



The VOW Project

ANNUAL REPORT 2022/2023

• EDINBURGH •
THE CITY OF EDINBURGH COUNCIL



**POLICE
SCOTLAND**
Keeping people safe
POILEAS ALBA



**AID
& Abet**



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ABOUT THE VOW PROJECT

The VOW Project is a Police Scotland initiative in partnership with Aid & Abet. The Project offers support to people aged between 16-24 years who have had involvement within the Criminal Justice System.

The team consists of three police officers working alongside three peer mentors with lived experience of prison, trauma and addiction. This approach aims to overcome barriers and offer support in relation to the following:

- Reducing Offending - Emotional Wellbeing - Housing/Benefits
- Drug/Alcohol Dependency/Recovery Services - Employment/Training Opportunities



Story Contracting: One of our major successes this year has come via a partnership with Story Contracting which has seen one of our young people enter full time employment for the very first time. This has resulted in an incredible improvement in his quality of life and self-confidence.

The primary aim of the VOW Project is to reduce offending, within the City of Edinburgh, amongst those that the team support by offering assistance and signposting to appropriate partner agencies, both statutory and third sector.

The VOW Project is completely voluntary and person centred with specific plans created to suit the young person's needs.

On deciding to commit to the VOW Project the young person will complete an assessment and consent to information about themselves to be shared. This allows the team to create a tailored plan and monitor and review their progress. The young person can disengage at any time through their own choice. This may be when they feel they have achieved their desired positive destinations or if it is apparent that that time just is not right for them.

The sharing of information between agencies assists the officers and mentors in providing the best service for the young person's needs and to help them achieve the positive outcomes that they desire. Information about the young person will only be provided to those who need it for the purposes of the young person's care or for achieving VOW Project objectives namely:

- Reducing drug and alcohol linked offending
- Reducing anti-social behaviour
- Promoting community safety and well-being
- Reducing the fear of crime
- Encouraging offenders to become involved in training and work initiatives.

Each young person's plan is designed with the centre focus on their own views, goals, desires and achievable outcomes.

MEET THE TEAM

PC Lyndsay Barr

Lyndsay has 31 years Police service and developed her expertise in adult and child protection from her time as a Detective Constable in the public Protection Unit. This experience provides the team with an enhanced understanding of adversity and trauma and its impact on children, young people and families.

PC Amy Fowler

Amy has 8 years police service and joined the VOW Project having been a School Link Officer. This exposed Amy to the trauma and adversity faced by many school-age children and allowed her to work closely with education authorities, young people and their families.

PC John Dunn

John has 15 years police service and spent many years working within the Criminal Investigation Department and brings many skills to the Project as he aims to support people in removing themselves from the offending cycle.

PC Hannah Murray

Hannah has 6 years police service and, prior to joining the VOW Project, spent two years working as a School Link Officer. This time gave Hannah an increased understanding in the importance of early intervention, as well as how trauma and adverse experiences impacts on the lives – and futures - of many children and young people.

Kevin Neary

Kevin is a co-founder of the charity Aid & Abet and joined the VOW Project 8 years ago and brings lived experience of the criminal justice system, addiction, recovery and the healing process. Kevin spent 30 years in the criminal justice system and addiction and was brought up as a young boy who had experienced traumas linked to the bio psycho social model. After recovering himself in 2014 he has since used his past lived experience as an asset in helping and supporting others with the preventative work done within the VOW Project.

Kevin has a positive working relationship with his police colleagues and through their working relationship and example, together they go out and reflect and shine a beacon of hope on the young people they serve: breaking down barriers, building relationships and gaining trust from the young people who have never had trust through intentional and unintentional neglect.

Julie-Anne Graham

Julie-Anne is an employee of Aid & Abet who is seconded to the VOW Project and has been part of the team for over 2 years. Through her peer relationships she started using substances that took her on a journey of chaos, addiction and criminality for 27 years. Since getting into recovery 8 years ago Julie-Anne gained a better perspective on life and uses her past experience, knowledge and wisdom to prevent young people from making the same negative choices she had made in her past.

Julie-Anne's primary focus within the VOW Project is supporting young people who have experienced near-fatal overdose and are at significant risk of further drug related harm. Julie-Anne has a very close working relationship with NHS, Scottish Ambulance Service and other partners supporting people in addiction. Julie-Anne breaks down barriers by reaching people who find it difficult to engage with services. She takes pride in building trusting relationships and directing people onto positive destinations. Julie-Anne is able to discuss issues that young people are currently facing with an understanding as she has ultimately walked a similar path and is proof that negative outcomes are not inevitable.

Donald Tumilowicz

Donald was 14 years old when he was removed from the family home and placed in care for offending behaviour. This was the start of a journey that would lead to young offender units and then adult prison.

Donald is the co-founder at Aid & Abet, and works with Police Scotland's VOW project. He has also been involved in the City of Edinburgh Council's Turn Your Life Around and Police Scotland Choices for Life, Violence Reduction Units, Edinburgh Tattoo and Community Justice Scotland's Tribal Home. Donald supports people who have found themselves caught up in the criminal justice system and sees the importance in building trust, having positive relationships, being a role model and I am passionate about early intervention.

Donald said "If my experience stops one person going on the same journey as me, or helps them get out of that cycle, it would all be worthwhile."

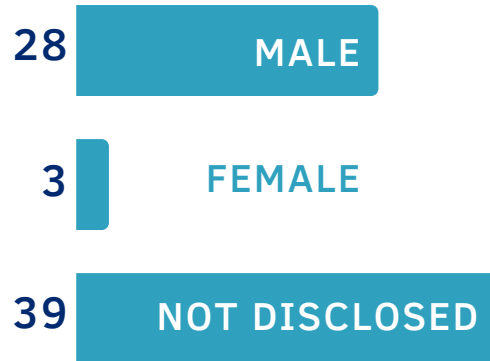
WHAT WE DID IN 2021-2023

Throughout the past 2 years the team were delighted with the young people that the team engaged with agreed to sign up and commit to the initiative. The team achieved positive outcomes for young people throughout the City of Edinburgh and delivered inputs and presentations to many partners and organisations across Central Scotland.

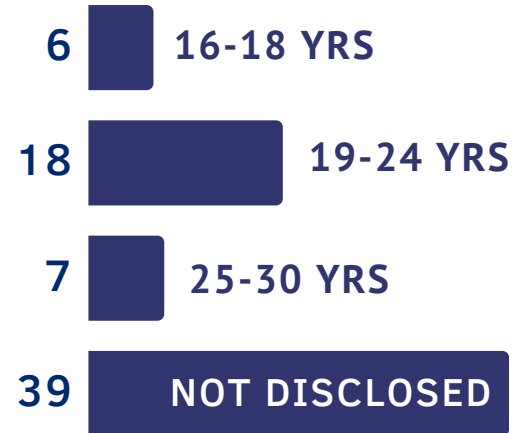


PROGRAMME DELIVERY 2021-23

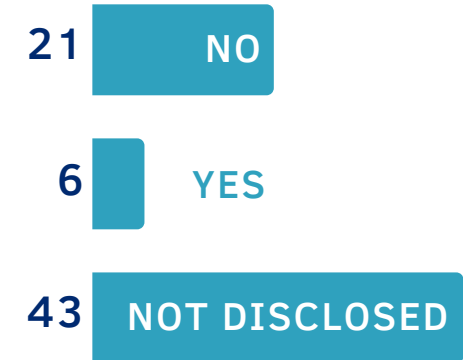
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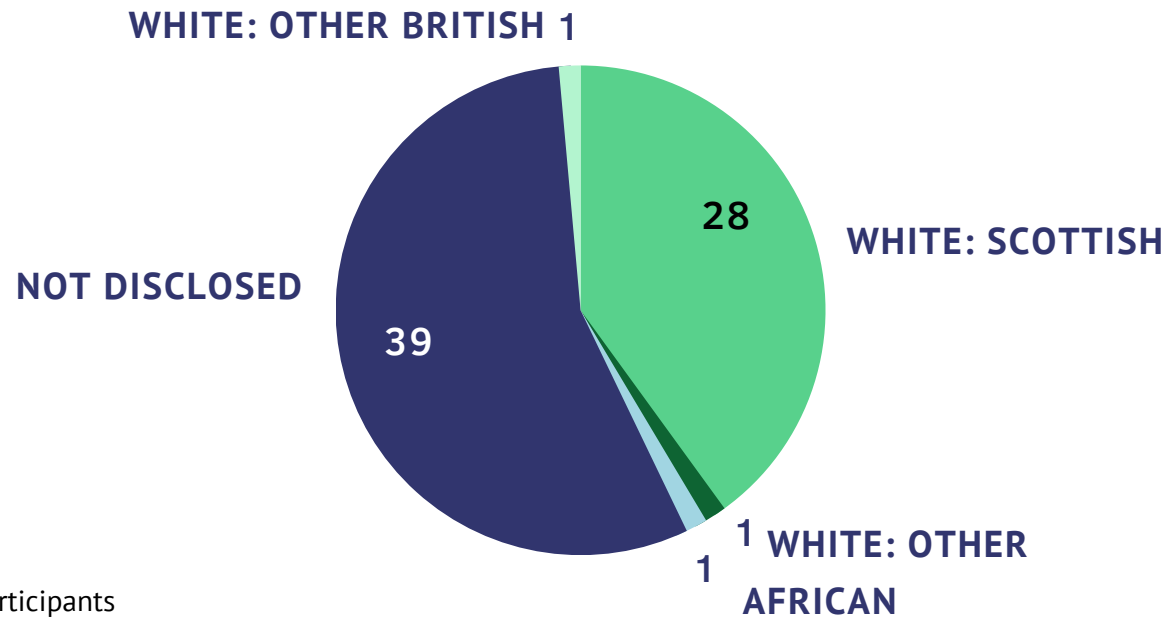
AGE



CARE EXPERIENCED



All young people commenced the VOW Projects when under 25 and therefore met programme criteria.



PROGRAMME DELIVERY

The team deliver the Project and support young people to stop offending and achieve positive destinations by establishing a person-centred plan catering for individual needs. These focus on the following main themes:

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

ADDICTION AND RECOVERY

TRAINING, EDUCATION AND
EMPLOYABILITY

REDUCTION IN OFFENDING



PROGRAMME DELIVERY

JOINING THE VOW PROJECT

Referrals are received from a variety of sources including police officers, the courts and wider criminal justice system, social services and from our many partners. Such is the reputation of the VOW Project we have received referrals from parents requesting support for their children. Following referral, the team will meet the young person and advise that involvement is completely voluntary and can be ended at any time of their choosing. Each young person must commit to reducing their offending and agree to completing GDPR paperwork to allow information sharing with partners.

HEALTH & WELLBEING

The team are acutely aware of the importance of physical and mental health and include this in the specific person centred plan. It is vital to acknowledge wellbeing in order for the young person to achieve their desired outcomes and we are fortunate to have an extensive range of partners who support health and wellbeing.

- We work closely with Edinburgh Leisure who provide subsidised gym passes for your young people.
- Venture Trust deliver a range of outdoor activities which many of our young people have seen great benefit from.
- Our officers and mentors are regular visitors to the Cyrenians FareShare food hub where they obtain food parcels to deliver to our young people, either living independently or at the family home where the food parcel also benefits parents and siblings.
- Through the provision of dedicated Cashback For Communities funding we have formed an excellent relationship with Bright Light Counselling. Several of our young people have benefitted immensely from this and have experienced significant improvements in their mental health.
- Many of your young people are not yet ready for counselling and we seek alternative therapeutic services. We have seen excellent examples through working with Heavy Sound, the Rangers Charity Foundation and Celtic FC Foundation.

ADDICTION & RECOVERY

Each of our three peer mentors have experienced addiction and recovery and this provides the very best opportunity to support and guide young people into recovery services to mitigate the risk of drug related harm and reduce offending. If a young person joining the VOW Project is experiencing addiction then this will be built into their personal plan. The officers and mentors of the VOW Project have built close working relationships with the NHS Lothians and Edinburgh Abstinence Programme and various third sector organisations supporting people in addiction including Change, Grow, Live and Turning Point Scotland.

PROGRAMME DELIVERY

TRAINING, EDUCATION & EMPLOYABILITY

The officers and mentors of the VOW project appreciate that training, education and employment are crucial pillars in life. The team understands that young people involved in the criminal justice system may be apprehensive about embarking upon these journeys due to what they perceive to be past failings. When creating their plan, the team encourages each young person to consider these aspects, explaining that each progressive step offers a greater chance of stability and opportunity.

Our partners can provide young people with support in relation to compiling a CV, embarking upon training and educational courses to boost their employability, assistance in completing PVG checks and courses to enhance basic life skills such as cookery and cleaning to support independent living. The VOW Project has seen significant success in the construction industry with many young people guided through the process of achieving the necessary health and safety requirements and qualifications enabling them to undertake roles in this sector.

Our range of partners is extensive and some of those we work closely and regularly with include:

- Action For Children
- Access To Industry
- Skills Development Scotland
- Apex
- All Cleaned Up
- Story Contracting
- Edinburgh College

REDUCTION IN REOFFENDING

The fundamental condition for young people joining the VOW Project is to show willingness to reduce, and ultimately cease, offending. The officers and mentors are aware of the many reasons as to why a young person can become involved in the criminal justice system and how it can result in a perpetual cycle of negative behaviour. It is the key focus of the VOW Project to divert our young people away from offending and we achieve this by focussing on health and wellbeing, addiction and recovery and training, education and employability.

THE VOW PROJECT PERFORMANCE

Outcome 1: Young people build their confidence and resilience, benefit from strengthened support networks and reduce risk taking behaviour.

Indicator	Target	Actual 22-23	Actual 21-23
Young people report their confidence increasing	67%	100%	100%
Young people feel able to do new things	67%	100%	100%
Young people feel more resilient	40%	100%	100%
Other stakeholders report perceived increases of confidence and resilience among young people	60%	100%	100%
Young people report positive supportive networks	55%	100%	100%
Young people report positive changes in their behaviour	60%	100%	100%
Other stakeholders report perceived positive changes in the behaviour of YP.	60%	100%	100%

The VOW Project has seen some remarkable outcomes achieved the young people that the team have supported in the past year, and the year previous. Across the six outcomes, the VOW project has seen young people address addiction, engage with counselling services, participate in community initiatives, obtain qualifications and, ultimately gain employment and remove themselves from the criminal justice system.

Every young person supported by the team have a person centred, unique plan created to suit their circumstances and assist them achieving their desired aims. It was heartening to hear that every young person who undertook the externally evaluated survey indicated that they had experienced an increase in resilience and confidence which goes a long way in helping achieve their ultimate objectives.

The VOW Project offers support in relation to developing skills to support independent living and increase employability by undertaking training and achieving accreditations. We are grateful to partners including Action For Children, Skills Development Scotland and Access To Industry, who have assisted many young people in achieving qualifications such as the Construction Skills Certification Scheme and improving their employment opportunities.

THE VOW PROJECT PERFORMANCE

Outcome 2: YP develop their personal and physical skills.

YP will gain accreditation for learning and skills development	10%	80%	17%
Young people report their skills are increasing	30%	100%	100%
Other stakeholders report skills increasing	25%	100%	100%

Outcome 3: YP's health and wellbeing improves.

Young people report increases in feelings against SHANARRI indicators: - Safety, Health, Achievement, Nurture, Activity, Respect, Responsibility, Inclusion	67%	100%	100%
Other stakeholders report perceived increases in SHANARRI indicators among young people	60%	100%	100%

Outcome 4: YP participate in activity which improves their learning, employability and employment options (positive destination).

Young people progress to a positive destination	25%	100%	97%
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The health and wellbeing of the young people whom the team support is paramount and is a key priority area in ensuring that they reach their desired destinations. Every young person who took part in the evaluation indicated that their health and wellbeing improved. The team concentrate on both physical and mental health, working alongside a wide range of partners. . The officers and mentors of the VOW Project work closely with the NHS assertive outreach team supporting people who have experienced near fatal overdose. On being approached these young people often sign up to the VOW Project. The team can provide referrals into primary care along with third sector support.

The team have seen two young people enter, and graduate from, the NHS Lothians and Edinburgh Abstinence Programme, a 12 week residential rehabilitation placement. One young man stated in his graduation speech that 'the police saved my life'. Not only this, but he invited an officer and mentor from the team to attend this event.

THE VOW PROJECT PERFORMANCE

Outcome 5: YP contribute positively to their communities.

Number of participants going on to volunteer, coach, mentor, support or take a leadership role in community organisations	7%	27%	6%
Number of hours of volunteering contributed by participants	208	150	150
Young people feel their contribution, links with communities and social interaction are improving	40%	64%	80%
Other stakeholders perceive that young people's contribution, links and social interaction are improving	40%	92%	91%
Participants' perception of neighbourhood improves	25%	36%	57%
Participants have a heightened sense of belonging to a community	40%	36%	57%
Participants have increased motivation to positively influence their community	33%	36%	50%

Outcome 6: YP are diverted from criminal behaviour or involvement with the criminal justice system.

Young people report that their own participation in antisocial and/or criminal behaviour has reduced	67%	91%	97%
Young people feel less inclined to participate in anti-social and/or criminal behaviour	67%	91%	97%
Other stakeholders report reduced antisocial behaviour and/or criminal behaviour	50%	100%	100%

THE VOW PROJECT PERFORMANCE

Through the specific funding for the provision of counselling, the VOW Project has seen young people enter into a course of counselling with Bright Light Counselling Services. This has achieved incredible results with young people addressing traumatic childhood experiences which have influenced decision making and behaviours and has assisted in removing young people from the cycle of offending. It has been recognised that counselling is not appropriate for every young person working with the VOW project and, as such, the team have provided alternative therapeutic support via our partners Heavy Sound Edinburgh Community Yoga. The latter has been such a success that one young woman is about to complete a practitioner's diploma, having gained so much from Cashback funded yoga sessions.

Many young people involved with the VOW Project have had negative relationships with their communities for a host of reasons including substance misuse and associated anti-social behaviour and offending. It has become evident that the role model aspect of the relationship with the peer mentor plays a significant part in the young person becoming aware of their community and the impact that their behaviour can have on the quality of life of those around them. Although there have been a number of young people enter into volunteering, this number is perhaps lower than anticipated due to the high number gaining employment. It is testament to the young people and to the officers and mentors of the VOW Project that there is a remarkably high rate of employment within those being supported by the team. It is acknowledged that, should there be more time spent volunteering then the sense of belonging within the community may increase.

The ultimate aim of the VOW Project is to reduce offending and remove young people from the criminal justice system. The police officers within the VOW Project make it clear to young people that should commit to stop offending upon signing up with the Project. However, it is accepted that there may be instances of offending in the future and this is then addressed as and when necessary. The overwhelming majority of young people change their behaviour very quickly and offending ceases. This outcome is achieved by focusing on physical and mental health, building relationships, gaining trust, increasing self-esteem, enhancing life skills and improving employability. Each tailored plan addresses these aspects, forming a holistic approach through extensive partnerships which sees young people achieve remarkable outcomes.

We have 12 young people received accreditations. These have included the following qualifications:

- Construction Skills Certification Scheme. 8 young people achieved this through Access To Industry, Storey Contracting, Community Renewal and Apex.
- European Computing
- Hospitality – Bar Tender Skills Course through Springboard
- Health and Safety qualifications through Storey Contracting
- European Computer Driving License qualification through Access To Industry

We have 4 young people who have been volunteering a minimum of 150 hours.



We work in partnership with Scottish Ambulance Service to provide peer mentor experience of drug related harm to trainee Ambulance Technicians.

TURN YOUR LIFE AROUND PERFORMANCE

Outcome 1: Young people build their confidence and resilience, benefit from strengthened support networks and reduce risk taking behaviour.

Indicator	Target	Actual 2022-23	Actual 2021-23
Young people report their confidence increasing	50%	93%	95%
Young people feel more resilient	50%	94%	94%
Other stakeholders report perceived increases of confidence and resilience among young people	50%	100%	100%
Young people report positive supportive networks	50%	91%	96%
Young people report positive changes in their behaviour	50%	89%	94%
Other stakeholders report perceived positive changes in the behaviour of YP.	50%	100%	100%

Outcome 2: YP develop their personal and physical skills.

Young people report their skills are increasing	50%	79%	79%
Other stakeholders report skills increasing	50%	100%	100%

ABOUT TURN YOUR LIFE AROUND

BACKGROUND

The VOW Project also supports the City of Edinburgh Council 'Turn Your Life Around' (TYLA) Project. This initiative is informed by research on mental health, trauma, and resilience. TYLA recruits and trains local volunteers with lived experience of growing up with adversity, such as poverty, abuse, and trauma. Volunteers are supported to share their story with staff, pupils, and families in Edinburgh Schools. TYLA aims to increase awareness of childhood trauma, how it impacts learning and behaviour and what a school community can do to build resilience.

Since 2016, 22 volunteers have been trained and have engaged with over 3000 people. In the last full year prior to the COVID-19 pandemic (2018-2019), volunteers worked with 709 children and young people, 294 staff and 32 parents and carers.



PANDEMIC AND BEYOND

From March 2020 until October 2021 all visits by outside organisations into schools were halted. During this time TYLA continued to support volunteers through regular phone calls, zoom meetings and online counselling. As part of the risk assessment TYLA concluded that volunteers telling their story via online methods such as teams would not be in their best interests, as the level of support that volunteers require could not be given online. Therefore, parallel to the goal of returning to face-to-face school inputs TYLA also made plans to create lessons, which could be delivered by school staff in the absence of the volunteer.

In September 2021 TYLA commissioned the production of six films that could be used as part of the TYLA lessons. Two of the films featured a volunteer sharing their own story and the other four films featured seven volunteers talking about their past experiences, what helped them get to where they are today, advice they would give to staff, and advice they would give to children and young people. These videos have been incorporated into two lessons that can now be delivered independently by school staff. There will be a screening of all the films at the Filmhouse in May 2022 as a celebration of the completion of this work and to recognise the bravery the volunteers have shown in recording their stories on film.

The films now form part of all follow up TYLA lessons in schools, (even if they have already had a volunteer into speak), and they will be used in the City of Edinburgh Council's new staff mental health and wellbeing training resource Mental Health Matters.

Access to educational establishments became possible again during this past year and our TYLA volunteers have attended 6 schools delivering inputs to 724 pupils and teachers. These schools include: Castlebrae High School, Currie High School, Wester Hailes Education Centre, Brunstane Primary School, Stenhouse Primary School and James Gillespie's High School.

Our intention is to continue to work closely with City of Edinburgh Council in the delivery of the TYLA programme and support the training of volunteers.

ABOUT TURN YOUR LIFE AROUND

IMPACT

Due to government restrictions in relation to COVID-19, TYLA visits to schools were halted. However, in the last 6 months TYLA have been able to deliver sessions in two high schools and three primary schools, reaching over 300 pupils.

From the evaluations received:

- 75% agreed that they had learned ways to build their resilience
- 75% were more confident that they would ask for help if they needed it
- 92% would be kinder to others

“You have made me feel better to share my feelings with other people”

“Thank you TYLA for what you have showed me, I'm grateful for what I have and you showed me that bad stuff is not permanent”

“It was so helpful that you came in and it gave me a bit more confidence in things, thank you”

TYLA has also managed to speak to approximately 80 school staff who provided the following responses:

- 89% thought the session was worthwhile
- 95% were reminded to see the child and not their behaviour
- 91% were given hope that no matter what the current situation people can turn their lives around.

“In times of my own work stresses to step out of this and just focus on the child in front of me”

“Try to spend quality time with pupils who are experiencing difficulties to see what/how we can reassure/help them to understand their feelings”

“I think hearing these types of real-life stories would be fantastic for children who may be experiencing similar situations. It would be inspirational for them and make them realise they are not alone.”

NEW VOLUNTEERS

In the summer of 2021 TYLA was able to advertise, recruit and train six new volunteers. Two training days were held in July and covered topics including attachment, risk and resilience factors for mental health, storytelling and trauma and healing. The new volunteers are beginning to meet with the TYLA staff to craft their stories, produce PowerPoints for their presentations and complete Disclosure Scotland forms. Of the new volunteers so far only one has been able to share her story in school with pupils and another has spoken at a conference regarding the Power of Positive Relationships. The hope is there will be many more opportunities for volunteers to share their stories next session 2022-23.

Additionally, the prohibition on outside agencies visiting schools during December 2021 and January 2022 impacted TYLA's ability to complete some sessions in schools, which resulted in some new schools not being able to begin the work. The restrictions on bringing large groups of young people together in assemblies also had an impact on the number of pupils TYLA could reach in high schools, and as a result pupil work is still to begin in one high school. In the summer term TYLA is aiming to deliver volunteer inputs in two further high schools.



ABOUT TURN YOUR LIFE AROUND

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

There are currently 13 volunteers trained and able to share their stories in schools. Three of these volunteers are VOW Project mentors. TYLA has a steering group consisting of representatives from City of Edinburgh Council and Police Scotland officers who meet monthly to agree the direction of the project and offer support to the volunteers. The benefits of using role models and people with lived experience to help develop resilience in children and young people is widely acknowledged and it is hoped that requests from schools to use the TYLA project increase and engagement returns to pre-pandemic levels.

Despite the difficulties experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic, the TYLA programme began to deliver in-person inputs again late in 2021 and into 2022. An excellent 2022 / 23, which saw delivery to 724 pupils and staff sees TYLA in a strong position going into the school session 2023-24. The development of the TYLA inputs into a block of lessons, for both primary and high schools, that use teaching, discussion, videos, and group work, mean that the volunteer inputs are now more meaningful for pupils. The pupils can reflect, ask questions, and compile their own pieces of work on the volunteer's story or cover a connected aspect of mental health and wellbeing. The messages of the TYLA project on risk and resilience factors strongly align with work that pupils will already be doing as part of Health and Wellbeing or PSE lessons. This allows pupils develop progression and depth in their learning.

We are delighted that City of Edinburgh Council are committed to the TYLA programme. We will see a seamless transition from Phase 5 into Phase 6 with the provision of inputs to primary and secondary schools throughout Edinburgh over the next 3 years.



Our peer mentor, Julie-Anne, pictured with pupils from Brunstane Primary School following her input as part of the TYLA programme.

CASE STUDIES

JESS' STORY

The VOW Project made an approach to Jess, a 21 year old female, who was in police custody awaiting an appearance at court. Following her court appearance an officer and a mentor from the VOW Project arranged to meet with Jess at the home she shares with her parents, sister, and brother. Jess had a stable upbringing and was from a loving family. One of the VOW Project mentors explained about the Project and shared some of her own lived experience.

Jess spoke openly about using alcohol as a coping mechanism. She shared that she was drinking two bottles of wine each day and thought she was doing ok, however things had begun to escalate and she was charged with drink driving. Jess was a student and felt that she was struggling to cope with the pressures surrounding such.

Jess was open to support from the VOW Project from the outset. She was aware of the negative impact her alcohol consumption was having, but was also frightened of her risk taking behaviour which was not only putting herself in dangerous circumstances but also others.

Following the offence and crisis point that Jess reached, the VOW Project mentor discussed the possibility of attending the Young Person Alcoholics Anonymous meetings both in person and online. Jess agreed to this and, following attending several meetings, stated:

“I’m getting a better understanding of addiction and my own triggers by attending AA meetings.”

Jess was also signposted to Change Grow Live (CGL) and offered Cashback for Communities funded counselling with our partners Bright Light Counselling. Jess agreed to both and seized the opportunity immediately.

During the first weeks of engaging with the VOW Project Jess experienced a few relapses, however over time, developed trust in the officer and mentor she worked closely with and was able to reach out for support. This helped her to get back on track fairly quickly.

The VOW Project mentor had built up such a trusting relationship with her that Jess was very open and transparent about her mental health and various aspects of her personality that she had been aware of since childhood.

The mentor suggested that Jess may wish to speak to her GP about this, to which Jess agreed and this allowed for the diagnosis of ADHD. Jess was subsequently medicated for this which, in turn, helped alleviate her symptoms.

CASE STUDIES

JESS' STORY

Jess was a highly anxious individual and this would present itself in many ways during the initial meetings with the VOW Project.

This diagnosis seemed to ease much of Jess's anxieties and had a significant impact on her mental health. Following this diagnosis Jess was able to link in with her university tutor to update them of her situation and discuss options going forward. The university were supportive of Jess and allowed her to take time out away from studying to work on herself and her addiction. Jess was given a 6 month break from university, without losing her grant, which enabled her to work on her underlying issues.

Jess began counselling with Bright Light and built a good connection and rapport with her counsellor. Jess completed 16 sessions and stated:

"It was really difficult, but I felt better after saying so much."

"Through a mixture of being on the correct medication and having counselling sessions it has helped reduce my anxieties and I feel more confident within myself."

On completion of the counselling sessions, the team linked Jess in with our partners at Edinburgh Community Yoga. Jess attended weekly sessions, funded by Cashback for Communities. These sessions are trauma informed which encourages individuals to connect mind and body, aiding both physical and mental wellbeing. Jess was enthusiastic about attending these sessions independently. She explained that she felt empowered within the group sessions.

Jess feels she is in a much better place, she socialises both with friends and family and genuinely feels supported having this strong network around her. Jess doesn't feel any pressures within her social circle and doesn't feel out of place when in the company of others whilst they are drinking alcohol.

Jess was provided with a wholesome approach whereby she was linked in with the appropriate services and supports. Jess is now thriving, she recently applied for, and was accepted, onto a 6 month Action Scholarship Program with Edinburgh Community Yoga where she has a fully funded bursary place. There will be an opportunity for Jess to progress to a teacher training program thereafter if this is something she wishes to explore.

"HAD I NOT COMMITTED THE DRIVING OFFENCE AND MET THE VOW PROJECT I HAVE NO IDEA WHERE I WOULD BE WITH MY DRINKING BUT BELIEVE I WOULD HAVE CONTINUED TO ESCALATE FURTHER IN CRIMINALITY AND SELF-DESTRUCTION."

JESS

CASE STUDIES

RYAN'S STORY

Ryan was brought up in poverty in a socially deprived area of Edinburgh and he and his siblings have had support from Social Services since early childhood. The family still live in a home with very little by way of material goods and sometimes food within the house is not plentiful.

Ryan struggled in mainstream school and at 12 years old he was excluded from high school and sent to a school specifically for children with behavioural issues. Over the course of a few short years, Ryan accumulated 137 criminal charges making him one of Edinburgh's most prolific juvenile offenders.

The VOW Project began working with Ryan two and a half years ago when he was aged 17, after one of the police officers in the team noticed that he'd been arrested. The officer remembered Ryan as a first year pupil who'd been excluded from the school where she'd worked as a school link police officer. Ryan was approached by the officer and a peer mentor and having remembered the police officer from years before, Ryan was happy to open up about his life and the various struggles he endured. He was honest about his involvement in criminality and said he was fearful he was going to be sent to prison. He said he wanted to live a better life but that he felt as though he'd never been given a chance to "JUST GET OUT OF THE BIT" and he openly spoke about his illicit drug use.

Ryan was later remanded to Polmont young offender's prison where the VOW Project paid him a visit. In prison Ryan looked agitated and anxious and admitted he'd stopped eating and couldn't sleep. He also mentioned his mum's poor health and how he was upset not to be at home helping to look after her. Ryan said prison "WASN'T FOR HIM" and that he was keen to work with the VOW Project to take steps to ensure he turned his life around and did not return to Polmont.

Ryan was released from prison several weeks later and the VOW Project supported him to engage with his Criminal Justice Social Worker within the Young Peoples Service to work on his care plan. Over the following months, the VOW Project continued to build a trusting relationship with Ryan and provided guidance and support through the difficult times.

The VOW Project supported Ryan to do a work placement with our partners All Cleaned Up and to study through fellow Cashback partner Action for Children towards obtaining his CSCS health and safety card. Edinburgh Leisure generously provided a gym membership card for Ryan and the team visited him and his family on a weekly basis, assisting with food parcels and understanding that at that particular time, Ryan was very vulnerable and needed intensive support. Ryan admitted to the team that he still regularly used illicit street drugs.

Seven months after signing up to the Vow Project Ryan offended and was sent back to prison. He was distraught at this but two positives came from this second remand, firstly Ryan received a formal diagnosis of ADHD and as a result of this he was subsequently prescribed the appropriate medication to help with this condition. The VOW Project thereafter linked in with Ryan's allocated social worker and asked that a referral be made to the Adolescent Substance Misuse Team in order that Ryan could be supported regarding potential drugs misuse upon release.

CASE STUDIES

RYAN'S STORY

The VOW project became aware of potential employment for Ryan with Story Contracting. This position would involve completing various courses including the CSCS health and safety exam. An officer from the team explained details of the opportunity to Ryan and his response was extremely enthusiastic.

Ryan was offered an interview and the team assisted by providing some possible questions/interview scenarios and ensuring that he had appropriate clothing to wear. The team assisted Ryan in attending the interview which was out with the Edinburgh area and Ryan was absolutely delighted to be offered the position and felt his increased confidence and communication skills helped him immeasurably.

In the last three months Ryan has passed his mandatory drug tests and the company have now provided him with a 4 year apprenticeship. Ryan is a respected member of the Story Contracting team and during a recent meet up he told the VOW Project that for the first time since he was 12 years old, he is 'drug free and loving life'. As part of his apprenticeship he will attend college and obtain qualifications and he is delighted at being given a chance to 'get out of the bit'! College attendance, working towards various qualifications and secure, well paid employment for the future are now all within Ryan's reach. Essentially a proper chance in life.

After his release from prison Ryan spoke to the team about his distress at not being permitted to see his young child due to his criminal history. Ryan trusted the officer and mentor enough to speak about this emotive subject and the VOW Project assisted by providing a progress report to Social Services. This, along with Ryan's hard work and positive lifestyle choices, resulted in him and his mum being allowed supervised access to the child on a regular basis

Through continual support and encouragement, Ryan's confidence grew and he attended his various appointments often being transported to and from these by the team. He regularly scored 50/50 in his mock CSCS tests and managed his daily life better by making more positive choices.

Ryan's communication skills and ability to build trusting, appropriate relationships improved significantly and in turn his feelings of self-esteem and self-worth also improved. Since his second remand Ryan has not returned to prison and his criminal activity has ceased. He is now a positive role model for his younger brother and is working towards being the best father to he can be.

Fast forward to February 2022 when the VOW Project were contacted by Story Contracting and advised of a position available to a young person who had criminal convictions and wanted to take part in a 5 week work placement in railway construction.

"I WOULD NEVER HAVE GOT THIS IF IT HADN'T BEEN FOR YOU. I START NEXT WEEK AND THE WAGES ARE GREAT!"

"THIS IS AMAZING, I'VE NEVER BEEN GIVEN A CHANCE LIKE THIS BEFORE. OTHER FOLK GET CHANCES BUT NOT ME. I'M DEFINITELY INTERESTED. THANK YOU." - RYAN

WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

The VOW Project would not be able to support young people to achieve positive destinations without incredible partners throughout Edinburgh and the Lothians. By tailoring plans to suit each young person's situation and circumstances the team can signpost to the most appropriate partner to give that young person the very best chance of reaching their desired destination.

The VOW Project have established a significant number of vital partnerships across all areas in which they aim to offer support and signposting. These relationships also include fellow Cashback for Communities partners. The team utilise the expertise of our partners with the support of Inspiring Scotland.

CYRENIANS

Created in 1968, Cyrenians tackle the causes and consequences of homelessness through their values of compassion, respect, integrity and innovation. Through partnership their FareShare food hub depot in Leith we assist in providing young people with good quality food to tackle food inequality.

ACCESS TO INDUSTRY

Access To Industry works across Scotland with unemployed people who face barriers to employment. Our partnership with Access To Industry has provided many of your young people with new skills to enhance their employability, offers of work and supported a reduction in substance misuse and offending.

SKILLS DEVELOPMENT SCOTLAND (SDS)

SDS is the national skills body supporting the people and businesses of Scotland to develop and apply their skills. Through partnership with SDS our young people not only develop existing skills but acquire new ones through a tailored plan to suit each individual. This has resulted in young people enrolling on training courses, achieving qualifications and taking on paid employment.

SCOTTISH PRISON SERVICE (SPS)

The VOW Project are grateful to SPS for giving us the opportunity to speak with young people close to release from HMP / YOI Polmont. Officers and peer mentors attend regularly to provide inputs to a variety of subjects and highlight the support that is available in an effort to support people break the offending cycle and reach positive destinations.

ACTION FOR CHILDREN

Our Cashback partner Action For Children protect and support children and young people by providing practical and emotional care and support. By working closely with Action For Children we can refer our young people to specialists in protecting young people from neglect and abuse and mitigate the risk of homelessness.

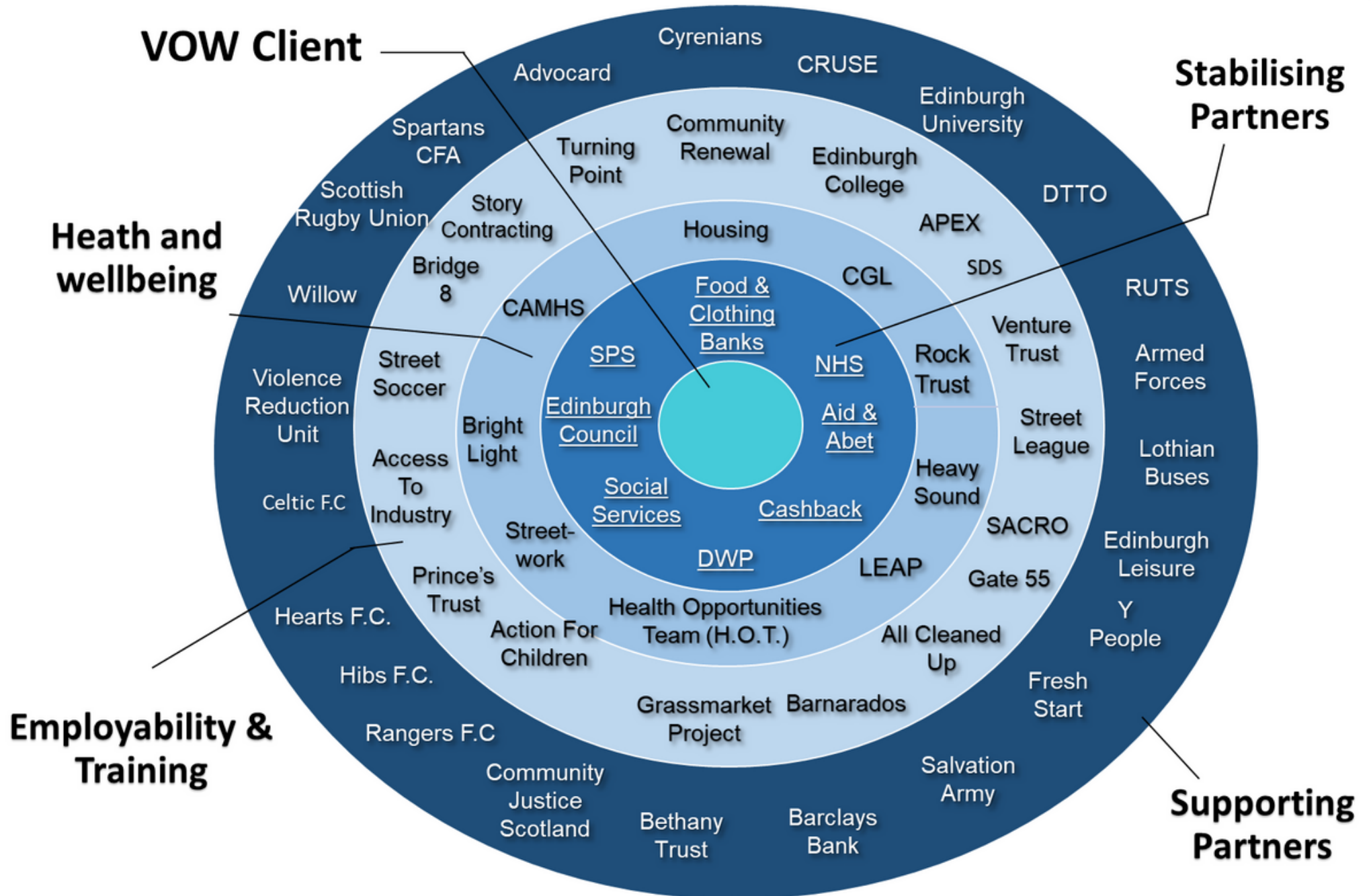
CITY OF EDINBURGH COUNCIL

The VOW Project has a long standing relationship with City of Edinburgh Council who provide support in relation to homelessness and housing and essential engagement with social workers and other lead professionals involved in the care of the young people we support. This partnership is also vital as we help to deliver the Turn Your Life Around programme.

BRIGHT LIGHT COUNSELLING

The VOW Project are grateful to Cashback for Communities for funding allowing for the provision of counselling services. We have developed a strong and positive relationship with Bright Light Counselling, the largest charitable provider of counselling in Scotland. Bright Light have evolved their services to cater for the young people that the VOW Project support and have shown flexibility and a dedication to provide a high quality service. We are looking forward to this partnership continuing to develop and is a key feature in how we support young people.





WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

Our partnership with Cyrenians / FareShare is invaluable in allowing us to support and encourage a healthier lifestyle for the young people we support. The provisions of a nutritious diet is key and without this partnership this would not be possible.



Our partners at Heavy Sound provide a number of activities and educational support for young people, tailoring their service to suite the interests and skills of the individual.



We are grateful to our Cashback for Communities Partner Celtic FC Foundation who provided tours of Celtic Park.



Thanks to Cashback partner Rangers Charity Foundation one of our young people said 'that was the best day I've had in a very long time and it helped with my depression'.



We promote positive mental health working alongside SAMH, SPFL Trust and the Big Hearts Community Trust on the Changing Room programme

FINANCE 2021-2023

PROJECT COSTS	
STAFFING	£63,596
TYLA VOLUNTEER TRAINING	£10,650
COUNSELLING SERVICES	£0
MENTOR EXPENSES	£1,382
EVALUATION	£4,017
OTHER COSTS	£946
TOTAL 2022-23	£80,591

TOTAL 2021-2023	£143,414
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It is acknowledged that the VOW project recorded an underspend during Phase 5. This is attributable to the budget provided for counselling services. It became clear that the young people being supported by the VOW Project may benefit from counselling but, owing to their current circumstances, may not be in a position to undergo such sessions at that time. From this learning, the team are now better placed to identify young people who may be ready to receive counselling and our partners, Bright Light, have enhanced their service provision to include outdoor sessions and introductory meetings in public spaces. Bright Light have also created an information leaflet specifically designed for clients of the VOW Project to enhance their understanding of counselling and to ensure appropriate expectations are set. This learning and enhanced service, in partnership with Bright Light, has the intention of maximising the availability of counselling and preparing young people appropriately.



EVALUATION

We have developed an excellent relationship with our evaluation partner, Social Value Lab. The overall aim of the evaluation is to understand and evidence the impact of the Cashback VOW Project and TYLA programme on the lives of young people. The evaluation process is an opportunity to work together with our evaluators with a focus on learning and continuous improvement.

Social Value Lab approach:

- Is outcome-focussed
- Is forward looking and developmental.
- Inspires openness and curiosity.
- Celebrates achievements and captures learning.

In Year 1 and 2 Social Value Lab supported by VOW Project by:

- Carrying out an Evaluation Workshop.
- Designed consultation materials.
- Conducted a desk-based review.
- Commenced field work consisting of Young People Interviews, Stakeholder Surveys, Key Stakeholder Interviews, Participant Case Studies.

We are grateful to the team at Social Value Lab for their support and guidance over the past 2 years.



IMPACT

The VOW Project is completely voluntary and provides a person centred, unique plan which is focussed on the circumstances, needs and aspirations of the young person that the team are supporting. The wealth of partners that the team engage with, across a wide spectrum of service provision, ensures that the young person can be referred into the most appropriate agencies, giving them the best opportunity to achieve their desired outcomes.

Without exception, all young people whom the team have supported have achieved a positive outcome of some sort, with many achieving everything that they had hoped for – and more. These outcomes include a reduction in offending, education, training, achieving a healthier lifestyle and in many cases independent living and, ultimately, employment. It is also notable that most young people report an increase in confidence and self-esteem, improved decision making and improvement in their wellbeing.

The team developed relationships, built on mutual trust, removing barriers between offenders and police officers with the support of the peer mentors. This trust, support and encouragement has extended to involving families and the team have reinvigorated familial relationships, following complete breakdowns. This bringing together of parents and young people have seen remarkable improvements in quality of life, not just for the young people that the team support, but their extended families.



We are grateful to Scottish Rugby Union who provided a tour of Murrayfield this year.

PLANS AND PRIORITIES FOR THE YEAR AHEAD

Many of the young people that the VOW Project support have experience of childhood trauma and adversity and we were very grateful to Cashback For Communities for the provision of funding which allowed for us to refer young people into counselling. We have seen significant positive results through this and are grateful to Bright Light Counselling for their commitment to the VOW Project and the flexibility they have shown. Of interest was that it became apparent that many of the young people that the VOW Project support were not yet ready for counselling, however, would still benefit from some form of activity which may be of therapeutic value and have a positive impact on their mental health. This was evident when we were provided tours of Ibrox Stadium and Celtic Park by the Rangers Charity Foundation and the Celtic FC Foundation and we also evidenced the positive impact of activities provided by our partners Heavy Sound. With this in mind the officers and mentors at the VOW Project will seek to develop their current relationships and form new partnerships to enhance the prospect of referring young people into services which may be seen as an alternative to counselling. We have already taken steps to research trauma informed yoga with Edinburgh Yoga and will seek to develop this further and create a portfolio of options for young people.

As a Cashback for Communities partner, we have seen our young people achieve so much and reach destinations that they never believed possible. We are very much looking forward to Phase 6 and the next 3 years, during which we will continue to focus on creating specific personal plans based on what our young people wish to achieve. This will be done by a consistent approach to

- Health and wellbeing
- Addiction and recovery
- Training, education and employability
- Reduction in offending

With an added emphasis on the provision of signposting to counselling and exploring new partnerships to offer alternative therapeutic services we are excited about our second year and how we can help young people out of the offending cycle and to reach positive destinations.