

## Annual Impact Report 2020 – 2021

### Chairman's Introduction

I am delighted to present our Annual Impact Report for 2020/2021

At a conference that I attended many years ago the main presenter spoke of “the smiling eyes of the teacher”. I have never forgotten those words and often reflect on their importance. At the time, it was spoken in reference to school teachers but, of course, we are all teachers. We all have an impact on those around us and after the last 12 months I am remembering those words again.

The Duke of Edinburgh's Award Perth and Kinross Association staff and volunteers have worked magnificently over the last 12 months to ensure that all the young people we had contact with prior to the lockdowns and inhibitions of COVID 19 have been fully supported throughout and have engaged in confidence, fun and hope building activities. More than that, we have managed to reach out to greater numbers across Perth and Kinross through online mentoring, the development of an extensive range of challenges on our newly created Distance Learning Hub, and the provision of physical resources. And while doing all of this we have developed the infrastructure and systems to get us outside again as soon as national and Council guidelines permit.

Our staff most certainly have “the smiling eyes” that young people need so much. They care about the young people we support, they demonstrate “correct compassion”, they build strong and appropriate relationships, they never give up, and their commitment to our work and journey together is superb.

We are all teachers and we are all learners too. Throughout our lives. This is what makes our work and journey together so enriching. The parents, the carers, our partners, our funders, our Trustees, our volunteers and our staff - all are striving to bring encouragement, support, achievement, ambition and belief into the lives of as many young people as we can. And in return, they inspire us and enrich our lives too.

Thank you all for the contributions you make. As this report demonstrates, they are massive and for many, life changing.

Robin Illsley

## Foreward

*I don't know what I'd be doing now if I hadn't gone - Starfish Way has just changed everything for me'. **Participant***

Supported by our dedicated team of staff and volunteers, The Duke of Edinburgh's Award Perth & Kinross Association has been working to help young people and volunteers participate in the Award for 30 years.

We offer support in the recruitment and training of volunteers that run Duke of Edinburgh groups, assist with relevant qualifications and expedition advice and give information to participants, parents, carers, volunteers and other interested parties. We work collaboratively with many other support organisations throughout Scotland and act as a link to our participants and volunteers for new and relevant services.

Providing access to equipment, expedition kit and clothing, our minibus and BOMA motorised off-road wheelchair to individuals and groups maximises the participation opportunities of all young people. Available to other community groups and not for profit organisations, we share these resources across Perth and Kinross and beyond. It is our aim to remove any barriers to participation to enable all young people – and volunteers - to participate in the Award regardless of ability, financial constraints or self belief.

We also provide specialist advice and practical support to young people with additional support needs (ASN), some with very complex support needs. Such challenges can include neglect, abuse, learning difficulties, mental ill health, physical disabilities, anxiety, social isolation and chronic lack of confidence and self belief.

Nearly 4 years ago, we launched Starfish Way to encourage more young people with additional support needs take part in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award. Based at the Megginch Castle Estate, we work in close partnership with the Drummond-Herdman family in the most stunning therapeutic environment. This provides a safe and nurturing space to provide wonderful opportunities for the young people to achieve, thrive, feel secure, grow and build confidence and hope.

With our high staff to participant ratios on which our success is based, we focus on building strong and trusted relationships. Only when a feeling safety is achieved can the exploration of abilities and the unlocking of potential begin. Our original Starfish Way model was designed around a year long programme of activities during which our young people would achieve not only a Duke of Edinburgh's Award but also a John Muir Environmental Award, a Saltire Volunteering Award and a National Navigation Award, First Aid certificate and Perth & Kinross Higher Achievement Standard. As word spread about the success and life changing effects our programme, we were

approached by other organisations to take part. This year these have included Perth & Kinross Council Edge of Care and Youth Services and Perth Autism.

Tailoring provision to the specific requirements of each group, we now offer bespoke programmes of activity for schools and youth and community groups including employability, confidence building and one to one support.

## COVID-19

No one could have predicted the events that were to unfold in March 2020 with the arrival of COVID-19 but as with most things in life, with adversity comes opportunity. With lockdowns, social distancing and school closures, our biggest challenge was to ensure the continued support for our young people.

When we could no longer work face to face, we had to quickly adjust our way of working with our groups and Starfish Way participants to ensure all were supported, motivated and helped to continue with their Award. Our response was the setting up of a Distance Learning Hub, <https://pkdofe.com/distance-learning-hub/>, a provision of online activities (to complete Expedition preparation and Skill, Physical and Volunteering sections), mentoring and group meetings would lead to a hugely a positive response and a new way of reaching even more young people.

Our challenge was turned into an opportunity. Our determination to be there for the young people, to support and encourage them and to provide fulfilling activities became a real lifeline for many.

Our Distance Learning Hub is helping people across Britain and as far afield as Africa and the success of this new resource and method of participation will remain part of our provision in the long term.

## Distance Learning Hub

We wanted to create a Distance Learning Hub, free to young people and their families, that would support those disadvantaged throughout the COVID crisis, and afterwards.

The Hub would deliver online and remote recreational, vocational, and wellbeing activities to young people, aimed to improve their physical and mental wellbeing, reduce isolation, and increase achievement and self-esteem.

Alongside the online activities, resources would be provided where necessary, and weekly mentor support put in place for those needing an increased level of support and encouragement.

Especially during this pandemic, it was vitally important that we ensured we were *Getting it Right for Every Child*, and focussing on Scotland's Wellbeing Priorities, such as, ensuring that young people are *"well educated, skilled and able to contribute to*

*society”, “we are healthy and active”, and “we grow up loved, safe and respected so that we realise our full potential”.*

We created 30 online courses lasting a minimum of 12-weeks each. These provided a significant variety of choice of subject matter and provided a progression of challenge. They are free for anyone to use of all ages and abilities. Volunteers have assisted in starting to adapt modules into audio file for the visually impaired.

*‘The staff at Starfish have encouraged our daughter to do things out of her comfort zone and try things she would normally say “No, too hard for me”. She didn’t want to go at first but the staff have made her feel so welcome and safe she loves going to Megginch and at the moment misses going terribly. And I love that even in this scary time they have provided 1-2-1 support and activities on the Distance Learning Hub to keep them going and on their learning journey’. Parent,*

We have purchased resources supporting the Distance Learning Activities that will either be loaned or given to the people we support including Fitbits, tablets, sports equipment, arts and crafts materials and sound recording equipment.

*‘The Distance Learning Hub has been incredible! Our daughter has found her way around it so easily and she has really enjoyed doing it - with a little help from you (lol!). But in all seriousness, it has been very accessible on the mobile phone and laptop - thank you for all your support you have given her too. Without the resources you have provided our daughter just wouldn’t have been able to do all these things’.*

**(Parent)**

Young people and families facing barriers to participation through lack of finance/resources have been supported through us delivering resource boxes and equipment to their doors for all activities on our Distance Learning Hub. This has been appreciated hugely.

*‘I was so excited to wait for the creative crafts box and couldn’t believe what I got in it. It was like Christmas! Thanks so much’.*

**(Participant)**

*‘I couldn’t believe it when you brought me a Fitbit and all the art supplies to the school. We were all dead excited but I am scared I am going to lose my Fitbit so that is going to be part of my skill, keeping it safe it!’*

**(Participant)**

'The Distance Learning Hub has been fab! our daughter has found her way around it so easily and she has really enjoyed doing it with a little help from you lol but in all seriousness, it has been very accessible on the mobile phone and laptop - thank you for all your support you have given her too. Without the resources you have provided our daughter just wouldn't have been able to do all these things'

**(Parent)**

**Young people across Great Britain and beyond are being supported by us – emails include:**

'My son, Joe is 14 years old and is taking the Bronze level of the DofE award. He would like to do a drawing course for his skills section, hoping that it will help with his GCSE DT drawing skills in the future. He would like to do the 12 week course. Can you tell me if this course would be free? (as we are a low income family, due to my husband passing away 2 years ago). Please could you let us know if you think this course would be suitable for Joe and what we need to do next. Thanking you in advance'.

'We came across your website whilst searching for DofE approved chess learning, now that most normal contact is unlikely. This is the kind of quality offering we are looking for! Could my son do your 12 week course and get approval for skills learning?'

'Hi, I would like to enrol with the pkdofe. Found your website and would like access to the distance learning hub and an assessor to help me complete my silver Dofe. I am a year 12 student living on the Isle of Wight'.

'I found your online Rewilding Yourself course and would really love to do it as my Duke of Edinburgh Skill. I'm 15 and live in London but I am not part of Starfish Way or Association ASN Groups. I hope I would still be able to do the course and my parents would be happy to pay for it'.

**And all the way from Morocco...**

'Thank you very much indeed for giving me this opportunity to learn all these tools and skills about the game of ultimate frisbee'.

The appointment of a Digital Marketing Manager was essential to promote our website and the Distance Learning Hub, to update the Hub and to oversee the management of our online modules.

We have engaged with the parents/carers of the young people we support to add to our support framework and to ensure they are included and valued throughout our development processes.

The Distance Learning Hub resources are being used by many schools, youth groups, families, and Youth Workers across Scotland and England, there has also been international interest.

Perth and Kinross Council wish to use the Hub to promote the mental wellbeing of children throughout Perth & Kinross. Perth & Kinross Council are also funding 25 enrolments to the Duke of Edinburgh Award and are using our Hub and resources to support local young people.

*'These resources are a big part of our health and wellbeing offer and are constantly being developed by the Association. **Not only are young people thriving through the use of these resources, but they surviving as they are accessing them to improve their mental health**'. Brian Hutton, Manager, Perth and Kinross Council Youth Services*

Young people are engaging with the activities, engaging with our staff mentors and are completing sectional certificates and full Achievement Certificates issued by the Duke of Edinburgh Award. Their confidence is growing, they are feeling a real sense of achievement and their personal interaction with adults they trust is providing security.

Staff at schools report that our work is a real lifeline to these young people, and that their work with us is helping them gain confidence, motivation, and that they are starting to believe in themselves.

*'In these exceptionally challenging times, students at Blairgowrie High School have been supported uniquely by the invaluable work of all at the P&K DofE Association, which has been adapted as necessary to maintain personal mentoring relationships when direct work in person has not been possible.*

*This has made a vital difference to the experiences this year of students in our Intensive Provision for those with diverse and complex needs. Accessing personal support and guidance from the skilled and experienced team of mentors has provided a lifeline to many of our young people, supporting them to participate with confidence and to achieve progress in spite of all the barriers they face. **This has been a crucial element in the clear progress that we have observed in students with the most complex additional needs.** Association staff have gone above and beyond to provide this support, for students in all manner of situations including where their family has been made homeless.*

*Throughout the extraordinary challenges of the last year, their involvement in the Starfish programme has provided invaluable support and guidance to not only cope but find and take opportunities for personal growth and the development of capacities and skills. From my close observations in school (where many attend the provision for vulnerable pupils), **this additional support has been seen to significantly develop their self-esteem and skills to manage emotional challenges, overcoming anxiety and other barriers.***

*Thank you for your unique and continuing support, which means so much to our young people'. **D Higgins, Pupil Support Teacher, Blairgowrie High School***

Young people and families facing barriers to participation, through lack of finance/resources, have been supported by us delivering resource boxes and equipment to their doors. This has been a crucial support for some.

Over 20 resource boxes were organised, packed and distributed to families during the pandemic to support Distance Learning Hub activities.

During the Covid 19 pandemic we succeeded in providing remote recreational, vocational, and wellbeing activities to young people, aimed to improve their physical and mental wellbeing, reduce isolation, and increase achievement and self-esteem.

## **The Covid Fallout**

The services that we offer are more vital than ever before. As young people return to schools, the attainment gap is more apparent and mental health issues are reported at an all time high.

As we come to the end of our 3<sup>rd</sup> year of the Starfish Way's programme of high nurture support for vulnerable young people, schools and youth groups that have previously been involved are seeing the tangible results of participation. They continue to build on their achievements through improved engagement at school and positive post school destinations including employment, further education and apprenticeships. Information received about individuals prior to commencing the programme indicated many were highly likely to leave school without qualifications, heading towards negative post school destinations so this has been an incredible achievement. Many of these young people have continued to work with us on their Duke of Edinburgh Award to Silver and now Gold level, some taking on leadership roles as mentors for new groups.

*'My daughter is achieving beyond her dreams. The school told me the Starfish Way experience has been a complete game changer for her. How wonderful! She has achieved things we never thought she could in this past year. We just can't thank you enough'. **Parent***

In recognition of the success of our programmes, we have received funding from Perth & Kinross Council to support 3 secondary schools participate in Starfish Way and on our Distance Learning Hub for the next academic year.

## **Megginch, "home" of the Starfish way**

During lockdown when we were unable to visit Megginch, the Drummond-Herdman family stepped in to offer their support. Catherine and her children in diligently maintained our garden, crops and activity areas. When our volunteers were able to return, they tended the garden and assisted in preparations for our groups return to Megginch.



As restrictions eased, we continued to build infrastructure with a roofed, outdoor multi purpose structure with log seating and an open fire to be used for activities such as archery, green woodworking and bushcraft. In the physic garden a mediation labyrinth was created and plans have been drawn up for a Petanque court and a composting toilet.

*'Working with the DofE Association has been extremely inspiring. Seeing the commitment from every member of staff, including volunteers, to the youngsters that come to Megginch, is heart warming. The first Starfish Way youngsters for 2021 are now visiting the walled garden again, a safe, secure oasis. Seeing them gathered round the fire in the Coorie Hoose, their trepidation easing, shoulders not so hunched, eyes raised a little from the ground and hands untwisting and unclenching was deeply moving. I know that these children will gain so much from being here at Megginch and being encouraged by all the wonderful leaders they will encounter. The Starfish Way is a hope giving initiative which all of us at Megginch are very proud to be a part of'. **Catherine Drummond-Herdman, Megginch Castle Estate***

## **Supporting Positive Mental Health**

High levels of anxiety have been widely reported and as well as stress, loneliness and social isolation - returning to school and normality being just as stressful for some. This has been especially notable for those that are disadvantaged and those with Additional Support Needs.

When we were unable to work face to face with our young people, we continued to support them virtually with almost 90% engagement. This included talking therapies and a safe place to share feelings and emotions by phone, video calling and messaging. Then, when possible, socially distanced Walks and Talks.

With the easing of restrictions, we will begin to support our young people in person once more. We will continue to offer one to one mental health support, working collaboratively with schools and other support organisations where necessary. Back on the menu at Megginch will be forest bathing, Reike, guided and walking meditations, Heart Math, relaxation techniques, aromatherapy and much more as part of our positive mental health provision.

## **Volunteers**

The Duke of Edinburgh Award would not exist without the support of our incredible volunteers. Not only do they feel they are making a difference to the lives of young people they support but they also tell us it has helped combat social isolation, provided skills and training and a feeling of camaraderie and belonging.

### **Kate, ASN Open Group Leader**

For many years Kate has been involved with DofE both personally and professionally and for the last 4 years has expertly led our ASN Open group. The group have had



many incredible achievements on their journey from Bronze through to the completion of their Gold Awards this year. With her knowledge and expertise, Kate has skilfully guided the group with support and encouragement, making every challenge a positive and fun learning experience. We would like to say a *huge* thank you to Kate for her tireless work and dedication to this group - she is nothing short of amazing!

As well as Trustees, Drivers, Distance Learning Hub Module Writers, Leaders, Assessors and Expedition volunteers, our brilliant and dedicated Gardeners at Megginch go above and beyond to in all weathers support the Association:

‘I decided to volunteer at Megginch because I missed gardening after being made redundant. I have Asperger’s so I think it is great that disadvantaged kids and others with Autism get a chance to learn things in a fun way and also get to appreciate the outdoors. I found peace, contentment and a feeling of being useful by helping in the garden. I am looking forward to seeing things grow this year’. **Jenny** (*jenny photo*)

‘I am a semi-retired social worker with a background in support and help for children and young people who have Additional Support Needs. That’s really why I volunteered with the Starfish Way , but a global pandemic got in the way. That said, I’ve been with the organisation for around 12 months and discovered gardening and joinery skills I never knew I had! I’ve built a compost heap out of old pallets, tidied up raised beds, wrestled with a dismantled greenhouse, discovered a passion for the history of apples and generally loved coming out to Megginch every week, as restrictions have permitted.

Wendy has ensured that I’ll keep coming, with a healthy supply of biscuits and a warm Duke of Edinburgh jacket! Seriously though, I have thoroughly enjoyed my time volunteering with Starfish Way and would recommend volunteering here to anyone. It’s also a lot of fun. You feel valued and your comments matter - and of course the castle gardens are amazing! It’s a productive way to spend your time and supports the Association in the work that they do and will do in future’. **Dave** (*Dave photo*)

We are always looking for more Volunteers so if you have some time to spare and would like to join our merry band, please get in touch!

## Trustees

Our Board of Trustees are a very active cohort who meet frequently throughout the year. Forming steering groups, they help drive project work, providing advice and practical help. They bring a broad range of experience in education, social work, youth services, mental health, marketing and PR and business development. Drawing on their diverse range of experience, our 10 trustees are developing our ambitious 3, 5 and 10 year plan.

Our work has attracted 2 new Trustees this year. Elaine Howie runs her own PR company and has provided PR and communications support for some of the UK’s leading corporate and luxury brands. She also has extensive experience within the

third sector and has created and delivered fundraising campaigns and events. Paul Rennie-Smith is an ex-army Officer who is currently working as a Programme Director. He has supported a number of charity and social enterprise organisations and has raised a significant amount of money for charities over the past 20+ years.

## Partnership Working

We have entered into partnerships with the YMCA, Breathe Project (Youth Mental Health) and Alyth Youth Partnership to provide Distance Learning Hub and Outdoor experiences through Covid-19 special funding. We are also working with school staff and youth workers from Perth Grammar School, Perth High School, Perth Academy, Blairgowrie High School's high nurture provision, Young Carers (PKAVS) and Perth & Kinross Councils REACH Edge of Care and Youth Services teams on Starfish Way and specialist bespoke provisions.

## Summary

### In our 2019/20 Report we said "we will" –

- Expand our infrastructure at Megginch to include a multi purpose area and outdoor teaching space with firepit for archery and green woodworking (COMPLETED)
- Focus on enlisting further volunteers (ONGOING)
- Reach out to an increasing number of youth groups, schools and organisations (ACHIEVED)
- Expand the number of young people with ASN that we support (ACHIEVED)
- Promote our Distance Learning Hub to wider local and national communities (ACHIEVED)
- Develop our digital presence and marketing through analytics and targeted campaigns (ONGOING)
- Expand our partnerships, particularly seeking additional unrestricted funding (ACHIEVED)
- Develop effective transport solutions for our volunteers and young people (ONGOING)
- Continue to create and implement strategies to support young people and volunteers within the context of COVID-19 (ACHIEVED)

## Looking to the Future

Whilst lockdown caused a halt to our outdoor learning and high nurture approaches at Megginch, it gave us the opportunity to develop our Distance Learning Hub and associated support mechanisms. We have a new model that provides for young people needing a high level of nurture and support to those able to cope with increasing levels of responsibility and challenge. The future is one where we will use both approaches to support as many young people with support needs as we possibly can.

We are now ready to safely recommence our programmes at Megginch. We are hoping it won't be long until we can fully resume our Starfish Way and face to face group activities, getting our young people back into the great outdoors, to complete their Expeditions and for more wild adventures. (*Exped photo*)

Our focus during 2021 – 2022 will be to ensure that we secure funds to continue to deliver positive outcomes to young people throughout Perth & Kinross, working in partnership with more schools and youth groups and reaching even more young people with Additional Support Needs.

### We will:

- Expand our infrastructure further and improve our storage facilities for equipment
- Build and implement a programme for recruiting, training and retaining volunteers
- Reach out to even more youth groups, schools and organisations and thereby increase the numbers of young people with ASN that we support
- Expand our activities on our Distance Learning Hub and include formats to increase their accessibility for those that are visually impaired.
- Review our strategic plans and formalise a new 5 year plan.
- Devise and implement a revised marketing plan
- Plan for sustainability and seek ways to further generate income.
- Retain existing partnerships and build new ones.

### Stats (during lockdown)

- 72 sectional certificates earned
- 22 national D of E certificates of achievement awarded

- Over 30 enquiries from beyond Perth and Kinross requesting permission to use our Distance Learning Hub
- Mentoring provided to 70 young people with Additional Support Needs
- 31 volunteers actively working with us
- 360 distance learning modules written and made available online
- 20 resource boxes packed and distributed to families in the most need of support during lockdown

## **In Perth & Kinross**

- 1405 Registered Participants in the year
- 70 Full Awards Achieved (during Covid, a remarkable achievement)
- 180 Certificates of Achievement Awarded
- 252 Registered Volunteers

## **Conclusion**

The last 12 months has shown the ambition, resilience, adaptability and determination of our Association to support many of our most vulnerable young people.

Over the next 12 months we aim to extend the support we offer to many, many more.

We thank all our partners for the encouragement, practical support, advice and funding which makes all this possible.

We also pay tribute to our staff for the dedication, patience, adaptability and resolve they showed during the COVID 19 Pandemic. Thanks to them, many young people never gave up hope and felt a sense of achievement that amazed their teachers, parents and carers. Our team is small, their hearts are big, and they make a mighty difference.

Small acts make big differences. Together, we will reach out to many more young people.



PERTH & KINROSS  
ASSOCIATION