venturetrust

Impact Report 2025/26

Every Step Matters





Managing Directors Welcome

Whenever I can, I visit our Stirling base as a wilderness journey returns. What always strikes me is the difference between the group that left a few days earlier and the group that comes back.

During the final celebration, participants have the opportunity to reflect on their experience and hear feedback from the staff who have supported them throughout the journey. The atmosphere in the room can be remarkable. People who arrived with their guard firmly up are often speaking openly and honestly about themselves. Those who were quiet and hesitant are finding their voice. Individuals who started the journey as strangers are recognising one another's strengths and celebrating what they have achieved together.

What I find most moving are the moments when something shifts in how people see themselves.

For some, it may be the first time in years that they have been in an environment where they feel safe enough to be vulnerable. For others, it may be the first time someone has openly recognised qualities in them that they had long stopped believing existed. Sometimes it is the first time they have recognised those strengths in themselves.

There are often moments of pride, surprise and emotion. As people reflect on what they have achieved and what comes next, you can sense a growing confidence, a renewed sense of possibility and a belief that positive change is within their reach. Not because somebody has changed them, but because they have started to see themselves differently.

Those moments stay with me long after the journey has ended. They are powerful reminders that progress often begins with something small: a new perspective, a little more confidence, a willingness to ask for support, or the belief that a different future might be possible.

For me, that is what **Every Step Matters** means.

Across Venture Trust, moments like these happen in many different places. They might be found sitting around a campfire at the end of a challenging day on a wilderness journey, sharing experiences and reflecting on what has been achieved. They might happen during a walk in a local greenspace, where a young person alongside their Outdoor Therapist finds it easier to talk about how they are feeling. Or they might develop during a local outdoor activity session, where young people work together, support one another and discover strengths they did not know they had.

These are different experiences for different people, but they are united by a simple belief: that everyone has strengths, potential and the capacity to make positive change when given the opportunity and support to do so.

This report shows what that looked like during 2025/26.

The evidence within these pages demonstrates people building confidence, improving wellbeing, developing resilience and moving closer to positive outcomes in education, training, employment and everyday life. Just as importantly, it captures some of the stories behind those outcomes. Together, they help us understand both the scale of our impact and what that impact means for the people we support.

2025/26 was also an important year for Venture Trust as we strengthened our organisation and developed a new five-year strategy that will guide the next phase of our work. As we look ahead, our commitment remains unchanged: to deliver high-quality support, continue learning and improving, and create more opportunities for people across Scotland to move forward.

Behind every outcome is a person taking steps forward in a way that matters to them. This report captures some of those steps, the evidence they create and the potential they represent.

That's why Every Step Matters.



Gavin Sinclair,
Managing Director



2025/26 at a glance

779

people engaged across our services

22

people engaged with more than one of our services

435

Personal Development participants

268

Employability participants

100

Outdoor Therapy clients

86%

improved their ability to deal with challenge
(Personal Development)

88%

improved their confidence
(Employability)

83%

showed improvement in mental wellbeing
(Outdoor Therapy)



Every number tells a story

779 people engaged with Venture Trust during 2025/26.

Each arrived with different experiences, ambitions and starting points. Each defined progress in their own way.

Some built confidence. Some improved wellbeing. Some discovered strengths they had forgotten they possessed. Some took important steps towards education, training or employment.

Every statistic in this report represents a person.

Every person represents possibility.

Every Step Matters.

What we believe

At Venture Trust, we start from a simple belief: every person has potential.

Potential is not something we give people. It already exists. Adversity, trauma, poor health, difficult relationships, poverty or a lack of opportunity can make strengths harder to recognise and different possibilities harder to imagine. We acknowledge those experiences, but we do not define people by them.

Our role is not to change people. It is to create the conditions in which people can recognise their strengths, build confidence and make changes that matter to them.

Across our work, that means building trusted relationships, creating purposeful experiences, providing appropriate challenge, making time for reflection, and giving people opportunities to experience themselves differently.

We create the conditions. People create the change.



What we do

Personal Development

Personal Development combines community-based support, groupwork and immersive outdoor experiences. It works with adults involved in the justice system, women facing significant adversity and groups of young people, with support shaped around their circumstances. Multi-day wilderness journeys can provide time away from everyday pressures to take on challenge, contribute to a group and reflect, with community support helping people prepare beforehand and build on the experience afterwards.

Employability

Our employability work supports young people facing barriers to education, training and employment. During 2025/26, this was delivered through CashBack Green Futures, using outdoor activities and shared challenges to develop confidence and transferable skills such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving and leadership. Delivery ranged from structured employability courses to shorter sessions delivered with partner organisations (such as schools, youth organisations and third-sector partners), creating different opportunities for young people to recognise their strengths and think about what comes next.

Outdoor Therapy

Outdoor Therapy provides professional one-to-one counselling for children, young people and adults experiencing psychological distress. Sessions take place in natural environments, with walking, movement and the surroundings used thoughtfully within the therapeutic relationship. Working side by side outdoors can create a different space for conversation and reflection, with each session shaped around the individual and what feels safe and helpful for them.

The outdoors plays a different role in each service. A wilderness journey is not therapy. Outdoor Therapy is not an employability intervention. A Booster Session is not a shorter version of Personal Development. They all have different purposes and intended outcomes. The environment is chosen around the work being undertaken and the people taking part.



Personal Development

435

participants engaged

90%

improved their confidence

86%

improved their mental wellbeing

110

have already moved onto a positive outcome



What we did

1,655
one-to-one sessions with participants

3
programmes working with different cohorts



22
wilderness journeys delivered

158
wilderness journeys participants

1
community journey delivered

8
community journeys participants





72
community groupwork sessions

184
community groupwork participants

Our programmes

People came to Personal Development with different strengths, goals and experiences, often while dealing with several pressures at the same time. 73% experienced mental health issues, 58% substance-related conditions, 55% had no or limited work experience, 42% were homeless or at risk of homelessness, 27% had caring responsibilities and 24% were care experienced. Many experienced more than one of these challenges.

We delivered Personal Development through three programmes: Living Wild, Next Steps and Inspiring Young Futures. Each works with a different group of people, with the format and support shaped around their needs and circumstances.



Living Wild

299

participants engaged in the programme

74%

improved their attitude to offending

81%

reported a greater sense of personal responsibility

Living Wild works with adults involved in the justice system, many of whom are also dealing with challenges such as poor mental health, substance use, unstable housing, poverty or difficult relationships. Community-based support and preparation lead, where appropriate, to a seven-day wilderness journey, creating time away from everyday pressures to build confidence, take on responsibility, reflect and think about what comes next.



Next Steps

Next Steps is our women-only personal development programme for women facing significant adversity, including experiences of trauma and gender-based violence. The programme combines community support with a five-day wilderness journey, giving participants space to build trusting relationships, recognise their strengths, take on challenge and reflect on the changes they want to make in their lives.



84

participants engaged in the programme

93%

felt better placed to form positive relationships

86%

gained a heightened sense of hope/aspiration

Inspiring Young Futures

55

participants engaged in the programme

93%

improved their ability to self-care

83%

saw improvement in their mental wellbeing

Inspiring Young Futures works with young people through programmes shaped around the needs of the group. During 2025/26, this included young carers, young people supported by partner organisations and young people receiving more individualised support. Wilderness journeys were between 3 and 5 days, and where a wilderness journey was not the right fit, we adapted the approach through a Community Journey delivered locally.



Toby's Story*

**we do not use participant's real names or photos with our case studies for purposes of anonymity.*

When Toby first came to Venture Trust, several parts of his life felt uncertain at the same time.

He was involved in the justice system, living on a very low income and moving between supported accommodation and a family member's home. At times he avoided staying in his own accommodation because he was struggling to afford heating and electricity. Limited money for transport and phone credit could make keeping appointments difficult, and he was also trying to replace important documents.

More difficult than any of those practical problems was being separated from his children. His justice involvement meant he was unable to see them, and the situation weighed heavily on him.

Toby had worked and studied before, but recent experiences had affected his confidence and sense of direction. He described living from day to day, with little routine and uncertainty about what came next.

There were also important strengths to build on. Toby spoke openly about previous difficulties with drugs, alcohol and gambling, and had already made significant progress in his recovery. He enjoyed being outdoors and had previous experience of camping and other activities.

His first work with Venture Trust happened in the community. Alongside practical support, meetings gave Toby time to talk about what was happening in his life, what he wanted to change and the things that could make it harder to move forward. Gradually, the focus shifted from dealing with immediate problems towards preparing for the future.

The seven-day Living Wild journey gave him the opportunity to put some of this into practice.

Toby responded strongly to the routine of life outdoors. He was often up early and ready for the day ahead, stayed positive through difficult weather and took responsibility for practical tasks around camp. He helped with navigation and became increasingly comfortable taking on roles that involved decision making and supporting other people.



There was also time to think.

Away from the pressures of home, conversations returned to his children, his recovery and what greater stability might look like. Toby began to recognise how important routine was for him and thought about simple ways of creating more structure when he returned home.

That became part of what he took back with him.

Toby started using alarms and a digital calendar to organise his time. He applied to college to rebuild qualifications in Maths and English and began exploring work in kitchens, drawing on experience he already had. He spent more time in his own accommodation and started making plans to improve it, while accessing practical support to make his situation more stable.

Walking also became part of his routine. It gave him something positive to do, helped him manage stress and provided some of the space to think that he had valued during the wilderness journey.

One of the most significant milestones came in his recovery. During his continued support with Venture Trust, Toby reached a full year away from daily drug use. He described feeling clearer and safer as a result.

Not everything was resolved. His relationship with his children, his finances, housing and longer-term future were still things he was working through.

But his life was no longer simply about getting through each day.

Toby had begun to build more structure, think about education and employment, maintain his recovery and make choices that could create greater stability. The wilderness journey did not make those changes for him. It gave him an experience in which he could recognise some of his strengths, practise doing things differently and think more clearly about the life he wanted to build when he returned home.



Employability

268

participants engaged

88%

improved their confidence

84%

saw an improvement in their relationships

46

participants acheived an SQA qualification or positive outcome



What we did

6

Green Futures 4-week courses delivered

42

attended a Green Futures course

47

Booster Sessions delivered

201

attended at least one Booster Sessions



This year, our employability work was delivered through the CashBack Green Futures programme, which supported young people aged 13-25 facing barriers to education, training and employment.

The programme's key objective was to help young people build the skills, confidence and experience that could support their next steps. Outdoor activities and shared challenges gave young people practical opportunities to develop communication, teamwork, problem-solving, adaptability and leadership, and to recognise how these skills could transfer into education, training and workplaces.

The programme was delivered through two distinct strands:

- Four-week **Green Futures courses** offered a structured employability programme combining outdoor personal development with practical preparation for work, education and training. Young people developed transferable skills such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving and leadership, explored how these applied in the workplace, and received support with CVs, applications, interviews, volunteering and accredited learning.

- **Booster Sessions** were delivered in partnership with schools, youth services and third sector organisations to groups of young people already being supported by those partners. These shorter sessions used outdoor activities and shared challenge to help young people build confidence, work with others, try something new and recognise strengths they could use in education, work and everyday life.

71

participants received one-to-one support

Outdoor Therapy

100

clients accessed the service

83%

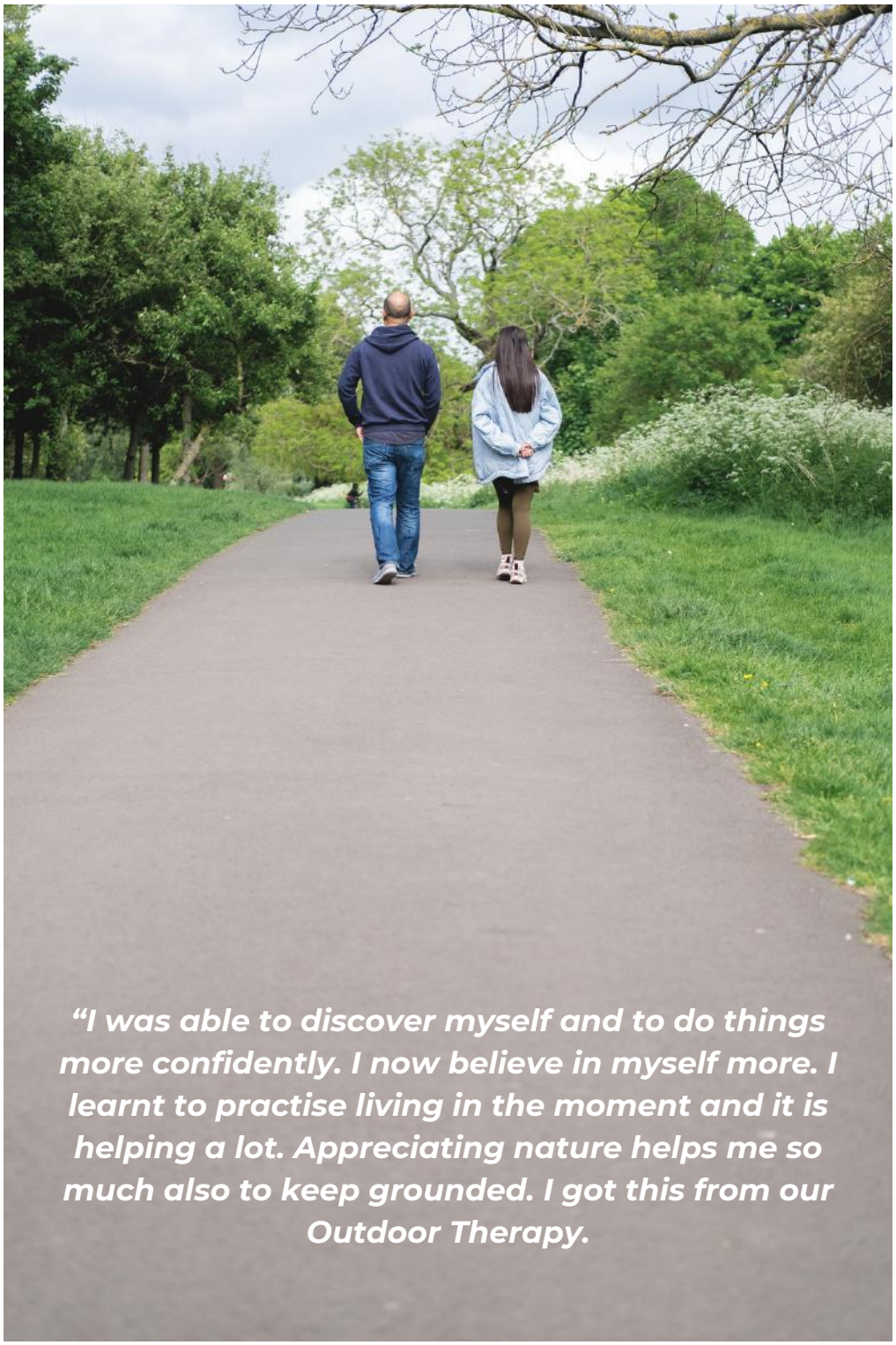
saw an improvement in their mental health

9/10

average rating for how helpful clients found the service

100%

of clients would recommend the service to others



"I was able to discover myself and to do things more confidently. I now believe in myself more. I learnt to practise living in the moment and it is helping a lot. Appreciating nature helps me so much also to keep grounded. I got this from our Outdoor Therapy.

What we did

742

one-to-one therapy sessions delivered

34%

of sessions with recorded themes explored interpersonal relationships

Outdoor Therapy provided one-to-one counselling for children, young people and adults experiencing psychological distress. Much of our work was with children and young people, with a significant proportion of delivery taking place in Fife. Sessions took place in natural environments, with walking, movement and the surroundings used thoughtfully as part of the therapeutic relationship. Sessions were shaped around each person, allowing the pace, setting and use of movement to respond to what felt safe and helpful. For some people, being side-by-side outdoors felt less formal than sitting face to face in a therapy room, creating different opportunities for reflection, grounding and conversation.

25%

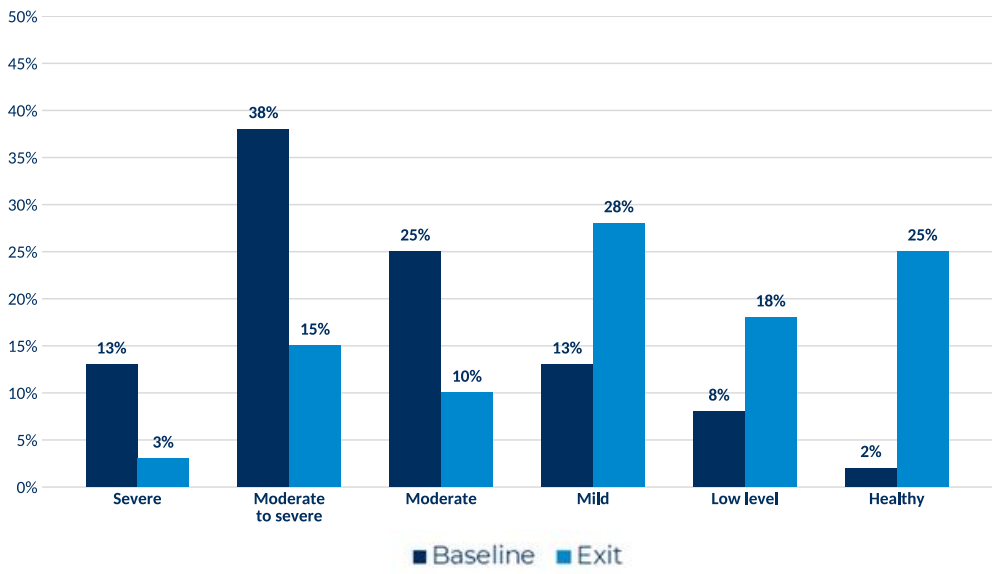
of sessions with recorded themes explored neurodivergence

We used CORE outcome measures to understand changes in mental health over the course of therapy. The results showed a clear shift. At the start of therapy, 51% of clients were experiencing severe or moderate-to-severe levels of distress. By the end of therapy, this had fallen to 18%. At the other end of the scale, the proportion whose CORE scores were in the low or healthy range increased from 10% to 43%.

81%

of clients were aged 10-24

How clients' mental health changed during therapy



Overall, 83% of clients showed improvement in their mental health. These changes were also reflected in what people told us directly, including feeling better able to manage difficult emotions, make sense of their experiences, set boundaries and cope with challenges in everyday life. Those completing our post-therapy questionnaire rated the helpfulness of Outdoor Therapy an average of 9 out of 10, with all describing their relationship with their therapist as excellent or very good.

79%

of clients were from Fife

Sadie's Story*

*we do not use participant's real names or photos with our case studies for purposes of anonymity.

When Sadie started Outdoor Therapy, school had become overwhelming. The transition from primary school had been difficult. Different classrooms, different teachers and different expectations left her feeling exhausted and anxious. She had recently received an ASD diagnosis, but was still trying to make sense of what that meant and how it connected to her experiences. Home increasingly felt like the safest place to be, and attending school had become more difficult.

Building a sense of safety became an important part of the therapeutic process.

At first, being outdoors felt unfamiliar and challenging. Together with her Outdoor Therapist, Sadie began exploring local greenspaces at a pace that felt comfortable for her. A small "calming bag" containing objects that helped her regulate difficult feelings quickly became an important source of reassurance. Inside was a dried lavender pouch whose scent reminded her to slow her breathing, alongside personal items that helped her feel grounded and calm.

Over time, the outdoor space itself became familiar. Between two old oak trees, a hammock was put up during an early session. What started as a simple activity gradually became something more important. The spot became associated with calm, safety and reflection, offering Sadie a place where she could pause and connect with how she was feeling.

As trust developed, therapy created opportunities for Sadie to better understand her emotions and the things that influenced them. Conversations about school, energy levels and daily routines helped her recognise patterns she had not previously noticed. In particular, she became increasingly aware of the relationship between sleep, energy and emotional wellbeing. What began as discussions during therapy helped her think differently about habits and routines in everyday life.

"She felt she had a voice that was valued, that she mattered and that she could be trusted."



One moment stayed with her therapist.

During a session beside a duck pond that Sadie enjoyed visiting, she was asked which duck she felt most like that day. She pointed to the duck leading the others across the water.

When asked why, Sadie explained that throughout therapy she had increasingly felt able to make decisions, express her views and trust her own judgement. She described feeling safe enough to choose where they went and what they did during sessions, knowing she would be listened to and supported. For perhaps the first time in a long while, she felt that her voice mattered.

That growing confidence became one of the most important outcomes of her time in Outdoor Therapy.

A key part of the work involved helping Sadie recognise and value qualities that were uniquely hers. Rather than viewing her differences negatively, she began to understand that they formed part of who she was. Through exploring her experiences, strengths and perspectives, she developed greater confidence in herself and a stronger understanding of why she might experience situations differently from other people.

By the end of therapy, Sadie had started setting goals for what came next. She wanted to establish healthier sleep routines, communicate more confidently with teachers about the support she needed and strengthen relationships at home. She also wanted to meet other young people with ASD, helping her feel less alone in her experiences.

Perhaps most significantly, Sadie spoke about taking her "voice" with her. During therapy she had even given it a name. What began as a way of understanding herself had become a reminder that her thoughts, feelings and experiences deserved to be heard.

Outdoor Therapy did not remove every challenge Sadie faced. What it provided was a safe space to better understand herself, recognise her strengths and develop the confidence to express them. By the end of therapy, she was beginning to see herself differently and feel more hopeful about the future.



Our impact reaches further

Sharing what we know

Venture Trust's impact extends beyond the people who take part directly in our services. We also share our experience with professionals and future practitioners who can take that learning into their own work.

Outdoor Therapy Training

Our two-day training gives professionals the opportunity to explore what it means to take therapeutic practice outdoors safely, ethically and intentionally.

Participants explore theory alongside experiential practice, including the therapeutic frame, boundaries, risk, reflective practice, metaphor and the role the natural environment can play within therapeutic work.

Feedback highlighted the value of experiencing the practice for themselves and having time to think about how they could apply the learning in their own settings.

"I came away from the training feeling well equipped to take this forward in my coaching practice."

Supporting the social workers of tomorrow

Venture Trust works closely with universities across Scotland to provide immersive practice-learning placements for social work students.

Students become part of a Personal Development delivery team, work in an Outreach Worker role, hold a small supported caseload, work directly with participants and take part in a wilderness journey.

There is a significant amount of work behind these placements: induction, supervision, reflective learning, practice education and ongoing support from staff throughout the placement.

We are not simply hosting students. We are helping develop the social workers of tomorrow.

3

Outdoor Therapy Training Courses

31

professionals attended our Outdoor Therapy Training

5

social work students supported on placement

People shaping venturetrust

Venture Voices brings together people who have previously taken part in Venture Trust programmes and gives them opportunities to use their experience to contribute to the organisation and support others.

During 2025/26, members took part in development sessions focused on building confidence in public speaking and talking about Venture Trust's work. They practised introductions and elevator pitches, worked on presenting messages concisely and explored how to prepare for media interviews.

Members then put those skills into practice. They contributed to our new strategic plan and organisational values, supported recruitment for three staff roles, recorded voiceovers for a new fundraising campaign and took part in wider fundraising and media activity. One member also represented Venture Trust in national media, speaking about the benefits of the outdoors.

Venture Voices also began joining pre-journey groupwork. Members shared their own experience of wilderness journeys, talked honestly about what participants could expect and offered practical advice on how to prepare. Feedback from participants and the delivery team has been positive, and the sessions have added a useful peer perspective to journey preparation.

Two members were involved in a University of Stirling research project that led to the film Green Threads, exploring stories of nature and recovery.

For some members, Venture Voices also became a route into more formal involvement with the organisation. By the end of the year, three members had progressed into volunteer roles, including supporting work in our stores and equipment maintenance, with pathways developing into supporting groupwork sessions and other areas of delivery.



3

members of Venture Voices moving into formal volunteering roles

What comes next

Reaching further. Understanding impact better.

At the end of March 2026, Venture Trust launched a new five-year strategy. It gives us a clear direction as we move into the next stage of our work, including the end of CashBack Green Futures and the need to build on what we have learned from that programme.

Our ambition is to reach more people while protecting the quality of the support we provide.

We also want to understand our impact over a longer period. That means strengthening follow-up and learning more about what changes last after someone's direct involvement with Venture Trust has ended. Alongside our charitable services, we will create more opportunities for individuals, groups, professionals and organisations to benefit from our experience of the outdoors. This will help extend our reach and generate income that can be reinvested in our charitable work.

The aim is straightforward: reach further, understand our impact better and build a stronger, more sustainable Venture Trust for the future.

To find our more, you can read Our Strategic Plan 2026-31 on our website.





Thank you

We would like to sincerely thank all those who have funded and supported our work over the past year - we really couldn't do this without you!

Thank you to our funders, who include: Alexander Moncur Trust, ALLIANCE Self-Management Fund, Arc'teryx, Appletree Trust, Cashback for Communities, Clothworkers Foundation, D'Oyly Carte Charitable Trust, Dunlossit & Islay Community Trust, Essentia Foundation, Fidelity, Fife Council, Gannochy Trust, Garfield Weston, Glasgow City Council, Gordon Fraser Charitable Trust, Inspiring Scotland, Kilpatrick Fraser Charitable Trust, Kintore Charitable Trust, Lady Eda Jardine Charitable Trust, Mathew Trust, Nancy Roberts Charitable Trust, North Lanarkshire Council, Perth & Kinross Council, RJ Larg Family Trust, Scottish Children's Lottery, Scottish Mountaineering Trust, Shared Care Scotland, The Cervus Fund, The CJC Whitehouse Trust, The Guildry Incorporation of Perth, The Jessica Rose Duncan Schuetz Charitable Trust, The Lady Marian Gibson Trust, The Nancie Massey Charitable Trust, The National Lottery Community Funds, The Scottish Government, The Souter Charitable Trust, Violet M Lessel Trust.

We would also like to thank our Board and every member of staff for the care, trust, belonging and courage they bring to Venture Trust every day. Their commitment, energy and belief in the people we support make this work possible.



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For more information, please:

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