

The VOW Project

ANNUAL REPORT 2024-2025



**POLICE
SCOTLAND**
Keeping people safe



• EDINBURGH •
THE CITY OF EDINBURGH COUNCIL

A WORD FROM PARTNERSHIPS SUPERINTENDANT PAUL GILLESPIE



The CashBack VOW Project is an innovative approach to reducing criminality in the City of Edinburgh. This award winning project has evolved significantly in recent years and the adoption of new wellbeing supports for their clients has led to improved outcomes.

The project's ability to improve the lives of their clients has had a direct impact Police resources, by reducing criminality amongst their clients.

The use of lived experience Mentors is absolutely key to the Project's success, the rapport and engagement that they are able to build with clients is invaluable and their ability to reference their own life experiences is often the key to helping others make better choices. The case studies in this year's report again demonstrate the impact the project has on individuals and the truly life changing potential that it has for young people.

I am proud that as a Policing Division we have pioneered this approach to reducing criminality and improving the lives of our communities and I look forward to hearing about the future successes of the young people working with the VOW.

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ABOUT THE VOW TEAM

The VOW Team is a Police Scotland initiative in partnership with Aid & Abet.

The team offers support to people aged between 16-25 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
- Achieving goals and fulfilling potential
- Housing/Benefits
- Drug/Alcohol Dependency/Recovery Services
- Employment/Training Opportunities

Young people are often identified and nominated for VOW support through police engagement although nominations from anywhere will be considered, including but not limited to:

- Social Work
- NHS
- Education
- Defence bar
- Friends and family

On deciding to commit to the VOW Team the young person will complete an assessment and consent to information about themselves to be shared (for the purposes of the project only). This allows the team to create a tailored plan and monitor and review their progress.

The VOW Team then offer one to one support to young people with no time limitation. The amount and duration of support is determined by the needs of the young person.

MEET OUR TEAM



PC Emily Noble

Emily has 25 years service and a vast experience working with hard to reach groups and working in partnership with external organisations. Emily has worked in response policing, licensing and the Equality and Diversity team. Emily brings a vast knowledge of services and excellent communication and presentation skills.



PC Heather Clark

Heather has 12 years service. Heather is trained Protest Liaison Officer and has worked in a variety of different roles in the Police. Prior to joining the VOW she worked in Crime Prevention and is skilled in the delivery of Presentations. Heather also has extensive experience working with partners.



PC Euan Forbes

Euan has 9 years service. His roles prior to the VOW involved plain-clothed proactive policing and investigating matters impacting the Scottish Government. He is also an experienced operational football officer. Euan has a keen interest in fitness and is incorporating this into positive social activities for clients of the VOW project.

Having police officers involved is beneficial for many reasons. They have immediate access to young people who are the hardest to reach and most in need of support. The young people agreeing to work with police officers is an indication that they are ready and willing to engage in a meaningful way. One of the most significant achievements the team work towards with young people is to build their confidence and widen the view of what they can achieve and what opportunities are available to them. Working with the police in a positive way plays a large part in initial stages of these objectives.



Julie-Anne Graham

Julie-Anne was lost in addiction for 27 years. She has been in recovery for 11 years and gained a better perspective on life, using her experience, knowledge and wisdom to prevent young people from making the same negative choices she did.

Julie-Anne's primary focus within the VOW Project is supporting young people who are at risk of drug related harm. She has a very close working relationship with NHS, Scottish Ambulance Service and other partners. Julie-Anne breaks down barriers with people who find it difficult to engage with services and builds trusting relationships, directing people onto positive destinations.



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's units and then adult prison. Donald is the co-founder at Aid & Abet, and works with Police Scotland's VOW project.

Donald supports people who have found themselves caught up in the criminal justice system and sees the importance in building trust, having positive relationships and being a role model. He is very 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."



Kevin Dickson

Kevin brings vast experience from his previous role working as a Mentor for Action for Children on the Sidestep Project. This project is similar to the VOW, with a mission statement to divert young people from crime and onto better outcomes.

Kevin also brings with him the unique viewpoint, that he himself was previously a VOW client and the VOW played a huge part in his recovery journey.

Kevin has experience of the care system, addiction and has spent time in secure accommodation.

Kevin's key strengths are his empathy and his strong desire to advocate for his clients.

PROGRAMME DELIVERY

WHAT WE DID IN 2024-2025

Actions	Value
Nominations Approached	60
Clients signed for one to one engagement	23
Young people engaged with through TYLA or other education opportunities	472
New TYLA volunteers trained	9
Professionals provided training to help them support young people	30



CASE STUDY 1

WILLIAM'S STORY

William was referred to VOW by CID after being identified for multiple housebreakings and possession of lock-snapping tools.

Initially sceptical, he was encouraged by one of our Mentors; Kevin to engage with the program and explore available support. At his first meeting, VOW staff recognised his potential but saw a lack of direction and motivation. Believing he had strong employment prospects with the right guidance, they connected him with Skills Development Scotland. He received assistance in creating a CV, exploring career options, and applying for apprenticeships. William successfully secured a Steeplejack apprenticeship. He was referred for a CAP gym program, channelling his energy into constructive activities.

One of William's biggest challenges was distancing himself from negative influences that had encouraged his criminal behaviour. Through intensive weekly support and patient rapport building, he gradually detached from damaging peer groups and broke his cycle of offending. The meaningful connections he created with VOW mentors and officers gave him the confidence to do this which allowed him to focus on building new, positive friendships through his apprenticeship.

Since joining VOW, he has remained crime-free. Another hurdle was his strained family relationships, particularly with his parents. Mentors helped him navigate difficult conversations, leading to improved family connections and stronger support networks.

Additionally, William faced ongoing legal issues tied to past offenses. VOW assisted in drafting a letter to the Crown highlighting his progress, ensuring his positive changes were recognised. The VOW offered meaningful support during Williams court proceedings and encouraged him to take responsibility for his actions which he did with a new found sense of maturity.

Since entering full-time employment, William has travelled extensively, an opportunity he had rarely experienced before. His mother later sent a heartfelt message thanking the team for their support, emphasising how they helped showcase William's true potential. His journey through VOW has set him on a sustainable path toward success.

PROGRAMME DELIVERY

JOINING THE PROGRAMME

Nominations come from diverse sources including

- Police officers
- The courts
- The wider criminal justice system
- Social services
- Education
- Members of the public

The source of the nomination does not impact how it is assessed and responded to. Recently a previous client nominated a family friend who was successfully signed to work with the team.

After receiving a nomination, our team meets with the young person and emphasises that participation is entirely voluntary and can be terminated at any time. Additionally, each young person must commit to reducing their offending behaviour and complete GDPR paperwork to facilitate information sharing with our partners.

NOTE:

The team have been working hard to use trauma informed and inclusive language where possible. One of the changes we made as a result was to change from 'referrals' to 'nominations'. The feedback from young people engaged with the project was 'referrals' had negative connotations and seen as a perceived punishment, such as being referred to the children's reporter or social work. 'Nominations' had much more positive connotations. Although the process has not changed rebranding it has resulted in young people nominated seeing it as a more positive opportunity.



PROGRAMME DELIVERY

SIGNING UP AND CREATING A PLAN

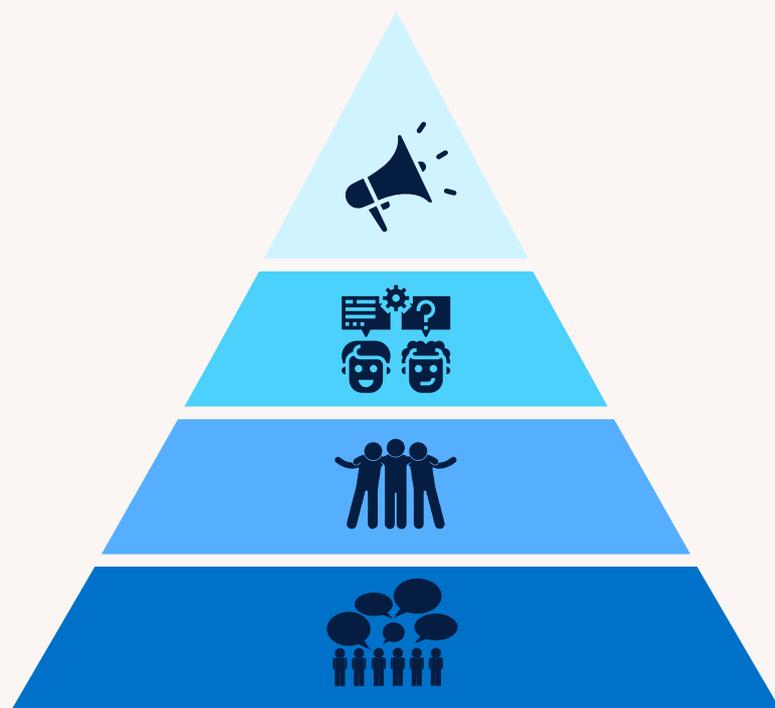
Once a young person has been nominated we will contact them by the agreed method and arrange to meet in person. If, once they have learnt more, they would like to work with the project they 'signup' and are provided with a personal plan and support.

We pride ourselves on our flexible and innovative approach to our plan design. This benefits from us not having any predefined timescales. The plan is fully bespoke and unique to the individual and its design may take an extended period of time to complete, or even start, while rapport and trust is being built between the team and young person.

Similar to having no predefined timescales there is no set approach or required goals for the young person to work towards. The goals, tasks and timescales built in to the individual's plan are led by them, their interests, motivations and capability. Once initial goals are achieved the plan can be adapted to add development of them or new goals. The VOW facilitate engagement with the plan and support for the durations of it, ensuring it is suitable and achievable, but will engage with partners and contract professionals to allow the young person to excel within their plan.

OUR FLEXIBLE DESIGN PLAN

- 04** We reduce support until we can positively end engagement, leaving the person with a plan and the potential to get back in touch at any time.
- 03** We aim to build on previous successes and develop more independence in to the plan and wider life. We can spend a long time moving between stages 2 and 3.
- 02** Once we have established an approach, including interests and needs, we build a plan and support the person through it
- 01** Initially we get to know the person and build trust and rapport. This allows us to have a greater positive influence and make a bespoke plan.



PROGRAMME DELIVERY

HEALTH AND 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. Some examples of this are:

- We work closely with Edinburgh Leisure who provide subsidised gym passes for the young people and we have a contract with an amazing Edinburgh Leisure based personal trainer who works with many of the VOW clients.
- Venture Scotland deliver a range of outdoor activities which many of the 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 the 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, Psychology First and George Street Wellness. Between the different providers the following are available:
 - Talking Therapy
 - Cognitive Behaviour Therapy
 - Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing
 - Art Therapy
- Over the last 18 months the VOW team have developed an excellent working relationship with 'Turn the Tables' who provides music lessons, particularly focused on rap and learning music software skills. Several young people have engaged in with this consistently for extended periods of time and have thrived and developed as result. It is gives them a safe 'unthreatening place to explore their experiences and associated emotions through lyric writing and performing'.

PROGRAMME DELIVERY

ADDICTION AND RECOVERY

Our team of three peer mentors brings first hand experience of addiction and recovery, making them uniquely positioned to support and guide young people toward recovery services. By leveraging their personal journeys, they can help mitigate the risk of drug-related harm and reduce offending.

When a young person joins the VOW Project and is experiencing addiction, we incorporate this into their plan. Additionally, our officers and mentors have established strong working relationships with the NHS Lothians, the Lothian and Edinburgh Abstinence Programme, and various third-sector organizations that provide support to individuals dealing with addiction.

A weekly multi-partnership meeting takes place between the team, numerous NHS partners and recovery services along with council colleagues. This ensures appropriate information sharing occurs and relevant support can be offered from the best professional. Both VOW clients and clients of partners benefit from this approach and it often results in positive nominations being received by the VOW team.



Key partners in relation to recovery and addiction

PROGRAMME DELIVERY

TRAINING, EDUCATION AND 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 have worked with previously include: Action For Children, Access To Industry, Skills Development Scotland, Apex, All Cleaned Up, Story Contracting, Edinburgh College amongst others.

Many of the young people the VOW work with have very limited education experience and are still living chaotic lifestyles. Formal qualifications can often require too much commitment at the early stages of the young persons engagement with the team. In response to this one of the VOW mentors has recently trained to put young people through 'Dynamic Youth' Awards with Youth Scotland. To gain a Dynamic Youth Award young people choose a challenge, set personal targets, complete a minimum of 10 hours of activity, think about and comment on their achievements, recording time spent on their activities and gather evidence of their participation. They will then receive a certificate showing their name, their challenge and the hours completed. The certificate will show the SCQF level and credit points. This approach builds from where a young person is, is person centred and the focus is on creating an award that is personal, meaningful and appropriate for the individual.

CASE STUDY 2

SHANE'S STORY

Shane was referred to the VOW project by a response Police Officer. At the time, he had 160 Vulnerable Person Database entries, primarily as a missing person, and 56 youth offending crime reports. He lacked stable familial relationships and positive role models, having endured domestic abuse through his mother's relationships. Shane had been placed in foster care and, over the years, moved between almost every young person's unit in Edinburgh.

As he approached the age of referral, his risk-taking behaviours escalated, leading to frequent missing person reports, sometimes daily, placing a significant strain on Police resources. His involvement in criminality was increasing, ranging from dishonesty and violence to antisocial behaviour and links with organised crime. At the time of referral, Shane faced serious pending criminal cases and was subject to a 7am–7pm curfew following his release from Kibble Secure Unit. Struggling to regulate his emotions, particularly anger, he found adjusting to life outside the structured routine of the secure unit challenging.

Through positive interactions, the VOW team quickly built rapport with Shane and established a structured routine around his interests. This had an immediate impact, and his behaviour noticeably improved through the guidance of lived-experience mentors. Shane was introduced to Turn the Tables, where he created and performed rap music, allowing him to express himself artistically. His commitment to music helped him reflect on the influence of negative peer associations and the importance of better decision-making. Shane has since produced multiple albums, which he proudly shares with the team.

Despite continued instability in his home life and occasional criminal charges, the VOW encouraged Shane to focus on productivity. In collaboration with Action for Children, he studied for and successfully passed his CSCS qualification, opening doors to employment opportunities. A significant challenge was his mistrust of authority and the police, fearing he would be seen as a “grass.” VOW officers worked hard to establish trust, and Shane is now confident confiding in them.

In late 2023, Shane worked with CrimeStoppers' Fearless campaign, recording a voice-over for a national social media initiative to encourage young people to avoid harm. Since joining the project Shane's criminal activity has dramatically reduced, he is no longer subject to a bail curfew, and he is actively engaging with the criminal justice process. He now attends CAMHS, and social work involvement has reduced to weekly meetings.

Reflecting on his progress, Shane stated:

“See the violence with young people—it's absurd right now. I was once in that position, not that long ago. I want people to know that things can change. It doesn't need to be this way... VOW saved me massively. I was around people I definitely shouldn't have been, and things weren't going well. They made a difference, a big difference.”

PROJECT PERFORMANCE

OUTCOME 1: YOUNG PEOPLE ARE DIVERTED FROM ANTISOCIAL, CRIMINAL BEHAVIOUR AND INVOLVEMENT IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

Outcome 1 Indicators	Year 2 Actual	Year 2 Target	% of Year 2 Goal	Year 1+2 Actual	3 Year Target	% of 3 Year Target
Young people report that their participation in antisocial and/or criminal behaviour has reduced	29	20	145%	54	49	110%
Young people report they feel less inclined to participate in antisocial and/or criminal behaviour	29	20	145%	54	49	110%

OUTCOME 2: YOUNG PEOPLE PARTICIPATE IN ACTIVITY WHICH IMPROVES THEIR LEARNING, EMPLOYABILITY AND EMPLOYMENT OPTIONS

Outcome 2 Indicators	Year 2 Actual	Year 2 Target	% of Year 2 Goal	Year 1+2 Actual	3 Year Target	% of 3 Year Target
Young people gain an accreditation for a new skill	5	4	125%	10	10	100%
The number of participants taking up/gain: Modern apprenticeship / employment	13	12	108%	41	25	164%

The project exceeded its targets for this year in Outcome 2 and has hit its target for years one and two in relation to young people acquiring a new skill. We are delighted that the CashBack VOW have been able to exceed our target for years one and two in relation to the number of participants taking up a modern apprenticeship. These are generally some of the most challenging outcomes for our project. It is our firm belief that gaining new skills and education is a key for young people achieving better outcomes in their lives overall. However we are aware that not all young people will be at a point in their journey to undertake training or employment. We are therefore hopeful that we can achieve these outcomes again in year 3 and feel positive that our clients will continue to commit to learning and development.

PROJECT PERFORMANCE

OUTCOME 3: YOUNG PEOPLE'S HEALTH, MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPROVES

Outcome 3 Indicators	Year 2 Actual	Year 2 Target	% of Year 2 Goal	Year 1+2 Actual	3 Year Target	% of 3 Year Target
Young people report an increase in feelings against SHANARRI indicators	37	20	185%	61	49	124%
Young people report their mental health has improved and they have a more positive outlook on life	39	20	195%	59	49	120%
Young people report they are more aware of the risks and impacts of harmful substance use	183	20	915%	195	49	398%
Young people report they are less inclined to engage in harmful drugs and/or alcohol use	41	20	205%	52	49	106%
Young people report their confidence has increased	43	20	215%	61	49	124%

The response from our clients in relation to our key indicators has been very positive in year 2 of the project.

The majority of the information above relates to the impact that the VOW project has had on our one-to-one clients. However in relation to those stating that they are less likely to engage in substance abuse. The result of some of the VOW team's school engagements this year resulted in additional information from pupils about their feelings around substance abuse.

In the past the project's work with large groups through TYLA has meant that these indicators could not be measured and data could not be obtained. However in year two the CashBack VOW provided targeted talks to groups, separate to the TYLA project, where a need was identified in relation to concerns around drug use. Due to working with a smaller group we were able to obtain feedback from all of the pupils in the groups. Hence the number achieving that outcome (183), vastly exceeding the expected 20 for year 2. 143 of the returns were from such groups, with 40 being from 'one-to-one clients' which would, in itself, exceed the targets.

PROJECT PERFORMANCE

OUTCOME 4: YOUNG PEOPLE CONTRIBUTE POSITIVELY TO THEIR COMMUNITIES

Outcome 4 Indicators	Year 2 Actual	Year 2 Target	% of Year 2 Goal	Year 1+2 Actual	2 Year Target	% of 2 Year Target
Young people going on to volunteer, coach, mentor or take a leadership role in community organisations	5	4	125%	8	5	160%

OUTCOME 5: YOUNG PEOPLE BUILD THEIR PERSONAL SKILLS, RESILIENCE AND BENEFIT FROM STRENGTHED SUPPORT NETWORKS AND REDUCE RISK TAKING

Outcome 5 Indicators	Year 2 Actual	Year 2 Target	% of Year 2 Goal	Year 1+2 Actual	3 Year Target	% of 3 Year Target
Young people report feeling more resilient *Includes TYLA data	193	300	64%	1270	749	170%
Young people report positive, supportive networks – including improved personal relationships	38	20	190%	62	49	127%
Young people report an increase in feelings against SHANARRI indicators	37	20	185%	62	49	127%
Young people report their mental health has improved and they have a more positive outlook on life	193	300	64%	1287	749	172%

This year we reduced some of our engagements with TYLA and as noted in outcome 3, we focussed some of our inputs on smaller groups in targeted schools to maximise our potential impact. This led to us being under our target for year 2 in relation to the outcome 5 indicators.

In year one we exceeded our targets for all 3 years in outcome 5, therefore we have still exceeded our overall targets in this area for the 3 year term of the project. With this in mind we aim to deliver targeted inputs again in year 3 to maximise the impact on the school groups we engage with.

PROJECT PERFORMANCE

FINANCES

Finances	2024/25			Phase 6 to Date		
	Actual	Target	Variance	Actual	Target	Variance
Staffing Delivery Costs	£60,804	£60,760	-£44	£122,527	£120,120	-£2,407
Non Staffing Delivery Costs	£35,868	£30,667	-£5,201	£62,084	£61,333	-£751
Management and Marketing	£7,080	£7,958	+£878	£13,483	£15,747	+£2,264
Total	£103,752	£99,297	-£4,455	£198,094	£198,094	0

We are currently on target for our budget having spent the full budget in the first 2 years of the project. We had an underspend in year one, which has been utilised in year two to balance the spend over the two years.

The main reason for the underspend in year one, was that many of our young people were still not taking the option of counselling, due to not being ready or it not meeting their specific needs. In year two we expanded our wellbeing options and saw a lot more young clients engaging in music therapy and other therapeutic activities. We also saw an increase in the number of young people taking the option of counselling. There was also a slight variance in the marketing spend across the first two years, with us not spending our full marketing budget, but utilising that in other areas, namely wellbeing experiences for our clients.

CASE STUDY 3

LIAM'S STORY

Liam was referred to the VOW project by his social worker in May 2023 after witnessing the tragic murder of a friend. At the time, he was extremely vulnerable, struggling with emotional regulation and a series of undiagnosed conditions. Although diagnosed with dyslexia, he had chosen not to disclose it, preventing him from accessing the support he needed. A CAMHS assessment later identified emotional dysregulation and speech and language difficulties. However, due to post-pandemic delays, his autism assessment was never completed. Liam also had a strained relationship with his family and was deeply isolated, seeking social activities and mental health support.

Early in his engagement, Liam self-medicated and refused to acknowledge the extent of his habitual drug use. While under the influence, he frequently came into conflict with the law, leading to multiple criminal charges. Initially, he declined to participate in diversionary criminal justice meetings, making prosecution seem inevitable.

CashBack VOW provided Liam with housing and benefits support, offering much-needed stability and financial security. Through regular interaction, the team discovered his passion for music and enrolled him in weekly sessions with Turn the Tables, where he learned to produce and mix dance music. These sessions became a vital outlet for expression, helping Liam manage his emotions without words.

VOW also worked to clarify his mental health diagnosis, ensuring he attended medical appointments and received formal support. He was later diagnosed with BPD and committed fully to his medication routine and art therapy at the Royal Edinburgh Hospital. With support, Liam embraced the criminal justice diversionary process, ultimately avoiding prosecution for his 2024 offences.

Liam's journey focused more on stability and emotional well-being rather than employment.

However, the structured activities proved invaluable. He reflected:

"I've learned how to use professional studio equipment and DJ. Robby has been great to talk to, he understands what I've been going through."

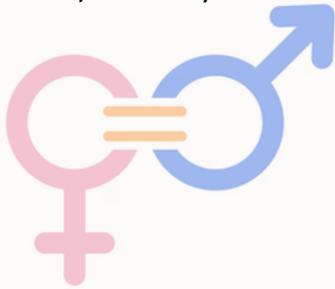
His mother highlighted the transformative impact of the project:

"Having the studio, as a constant has been vital. Music gives Liam structure, calms him, and builds his confidence. The support from VOW has been life-changing—I truly believe he might not still be with us today without it."

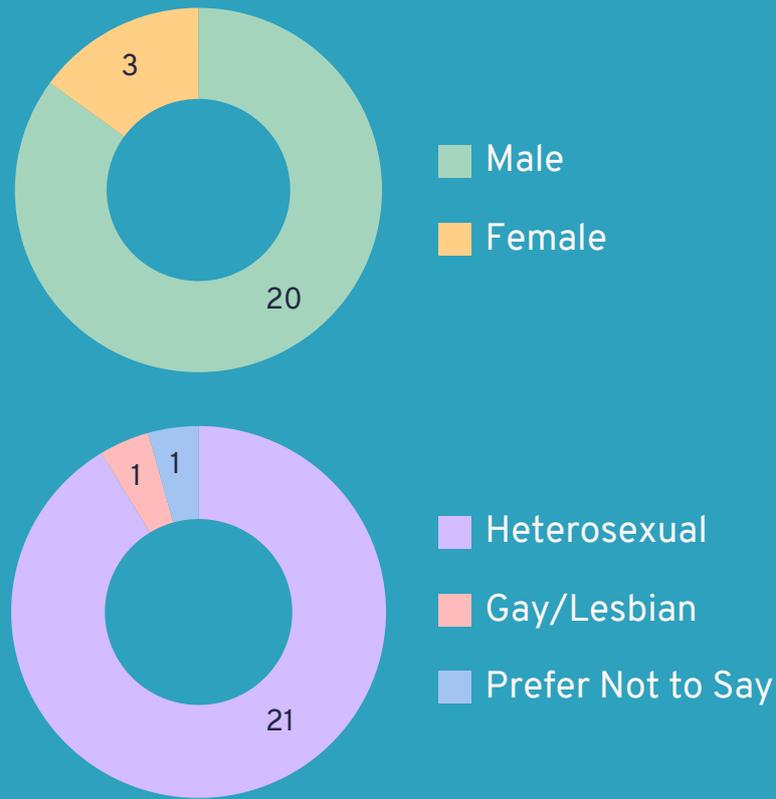
VOW will now continue to support Liam in living independently and exploring future employment opportunities.

The primary objectives of the VOWs work, reducing offending, results in the majority of the young people being nominated for support are heterosexual men.

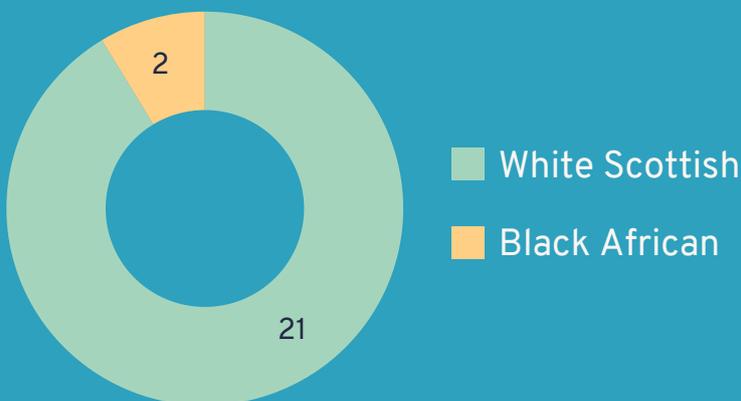
The VOW team have worked with numerous partners in the last year to support young women in different ways. For example, a female police officer and female mentor attended a group for girls aged 11-13 not attending school regularly. They ran workshops on addiction, domestic abuse and other topics which included lived experience. This received exceptional feedback leading to other similar inputs. A parent of one of the young people contacted the VOW team to thank them, stated it was the first time her daughter had come home and spoken positively about her day in years.



GENDER & SEXUALITY



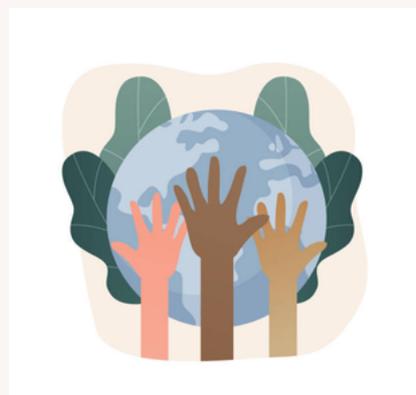
ETHNIC BACKGROUND



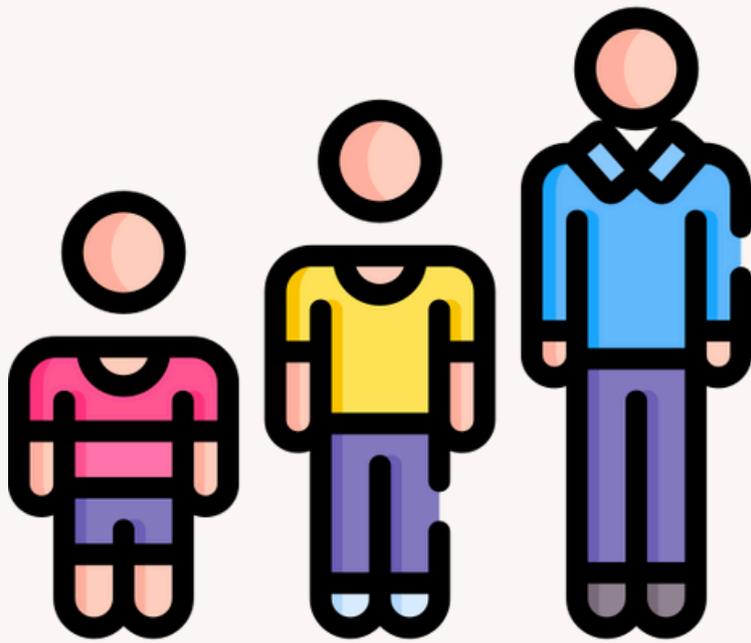
In the last year the VOW team have made connections with NABA, SCORE Scotland, Intercultural Youth Scotland and Passion for Fusion.

The VOW team have spoken at a NABA led Gambian community day and provided training to staff from SCORE Scotland and Intercultural Youth Scotland in relation to youth justice procedures and Child Criminal Exploitation. Passion for Fusion and the VOW team are both supporting the same two young people and their families.

These initial positive working relationships have led to exciting talks about potential projects during 2025-26. The VOW has also opened up their nomination process to these partners.



AGE GROUP



AGE	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	TOTAL
10-15			1		1
16-18	3	1	5	1	10
19-25	5	5	1	1	12
Over 25					
Total	8	6	7	2	23

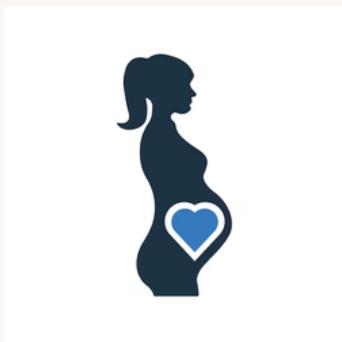
SIMD DATA

SIMD data	Anual
0-20%	50
20-30%	3
30-40%	42
40-50%	
50-100%	400

Our TYLA engagement is done with large groups at schools and therefore the SIMD data is derived from the area where the school is situated.



Some of the schools we targeted for inputs this year have catchment areas which include the highest levels of deprivation. However the schools themselves sit in the lower area of deprivation. It is therefore likely that we have reached more people in the 0-20% area, but it has been challenging to measure the exact numbers in relation to this.



DISABILITY

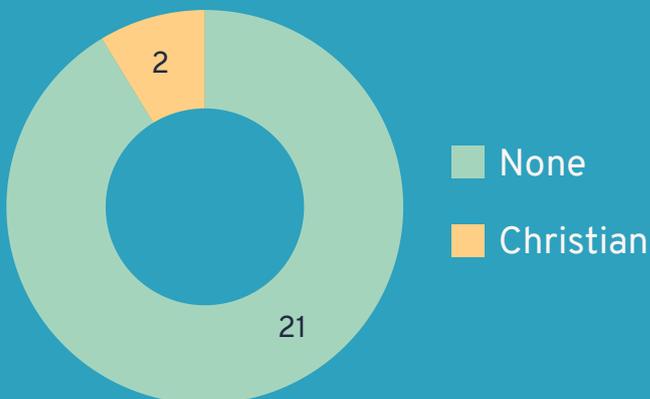
Out of the 23 clients signed in 2024 -2025:

- 23 state they have behavioural / social concerns
- 1 has a visual impairment
- 2 have been formally diagnosed with a learning difference although several others have stated they think it likely they have a learning difference

PREGNANCY

One new client was pregnant at the time of signing with the VOW team and now has a 6-month old son.

RELIGION



CASE STUDY 4

FEARLESS PARTNERSHIP

The CashBack VOW team has a long running partnership with Fearless, the young people's arm of Crimestoppers. This year the VOW Team have delivered joint inputs to those working with children around criminal exploitation, reporting mechanisms, youth justice etc. The VOW have also partnered with Fearless in recent campaigns, including visual podcasts created for last year in relation to their drug harm prevention campaign.

The violence campaign released this year was our most recent partnership. Four of the young people currently working with the VOW provided the voices and input to scripts for the campaign (the visuals were provided by actors). All of our young people involved have experience of youth violence, both as complainers and perpetrators, with some having carried knives before. One of the young people witnessed a knife attack which cost his childhood friend his life. He chose to wave anonymity, and his pictures are being used in the campaign.

All the young people visibly grew in confidence throughout their involvement and surpassed our expectations of how positive and enthusiastic they were during their time working with the professionals producing the materials. It was an amazing opportunity for them and gave them a chance to speak passionately about a topic that they would normally not have an opportunity to speak about. We could not be more proud of them.

The four short videos produced were released on social media (Tiktok, Instagram, Snapchat) with a targeted audience of 13-21 year olds in Scotland.

Three of the four young people provided a follow up interview to Fearless, supported by the Guardian, which has since been provided to news outlets. This prompted pieces in the National press.

The campaign generated over 5.2 million impressions across social media, reaching 75, 000 users. Users swiped to the fearless website from the campaign 32,000 times. The news articles reached a combined audience of over 333 million.



TURN YOUR LIFE AROUND

Turn your life around (TYLA) focused on recruiting and training new volunteers in 2023-24 after the successful delivery of the approach in 2022-2023.

The potential to widen the scope of the inputs offered by recruiting more diverse volunteers who were impacted by varied adverse childhood experiences themselves was identified and developed. Although this began to move the project away from the VOW teams justice focused approach it appeared a natural development which would support young people and adults working with young people in a unique and needed way. Volunteers have been recruited who can share experience of childhood abuse, racism, homophobia, having been a New Scot themselves and grief. This development has produced a robust and sustainable product which fits well with City of Edinburgh Council's objectives. The VOW team will continue to support the TYLA project for the next year and there are plans for the future for Police to continue working in partnership with TYLA, beyond the CashBack VOW's current funding.

9 volunteers have been trained this year and added to the cohort of volunteers available to deliver inputs. 2025-26 is expected to be both exciting and productive.



**YOU ARE DEFINITELY AN
INSPIRATION AND I WILL
TAKE THE IMPACT
FORWARD WORKING
WITH AND SUPPORTING
YOUNG PEOPLE**
-Teacher

**GREAT TO KNOW IT IS
POSSIBLE TO BREAK
THE CYCLES OF OUR
PAST**
-S2 pupil

**IT HAS MADE ME THINK
OF PUPILS WHO MIGHT
BE IN SIMILAR
SITUATIONS AND GIVEN
ME IDEAS OF I CAN
BETTER SUPPORT THEM**
-Teacher

**I REALLY ENJOYED
LISTENING TO YOUR
STORY. YOU MAKE A
DIFFERENCE**
-S2 pupil

NEW EDUCATION APPROACH

With the exciting developments of Turn Your Life Around the VOW team realised the need to develop new approaches to education and inputs to ensure the justice focussed approach of their work was not lost as TYLA grew.

The VOW engaged with schools and partners, such as Access to Industry and Lothian Association of Youth Clubs amongst others, to identify the needs of young people and professionals at the current time in relation to justice related topics. The most requested input for young people was regarding drug harm prevention. Both young people and staff said drug use and the associated risks, including becoming involved in more serious criminality, was what impacted young people most. Professionals requested inputs regarding the youth justice system and criminal child exploitation for themselves to better identify risk and symptoms of exploitation and support young people experiencing it and the potential consequences of it.

The VOW team worked hard to develop meaningful workshops in relation to these topics which involved interactive activities and lived experience. The feedback has been excellent and further workshops are currently being developed to build on this success.

To date the adults workshops regarding exploitation has been delivered twice to 30 professionals from social work, council and third sector partners.

The drug harm prevention workshops have been delivered 5 times to around 400 young people aged 13-17 and has been praised for its unique, engaging and honest approach.



Young people considering all the consequences of using drugs for the first time.



Mentors sharing their lived experience with professionals during exploitation workshops.

SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT POLICIES IN FOCUS - UNCRC

As a Police Scotland led project the VOW is committed to increase awareness of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

UNCRC is included in the 'jargon buster' section of the Police Scotland website where members of the public can find explanations of key terms and links to UNICEF website.

The VOW project CRWIA has been reviewed in 2025, with no changes made to the policies from the previous year. The document focuses on:

- Article 3 (Best Interests of the Child)
- Article 6 (Life, Survival and Development)
- Article 18 (Parental Responsibilities and State Assistance)
- Article 19 (Protection from Violence, Abuse and Neglect)
- Article 24 (Health and Health services)
- Article 27 (Adequate Standard of Living)
- Article 29 (Goals of Education)
- Article 33 (Protection from Drug Abuse)
- Article 39 (Recovery from Trauma and Reintegration)
- Article 40 (Juvenile Justice)



The VOW project team provides regular internal briefings to Police Scotland personnel, outlining how the initiative supports the referenced articles through constructive and proactive engagement with children and young people in Edinburgh.

The police officers within the VOW project previously undertook training and in relation to the UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Bill 2021. This learning was shared with the wider team. All staff are trained in Child protection procedures and escalation processes around any concerns.

The VOW project adopts a tailored approach to engaging with young people, adapting its methods to meet the unique needs of each individual. All participants take part in rights-based activities designed to align with their specific requirements. Additionally, the Turn Your Life Around initiative, supported by the VOW project, provides educational resources to help children recognise and mitigate risks, including but not limited to violence, criminal behaviour, and substance abuse.

SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT POLICIES IN FOCUS - CLIMATE CHANGE PLAN

ACTIVE TRAVEL

The VOW project works in partnership with 1st Step Bikes who provide push bikes to clients who require them for transport or would benefit from more outdoor activity. To date 1st Step Bikes have provided VOW clients with approximately 10 bikes.

1st Step Bikes was introduced to the VOW team in 2024 and also provides classes about bike maintenance which allows VOW clients to gain a qualification.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT

All VOW staff predominantly use public transport to travel to work and are encouraged to engage in active travel. The team's working times are structured to allow this without any negative impact on staff or project delivery.

VOW clients are provided with bus tickets at no cost to themselves to travel throughout Edinburgh when required and supported in using public transport with information and assistance.

TRAVEL BY CAR

Remote working is regularly supported with VOW mentors regularly working from home one day a week. Workloads are arranged in such a way to support this and ensure no face-to-face time with clients is lost as a result.

The VOW project currently utilises one electric vehicle within.

FOOD

A number of the VOW clients are supported in managing their finances and ensuring they have sufficient and appropriate food for themselves and those that they live with. We work with different providers and charitable organisations, depending on the needs of the individual client.

Some of the approaches include, upskilling our clients with cookery courses, money management skills development to help them spend their money appropriately and providing food parcels as needed. Recycling is available within the office space the VOW staff use.

PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

The CashBack VOW Team are delighted with our performance this year and what the team have achieved. We have again exceeded the targets set for the project in almost every category.

Our new approach to education inputs, referenced earlier in the report has been hugely impactful and successful for the team and the feedback received from these targeted sessions has been positive.

As important as our key measures are, the CashBack VOW has always been a project that has focussed on making a life-changing impact to a small group of clients, while carrying the wider message about avoiding risk taking behaviour to larger groups of young people. Our Case Studies are therefore a key measure of success for us and this is reflected in this year's annual report with young people and their families crediting the team with a huge positive change in their lives.

This year we have increased our approaches for new clients, increased our referrals from Police and other sources and have made more approaches to harder to reach clients. These approaches have sometimes been met with rejection by prospective clients. However our hope is that by raising awareness of the project with these individuals and their families we may encourage them to engage again in the future.

In the coming year we are aim to:

- Provide more bespoke engagements with schools and other organisations
- Further increase the project visibility with external organisations for referral opportunities
- Continue to focus on hard to reach clients, including high tariff offenders, with the aim of maximising the impact on individuals
- Support our existing clients to achieve the best possible outcomes in relation to education and training

The CashBack VOW Project has always been about our young people making a “Vow” to commit to the project and enable us to support them to improve their lives.

We are delighted that in this past year the project has been able to keep our reciprocal vow to our clients and improve their lives.

TESTIMONIALS

"I would just like to thank you from the bottom of my heart for not giving up on him. You do such a wonderful job, guiding those who are lost in addiction to be free again."

From the grandmother of a young person who graduated from LEAP rehabilitation centre.

"I don't know what you are doing with her but the difference is unbelievable, she is like a different girl"

From the defence solicitor a young person 2 months after he nominated her for VOW support.

"VOW saved me massively. I was around people I definitely shouldn't be and things were not going well at all. They made a difference mate... a big difference to me."

From a young person currently working with the VOW.

"Just want to say thank you for really pushing me to do this even when I didn't want to at times. Really is the best thing I've done for myself"

From a young person on completing a rehabilitation programme, drug free for the first time in their adult life.

"You just need one professional who cares. One good person who knows you and cares."

From a young person currently working with the VOW.

