



THE STARFISH WAY
UNLOCKING POSITIVE FUTURES

Annual impact Report 2025-2026



**Unlocking positive futures through inclusive
learning and adventure**



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THOUGHTS BY OUR CHAIR

This year we changed our name to 'The Starfish Way'. A bold decision and one that involved debate and decision making by the head and not the heart.

For 35 years we proudly used "The Duke of Edinburgh's Award" within our name. We have a history of royal visits, uplifting interactions with so many young people and their supporters, and a vast archive of Awards achieved.

But we needed a name change. Though we continue to uphold the values and programmes of the Award Scheme, we have our own vision, and our own story to tell.



The report that follows demonstrates our commitment to helping young people be "the best they can be", to have dreams, ambitions and belief in themselves. It also demonstrates our commitment to focusing our efforts on those with support needs and who lack confidence and are unable to see the amazing skills and qualities waiting to be unlocked within them.



Before you read the rest of the report let's remember the story behind our name.



The little boy walking along the beach after a huge storm picking up stranded starfish and throwing them into the water to save them. The old man disdainfully telling the boy that there are thousands scattered along the beach, so many that he can't make a difference. And the young boy replying bravely, as he threw a single starfish into the water, "well, I made a difference to that one, didn't I?"

This is why our charity exists. We make a difference to the lives of young people, their parents, their carers and to the adults, staff and volunteers, who support them. The lives of some of our most vulnerable young people.

So, thank you to our volunteers, staff, numerous partner organisations, funders and supporters. And a particular thank you to the Gannochy Trust who have stood with us for an unbroken period of 35 years. That sort of commitment is the oxygen of life to a small charity. Thank you everyone as we continue to pick up starfish from the beach. No longer a single boy, but a growing band of supporters.

Thank you,
Robin Illsley



WHO WE ARE



The Starfish Way, formerly the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Perth and Kinross Association, has supported young people for over 30 years, with a strong focus on inclusion and accessibility. Last year we took the bold decision to change our name to The Starfish Way, to better reflect the work we do supporting young people. The Duke of Edinburgh's Award is still at the core of our delivery, and our focus is on ensuring new generations of young people can participate in award schemes without barriers or obstacles to inclusion.

Our Starfish Way programme provides tailored support for individuals with additional support needs, mental health challenges, and complex barriers to participation, such as trauma, adverse childhood experiences, poverty, social isolation, low confidence, and disrupted education or employment pathways. Through outdoor and experiential learning, we offer opportunities to engage in outdoor education, gain accredited awards, develop employability and independent living skills, and improve overall wellbeing. Participants build confidence, strengthen resilience, and achieve recognised qualifications that support their personal development, independence, and future aspirations.

This year, our work has expanded further into the community, including the successful introduction of programmes for adult learners — demonstrating the adaptability and reach of our approach.



Our Vision - 'To support young people, particularly those with additional support needs, to feel happy, be safe, experience achievement, and believe in themselves.'

OUR VALUES THAT GUIDE US

- Inclusion and equality
- Kindness and wellbeing
- Listening and learning
- Relationships
- Continuous improvement
- Sustainability

Our Mission - 'To bring passion, joy and encouragement to the support of young people as they discover their abilities and become their best selves.'

Izzy at Rewilding Denmarkfield said, *"We have loved partnering with The Starfish Way and having several groups on site supporting our activities. All young people are included and respected, they are valued and have their additional support needs met by leaders. It has been so much fun planting the trees with the various groups and we look forward to more collaborations. The groups have been enthusiastic and passionate about their programme."*

YEAR AT A GLANCE



1606

Total users of the DLH



448

Young people took part
in Starfish Way
Activities



3

New partnerships



230

Awards achieved



337

Hours of volunteering
given to the community
(social value - £4,533)



104

Volunteering hours
given to the
Association

HIGHLIGHTS

- Expansion into adult learning
- Increased community delivery
- New partnerships established
- Inclusive expedition opportunities



THE STARFISH WAY SCHOOL PROGRAMME



8 Schools represented:

- Perth Grammar School
- Perth High School
- Kinross High School
- Bertha Park High School
- St John's RC Academy
- Forfar Academy
- Crieff High School
- Blairgowrie High School

Our core school programme continues to provide structured, inclusive opportunities for young people to develop confidence, independence and social skills outside the classroom.

Schools report:

Improved attendance

Increased confidence

Stronger peer relationships

Greater engagement in learning

Participants benefit from tailored delivery that allows them to progress at their own pace while working towards meaningful goals.

Participant feedback, 'I loved visiting the ponies and grooming them, it made me happy. I felt confident leading Fallon around the obstacle course, I was nervous, but Fallon and my leaders made me feel safe. I was so excited to tell Mum, it made me feel so happy.'



CASE STUDY

BACKGROUND

Ciara lives rurally and has limited opportunities for socialising due to financial and geographical barriers. She is quiet, struggles with fitting in, and has experienced declining mental wellbeing due to isolation.

WHAT WE DID

Ciara joined an 8-week block of outdoor wellbeing sessions delivered in partnership with Mindspace.

OUTCOMES ACHIEVED

Ciara engaged particularly well with outdoor cooking and creative activities. Over the course of the programme she became more relaxed, confident, and developed positive relationships with the group.

IMPACT

Without this intervention, Ciara would have remained socially isolated with limited opportunities. The sessions provided a safe and inclusive space to build confidence and experience the positive effects of connection and nature.



9 Accredited awards delivered

- Duke of Edinburgh Bronze, Silver and Gold
- Certificate of Achievement (DofE)
- Saltire Award
- Heritage Hero
- NNAS
- JAS Gold
- RevivR CPR
- Wild Journey
- National Outdoor Learning Award

Ciara said, “Being outside makes me feel happy and relaxed. I enjoy making friends and learning new skills.”

The school said, “It is good to see her enjoying conversations with others and taking part. At school she is less isolated and more confident when speaking to others.”



TRANSITION TO HIGH SCHOOL



This year we supported p7 and s1 pupils through the transition into secondary education. This work focuses on:

- reducing anxiety
- building confidence
- supporting peer relationships
- developing resilience

We worked with Perth High School and feeder primary schools to support this important stage.

HIGH NURTURE PROGRAMMES



Our high nurture programmes provide safe, supportive, and therapeutic environments for individuals experiencing significant barriers to participation.

Participants include those with:

- Mental health challenges
- Neurodiversity
- Trauma or care experience
- Social isolation

This year, we have prioritised:

- Emotional wellbeing
- Safe spaces for expression
- Building trust and relationships
- Supported engagement in activities



The impact has been significant, with participants reporting:

- Feeling safe and respected
- Increased confidence
- Improved emotional wellbeing



A wide range of additional support needs were supported, including:

- ASD (autism spectrum disorder)
- ADHD
- BPD (borderline personality disorder)
- SH (self-harm)
- Global developmental delay
- Dyspraxia
- Dyslexia
- Anxiety
- OCD
- Depression
- Tourette's
- ESOL
- Learning disabled
- Visual impairments
- Eating disorders
- PTSD
- Suicidal thoughts
- EDS (Ehlers Danlos Syndrome)
- Tics
- School non attenders
- Care experienced
- Kinships
- Cerebral Palsy
- School exclusion
- Downs Syndrome

Awards attained:

Duke of Edinburgh - Bronze - physical	6	Duke of Edinburgh - Silver - physical	11
Duke of Edinburgh - Bronze - skill	6	Duke of Edinburgh - Silver - skill	11
Duke of Edinburgh - Bronze - volunteering	7	Duke of Edinburgh - Silver - volunteering	11
Duke of Edinburgh - full award	9	Duke of Edinburgh - full award	10

CASE STUDY

BACKGROUND

Kevin has experienced significant childhood trauma, including bereavement, and left school early due to poor mental health. He is preparing to transition to college.

WHAT WE DID

Kevin was referred through Navigate and he took part in an 8-week outdoor wellbeing programme designed to build relationships, confidence, and transferable skills.

OUTCOMES ACHIEVED

Kevin thrived in outdoor learning environments and became an advocate for open discussions around mental health. He has developed better communication skills, confidence, and a stronger ability to connect with others.

IMPACT

Without this support, Kevin would have had limited opportunities to develop skills and connections critical to his transition into further education.



Kevin said, “I want to show other young men that it is okay to speak about stuff when they feel down.”

Emma at Navigate said, *“The block that has been delivered to our young person has benefited them so much, they feedback after every session with enthusiasm and clearly have established a positive relationship with the member of staff. They feel safe and respected and have been able to use the sessions as an outlet to enjoy outdoor activities while discussing their mental health struggles. They feel validated and heard and the impact of this is huge. We are delighted to have secured further funding for this young person to continue the programme.”*



Adult Learners in the community



2 Community groups worked with

- Highland Perthshire Plus
- Kinnoull Day Opportunities

The programme has proven highly adaptable, with adult participants benefiting from:

- Social connection
- Confidence building
- Opportunities to engage in outdoor learning
- Development of life and employability skills

These sessions have helped reduce isolation and create meaningful opportunities for community engagement.

Adult learners have demonstrated:

- Increased independence
- Improved wellbeing
- Strong engagement in group activities



CASE STUDY

BACKGROUND

Brendan lives alone with limited opportunities for social interaction. He has a low income and additional support needs and has been experiencing poor mental health.

WHAT WE DID

Brendan joined a 25-week programme of outdoor wellbeing sessions designed to build confidence, resilience, and social connections.

OUTCOMES ACHIEVED

Brendan has grown significantly in confidence, built strong relationships, and actively participates in group activities. He has begun to see his own potential and capability.

IMPACT

The programme has reduced isolation and provided meaningful routine, helping Brendan feel more confident and positive about his future.

WIDER ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS

Paddle start – 7

Saltire Award – 9

Heritage Hero – 8

National Outdoor Learning Award – 51

Wild Journey Adventure – 45

Junior Award Scheme – 29

Brendan said, “I feel so much better knowing I have something in the week to keep me busy.”

OUR LOCATIONS

We are fortunate to deliver our programmes across a range of diverse and inspiring locations, each offering unique opportunities for learning, development and connection to the outdoors.

These environments play a vital role in supporting our participants to engage, build confidence and experience achievement in settings that are safe, inclusive and tailored to their needs.

MEGGINCH CASTLE ESTATE

A central base for The Starfish Way delivery, providing a calm and therapeutic environment for activities including outdoor learning, heritage, gardening, bushcraft and social development.

BAMFF CONSERVATION AND REWILDING ECOTOURISM

A more remote and natural setting supporting conservation, rewilding activities and progression to more adventurous outdoor experiences.

ABERDALGIE CHURCH

Provides a useful base, particularly in the winter months where young people have learnt green wood working skills and Christmas wreath making.

CULTYBRAGGAN

A key site for expeditions and residential opportunities, supporting independence, teamwork and extended outdoor experiences.

DENMARKFIELD REWILDING

An innovative natural environment where participants engage in conservation work and adapted expedition experiences.

COMMUNITY AND LOCAL ENVIRONMENTS

Including locations such as the Inches and Quarrymill in Perth, Dunkeld and Crieff, where we deliver accessible, community-based activities to increase visibility, engagement and inclusion.



Why This Matters

Access to a variety of environments enables us to:

- Adapt programmes to individual needs
- Offer progressive challenges
- Support wellbeing through nature
- Increase accessibility across urban and rural communities

These locations allow participants to experience new environments, build confidence, and develop skills that extend beyond the programme.



ACTIVITIES AND EXPEDITIONS

A wide range of activities were delivered, including:

Outdoor learning and expedition training, including bushcraft, navigation, hill skills and outdoor cooking, orienteering, green woodworking, first aid and survival skills

Sport and physical activity including cycling, stand up paddleboarding, climbing, archery, walking, badminton, Nordic walking and tennis

Creative and wellbeing sessions, including arts and crafts, sound mapping, meeting trees, Swedish candles, affirmation jars, journalling

Conservation and volunteering, including litter picking, gardening, pond dipping, tree planting and hedge laying

Life skills including independent living, café visits and young enterprise

History trips to the Blackwatch Museum, Abernethy Tower, Balvaird Castle, Cultybraggan Museum, William Wallace monument and Bannockburn

127 INDIVIDUALS SUPPORTED IN FACE TO FACE ACTIVITIES

BENEFICIARIES BY AGE GROUP

Age 12 - 14: 21%

Age 14 - 16: 28%

Age 16 plus: 51%



This year's expedition programme has been a major success, offering both land and water-based experiences tailored to individual needs.

This year the young people's team goals focused on the environment, arts and crafts and heritage.

Level	Practise	Qualifier	Adapted
Bronze	2	2	1
Silver	2	2	



Participants have:

- Pushed beyond comfort zones
- Developed practical and teamwork skills
- Gained confidence through achievement
- Connected with nature and increased awareness of and respect for the environment



‘This year has been highly successful for the expedition programme, delivering inclusive water and land-based experiences that enabled participants to access new opportunities and push beyond their comfort zones. The dedication of staff and volunteers has been central to this achievement.

A key milestone was the expansion of The Starfish Way programme to adult learners, demonstrating its adaptability and reinforcing its core aim of building confidence, resilience, independence, and self-belief.

Support from the Perth and Kinross Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund allowed for increased community outreach through mini-blocks and tailored sessions, including partnerships with local organisations and rural groups, improving access to inclusive outdoor activities.

A strong focus on inclusion and community awareness has helped break down barriers, promote visibility, and create meaningful connections through volunteering, fundraising, and collaborative activities.

Wellbeing remains a core theme, with outdoor experiences supporting mental health and providing safe and supportive environments for participants.

Schools have reported very positive feedback, noting improvements in attendance, confidence, and social skills among young people.

Finally, the programme continues to evolve through reflection and participant feedback, with individuals playing an active role in shaping its development and ensuring it remains responsive to their needs.’

Alex Deliyannis, Senior Development Worker



Parent of a Gold DofE participant: *“Our daughter has not been able to access DofE via her school due to her additional support needs. This was disappointing as physically she is more than capable. Having found The Starfish Way and speaking with staff about our daughter’s additional support needs, she has been able to work her way from bronze to gold. Her needs are met and material differentiated so she can access all the activities that her teammates do. She is included and valued in her team, and this has given her confidence and self-belief in herself and her abilities, she is more outspoken now and actively contributes and shares ideas. She feels seen and part of a team. She has continual support from staff who have taken the time to know, not only her additional support needs but her as a person, this level of commitment has been greatly appreciated and a contributing factor to our daughter loving and flourishing with her award.”*

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND SOFT SKILLS

Developing essential life skills remains central to all areas of our work. Across all programmes, we continue to see strong development in key life skills and soft skills, all helping to support participants' personal and social development

SOFT SKILL	Nearly all (80%)	Most (60-79%)	Some (20-59%)	Few (less than 20%)
CONFIDENCE	X			
COMMUNICATIONS		X		
SELF ESTEEM		X		
ATTENDANCE	X			
LEADERSHIP	X			
RESPONSIBILITY	X			
EMPATHY	X			
RESILIENCE	X			

The data highlights that attendance, empathy and resilience are particularly strong outcomes, reflecting the supportive, inclusive, and relationship-based nature of the programme.

THE DISTANCE LEARNING HUB

“My family have enjoyed me doing the cooking!”

“Zoe has really enjoyed the course and has come on so much.”

“He has loved the course... this means he has fully completed his Silver Award.”

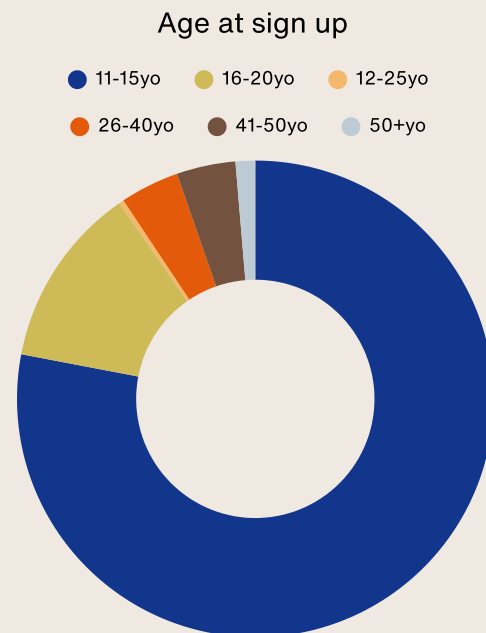
Our innovative Distance Learning Hub continues to provide accessible learning opportunities for participants who may face barriers to in-person engagement. The Hub offers flexible modules across skills, physical activity, and volunteering, tailored to meet the requirements for the Duke of Edinburgh's Award and enabling individuals to progress at their own pace while working towards an accredited award.

The most popular modules this year are:

- **Learning & Playing Chess** – A beginner-friendly course that teaches how to play and improve at chess using online tools, practical skills and real gameplay activities.
- **Cooking for Fun** – A hands-on cooking course that builds kitchen confidence through learning food safety, techniques and preparing a variety of enjoyable recipes.
- **Photography** – A course designed to develop photography skills by exploring techniques and creative approaches to capturing and improving images.
- **How to Train Your Dog** – A practical course that teaches essential dog training skills and commands to strengthen behaviour and the bond between owner and dog.
- **Drawing Cool Stuff** – A creative course that helps learners improve drawing skills through fun challenges and varied tasks suited to different interests and abilities

THE DISTANCE LEARNING HUB

Total lifetime users	1606
New users 2025-2026	321
Modules assessed	26



“Again, I would like to thank you and your whole organisation for everything you do. My main worry when starting my award was the activity section, as it’s something I struggle with. I was worried about having to do something I was uncomfortable with, not to mention the added stressors of the rest of the award, school, life, etc. The online yoga program you offer helped me tremendously. I had fun, felt safe, and was able to grow as I needed without external pressure. Yoga has become the favourite part of my day. Frankly, I don’t think I can even convey how thankful I am for the program and for the support your organisation has offered me. There are so many people in situations like me, and just knowing that there are opportunities like this, to help us even when we’re struggling, is such a blessing. Truly, I think you are doing some of the most important and noble work there is out there. Thank you so much for your time and everything you do :)” **Penelope, DLH User**

PARTNERSHIPS AND COMMUNITY IMPACT

This year we continued to build and strengthen partnerships, including with:

Social Flock

Mindspace

Minds and Manes

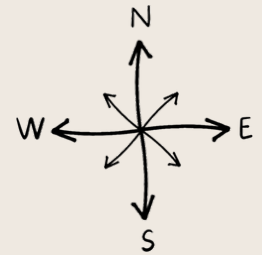
Bankfoot Tennis Club

Rewilding Denmarkfield

Perth and Kinross Countryside Trust

Comrie Development Trust

Comrie Development Trust Community Woodland group



Our work within the community has included:

- Volunteering opportunities, in total our participants have contributed over 194 volunteering hours
- Fundraising activities
- Conservation and environmental work, including the planting of over 200 trees
- Increased visibility and inclusion

These partnerships allow us to extend our reach and create more opportunities for participants.



EMPLOYABILITY & SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Developing life and employability skill is a key part of our work. Through volunteering placements, practical experiences and community partnerships, participants gained real-world experience while building confidence, independence and transferable workplace skills.

Working with community partners

We worked with a range of partners to create supported employability opportunities that reflected participants' interests and goals.

Auchingarrich Wildlife Park provided volunteering opportunities supporting animal care and the day-to-day running of the park. Participants developed responsibility, teamwork, communication and practical animal care skills.

Through Minds and Manes, participants learned about horse care and welfare, building confidence, responsibility and communication skills.

At the Denmarkfield Rewilding Project, participants took part in conservation activities including habitat maintenance and tree planting, developing teamwork, problem-solving and environmental awareness.

Our partnership with Social Flock provided community volunteering opportunities, helping participants build confidence and gain experience contributing to local projects.

Participants also organised and delivered a fundraising bake sale, taking responsibility for planning, advertising, baking and serving customers. This developed hospitality, customer service, teamwork, money-handling and organisational skills.

impact

Participants developed skills in:

- Communication and customer service
- Teamwork and collaboration
- Responsibility and reliability
- Time management
- Problem-solving
- Money handling
- Confidence and self-belief
- Animal care and welfare
- Environmental conservation
- Planning and organisation
- Community participation



For many participants, these activities provided their first experience of a workplace-style environment, helping them discover new interests, build confidence and take positive steps towards future volunteering, training and employment.

"The programme has helped participants recognise their strengths, contribute positively to their communities and gain valuable experience that supports future aspirations and independence." Erica, Operations Manager

Key Employability Outcomes

- Starfish Way participants engaged in employability activities.
- Volunteering opportunities delivered across conservation, animal care and community settings.
- Strengthening partnerships with Auchingarrich Wildlife Park, Minds and Manes, Denmarkfield Rewilding Project and Social Flock.
- Participants developed transferable skills that support future education, volunteering and employment pathways.
- Participants moved onto college and supported volunteering

LOOKING AHEAD

We will continue to:

Expand our reach across all programmes

Grow adult provision

Strengthen partnerships and increase community engagement

Enhance accessibility and inclusion

Respond to participant feedback

2026/2027 will focus on the continued development of two key projects:

1) Migrating the Distance Learning Hub to a new learning platform

2) Launching our boutique residential facility for young people with Additional Support Needs - Hut 47 at Cultybraggan Camp.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF SUPPORT

We extend our sincere thanks to: funders, donors, partners, schools, families and carers, staff and volunteers

Your continued support enables us to provide meaningful opportunities that transform lives.



Keep Scotland
Beautiful

Perth City Boys Club



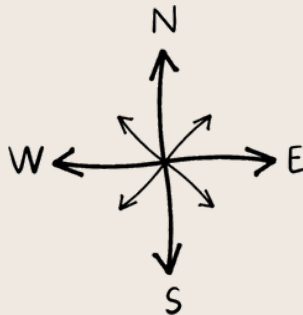
The Forteviot
Charitable Trust





THE STARFISH WAY

UNLOCKING POSITIVE FUTURES



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