deal with complex matters. My team were flexible and supportive of all my work and I achieved a great work life balance. Without Apex I would not have gained the self worth that I have today. I cannot thank them enough.”

Duncan Bennington, IT development volunteer



Highland team volunteers

My Volunteering Experience

"My name is Camila, and I would like to share with you my unique and unexpected journey as a volunteer in Apex Tayside.

"I am a nurse, and I always wanted to help people addressing health promotion. In Brazil, where I am from, I always worked with marginalised groups that lived in deprived communities such as slums. I came to Scotland in 2018 to pursue one of my dreams: to conduct my PhD studies at the University of Dundee with a scholarship from Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (CAPES/Brazil).

"Even though I enjoyed conducting my research, I was missing the contact with people and the possibility to support them during challenging times. Because of that, I spoke with my research supervisors, and they put me in contact with Alan Staff, Apex's Chief Executive. This is where my journey at Apex began.

.....
**Apex helps clients
break barriers to access
services and offers
better life possibilities
beyond the criminal
justice system.**
.....

"I was guided to the Apex Tayside team to start a voluntary position working with the New Routes service. It was not planned, but it was an incredible idea to be face-to-face with people and to discuss their needs and challenges. I would say it has been a life-changing opportunity, and I will share with you the three main points of my ongoing experience: (i) the contact with the clients, (ii) the feeling of being part of the Apex team and (iii) the learning opportunities.

"The first point is related to my experience with Apex clients. My experience working with them has been great. Every person I worked



Camila (bottom right) with the Apex Tayside team

with has a different story and different challenges. Together with the Apex Tayside team, I developed various planned opportunities tailored for each person. The clients reinforced my understanding and belief about the importance of relationships for practice. Relationships that the clients construct with Apex mentors is essential to support positive pathways to reduce reoffending. In addition, these relationships are crucial to understand people's perspectives and to tackle discrimination and stigma that they may face.

"The second point is related to my experience with the Apex team. I was fascinated by Apex mentors' support during people's prison experience and I kept learning so much with the mentors - Jamie, Randy, Amy, John, Lara and team leader Rioghnach. They always made me feel like an essential part of the team. They inspired me and guided me to focus on the Apex goals to help people change their futures.

"The last point is about all the learning opportunities provided by my position as an Apex volunteer. I had a chance to participate in training with Apex and Scottish Drugs Forum which I would not have had if I was not a volunteer. I also managed to have a better picture related to the service provision and policy in Scotland. Moreover, this voluntary position helped me to frame my research interest, making my research meaningful to the real world. I like to think that I also contribute to the team and brought a different view to some complex issues faced by practitioners when navigating through the services to support marginalised people in diverse contexts. I believe in the centrality of having university and community organisations working together. Because of my supervisors at the University of Dundee and the Apex Team this was possible.

"To conclude, I am a very proud Apex volunteer! Apex helps clients break barriers to access services and offers better life possibilities beyond the criminal justice system. This voluntary position gave me purpose and the opportunity of mentorship practice in Scotland. I hope to keep supporting Apex clients and working with the Apex Tayside team during these challenging times associated with the Covid-19 pandemic."

**Camila Biazus Dalcin
Apex Volunteer, Tayside**

Memorial Awards

Each year we present 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 2020/21, particularly as we are aware that everyone had to overcome challenges they would not usually be faced with.

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 jointly to the teams who run our two foodbanks in Dumfries and Stranraer. Almost overnight their role changed from 'added value support' to frontline workers who had to implement immediate changes to working practices to keep themselves and others safe, and cope with increased demand as the pandemic affected the lives and livelihoods of those in their local areas.

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 self-monikered STACC team. As mentioned elsewhere in this report, funding provided as a result of the pandemic gave us the opportunity to create and implement a user-friendly, secure online training system to help our service users stay engaged and motivated throughout the pandemic. We do not have a dedicated IT support team within Apex, but these colleagues from across the country came together virtually with their knowledge and enthusiasm to build this new system in record time at the start of lockdown so that we could continue to provide services when they were needed most.

We believe all our staff deserve a medal this year, but our congratulations go to these particular teams for their amazing efforts.



Members of Apex Stranraer



Members of Apex Dumfries



Our 'STACC' team (L to R), Steven Hamilton, Kirsti Allison, Doug Yule, John Brownlie, Jai Twigge, Callum Gibson

Sally's Story

Our Steps service assists with any number of barriers to work, not just criminal convictions. Ellie from our Edinburgh team has been working with Sally for a few months and explains how she tackled this unique situation following a referral from a female trauma support organisation.

"Sally* is a refugee and her situation poses different complex barriers and life experiences that I had not had experience working with before. Sally was looking for work in the UK but, although she is a qualified physician, she needed to get her medical licence recognised in the UK before she could start looking for work. The first step was to get help her train for her occupational English test which is a requirement for getting her licence recognised here. I started researching training courses for the test based in different language schools in Edinburgh, and contacted ECS in regards to finance options surrounding the courses. The manager of ECS spoke for some

time about Sally's situation. Due to Covid-19, they had not been experiencing the same number of students and wanted to offer assistance to Sally so that she could take the test. After our conversation, the manager offered to help Sally on a complimentary basis so she could take the test quicker. With the offer of free training and a free test, it was a fantastic offer for someone in Sally's position. She has now received the training and taken her test which is the first important hurdle to cross in this process and is delighted with the help she is receiving.

"I will now be working with her to ensure that she knows how to present the employability skills that employers in the UK will be looking for. She will be taking part in our Employability Award qualification and I will be supporting her through all stages of finding work, including the process to get her medical licence recognised here."

A Vital Spark in Forth Valley



The Vital Spark Project

The Forth Valley team has been moving into the fast lane in its new partnership with Vital Spark Racing. Vital Spark is a new community interest company based in Alloa with an aim to offer a practical workshop course in powerboat building which will benefit, support and empower disadvantaged young people in the Clackmannanshire region. This course will offer the clients the opportunity to gain self-confidence, work experience and a company reference to assist towards a productive future.

The original project which would see 10 local people split into three teams to build a power boat, a trailer for the boat and a third team dealing with the admin and social media had to be shelved when Covid restrictions hit in 2020. Undeterred, Vital Spark scaled down the project and we were delighted to have two local people involved with the smaller project – one who

helped to fully refurbish the power boat to its former glory and the other responsible for photo documenting the transformation.

During lockdown Forth Valley Team Leader, Ann Mathieson, managed to secure sponsorship for our client, Ian Banks, to undertake a weekend training course for the RYA Power Boat Level 2 qualification at Edinburgh Marine Academy. We are very proud that he has now achieved his licence which will allow him to drive a power boat almost anywhere in the world.

The Vital Spark team is hoping to be back in full swing soon. We are excited to see the end results and are looking forward to offering this opportunity to many more clients in the future.



Ian Banks (right) receives his power boat qualification

Effective and Exciting Partnerships

At a time when funding is tighter than ever, the prospect of partnership working in the third sector, of sharing knowledge and expertise, could feel more threatening than opportunistic. It could be tempting to pull resources close to your chest and choose to cushion yourself in isolation rather than risk the trust involved in a true partnership. If we have learnt one thing this past year, it is that our wellbeing, and the wellbeing of those we support, is at its best when we work with partners who have a like-minded drive to put service users first and see them thrive. Partners who seek to improve current systems both for the benefit of the people who access them, as well as for the organisations who provide the services.

In 2020/21 we have been delighted to partner with talented agencies and organisations who are motivated to work with us to take service provision to the next level, who trust that working together is more productive, has increased benefit for everyone and produces successful outcomes.

This was particularly true of City of Edinburgh Council CPO team who were supportive of our innovative online CPO delivery which you can read about in this report. Also this year, a new partnership with Clued Up, Brag, Greener Kirkcaldy and CAB means we are now delivering a new Fife-wide service, called Bright Futures. Similarly, new partnerships with Rangers Football Club, the Resilience Learning Partnership, Vital Spark, Lornhill Academy, Police Scotland and the University of Dundee have seen us develop new services and provide new opportunities for service users across Scotland in 2020/21, and are giving us strong foundations for exciting future developments.

We are truly grateful for our remarkable partnerships, which are wide and varied, many of which have been with us for some years. We would like to thank each of them who have assisted us with their time, experience or financial support over the past year and look forward to continued successful collaborations in 2021/22.

Our partners in 2020-2021 were:

- » ACOSVO
- » Alcohol and Drug Recovery Partnerships
- » Alloa First
- » Asda Fight Hunger Fund
- » ASDAN
- » Beechwood
- » BRAG
- » Cale House
- » Calton Community Fire Station
- » CJVSF
- » Citizens Advice Scotland (Highland and Fife)
- » CPO Teams across Scotland
- » Clackmannanshire Third Sector Interface
- » Clackmannanshire Works
- » Clued Up
- » Community Justice Scotland
- » Community Planning Partnerships
- » Community Safety Partnerships
- » Crossreach
- » Custody Link Project Highland
- » DWP and Jobcentres
- » Edinburgh Napier University
- » European Social Fund
- » Fair Start Providers
- » Families Outside
- » Fedcap
- » Fife Voluntary Action
- » Graham Goulden
- » Greener Kirkcaldy
- » Highfield
- » Highland Third Sector Interface
- » HMP Dumfries Multi Agency Re-integration Team
- » Ian Marr, The Growth Partnership
- » Jan Montgomery
- » Local Authorities Criminal Justice Social Work and Education Departments
- » National Third Sector Fund consortium for European Structural Investment Funds
- » Navigator
- » New Craigs Hospital
- » New Routes (led by Wise Group) – national PSP partners
- » NHS and Health Partners
- » Open Gates
- » Opportunities for All partners
- » Osprey House
- » PASS UK Ltd
- » PeopleKnowHow
- » Police Scotland
- » Project Scotland
- » RAFT consortium
- » Rangers Football Club
- » RE:SET High Schools in Fife, Edinburgh and Clackmannanshire and those who have contributed to the RE:SET service
- » Recovery Network
- » Remploy
- » Release Scotland
- » Resilience Learning Partnership
- » Robertson Construction
- » 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 Holyrood Trust
- » The Robertson Trust
- » Trussell Trust and those who support the foodbanks in Dumfries, Wigtownshire and Levenmouth
- » Turning Point Scotland
- » University of Dundee
- » Venture Trust
- » Vital Spark
- » Volunteer Scotland
- » YPeople

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. 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.

Restrictions imposed over the past year, with the removal of prison visits, has meant an increased reliance on email correspondence with those in custody which has taken a great deal of tenacity on the part of our PDMs to maintain contact and reassure clients that they will continue to be supported on their release.



Wendy's Story

Wendy Stuart, 43, was initially referred to the Shine service in 2019 when in HMP Grampian. She had issues around addiction, offending, mental and physical health issues, and was a prolific shoplifter. What followed was an 18 month journey with her Apex personal development mentor, Jackie Ross, from our Highland team. This is Wendy's story.

Wendy: Jackie came to Grampian the day before I was released and we discussed what my intentions were, what I had to do and how to achieve this which put my mind at rest just knowing I had someone who wouldn't judge, who would listen to me and who would help me as much as she could. I had an 18 month DTTO to complete which involved eight drug tests a week, 3 appointments a week (2 CPN, 1 social worker) and I had to go to court monthly to show that this was being adhered to, so it was a huge relief to see a huge smile and caring person in the form of Jackie.

Jackie: After picking Wendy up from Grampian prison I went with her to her DTTO appointment on return to Inverness, then we went to the bank before I dropped her off at her house along with a food parcel to help her settle in. She was feeling very positive and confident that this was the start of a new life for her.

Wendy: Jackie gave me confidence and belief that there was someone who genuinely did care and wanted to help me achieve my main goal, "to be stable and finish my order successfully." This was a tall order for me as I've had addiction problems for over 30 years with alcohol, heroin and benzos and have been in the criminal justice system since I was 16, serving over 30 prison sentences for petty crimes, so needless to say Jackie had her hands full!

Jackie: A plan was put in place for me to attend all Wendy's DTTO appointments with her, 3 a week, and any other appointments that she would have, and I would support her wherever possible.

Wendy: The first few weeks were a huge stress trying to sort DWP and settle back into the community again. Jackie would call or text to see if I was ok and ask if I needed anything. She helped with food parcels when I needed them and helped with my prescription.

Jackie: Wendy put herself forward for Apex's outdoor project where she met up with likeminded people and loved tidying up the gardens and clearing litter from the beaches. It was good for her physically, mentally, and emotionally. Unfortunately, due to Covid this activity was put on hold.

Wendy: When the lockdown kicked off my anxiety went through the roof. Jackie helped massively just keeping me calm and reassuring me things would be okay which I needed as at this time I started to struggle. As the months went by I lapsed for around 3-4 weeks on benzos and things at home weren't great, but I'd still get that text or phone call from Jackie to say "Hey, hang on in there. You can do this. I believe in you." and that's what got me through.

Jackie: Contact was made every day and at every opportunity I applied for craft packs, books, clothes, food from other services and delivered them to her to keep her occupied and to make sure she felt supported. After travelling to the next village 10 miles away three times a week during lockdown on a limited bus service which brought huge challenges for Wendy, we worked out a plan along with her CPN to arrange to get her prescription delivered to her home address. She attended all her appointments and we discussed what would happen after her time with Shine came to an end. I explained that I could transfer her over to the Apex Steps service and continue supporting her throughout her recovery and appointments.

Covid restrictions were an issue though, and Wendy started to struggle with anxiety; the isolation and her cravings began to affect her mental health. I was in contact daily with her over this distressing time with moral support and encouragement. She did worry that she could go back to her old ways quite easily under the circumstances but realised with our continued support that this would pass in due course and, to her credit, she stayed strong.

Wendy: I managed to get off the tablets and maintained my sobriety. Now I feel amazing and although I still have a million and one problems, I can deal with them a lot better. My anxiety is not as bad as it was and I have found my laughter again!

Jackie: I have worked continuously with Wendy and we have experienced “highs” and “lows” throughout the lockdown. However, her hard work and perseverance has paid off and she has successfully completed her DTTO order with flying colours. She even received a letter from the Sheriff who praised her on her achievement and congratulated her on her progress.

Wendy: I never thought I'd ever get a letter like this off a judge – it blew me away!

Jackie: Wendy is an inspiration to all. She is open and honest. I watched her many a day take that long, cold four mile Shore Road walk from Invergordon to Alness to get her medication, dog in tow through rain, hail, bitter cold winds and on good days, sunshine, then coming back with bags of shopping. I only wished I could have helped her on these brutal days but I wasn't allowed!

Wendy: My family relationships are growing all the time and I now get to see my grandson on facetime (due to restrictions). This is the longest time I have stayed out of prison.

Jackie: Loyalty, friendship, respect, and trust was found by us both over the last 18 months and I will continue to work with Wendy as long as she needs me.

Wendy: Jackie has never just been a “Shine” worker, she has been a friend, someone without judgement and someone who will go that extra mile just to let you know you are worth more and with hard work, patience and a few good laughs along the way anything is possible.

Wendy's journey didn't stop there. We continued to support her to find employment and sourced a trial placement for her at a local cafe. She successfully completed her trial and has now been offered employment! Her new boss, Norma, is delighted with Wendy's progress and commitment to the job. She said, “Some staff members had concerns but I was happy to give

Wendy a chance. The same folk came back the very next day to report that they were indeed wrong and Wendy had proven herself immediately as she got stuck in and never lifted her head. A couple of shifts later and we saw Wendy thrive and her eager attitude to learn shone through. Wendy settled in quickly and has always got a positive and sunny demeanour when she comes in. She chats and greets everyone in her warm friendly manner and the team absolutely adore her. Wendy is now being trained up to help on the cooking and prepping of dishes and I shall look at trying to get her qualifications once we settle into the season. I do see positive and brighter times ahead for Wendy.”

We also know that Wendy is paying it forward by raising money through walking each day for MFR Cash for Kids and has already raised a considerable amount.

The last word goes to our Shine PDM, Jackie, who says “Wendy you so deserve a job and an employer like Norma who has given you that chance. This is the last piece of your jigsaw, which now shows a beautiful picture.”



Wendy loving life in her place of work

New Ventures

No-one is ever going to say, “it is time to reinvent the wheel.” But what they might say is “let’s see where else it will roll”!

One of the most exciting things for the Apex teams is to take their knowledge and expertise to a new audience who can benefit from it, either in terms of an individual recipient or by working with a new partner who is just as excited about what

a joint venture can offer to people who need our support. This is not something that you would naturally assume to happen during a worldwide pandemic, but the optimism and drive of Apex staff are not to be held back and we have been delighted to bring some new opportunities to fruition in 2020/21 which we are looking forward to seeing great results from in the coming year and beyond.

Arrest Referral

In June 2020 we were pleased to introduce a new pilot arrest referral service in partnership with Police Scotland, launching in Dunfermline, Coatbridge, Motherwell and Dundee. This new service now gives individuals being held in police custody the opportunity to be referred directly to Apex’s Steps service, assisting those who have multiple barriers to sustain a positive lifestyle and employment.

At the start of the pilot lockdown restrictions meant contact with new service users was initially by phone while still in custody but could progress to video call on their release. Ironically, the implementation of this partnership has taken place so swiftly because the majority of Apex services were operating on a remote only basis under lockdown. This allowed us to offer almost instant telephone support to individuals whilst they were in the police custody suite. Early one to one support assists the individual when they appear at court following arrest. This is followed by sustained mentoring support, regardless of whether or not they go on to receive a sentence. Over the year we have received 99 referrals for this service.

“Thanks again for all your help and support. I do mention Apex and the excellent help and support I have received at every opportunity. You have been a huge help in my recovery. You helped put all this together. Without this I would probably not be here now.”

Forth Valley client

Bright Futures

We are pleased to be able to expand our service delivery in Fife as part of a new No-One Left Behind funded partnership with BRAG, Clued Up, Fife Voluntary Action, CARF and Greener Kirkcaldy.

Bringing our expertise of employability support and working with those furthest from the job market, Bright Futures is the name of our new service where a Personal Development Mentor will be working with 19 - 24 year olds who have particular needs due to adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and have a criminal record.



Bright Futures PDM, Jai Twigge (left) with colleagues Zoe McMann (middle) and Ellie McPhail (right) outside our new Fife office

Open Gates

Open Gates is a social enterprise supporting prisoners and ex-prisoners in Glasgow through an employment programme with the aim of reducing offending and stopping the revolving door back into prison. In 2019 Apex was approached to assist with delivery and take referrals but, before we could gain any real momentum, lockdown hit.

Now that groupwork is back on the cards again, we have started delivery in earnest as part of a rolling six week vocational course where we mentor participants with the objective of them moving into employment, where our input includes CV building, interview skills and opening opportunities to specific training and qualifications such as CSCS cards.

Although not affiliated with Open Gates, our client, Christopher, was the first participant attending as part of the group to pass his CSCS test.



Christopher with his CITB pass certificate

Rangers Charity Foundation

In December 2020 we were approached by the Rangers Charity Foundation in response to hearing about how we were helping our service users in Glasgow. Meeting with the team, we explained the full range of services on offer which led to us being invited to be part of delivery on their Cashback for Communities programme which has similar aims to our own services. Our input involves speaking to the participants using lived experience examples and providing a disclosure service if required. There is also the opportunity for the young people to access all of Apex's services once they have completed the course.



Apex Team Leader, Andy Kimmett, speaks to course participants

University Partnerships



University
of Dundee

Edinburgh Napier
UNIVERSITY

Over the past year we have significantly evolved our relationship with both the University of Dundee and Edinburgh Napier University. This is progressing our commitment to student placement activity but also, importantly, to the more strategic implementation of research and development that will inform and influence both Apex and the wider sector.

In the coming year we are embarking on a collaborative PhD studentship with the University of Dundee, hosted by the SGSSS (Scottish Graduate School of Social Science). The position was highly sought after and a student has now been appointed who will commence with a Masters year in September 2021 before going onto the 3 year PhD. The student will be evaluating the Dundee Women's Community Custody Unit (CCU), due to open in April 2022, and considering the CCU model itself which we expect to draw on and feed into international research. Our teams will help to provide valuable insight and support as part of hosting the position.

RE:SET

Apex's RE:SET service works in partnership with schools to support young people who may be experiencing challenges that impact on their education.

Our team work with young people in a tailored but flexible approach, focusing on specific areas of support. We cover a variety of topics including, 'emotions', 'relationships', 'wellbeing' and 'anger management', supporting young people to learn new skills and build the confidence and motivation to make positive changes and recognise their potential.

Our talented team also deliver our Alternative to Exclusion (A2E) programme. The A2E service is for pupils who would otherwise have been excluded but instead engage with our staff focusing on actions and consequences of their behaviour whilst continuing with their given school work. Support is also offered to pupils who are reintegrating back into school after a period of exclusion. In the last year we supported 60 pupils on A2E, saving 61 days of exclusion. Whilst this service was affected by school closures, it provided a vital role to include pupils who were facing additional challenges.

"It's given me some place to come and calm down."

S3 girl

RE:SET partners with schools on the Getting in Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) approach and Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) to provide the best possible start and support for our young people, and follows SHANARRI wellbeing indicators. In 2020/21 we provided a RE:SET service in Levenmouth Academy and Dunfermline High School, Fife and began a new service in Lornhill Academy, Clackmannanshire, engaging regularly with 164 pupils.

As with all our services, our RE:SET staff had to think creatively about how to engage with pupils during the last year. The effect of the pandemic on the mental health of young people has been widely publicised, with school closures causing additional

"I talked to my Mum about what we discussed in our group – about the brain."

S3 girl

pressure for those already struggling. Using the school's digital learning platform as well as setting up private Facebook groups and video calls, the team initially focused on supporting as many of the young people already accessing the service as possible. For those pupils who were finding things particularly difficult, the RE:SET mentors arranged to meet them for a walk to provide additional support and, during the school holidays, annual leave was structured to include there being at least one working day per week to allow there to be a continuous support available to the young people. As the reality of lockdown began to bite, the team created self care packs and delivered them to pupils who were finding it difficult to cope. They also created fun work packs and 'positivity bingo' which involved carrying out an activity to achieve something positive for themselves or someone else. Pupil feedback was very positive, stating it helped them to keep their mind off of the current situation and they felt good helping others.

The team also used this time creatively to design a new package of workshops that our staff have been trained in and are now delivering to the young people attending RE:SET. To accompany these developments, we have created a new marketing brochure which we will be launching very soon.

As schools reopened, the initial focus was to resume as much 'normality' as possible to reassure the young people that they had a safe space to help them readjust once again. When group work could resume, pupils showed a particular interest in wellbeing, not just for their own sake but how to help others. The RE:SET team used this interest to create projects and aid discussions as part of the structure of delivery. Here is some of the project work undertaken this year.

"It was actually quite fun."

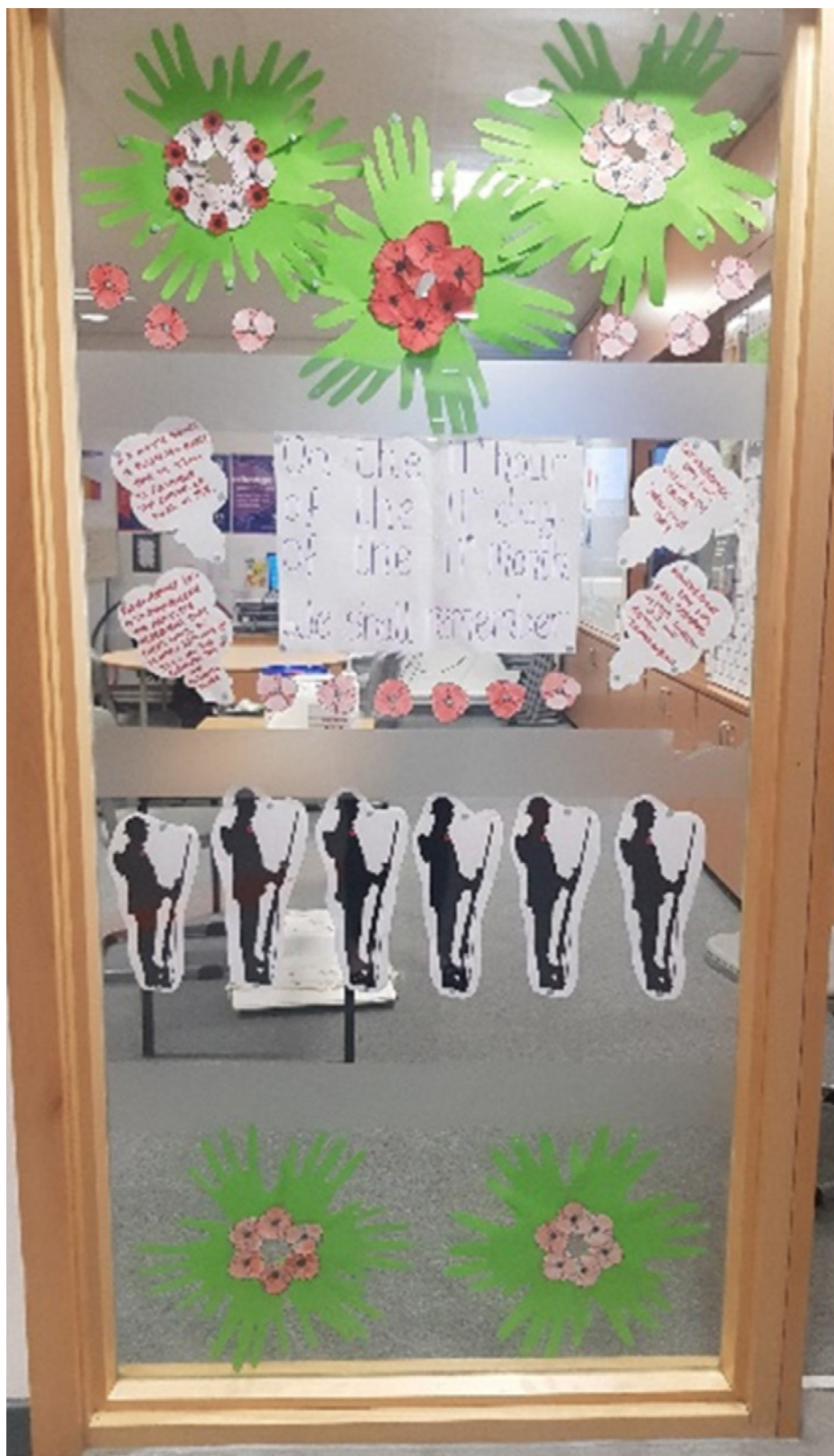
S5 girl

"I told my Mum and Dad you are easy to talk to."

S3 boy

Celebration Days

There are numerous celebrated days that will be incorporated into the year's learning. Levenmouth Academy put on a virtual ceremony for Remembrance Day. All pupils who were present within RE:SET were respectful of the marked silence and listened intently to the readings and poems. Pupils made their own poppy wreaths for a window display.



Remembrance Day display

Nurturing

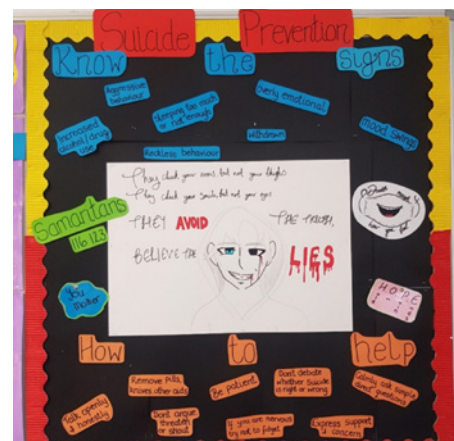
The nurture group consists of girls who lack confidence and/or social skills. Two members particularly struggle with verbal communication. The group focused on developing these skills through group activities, discussion, and crafts.



The Nurture Group learning new skills

Mental Health Awareness

Positive mental health has been a primary topic for young people over the past year, including investigating ways they could help anyone considering suicide. The pupils were sincere in their efforts and put together a number of encouraging quotes which were distributed around the school for teachers to display in their classrooms. They also put together a separate display on mental health which has started a number of conversations and encouraged the young people to explore additional ways to support people who are struggling.



Pupils created a suicide prevention display

All Cleaned Up



Despite the tribulations and uncertainties caused by Covid-19, All Cleaned Up (ACU) has enjoyed a reasonably successful year, experiencing a 32% increase in turnover. This was even more pleasing given the impact Covid had in curtailing contractual delivery at the outset of the pandemic.

Over the past 12 months ACU has continued to meet its social aims, employing over 56 staff throughout Scotland, 64% of whom are considered disadvantaged under Scottish Government procurement legislation. Within this time, ACU has added another national contract to its current portfolio of 34 clients; Support In Mind Scotland (SIMS) has contracted ACU to provide a cleaning service to its eight offices across Scotland.

From the beginning of lockdown, ACU demonstrated its commitment to customers by adapting working practices, including running extra vehicles and purchasing additional equipment, to be able to meet their needs whilst ensuring a safe environment for clients and staff. This was noted by Clackmannanshire Council who, already impressed by ACU's cleaning of void and homeless properties, stairwells and closes in the area, approached the company to provide vital support in the deep cleaning of local schools during the height of the pandemic so that education facilities were clean and safe to open.

Whilst the cleaning side of the business has been in demand over the past year across the country, the team has enjoyed its role in the upkeep and presentation of both Falkirk and Alloa town centres. This included the display of social distancing signage, the planting and upkeep of hanging baskets, flower beds and public spaces, and power washing of pedestrian walkways and litter picking.

ACU staff have demonstrated their flexibility throughout the year, and were delighted to add Falkirk Football Club and Bannockburn House to their list of customers. By power washing and cleaning the stadium areas and stands to a high standard, ACU assisted Falkirk FC to prepare for the 2020/21 SPFL season. Bannockburn House, a historic and beautiful 17th century mansion once frequented by Bonnie Prince Charlie, benefitted from ACU's expertise as part of its preparation to reopen to the public when lockdown restrictions eased. This was not ACU's first experience of a client with historic significance, having also provided a cleaning service for Edinburgh's famous Mary King's Close since 2019.

Moving into 2021/22, the ACU team is looking to continue to build upon the successes of last year and enjoy a bright, sustainable future.



ACU outside Bannockburn House

"You support me a lot just by not judging me.
I appreciate your peaceful attitude."

Edinburgh client

Finance

The primary purpose of Apex Scotland remains as it has always been, being 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 impact, of the work that we carry out but here will provide 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.

The pandemic, which brought about the first lockdown just prior to the start of the financial year 2020/21 caused great concern as to the ability to continue providing services and to the position of our funders. In the days and weeks following that lockdown announcement we worked hard, from home, to determine our funding position in order to inform our response to the situation. Huge thanks must be given to all of our funders who continued to honour the funding that we had previously anticipated. Most were also accepting of the likely changes to our services with no face to face support for a period of time and a shift in the focus of that support, away from employability and employment, given the uncertainty faced, to something more akin to low level mental health and personal support so that our service users were still engaging with us and ready to deal with the pandemic, as well as a future where jobs could be a real consideration. Most were also understanding of a need to reduce expectations of the numbers of people to be seen, with groupwork not being an option for many months of the year. Our staff have also to be commended for their professionalism, care and understanding in this most difficult year.

The Scottish Government has to be thanked for its support through the Wellbeing Fund which enabled us to develop an online training portal as well as providing tablets, or similar, to our service users so that they could remain in contact and benefit from the support on offer.

A significant area of our work is funded through the European Social Fund. Our Steps service is delivered across many parts of the country. Skills Development Scotland as the lead partner for the National Third Sector Fund is to be applauded for its recognition of the impact of the pandemic on the delivery of service by all members of the consortium and supporting a reduction in targets. However, we also continued to face a number of bureaucratic challenges in the delivery of the initiative under this funding scheme. This funding contributed significantly to our financial position because of the favourable funding model employed. We recognised that this model would be more beneficial to some organisations than to others but it exceeded our expectations and was further contributed to by a reduction in elements of our expenditure as a result of altered working because of the pandemic. Our understanding of the complexities and constraints of ESF funding has enabled us utilise this funding in the most effective manner possible. We

continue to seek clarity on the successor to European funding in the shape of the Shared Prosperity Fund as this could have a significant bearing on the future of our organisation. The coming financial year will present challenges with an altered funding model in relation to our ESF Steps service, which is less financially favourable than in the recent past and the continued uncertainty over any replacement funding and the impact this can have on staff morale and motivation.

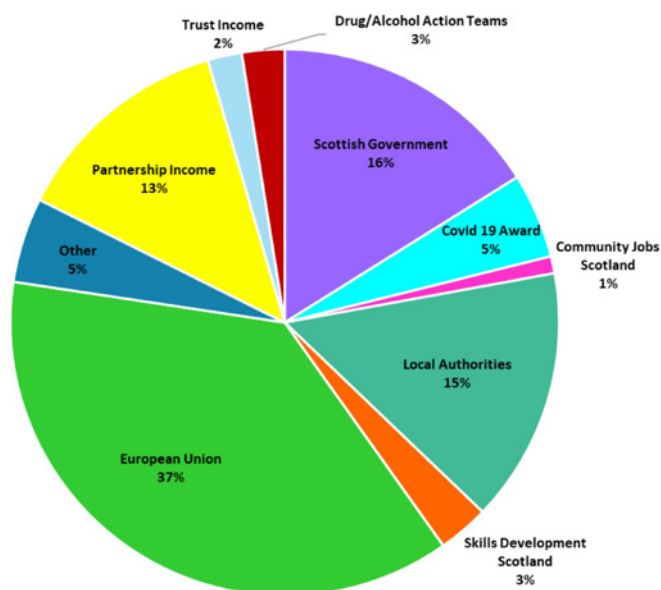
After having real concerns as to our ability to continue delivering training as a result of the pandemic, much of which is funded through Individual Training Accounts, we were able, through remote delivery and reduced groups with stringent Covid control measures, to reintroduce our delivery and ended the year with income close to what had been expected prior to the pandemic. Thanks, again, must go to our staff for finding safe and workable solutions which enabled us to continue providing a very meaningful series of qualifications to our service users.

We also benefitted from the Third Sector Resilience Fund provided by the Scottish Government which supported organisations who anticipated a significant reduction in funding, or who may have had to consider furloughing key staff. As such, we were able to minimise the number of staff on furlough to 13 out of a total workforce of 85 and only for one month, in the main. The UK Government are to be congratulated on the introduction, and speed of, the coronavirus job retention scheme. These supports enabled us to keep the organisation moving forward and the impact of that is clearly seen through the development of our online training portal mentioned earlier and through our work around developing new services and partnerships which we hope will come to fruition in the next few months.

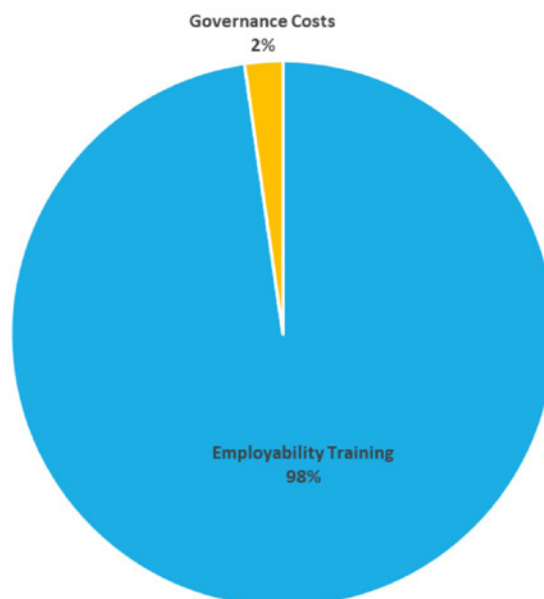
As was the case last year, our financial audit has been carried out on a remote basis. Thanks must be given to our Finance Service Manager, Mhairi Simpson, for her work on this as well as to our auditors, Geoghegan's. Normally our year end accounts would be audited and approved at the summer Board meeting. Whilst the audit has taken place, the formal approval of those accounts is now scheduled to take place in September. 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, however, anticipate any changes from those presented.

Given the comments immediately above, our draft SORP accounts for 2020/21 show a surplus of £475,457 for the charity alone. This was achieved against income generated of £3,104,967 (an increase of 13.98% in comparison to the previous year) and expenditure incurred of £2,629,510 (a decrease of 2.92% in comparison to the previous year). Covid related funding accounts for some of the increase in income, alongside the impact of the favourable ESF funding formula. Expenditure is reduced solely as a result of Covid. This financial performance is obviously pleasing and is testament to the

Income 2020/2021



Expenditure 2020/2021



determination, commitment and loyalty of our staff throughout an incredibly challenging year. It should be noted that SORP accounts are constructed on a different basis from management accounts and will include income received which will be utilised in 2021/22. As mentioned earlier, we recognise that 2021/22 may be significantly different but we have given ourselves a platform whereby we can protect the organisation and/or invest for the future. 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 the ongoing 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 2021/22 which gives a significant degree of reassurance.

Our trading subsidiary, All Cleaned Up, posted a draft loss of £12,925 in financial year 2020/21. Whilst this is disappointing it evidences a marked improvement from the deficit of £27,962 posted in 2019/20. All Cleaned Up suffered in the early part of the pandemic with customers not requiring, or being able to support, the type of cleaning undertaken previously. However, as restrictions began to ease All Cleaned Up saw an increase in opportunities for work as more organisations recognised the need for intensive cleaning to support Covid measures

and often chose to engage with a social enterprise for that purpose. 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, despite cashflow challenges which are faced. 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.

The surpluses we have created in previous years give us a 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. This is being done mainly through a review of our reserves policy where we intend to be able to better identify the expected usage of our reserves so that funders are clear as to our needs and our truly free reserves. 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 once the signing off process is completed.

Philip Dunion
Director of Finance and Corporate Development

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