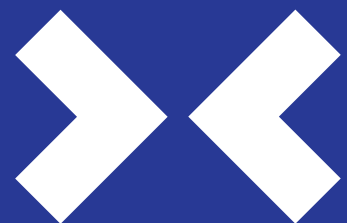




Supporting Journeys



apex

scotland

Annual Report 2023

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Apex Scotland Board 2022/2023

Ann Landels, **Chair**
Stephen Bermingham
Pamela Dobson *(resigned June 2022)*
Diana Fraser *(resigned February 2023)*
Peter Kennedy
Kathrine Mackie, **Vice Chair**
Gordon Mackenzie
Malcolm Melville
Claire Middlebrook
Karen Pryde
Adam Wilson, **Vice Chair**

Patron

The Rt Hon. the Lord Campbell
of Pittenweem CH CBE KC FRSE

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



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Journeys

I always feel a bit like I'm undertaking my own journey when I write the introduction to our Annual Report, a journey through time. I'm reflecting on the work Apex Scotland undertook throughout 2022-23, I'm writing it mid summer 2023 and by the time you are reading it we'll be three quarters through 2023.

2022 marked the return to actual journeys. Although the Board continued to meet online for most of the year some of us did journey to the City Chambers in Edinburgh in September, on a night of terrible weather and disrupted public transport, to attend Apex's first in person Annual Lecture since 2019. We were delighted to welcome the then Cabinet Secretary for Justice, Keith Brown MSP who fortunately had only travelled from the foot of the Royal Mile. It was a stimulating evening, not least because we were able once again to meet up with colleagues and supporters from across the country, renewing old contacts and making new ones and reflecting on the changes that Covid-19 brought to the ways we work, link and communicate.

The following month the Board journeyed to Perth for an 'away day' with the Corporate Leadership Team (CLT). It was a significant moment as all the current Board members, apart from myself, were appointed during Covid restrictions and this was the first time we had met in person. We all experienced the surprises that come with finally meeting people in full height 3D rather than restricted 2D. It was also in many ways a new group of people as there were a number of changes to the Board during 2022: at the start of the year Malcolm Melville, Claire Middlebrook and Adam Wilson joined the Board and Karen Kelly came to the end of her term as a Board member, Vice Chair and Chair of the Finance and Audit Sub group. Adam Wilson has taken on the roles of Vice Chair and Chair of the Finance and Audit Sub group. Then in late summer Pamela Dobson resigned for family reasons and at the start of 2023 Diana Fraser also resigned.

Much of our conversation in Perth focused on the impact that the ending of ESF funding would have on Apex. These changes, which were implemented at the end of 2022, have meant the end of the Steps service and the associated loss of staff but, as ever, the resilience of Apex as an organisation and the forward planning of the CLT has meant that the impact of these inevitable changes has been minimised and, where possible, has been seen as an opportunity to review and reprioritise services. The Board followed the away day at the end of the year with an in person Board meeting and AGM in Alloa where we were able to present Philip Dunion and Ged McEneaney with long service certificates marking 25 years with Apex.

I was also able to re-start my journey round Scotland to visit units and meet with teams. I started this in early 2019 and managed to visit my local Edinburgh team and ACU before the planned programme was halted due to sensitivities associated with the late payment of ESF funding followed by



Ann Landels, Chair of Apex Scotland Board

the 2020 lockdown. I was delighted to spend a couple of days in September meeting with the Dundee and Aberdeen staff in Aberdeen before travelling to Inverness to see the work of the Highland team. Although we'd met online at the 2020 Staff Conference and also through my participation in team meetings during lockdown, it was a privilege to be able to sit down with colleagues and hear about the work they do supporting our clients and, in Inverness, to meet with clients and hear about their personal journey. I can also report that I completed my journey round Apex units in 2023.

The most significant journey that the Board started in 2022 was the appointment of our new CEO. Alan Staff had given the Board plenty warning of his intention to retire and the Board started planning the process to appoint his replacement early in 2022. An appointment sub group chaired by myself was established and throughout the second half of the year we worked with our recruitment partner, Livingston James, to agree and refine the requirements for the new CEO who will lead Apex on the next stage of its journey. The news of Alan's retirement was announced at the end of 2022 in advance of the recruitment process starting in early 2023. I am delighted to be able to welcome Hawys Kilday to Apex and I know she will continue the work that Alan has started consolidating Apex's position as a key player and influencer in Scotland's Third Sector.

But I want to end these reflections on 2022 by acknowledging that this was Alan Staff's last full year as Apex's CEO. I first met Alan in late 2018 when he was passing on all the information that I needed as a new Board member. Everything I know about Apex's role in, and the contribution that Apex makes to, the Criminal Justice sector in Scotland I have learned from him. Not only is he a respected and influential leader in the Third Sector he is also well liked and respected by our staff and that is not something you can say about all CEOs. However, the only constant in life is change and Alan's retirement marked a change for all of us associated with Apex. On behalf of the Board I want to thank Alan for all he has done for Apex Scotland throughout his 13 years as CEO and wish him all the best for the future.

Ann Landels
Chair

Every Step A New Horizon

Back in my time as an NHS executive there was a well known meme called the three year trick. It essentially held that the secret of a successful senior manager was to promise the earth in your first year, make sweeping management and staff changes in the second while you are still popular, and then move on to another position in year three before everyone realises you did not know what you were doing in the first place. Well, as I reflect on over 13 years with Apex it would seem that maybe there had to be something about this organisation which kept me here, and I guess if you have read any of my previous Annual Report pieces you will recognise my appreciation of the people I have worked with and of the importance and value of the work which we do.

This does, however, make me think about some of the prevalent attitudes in the environment which we, and maybe society as a whole, operate in. The way in which short term goals and quick wins are the expected norms is essentially quite destructive when applied to people. The target driven, market dominated commissioning/procurement environment, which is our daily experience, is based on hard outcomes and frequently arbitrary measures of success. They are effectively based upon an industrial model of social intervention where proscribed systems are expected to produce specific throughputs and outcomes, which will inevitably be short term because these are easily measurable. At the same time, we are immersed in social intervention and construction models which tell us that these are not the desired outcomes, notably the Recovery Model, Trauma Informed Practice and virtually every model of behavioural change in the book. What a schizoid social matrix – there is widespread agreement on what works and yet we inevitably end up talking about person centered approaches whilst being required through our commissioning processes to provide activities which fundamentally contradict the research and treat individuals as a commodity.



Alan Staff, Chief Executive

It has always been part of the Apex culture and value system that we respect the individual and seek to tailor our interventions to the individual requirements of each person, whilst at the same time looking to encourage progression towards life goals. This is our ABC mantra and reflects the principles of recovery and trauma informed practice and, despite the pressure to perform against targets set by funders, we have been committed for many years now to developing our operational model, our staff and indeed our whole organisational culture to better align with what our clients and the available research is telling us. Perhaps one of the key elements of this is the acknowledgement that different people make their individual life journeys at different speeds and often through different routes. Interestingly, in health and social care the centrality of maintenance of change and the need to sometimes pause and consolidate any improvements is not only understood but built in to practice. For reasons I will not speculate upon here, the same latitude is not given to those we serve where an inability to maintain relentless progression towards targets is seen as a failure and often results in withdrawal of support.

.....

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.....

As I come to the end of my personal journey with Apex this sense of the need to recognise the value of maintenance as well as the desire to move on has been indelibly printed in my understanding of people by the many characters I have met who are, or have been, users of our services at various times. Some have come and gone, and some have relapsed and recovered, but all attest to the value of relationships and our willingness to provide our support even when there is simply the need to be near and pick up the pieces repeatedly. As a drug worker I was familiar with the concept of addiction being a chronic relapsing condition. In my experience this can apply to any behaviour pattern, and certainly we see it routinely in those who are regular offenders. I am so proud that despite the wagging fingers of those who believe in simplistic time-limited, easy-outcome models, Apex continues stubbornly to refuse to turn its back on those who seek our help. We recognise that for many the journey of recovery can be a lifelong struggle which is only made harder by punitive and judgmental 'targets'. Yes, the financial arguments are tempting in terms of only paying for a specific period of support, but if these simply give short term ticks and then long-term failure, the actual cost to society and the taxpayer is significantly greater. I wonder how my own career would have progressed if I was given basic training and then just left to get on with it with no further assistance?

In many ways this has been a typical Apex year with progress in some areas, funding loss in others and, as always, huge pressure on all staff to deliver in the face of political, financial and social change and uncertainty. The loss of European funding, which was not replaced despite promises to the contrary, was a significant loss for us and, being one of very few self-referral services available, an even greater loss for our client group. Nevertheless, we continue to develop and grow new services and influence policy and planning wherever we can towards trauma-aware and person-centred support for those going through the justice system. I know that Hawys Kilday, my successor, will continue this story of Apex and inspire and lead this fantastic organisation on the next leg of its journey.

I take just a moment as I conclude to thank Board members, staff and sector colleagues past and present for all the help, guidance and friendship throughout my, occasionally very bumpy, ride with Apex. It has always been impossible to predict what tomorrow will look like in the Apex world, in fact it is a planner's nightmare. But as always, I know that every new step will bring a fresh horizon, new challenges and untold possibilities. I do hope you enjoy reading this Report and seeing the impact that Apex has made over the past year. I encourage you especially to note and listen to the voices of those we have had the privilege of assisting, because the more we do that the more we will find our own pathways.

Alan Staff
Chief Executive

Award Winners

Each year our staff teams are nominated for awards that were created in memory of two of our most esteemed colleagues who were skilled at engaging with our clients and unafraid of challenges.

The Sam Dow award was created for those teams who go above and beyond the usual parameters of their job role and deliver to an exceptionally high standard. An award which is usually focused on front line delivery, this year that award was presented to our head office team who individually and collectively have helped to forge the organisation through a difficult year of new systems and many staff changes

The Betty Crawford award has a focus of innovation and creativity, for teams or individuals who think differently and challenge the expected delivery methods for the benefits of our clients and staff. This year the award was presented to our Stranraer Team who created the Time 2 Chat service as a preliminary offering for those who are not ready to fully engage with Apex but who need a safe space to begin the process without any obligation.



Head Office Team, Sam Dow Award winners



Stranraer Team, Betty Crawford Award winners

Annual Lecture 2022

After two years of online events, we were delighted to invite colleagues to attend our Annual Lecture in person again last September in Edinburgh's City Chambers.

The lecture was given by Keith Brown MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Veterans on the theme "Making Justice Work for Everyone". Mr Brown outlined the considerable scope of the justice agenda in Scotland, with particular reference to work around Covid recovery, ensuring victims are supported, reducing the prison population and establishing a person-centred, trauma informed approach to both criminal and community justice.

As always, the question time was lively, and prompted a great deal of discussion at the drinks reception afterwards.

A full video of the event is available on our website as well as a lecture transcript.



**Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Veterans,
Keith Brown MSP**

Our Partners

We are fortunate and grateful that we are funded by, and work with, a number of partners who are committed to ensuring that our client group are given opportunities to access the support they need by engaging with our services. The current funding environment is tough, and whilst there will always be people who need our specific expertise, without partner support we would not be able to reach as many people as we do.

We would like to thank all our partners and supporters who have assisted us financially, with delivery, or in some other way over the past year. This has ensured that over 1700 people who have particular barriers to work or specific challenges have been supported into employment, education and training where they may not otherwise have done so.

As well as a number of Local Authorities, here are some of the organisations which have partnered with us during 2022-23.



Finance 2022-2023

2022-23 saw a significant change to our environment with the ending of the receipt of monies from the European Social Fund as a result of the UK exit from the European Union. We had hoped that the Shared Prosperity Fund, announced by the UK Government as a successor to ESF, would have been available to a much greater extent than turned out to be the case. As a result of delays we had to make a number of colleagues redundant at the end of the calendar year. Our thanks go to them for their commitment and professionalism through a trying time. Those redundancy costs are not catered for through funding and have to be borne by the organisation.

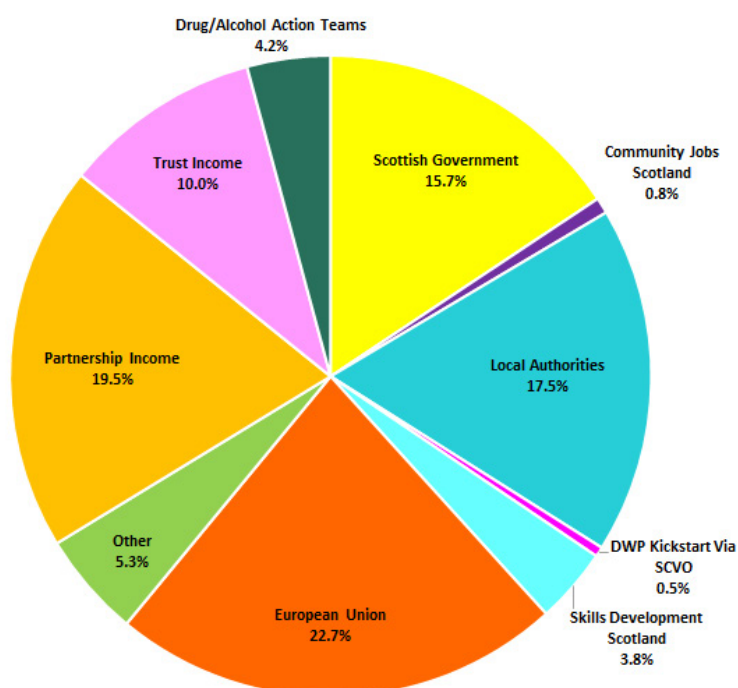
We also took the opportunity to make strategic investments in a small number of posts from our reserves towards the end of the year, and into 2023-24, in the hope that this will strengthen the organisation going forward.

As has been the case in recent years, 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 in relation to Apex and to Assistant Accountant, Anastasia Hamilton, for her work in relation to our trading subsidiary All Cleaned Up as well as to our auditors, Geoghegans.

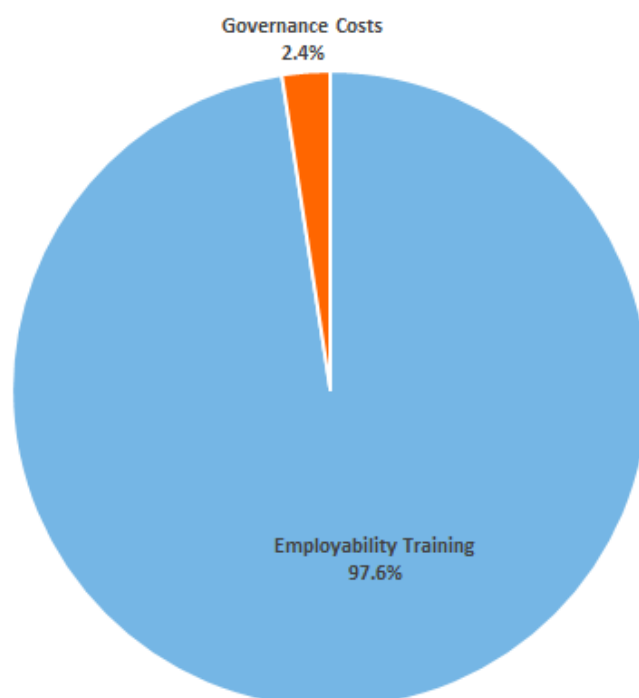
Given the comments immediately above, our SORP accounts for 2022/23 show a surplus of £153,276 for the charity alone. This was achieved against income generated of £3,172,653 (an increase of 3.54% in comparison to the previous year) and expenditure incurred of £3,019,377 (an increase of 6.68% in comparison to the previous year). The increase in income is particularly impressive given the ending of ESF and little or no replacement via the Shared Prosperity Fund. The increase in expenditure is contributed to by a number of factors including a continued return to “normal” ways of working; the effects of the energy crisis and general inflationary increases and due to ITA funding which has an element of associated expenditure. It should be noted that SORP accounts are constructed on a different basis from management accounts and may include income received which will be utilised in 2023/24.

The world in which we operate is constantly changing and it would seem that the days of national initiatives have ended. This brings challenges for us in terms of co-ordination of approach and resource availability. We are also seeing a greater use of 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

Income 2022-2023



Expenditure 2022-2023



Finance 2022-2023

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 continuing to experience the impact Covid-19 is having on funding for all of the public and third sector and the more recent cost of living crisis but we have been able to protect a significant element of our income in 2023/24, with the significant exception of the replacement for ESF. This will present challenges for the organisation going forward, but we have confidence in our ability to navigate through these turbulent times.

Our trading subsidiary, All Cleaned Up, posted a loss of £29,817 in financial year 2022/23. This is obviously disappointing but we remain hopeful for the future. This hope is underpinned by our decision to bring the accounting function of ACU in house. This has resulted in significant analysis to inform operational changes. We hope to see the benefits of those changes

throughout 2023-24. This initiative, which creates real jobs for our service users, continues to be an important element 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.

We remain determined to strengthen our services and infrastructure to support ongoing development of the organisation, ultimately for the benefit of our service users. We are aware of the volatility of the funding environment and the current political and economic climate, and will no doubt face ongoing funding challenges, but 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, supported by effective governance at all levels across the organisation.

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

Philip Dunion
Director of Finance and Corporate Development

In The Driving Seat

I am delighted to begin my journey with Apex Scotland. I am privileged and honoured to have been appointed as Chief Executive. I want to thank colleagues and trustees for welcoming me with such warmth and extend particular gratitude to Alan for his advice and encouragement.

Whilst I have only been with the charity a few weeks at the time of writing, I am impressed by the richness, depth and quality of support our highly skilled and committed team provide on a day-to-day basis. The extent of interventions is impressive. Our charity is committed to supporting some of the most vulnerable in our communities. The services we deliver provide hope and opportunities aimed at reducing barriers, increasing skills and confidence; all of which has a positive, long-lasting impact on those we serve.

Our values and ways of working are truly person-centred. The unique set of circumstances those we care for and support are put at the heart of our decision making and planning. I am proud we have invested and are committed in ensuring our charity adopts and embeds a trauma-informed approach across all aspects of our work. I am convinced this will enhance our offering, resulting in tangible, powerful benefits.



Hawys Kilday

I place particular importance on collaboration. I am encouraged by the trusting, strong partnerships that exist and I look forward to continuing to develop these further, together with seeking and establishing new relationships and opportunities all aimed at improving support offered to current and future clients.

Whilst I recognise the landscape in which we operate is challenging, not least the financial environment, I am confident we can build on our strong foundations, history and reputation. I believe opportunities exist to develop and grow our charity further that reflect our values and ethos. I look forward to leading the team at Apex Scotland, supported by a strong Board, in the next chapter of our journey with positivity, optimism and pride.

Hawys Kilday
Chief Executive (from June 2023)

The Client Journey

It was good to have someone to talk to and not feel judged by what happened, to help me move on with my life. Thank you so much.

Apex service user

Over the past year we have been reflecting on, and inspecting, our purpose and impact as an organisation.

Of course, this is something we continuously do strategically, while the past year it had a particular focus, since significant aspects of our operational service delivery changed, in particular the ending of our national ESF funded provision. We have committed ourselves to continuously better understand the experience others have of Apex services – the people who use our services, the staff who deliver them and the working partnerships we have across Scotland.

The past year has been a year of consultation, engaging with a range of parties and listening to them. We wanted to reflect on what our interactions with others look like, feel like and why that was important. We wanted to examine and refresh our priorities as an organisation in terms of our ultimate purpose, and also most importantly, the impact we are having.

Being a national organisation, with a spread of diverse services all over Scotland, this exercise is an ongoing essential to enable us to be effective with our contribution to and execution of, service provision. We focused on the experience of people

who use our services – why do they use them, what do they get from them, why do they come back? From that, we re-established our 'Client Journey' and revised the key components of that into journey stages, which makes up the collection of experiences people who use our services may have with us, over time. It was important for us to articulate clearly the primary purpose of each stage of the journey and the key impact for the individual, we anticipate it to have. These are:

- **ACCESS**
- **ENGAGEMENT**
- **BARRIER REMOVAL**
- **VOCATIONAL ACTIVITY**
- **SKILLS FOR WORK**
- **ROUTES TO WORK.**

We have been embedding this approach into our internal processes around service offerings and through this report we are delighted to share and showcase this with our partners.



Access

The longest journey starts with the smallest step. For some, this means walking through a door of a foodbank or accepting the offer of a cup of tea, a bowl of soup. This stage in the journey is where confidence is built and trust is earned. Our Personal Development Mentors (PDMs) offer informal, comfortable spaces to meet with people and start that initial relationship.

Through these conversations we can assist with most issues, offer practical help if appropriate, and listen to what they need. We offer people a person centred, holistic service where we can identify a range of support services that they might require access to. Some of this is done in community settings where PDMs are available on a drop in basis, and other teams run more established services such as foodbanks, Moving In and Time2Chat where people can be introduced to Apex without anything being required of them. Our foodbanks fed 5367 people in 2022-23, over 26% of which were under 16. This year we have partnered with Citizens Advice in Dumfries to offer a Financial Inclusion service to anyone accessing the foodbank there.



Apex staff and volunteers ready to chat



Leah's Story

When Leah was referred to us, it was with recovery and finding a job at the forefront of her mind. She soon attended a couple of SMART Recovery meetings but she felt this wasn't the right support for her.

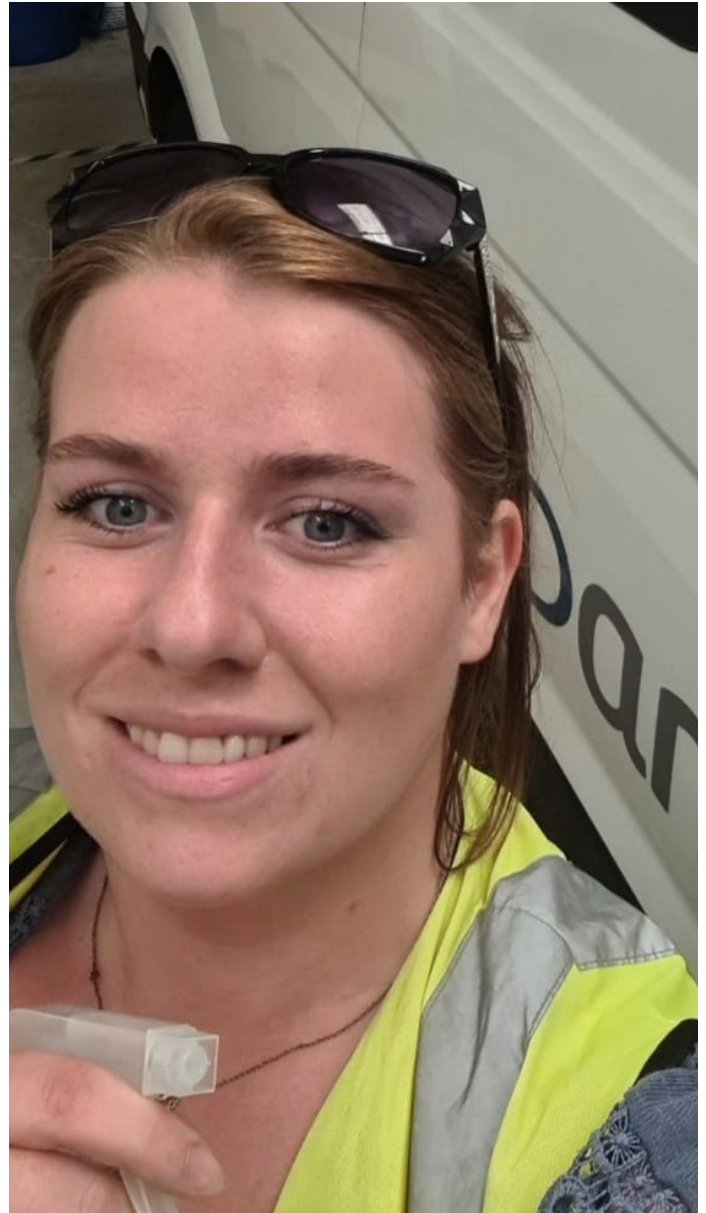
Leah then attended our "Going the Distance" mental health group, with an emphasis on outdoor activity, and here her confidence grew. She was around people who had been on a similar journey to her and she felt comfort knowing she wasn't alone in her struggles. We revisited her action plan and agreed to change her goals to focus on building confidence and reducing anxiety. Taking part in Decider Skills was a positive factor for Leah and gave her the tools she needed to help with her emotions.

We supported Leah to attend court for a citation that had been delayed due to the pandemic. Shortly after this, Leah received a letter from Disclosure Scotland to advise her they were considering adding her to the "barred list". Leah called us in tears - her dream career seemed almost impossible now. She wanted to use her lived experience of the criminal justice system and substance misuse to help others.

We worked with Leah on her appeal, compiling a portfolio of her achievements, certificates, letters of support, etc. A few weeks later, the decision arrived – she was to receive one more chance to prove she had changed. Leah cried with happiness and said she could never repay us for helping her. A couple of weeks later she was offered a volunteering opportunity. She was finally doing what she had always dreamt of – sharing her experience to encourage and inspire others to embrace recovery from problematic addictive behaviours.

We continued to support Leah and not too long after an opportunity arose with All Cleaned Up where we put Leah's name forward for a paid position as a cleaning technician. Leah was successful and a few days later we received an email to say "the manager absolutely LOVES Leah and has already increased her hours!"

The future is bright for Leah and it has been a pleasure to watch her on this journey of transformation.



Leah at work

Engagement

When people choose to formally engage with an Apex service, we start to introduce more structure to interventions and conversations, using our ABC ethos to Aim Higher, Behave Differently and Change Your Future, finding out what aspirations people have and exploring how they might benefit from our service delivery. Consolidating basic life skills is a key factor in this stage of the journey and PDMs begin a more intensive mentoring progress, including frequent contact with clients so that they feel fully supported as they start to move forward.

In 2022 we were funded to provide two peer-led services, Peer Navigator in East Dunbartonshire and POP (Path of Positivity) in Dumfries and Galloway, and in both cases the PDM has lived experience of the criminal justice system. Peer Navigator supports individuals during the difficult transition period from custody to the community and who are required to engage with organisations such as justice social work and alcohol and drug recovery services. POP was created with the intention of improving the shape and future of justice services in the area by groups giving their views to those who deliver different aspects of justice in the area.

Danny, our PDM who is relatively new in post, explains what he is doing in Dumfries and Galloway.

.....
“My present group is a gardening group where I try to help people talk and get active. I have five guys who all have their own traumas and issues but we work well as a team together. We currently have two plots for our gardening activities and we also have a place to go for a talk and a game of pool after our group. My aim is to try get all people from all walks of life to come together and get their hands dirty being able to watch the stuff they plant grow, with the option later to cook it.

“I have worked with my group together and also a bit of 1 on 1 to find out how it was for them going through Justice Social Work. Being new to this position I am now getting a good working knowledge for what I am doing and I feel I can do a lot for, and with, people. I also have plans for a walking group and, at some point, some sporting activities.”
.....

Peer-based support is a method we have always championed, encouraging a number of our service users over the years to become peer mentors for clients, leading from a place of experience. As we continue on our journey of being a trauma informed organisation, we recognise how those with lived experience in different aspects of life can add particular value to areas of our delivery.

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



Danny (left) with a POP group member

Barrier Removal

Our 'A Positive Future' approach is used to support people to translate their assessment needs into an action plan where they set individualised goals that will break down and overcome their identified barriers and enable progress. This is done collaboratively with clients to ensure that they have control over their progress and can take ownership of each significant achievement.

This stage is particularly key for those services commissioned by Local Authority Justice Social Work and for people who require a degree of advocacy, such as those leaving prison, engaging with us through Shine and New Routes services. This is a time when people develop core and basic skills to aid their progress, such as digital competence as well as being fully supported to consider their life choices and explore new opportunities.

Reta has been like a ray of sunshine to me at a time I needed it most. So kind, personable, with a great sense of humour. So knowledgeable and able to offer great advice. I feel extremely blessed to have her as my Shine worker.

Apex service user

RJ's Story

RJ* started to work with Apex through the New Routes service whilst he was approaching the last six months of his prison sentence. Affected by homelessness which he believed was a contributing factor to his offending, we assisted in securing temporary supported accommodation for RJ on his liberation.

RJ had a mental health nurse's support for particular health issues when we met him and during the last six months of his sentence, we worked with his nurse to refer RJ to supporting agencies that would continue to work with RJ on his progress in the community.

Once liberated, RJ successfully maintained engagement with us, attended SMART Recovery for his alcohol addiction, as well as participating in acupuncture and volunteering with Apex. He enjoyed the socialisation aspect of the services, and felt that he was improving with each opportunity. However, as we approached the second month in the community, RJ became anxious, and struggled to leave his accommodation. With his motivation very low, we concentrated on 1-1 meetings where RJ could open up about his anxieties and worries. We secured a referral to a

psychiatrist and RJ began the journey of counselling and trauma recovery.

RJ continued to work with his Apex personal development mentor (PDM) as well as attending sessions with his psychiatrist and in time there was an improvement in his behaviour and attitude. He was consistent, excited and looked forward to volunteering with Apex again. Together RJ and his PDM started to look at progressing other barriers and were able to secure permanent accommodation relatively quickly. RJ was delighted and felt that this would have a huge, positive impact on his road to recovery.

One of RJ's main goals was to gain employment. Once he was settled into his new accommodation and had maintained his tenancy, RJ's landlord offered him work as a cleaner in a bed and breakfast which RJ was delighted to accept. This offer was evidence of how far RJ had come and the positive changes he had made.

RJ continued to engage with Apex and his psychiatrist until the end of his New Routes programme, commenting that he was now on a positive path.

Vocational Activity

One of Apex's specialist areas of knowledge is the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act and disclosure. Our fully trained staff ensure all our service users have accurate information regarding spent and unspent convictions and about disclosing their criminal convictions and work with clients so that they can do this confidently with potential employers.

Another particular area of expertise for Apex is working with people who have a conviction of a sexual nature. Our Labyrinth programme and our latest pilot, Unboxed, focus on the challenges that these individuals face when looking for employment and supports participants on how to manage these challenges effectively with workshops tailored specifically to their needs.

We offer a wide variety of training courses, from the widely recognised First Aid and CSCS labourer card to our own SQA accredited Employability Award which covers various aspects of being ready for work. Our training courses are open to all, and we regularly deliver to other organisations, but clients are particularly encouraged to develop their skills and gain qualifications which will improve their chances of employment. We have trained almost 1200 people this year, over 60% of whom have received an accredited qualification. We have also developed a secure e-learning portal which allows clients to complete a variety of life skill modules online in their own time.

In a similar way, volunteering is an opportunity for our service users to experience working in an informal way, building core skills such as team work and negotiation, often discovering a talent or enthusiasm for a new activity such as gardening or woodworking. These volunteering opportunities are vital for finding a new level of confidence which leaves participants energised and with a sense of purpose.

Our intention in this stage is that clients will be ready to actively look for work and be equipping themselves to manoeuvre through the recruitment process more assuredly with our support.



Training brings qualifications

.....
Your induction and relaxed manner was great. Thank you for making a nervous individual so relaxed and welcomed. Derek was great, on the ball, explained all and practically showed us in a manner that was easy to understand. Thank you both so much.

Ian, Trainee
.....



Volunteering develops confidence and skills



Skills for work

Securing a job that requires experience is one of life's Catch 22 situations. Once the life skills, the qualifications and the volunteering are completed, this is the next leg of the journey. The creation of the ABC Skills Academy was from recognition that, particularly for our client group, the most valuable experience is on the job training with the safety net of ongoing mentoring. The Skills Academy provides end to end provision, taking participants through the entire journey from Access to Routes to Work.

Service users are supported with their own job searches, putting into practice what they have learned about their job options and conviction relevance.

Whilst our social enterprise, All Cleaned Up, offers training placements, 12 in the last year, our personal development mentors also secure work trial opportunities with various employers where people can gain invaluable experience of real employment, learning, sometimes for the first time, what it means to operate in a professional environment. Service users are supported with their own job searches, putting into practice what they have learned about their job options and conviction relevance.

One of our newest services, Build It, features elements of the Skills Academy, covering all elements of employability and training for work on a building site, including working towards the achievement of a CSCS labourer card. In partnership with Keir Construction, participants will be offered placements for real work experience, and the potential for full time employment.



Skills Academy participants get real work experience

Dave's Story

Dave* was referred to Apex by his Justice Services social worker after being released from prison. Dave has been in and out of prison since the age of 16 and has never worked. When we first met him he was very quiet and did not have much to say.

Dave had already achieved his CSCS card while in prison. He had no work experience on building sites but was keen to prove that he was willing to work and learn if an employer was willing to give him a chance. Given his lack of experience and conviction record, Dave agreed that if we could get him a work trial he would attend and prove he was ready for work and was confident he would succeed given the opportunity.

We made contact with a local building contractor, arranged a meeting and Dave's PDM accompanied him to meet with the employer. The conversation went well and Dave was offered a one week work trial with the promise of full time work if he proved himself.

We sourced safety boots for Dave through a local supplier and appealed on our local Facebook page for the necessary work clothing, receiving donations of hi-vis clothing and work gloves, giving Dave everything he needed to start work.

The work trial started on Monday 6 March and our PDM kept in touch with Dave and the employer daily to make sure everything was going well and offer support if needed. The work trial was successful and Dave was offered full time employment to start the following week. Our PDM was so pleased for Dave, praising his hard work.

Our PDM kept in touch with Dave's justice social worker throughout this time, updating her on progress. She said,

.....
"This young person has been heavily institutionalised and has been in and out of prison since 16. He has been supported by Apex into a full time job. He has personally told me that this support has been life changing."

Suzy Rook
Social Work Services, D&G
.....

Routes to Work

For the majority of people who are referred to Apex, sustained employment is the end goal. During this final stage in the Apex client journey, the individual takes their skills, qualifications and growing self belief into a real workplace, whilst being supported with the transition. Towards the end of the journey the focus is on sustainability and independence, consolidating all the learning that has brought a client to this stage, with some reflection on what they have achieved, but with their future plans firmly in mind. Personal development mentors continue to provide support by organising work trials and guaranteed interviews for ongoing employment, as well as helping people to manage potential new situations when engaging with a new employer and colleagues.

.....
Got my payslip today. Thanks for everything. I appreciate you getting me into this. Having a job has made a heavy difference – this is the best things have went.
Apex service user
.....

Michael's Story

One of our personal development mentors from our Highland team, Jackie Ross, tells Michael's story.

"Michael was referred to Apex by Drug and Alcohol Ross-shire. He had health issues and his daily drinking was starting to take its toll. At our initial meeting we had a long chat and Michael was a bit anxious about everything. We decided that initially the SMART Recovery Group would be good for him as he would be with like minded people who knew what he was going through.

Michael started coming to the meetings on a weekly basis and became a valued and well liked member of the group. When we began our mental health intervention programme in Invergordon in 2022, Michael decided he would come along for the full day group. Initially Michael was quiet and watchful, rather than fully participating, but after a few weeks, being more familiar with everyone, he started to join in with the group, making meals and offering to help where he could. As the weeks and months passed Michael became the most reliable member of the group for attendance. He was always eager to help anyone and helped a lot of our clients fill out applications for benefits and housing issues.

By September 2022 the group had grown so big that I needed someone I could trust to help me. Michael started volunteering, becoming my trusty 'sidekick' who I knew would not let me down. As I write, Michael is still putting 100% into the group and his help is invaluable.

Due to his addiction and health issues Michael had been unable to work for a considerable time but recently said he was at the stage that perhaps he would look for some part time work. When a vacancy become available through ACU in the Ross-shire area we decided that he should go for the position. Michael interviewed successfully, has been working there over the last few months and is loving it!

I have seen Michael totally turn around from when he first came through Apex's doors. I am so proud of him and so thankful for his support."

Michael says of his journey:

.....

"The worst thing about sobriety is all of them thoughts and feelings come rolling back and you can't even self-medicate or have a drink to block it all out. All your family and friends don't understand and walk away, and the ones that stay always question you on what you're doing as if they don't trust you. Feeling broken, worthless and hating yourself never gets easier - the pain you've put others through kills you.

"The CPN had sent me to this group in my local town Invergordon. I didn't wanna be seen with people like that, but I went so I could do my detox via the county hospital. I went in, sat in a corner in the kitchen. Jackie spoke to me, and before I knew it I loved it, and went back the week after.

"Now one year on I'm still there doing all different activities, volunteering, studying (thanks to Jackie at Apex getting me a laptop a phone) passing exams, and a job with Apex All Cleaned Up!"

.....



Michael has new purpose



We want to say a HUGE thank you to the team from All Cleaned Up Scotland who have made such a difference to the toilet block this week. They've cleaned, scrubbed, weeded and painted for us and it's looking good!

Tiphereth, Edinburgh

The year to end of March 2023, saw a number of significant changes to All Cleaned Up. The most significant of these was that Alasdair Scott, the long serving Operations Manager left the organisation to pursue his career. Ally, as he is known to many, had raised performance levels and there is no doubt he left it in a more professional and healthier position than when he took management reins.

Another huge change was taking the financial function in-house to Apex, coinciding with a comprehensive in-depth business analysis which took place in the second half of 2022. The result of all this important activity is that we now have a very clear business structure with financial information that is accurate and we can access immediately. The business review also allowed us to identify areas of operations that we will concentrate on in the new financial year, necessitating a reduction in our current workforce. Of our 32 staff, 60% come from a recognised disadvantaged background and this will continue to be our policy in the future.

ACU partners Apex Scotland in the ABC Skills Academy which continues to provide on-the-job support and employment opportunities for people in Edinburgh. Providing a work structure and cleaning sector experience, ACU can provide crucial references for people who may struggle to find work because of their criminal convictions.

ACU is contracted by a number of high profile companies including Link Housing, East Lothian Housing Association, C-urb PSL, CCG, Social Bite and Balfour Beattie. ACU even featured in [McLaughlin and Harvey's video](#) showcasing the work ACU did on the University of Edinburgh Nucleus building project.

We are delighted, as this Report goes to press, that ACU has been selected as a finalist in the Social Enterprise Awards Scotland 2023, shortlisted in the Building Diversity, Inclusion, Equity and Justice Category

The ACU Board, which operates separately from the Apex Board, has been supportive of the changes that have been made over 2022-23 and the focus for the coming year will be to increase the number and diversity of ACU Board members.

Just want to thank the guys again.
Their cleaning abilities are top class compared to the last contractor. Keep up the good work.

Housing Association Tenant

Early Intervention

Over the last few months Apex has reviewed its early intervention strategy and refined our offering to schools.

Nationally schools are facing more resistance from pupils with engagement and, unfortunately, adapted timetables as a response to disruptive behaviour are becoming the norm.

The age of the young people who are being marginalised from mainstream education is dropping and as a result we have decided to transition our schools service into primary schools to work with p7 cohorts Monday – Wednesday. We will still be in high schools on the Thursday – Friday and this gives an additional edge in how our staff can facilitate transitional activity for those young people at an increased risk of exclusion to provide them with the best possible preparation for high school by increasing their self-worth, capturing attainment through youth achievement awards, improving their attendance and changing the way they view learning.

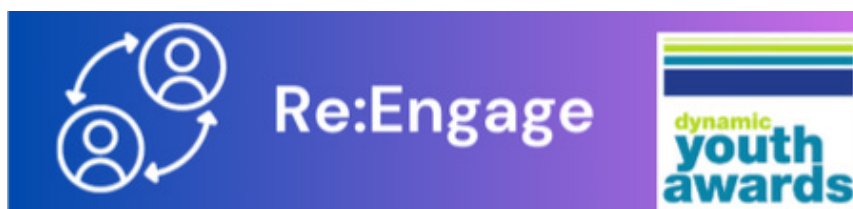
We are running three very separate styles of intervention:

- **RE:Set**
- **RE:Engage**
- **RE:Build**

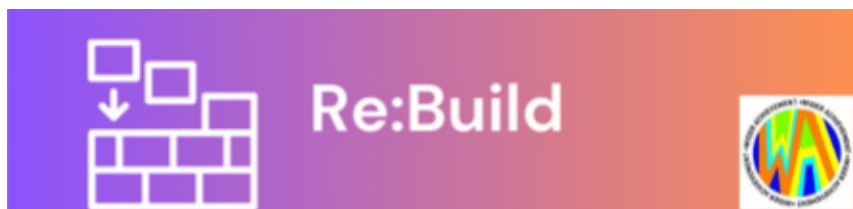
As of August 2023 the new service will be piloted in Clackmannanshire across two primary schools and two secondary schools. We aim to showcase what we can do as a team to reduce the disruption to learning that vulnerable individuals experience and provide evidence in the form of wider achievement qualifications to recognise the different ways that we can celebrate success for those young people who schools are finding it difficult to manage at the present time. By better preparing primary students for high school we will give them the best chances to thrive and change their trajectory once they get that fresh start in high school. We will also empower those secondary school students who will be present in the process to reflect on themselves in a different light when helping with the transition through being entrusted to work with young people at the primary school.



RE:Set – is aimed at those students who are attending school full-time but have external influences that are disrupting their ability to learn, our staff will run 1:1 bespoke sessions for students to help them regulate, feel supported and build resilience.



RE:Engage – aims to add variety and collaboration to the learning experience for young people who are on a reduced timetable through group work. Within the primary setting this enables our staff to plan and deliver projects that create visual spaces in the school, whilst drawing on all the different problem solving and hands on skills that young people will need to upcycle, repurpose and creatively restore. In the secondary schools young people will use this group time to help plan sessions/ schemes of work to upskill younger pupils, with the aim of giving these pupils the opportunity of volunteering in primary schools and delivering their lessons to the younger children, all of which will be captured through Scottish youth achievement awards.



RE:Build – is designed to work for those young people who are non-attenders but still enrolled with a school. This strategy aims to link pupils up with experiential learning in the community by our practitioners running outreach. We want to capture and recognise the skills that these young people have and widen their windows of tolerance through work placements and community engagement.

Partners in Change

As one of the Robertson Trust's Partner in Change, It is a strategic priority for Apex to better understand the current popular and familiar language of “being trauma informed” and to ensure we can apply this to our organisation in a genuine and robust way. Our three year project is covering all organisational bases, from leadership and policy review, staff training and wellbeing, deep insights from people who use our services and a thorough review and action plan of the way in which we embed ‘lived experience’ into the organisation.

At the half-way point in the project we have reviewed our learning so far with Partners in Change. Here we look at six key areas as we move into the second half of the project.

Staff Training



We are building our knowledge base on how trauma impacts upon brain function. With the hope to build a cultural sense of trauma informed service delivery providing focus on how well-regulated staff contribute to better outcomes for clients. The project will help shape our induction package for staff as well as bringing about CPD (continual personal development) training opportunities for staff to access throughout their employment with Apex Scotland.

Staff Wellbeing



Understand and recognise that staff have external social responsibilities and support these as an organisation where necessary. We need to explore ways in which staff access employee support programmes and put time aside as teams to collaborate and build resilience through a shared sense of collective conscience being a set of shared beliefs, ideas, and moral attitudes which operate as a unifying force. Through the redesign of commitments to staff wellbeing we aim to reduce staff absence, burnout and compassion fatigue.

Service Design



From what we are learning through the inputs from Jan Montgomery and the team at Resilience Learning Partnership, it is important that our services promote and provide opportunities for people to be creative, to see themselves in a new light, to use their senses as much as possible in order to be grounded and experience natural joy.

Everyone has the ability to shift their mindset through what we know about neuroplasticity and there are various tried and tested methods of activity that have success in helping people reduce the perception of threat, reduce the impact of shame and improve people's affinity to build trust, stability and a sense of purpose. By applying this theory to stages 1-3 of the client journey, the project will generate recommendations for how we can structure our service design to better prepare people for accessing employment.

Organisational commitment/Values



This is being shaped all the time right now as we build our knowledge on trauma informed practice and rethink how we get the best outcomes for our clients. The lived experience voice within the project will recommend suggestions for how we better communicate through marketing material and branding. This will hopefully over time improve our consistency in how we define ourselves which will be underpinned by potentially rethinking our mission statement.

Lived experience



We aim to have a number of recommendations from the project on how to collect meaningful and valuable feedback from the people who use our services whilst also building collaborative spaces for people to connect and build resilience.

We are piloting a workshop style focus group as part of the project, facilitated by the Resilience Learning Partnership to find out what people want from organisations like Apex, whilst also measuring the benefit of participation in the workshop from those who choose to attend regularly.

Feedback Loops



The team from the University of Dundee are providing us with recommendations for systems we can put in place to gain staff feedback. A big part of this is redesigning and repurposing our staff supervision protocol. This aims to help staff develop their practice and recognise performance. Other ideas include recording a monthly score for staff wellbeing as well

as enabling front line workers to voice feedback on a variety of topics to help shape Apex and find solutions to problems we face.

Feedback loops are also being reviewed within management, corporate leadership team and the Board so that we are set up better to respond to immediate issues that are presented and let us adapt to demands. We want people all the way through Apex to feel valued and the whole data collection procedure attached to this project will guide us in creating sustainable feedback loops after the life of the project.

This is not an exhaustive list of all the components that are under review and scrutiny within the project but serves as a guide as to where some of the recommendations for change will be directed.

We would like to thank everyone who has been involved with the project to date on their honesty and openness throughout the process to date, the quality of input from staff has been fantastic and shows the commitment we have to driving Apex forward.

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