



Next Steps Venture Trust

Executive Summary

Launched in 2010, Venture Trust's 'Next Steps' programme aims to support women of all ages who have been involved in the criminal justice system, and helps them to reduce their risk of re-offending and move towards a positive destination in employment, education, training or volunteering. The main objectives are to support participants to identify the changes they want to make in their lives, and develop skills, motivation and aspirations for a more positive future.

Many of the women have experienced difficult backgrounds often involving abuse, domestic violence, substance misuse, unemployment and broken relationships which impacted their ability to engage fully with services and feel safe on mixed gender courses.

Venture Trust was set up in 1982 and has 30 years' experience in providing successful (mixed gender) Wilderness-based personal development for young people involved in offending. The Wilderness based personal development programme was identified as suitable for adaptation and modification to cater within a female only context and the demand for women – including those aged 30+ and thus outside the remit of existing Venture Trust provision.

The programme was initially launched with two specific partners, the 218 Centre (Glasgow) and the Willow Project (Edinburgh), which resulted in an increase in the demand for, awareness of, and access to the programme.

Since its launch the programme successfully delivered five 'Next Steps' wilderness expeditions in 2012, supporting 55 women with up to 140 hours of one-to-one and group support per participant.

An external evaluation highlighted that on completion of the course participants reported:

- Increased Self Confidence
- Increased Sense of belonging and identity
- Healthier lifestyles, particularly an increase in time spent outdoors following the programme

Positive life changes were also noted and included alcohol abstention, desisting crime and seeking voluntary or paid work.

The evaluation also identified that participants and referral agents felt that there should be more time spent with participants following the wilderness expeditions and as such from 2013 Venture Trust are exploring the integration of peer training and support into the Next Steps programme.

The Project won the National Initiatives category of the Safer Community Awards.

Background and Aims

In 2010 following dialogue with partners, and in response to the need for support for women within the criminal justice system, the Venture Trust created the 'Next Steps' programme which identified women who were disengaged from their communities, creating substantial costs through repeated negative engagement with public services, receiving considerable care and support provision for themselves and their families and repeated offending.

An estimated annual cost to public services of £65k per prolific offender was identified – a figure relating to their need for a range of benefits such as unemployment, ill health, housing and child care.

Venture Trust's monitoring data identified that 49% of women referred to the programme had a history of substance misuse, 27% were misusing alcohol, 36% reported a mental health issue and 15% were homeless.

In 2012 Venture Trust were asked to contribute to the Scottish Government's Commission on Women Offenders and the Next Steps programme was cited as an example of 'what works'.

The aim of the Next Steps programme was to support women involved in substance misuse and offending – especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, to make sustainable changes to the stability of their lifestyle.

The programme used wilderness based personal development opportunities to enable women to develop the skills and motivation to move away from offending and contribute positively to their community.

The wilderness based programme is a 'catalyst for change' which boosts participants' confidence, motivation and core life skills using activities such as expeditions, hillwalking, kayaking, camping, rock climbing, cooking and 'games with aims' to present participants with opportunities for learning and personal development.

The identified aims were to enable participants to:

- Stabilise their lives by positively addressing problematic substance use, finding suitable housing and reducing their desire to and risk of re-offending
- Build stronger relationships, to contribute and engage positively with people, services and opportunities within communities
- Improve their self-esteem, and develop confidence to aspire to more positive futures
- Develop a range of work- related skills, thereby improving their employability, taking steps to secure employment, getting back into education or training, or taking up a volunteering placement.

Activities

The programme was initially launched with two specific partners (The 218 Centre, Glasgow and the Willow Project Edinburgh) to identify participants for whom the wilderness based programme would be of benefit.

Partners were engaged in focus groups to identify women who were reaching key transition points, for example release from prison, or during early stages of a substance misuse programme and who were in the need of additional confidence, motivation and core life skills to improve their prospects of avoiding re-offending.

Referred candidates met Venture Trust outreach workers to assess readiness for the wilderness phases, to discuss the programme and to set individual aims and development goals.

The participants engage on a five day wilderness experience thereafter the women return to their communities where they continue to be supported by their outreach worker and local agencies/ partners.

Five expeditions were carried out during 2012, directly supporting 55 women. Through the programme up to 140 hours of one to one and group support was provided to each participant equating to 7,700 hours in total.

Thirty community based group sessions were provided to prepare participants for the expedition and to build on their new skills when they returned home.

Impact

Following completion of the wilderness programme, participants were monitored for a further period of six months. This monitoring identified that during this period all participants evidenced and sustained increased self-confidence and employability.

Using the Behaviour Indicators Tool indicated that 70% of participants showed behaviours indicating a reduced risk of re-offending. 66% evidenced improved use of services within the community and seeking employment, securing job interviews and joining walking groups.

An evaluation by the University of Edinburgh confirmed that, following participation in the Next Steps programme, participants evidenced positive changes in behaviour with participants abstaining from alcohol, desisting crime, taking up voluntary work and attempting to secure paid employment.

The evaluation demonstrated that the 'Next Steps' programme had a positive effect on participants' personal and social development with a reported increase in self-confidence, re-discovering a sense of belonging and identity and time spent outdoors following the programme.

It also found that being part of the group was an important factor for enhancing participants personal growth and the establishment of relationships prior to and whilst on the programme. This, coupled with the programme content, facilitated the participant's positive life changes.

The referral agency staff felt the programme was effective in helping the women to reach a more positive sense of self.

Evaluation of the programme and on-going projected costs identifies a future annual cost of £147,000 enabling 48 women participants. This equates to a cost per participant of £3,063 or £22 per hour of support. Although the initial programme provided for 55 participants, the sustainable future of the programme aims to support 48 women per year.

This identified the financial cost of the programme per participant of £3,063 as best value from a cost benefit and preventative spend perspective.

Monitoring and Evaluation

A monitoring and evaluation system was designed with Evaluation Support Scotland with baseline data collected on participant's skills and capabilities using a scoring scale of one to five measuring individual's confidence, employability, relationships, use of community services, stability and positive destination.

Each category looked at a number of indicators for example 'stability' looks at housing status, substance use, offending profile and peer group influences. Data relating to any care history, prison history misuse or addiction history.

The data collected assisted in the identification of individual support needs and informed programme development.

A full evaluation was carried out by Edinburgh University (Outdoor and Environmental Education). This evaluation comprised of individual interviews, focus groups and collection of qualitative data from the agency staff involved in the referral of participants.

Feedback sheets were also created and provided to each participant to enable them to record changes in attitude and behaviours, celebrate achievements and identify areas for future development. Over fifty participants have completed feedback sheets which are the basis for personal actions plans to set out goals and ambitions for the future.

The evaluation study was carried out over a two month period and aimed to understand the impact of the Next Steps programme on the lives of the women taking part and understand, how why and to what extent, Venture Trust's wilderness, expeditions and environments have been effective mediums in enabling women to achieve positive life changes.

Lessons Learnt and Sustainability

The external academic evaluation identified there should be more time spent with participants following the expedition via a post-course follow up.

This has been taken on board with the development of peer mentor training. This will offer participants an additional opportunity to train as mentors and provide regular access to trained peers from 2014.

A three year grant has now been committed by Comic Relief and all existing funders have pledged continued funding, this will ensure sustainability of the programme.

Moving from a pilot programme to sustainable on-going provision, as well as secured funding for the next three years has led to a reduction in the number of participants from 55 to 48 per year.

Resources

Funding	£147,000 per annum.
Partners	Delivery and funding partners: Venture Trust Porticus UK Comic Relief The Rank Foundation Trusts and Foundations

Outcomes

National	9 - We live our lives safe from crime, disorder and danger. 11 - We have strong, resilient and supportive communities where people take responsibility for their own actions and how they affect others.
Local	Not applicable for this Award category

Practice Note Information

Practice Note Title:	Next Steps
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Contribution to SCSN newsletter – VT & Network Rail

Malcolm Jack, Senior Management Team, Venture Trust

Venture Trust has teamed up with Network Rail to get lives back on track!

With the support of Network Rail, Venture Trust is offering individuals the opportunity to overcome obstacles in their lives and accelerate towards more positive futures. We're helping more than 600 people each year on their personal development journey, getting their lives back on the rails, and not falling into the trap of making obvious puns in any shape or form.

In 2013 Network Rail granted Community Safety Partnership Group funding to support Venture Trust's work with people who feel their lives have hit the buffers – involved in offending, facing drug/alcohol issues, struggling with unemployment or feeling isolated. Network Rail recognised that Venture Trust could engage individuals with whom many other agencies couldn't or wouldn't work. But most importantly, Network Rail also shared an ethos with Venture Trust; that many individuals have the capacity to change, and, with the right support, can flourish and make valuable contributions to their communities. Engineering change if you will...

The centre point, as with all Venture Trust programmes, is providing intensive support to help individuals develop the confidence, the motivation, the aspiration and the core lifeskills they need to make change possible. Time, space and carefully designed support in wilderness environments away from day-to-day pressures helps participants recognise and unlock skills that many of us take for granted. Recognising the "triggers" that wind us up and how to avoid them; communicating effectively with other people and building positive relationships; how to set goals and stick with them. Most importantly, the wilderness of Scotland demands and reveals self-reliance, helps people celebrate their personal achievements often for the first time in their lives, and builds a sense of self-worth and purpose.



Venture Trust offers time, space and carefully designed development sessions in wilderness environments across Scotland, helping people make positive life changes.



And did you know, most participants take the train to the starting point of their journeys from as far afield as Exeter, Wick, London and Ipswich? Sometimes it's the first time they've taken a train, and as the train heads towards Scotland's amazing mountains, rivers and coastlines, individuals start to reflect on their lives at home, what's working and what's not, and so the journey of change is already beginning.

Whilst funding for Venture Trust's world leading personal development programmes forms a vital component, the partnership with Network Rail also goes well beyond that. We want to offer people employability opportunities, in a sector which is growing with major infrastructure projects across Scotland and the rest of the UK. And we want to help Network Rail in their mission to keep people and the railway safe. So in case there are any engineering jobs going, we've done a blueprint for success!



Behaviour change amongst most susceptible/at risk



Positive alternatives: training & employability

Progression & opportunity for individuals
Improved rail safety

Share rail safety messages directly



Spreading rail safety messages more widely



Going forward, we'll be sharing rail facts and rail safety messages with Venture Trust participants in a variety of ways. We won't be doing 'sit-down lessons' concentrating solely on this topic because we know these don't work for our participants. Instead, we'll continually drip-feed messages when and where it is relevant – round the camp fire one night in the mountains near the West Highland line; in a 1-to-1 'walk and talk' with an individual in a local park; via our Facebook pages that we know participants use. By integrating the messages with personal and social development sessions, we help participants absorb the messages in a relaxed but meaningful environment.



A campfire offers a great space to discuss and reflect on important issues.

Venture Trust and Network Rail are aiming to offer a range of employability opportunities within the Network Rail family, ranging from training, work shadowing all the way to real jobs in an industry that needs people with resilience, with energy, and with commitment to change.

Network Rail Scotland's Community Safety Manager, Mark Henderson sums it up admirably:

"Working within Venture Trust's robust and extremely well delivered engagement programme we are able to connect with a target group that can often be difficult to reach.

As well as promoting our key rail safety messages, we aim to use our resources to help improve individual's employability and life chances by providing work experience placements and guidance."

And do Venture Trust programmes work? Don't take our word on it, how about a recent note from the mother of one of our participants:

“A small thank you. My son joined one of your [wilderness] groups for 10 days in October 2013. His outlook has changed and the

We will aim to keep you abreast of this partnership work as it evolves, and you can check out stories, features and a short film about our work at www.venturetrust.org.uk.

And we'll stop all this punning, which is frankly de-railing a perfectly good article!

We'd like YOU to get involved and support Venture Trust's work. Why not sign up to an exciting fundraising challenge? www.venturetrust.org.uk/getinvolved.