

# Galloway Forest District Volunteer Project

## Final Report

### **Background**

The idea for the project was developed as a result of a successful project in Stration, South Ayrshire. Forestry Commission Scotland in partnership with Project Scotland had developed volunteer placements for disadvantaged young people in East and South Ayrshire. Young people learn practical skills in forestry, access provision and wildlife conservation as well as improving their personal development, communication skills and self-esteem. The project is so successful in turning around the lives of young people who have been involved in crime, suffered mental illness or addiction that the intention was to run a similar project in Dumfries and Galloway.

In the setting up of the Galloway Forest District Volunteer Project the same model was used as in the South Ayrshire project. It was felt that as the out-sourced mentoring worked very well we would use the same mentor (Siobhne Currie) for both projects. The mentor was out-sourced from Volunteer Action South Ayrshire (VASA). The funding providers are Forest Enterprise Scotland, Project Scotland and Leader Dumfries and Galloway. The volunteers were recruited from the small rural villages on the outer perimeter of Stranraer and Newton Stewart; they were recruited through APEX, Skills Development Scotland and Volunteer Action Dumfries and Galloway.

The projects aims were to offer disadvantaged young people (16-25) the opportunity to improve their future prospects through long-term placements (12 months) that gave them time to make real changes to their lives. The training and experience in turn creates constructive young people that contribute to society and also set a positive example to their peers. The young people learn skills and gain qualifications that offer real job prospects in forestry, horticulture, construction, access provision or conservation. They also develop their communication skills, self-confidence, team working and understanding of others so that they are considered employable young people. A key aim of the project is to provide disadvantaged young people with the skills and personal ability to find employment following the placement.

One of the important training areas proposed for the volunteers in the first year was in the Stranraer Community Town Woodland. It was intended that the volunteers worked closely with the constituted woodland management group and contribute to the establishment policies for this woodland. In this way, they were actively involved with the community helping to build mutual trust and respect.

The project offers young people that have had negative impacts on their community through crime, drug or alcohol abuse, as well as individuals coping with mental illness, a means of turning their lives around and becoming positive contributors to society.

In summary the project aimed to:

- Help young people of the outlying areas of Stranraer to gain employment.
- Improve their level of skills and training.
- Increase levels of confidence and self esteem.
- Assist in lowering levels of crime and disorderly behaviour, and helping reduce the fear of crime in the community.
- Raise young people's awareness of their natural environment.
- Helping young people turn their lives around and become positive contributors to society.

## **Funding**

To make this possible we needed to acquire additional funding.

Forestry Commission Scotland was prepared to put in another £65,800 to support the Galloway Forest District Volunteer Project, as they were already paying the lions share in Straiton South Ayrshire.

Project Scotland were willing to put up £57,200 in addition to what they were already putting into the Stration Project, this made a total of £123,000, £82,000 short of the money to run the project for two years in Dumfries and Galloway.

It was decided to approach Leader to try and acquire the £82,000 we needed to make the project happen. This bid was successful.

£65,800 Forestry Commission Scotland

£57,200 Project Scotland

£82,000 Leader Dumfries and Galloway.

## **The Project Experience**

The Galloway Forest District Volunteering Project was late in getting started; the volunteers were recruited in late November. The recruitment was later in getting started due to the delay of getting a supervisor in place and the setting up of the recruitment process.

The volunteers were recruited in November 2009 as stated, 25 volunteers in total were taken on, and all were from outlying areas from Stranraer. Out of the 25, 10 went into employment, 0 went onto further education, 1 is not in employment and 8 are still

on the project to date. The volunteers received a £55 subsistence allowance that was provided and paid by Project Scotland, this was paid weekly.

Of the 25 volunteers who started in November 2009, six of these were put off the programme for a variety of reasons. No volunteer was put off the programme without first trying to address the problems that were being displayed and trying to get to the route of the problem. All the volunteers were given a two week action plan that they signed up to, this was to try and help improve their attitude and behaviour before the final action of eviction from the programme. The volunteers that were put off the programme had issues that were too problematic for us to deal with. The project team considered it a failure on their part if a volunteer had to be withdrawn from the project.

## **Project Delivery**

The marketing that was undertaken to recruit the volunteers consisted of presentations to various organisations such as Skills Development Scotland, Apex Scotland, Career Development Scotland and Job Centre plus. This approach allowed the referring agencies to fully understand the aims and objectives of the programme and they could relate this to their clients. Leaflets were also distributed to the above agencies for further reference. Siobhonne (mentor VASA) undertook regular visits to Job Centre plus in Stranraer and other various agencies to keep them up to date on any placements that became available and to meet with potential volunteers. The volunteers came from a variety of different backgrounds all with various issues. Each volunteer was offered a taster session in the first week, this was to allow the volunteer the opportunity to decide if the project was suitable to themselves without fear of losing their benefits if they decided that forestry was not for them. At the end of the week's taster the volunteer would then sign off with the benefits agency and start to receive the £55 subsistence allowance. The first few months were involved in helping the volunteers come together and to start operating as a team, this took a lot of time both mentally and physical from both supervisors and mentor.

The team started to work really well together and began to settle into the working lifestyle. As the team developed, training courses were undertaken; each volunteer understood that attendance and behaviour were the main factors in receiving any training courses. Of the volunteers that started we lost 1 within the first month and another at 11 months into the programme.

The volunteers all undertook training in small tools, manual handling and strimmer/brush cutter. Some of the volunteers struggled with the strimmer/brush cutter course, they were given extra time and support to pass this course as the team felt it was important to raise their confidence levels. This was achieved.

A training course in digger, dumper and rollers to NPORS qualification was undertaken by eight of the volunteers. The participants for this course were chosen through their attendance, their personal development and their ability to pass the course. This was also true of the chainsaw course which was very popular amongst the volunteers.



Of the four volunteers that undertook the digger, dumper and roller training, three completed the training and consolidation and one left early. The volunteer that left was progressing really well on all the machines and the trainer had high hopes for the volunteer. The volunteer had a history of alcohol abuse which we felt he had moved on from, this was not to be the case. The volunteer was supported through his relapse by all the project staff and the trainer to try and encourage him to continue but to no avail. Another volunteer was given his place but this did not work out. Of the three that continued, all went into full time work.

Numerous team building activities were undertaken to help in encouraging the volunteers to work within a team setting, these consisted of Paintballing, BBQ's, go-karting, award ceremonies, coast steering and a football competition between the volunteers from Culmore and Stration in South Ayrshire.



All the volunteers' achievements were recognised by the project team, regardless of how small some of these may have been. Galloway Forest District and Volunteer Centre South Ayrshire (VASA) have a twice yearly awards event where all were given awards; one volunteer was given a certificate for completing a week on the project. He was so pleased with his certificate as it was the only one he had ever managed to achieve; it took pride of place in his home. The volunteers were also celebrated through the National awards such as Millennium Volunteers; all received this award for their time volunteering.



One of our outstanding volunteers was a young man named William Lamont. When Wull joined us he had many various issues, he was currently in foster care and had the social care that follows. Wull was hard work for the supervisors and had a lot of input from the mentor. In the months that followed, Wull turned his life around and seemed to take onboard the advice and guidance that was offered. Wull improved so much that we took the chance and put him on the digger and dumper course, he passed all his exams, worked from 8am to 4.30pm to get the most out of the training and consolidation. Wull went on to be nominated for a Young Quality Scot award, which he won; he was also nominated for a Daily Record Young Scot award (he didn't win). He was nominated for Project Scotland's VOSCAR awards for the environment category. He went on to win this category and also received the VOSCAR for Volunteer of the Year at their award ceremony at the Bank of Scotland's building on the Mound. Wull left the project after his year and took up an apprenticeship with Dumfries and Galloway council; he is still with the council and doing very well.



## Project Summary

An important element of the project was to raise the confidence levels and feeling of self worth within the volunteers and to help them focus on life after their volunteering opportunity and to make them more employable. This was achieved with great success as many of the volunteers then went on to full time employment.

Many different tasks were taken on by the volunteers, these ranged from tree planting, dyking, concreting a disabled footpath, fencing, chainsaw work, path clearance work and habitat improvements. An area that the volunteers worked at was in the creation of a community woodland in Stranraer. The volunteers helped plant in the region of 60,000 mixed broad-leaved trees, create a variety of footpaths, and sat up till 8 – 9pm in an evening to make sure nobody wrote in the wet concrete of the disabled path. As the volunteers came from the surrounding areas of Stranraer they all were enthusiastic in being part of the community woodland and were regularly praised by the Gallowhill committee and were frequently mentioned in the Free Press (local newspaper for the Stranraer area) articles on the creation of the Community Woodland.





This has been a very worthwhile project and a few lives have been improved for the better. One of the most rewarding moments for me was in the statement one of the volunteers made. This volunteer had told us from the day that he started that “he would make the supervisors life hell”! This was quickly nipped in the bud and support and encouragement was offered. This volunteer went from strength to strength until recently he was in my office at Newton Stewart and he told me “I have been on many different programmes before such as Apex etc., they were boring and I lost interest. This has been the best programme for me, it has totally turned my life around, I seem to be getting somewhere and for the first time I have direction. It’s been what I needed, thanks”. I could feel a lump in my throat.

All the volunteers benefited from the programme, even the few that we had to put off. The people of Stranraer benefited by the creation of the community woodland which is considered an asset and used regularly by the people of Stranraer.

Society as a whole has benefited from the project as the youngsters are engaged; they are less destructive and are now employees who contribute to society through their taxes.

The project achieved the following outputs and outcomes:

- 25 volunteers were placed on the programme
- 10 volunteers went into full time employment
- 8 still attending the project
- 28 received Millennium volunteer awards
- Winner of Project Scotland’s Volunteer of the year award
- Winner of Project Scotland’s Environment VOSCAR
- Young Quality Scot award

- 7 Volunteers passed their digger, dumper and ride on roller qualifications to NPORS standard
- 10 received chainsaw qualification
- 25 received training in small tools, risk assessments and manual handling.
- 17 received training and assessment in brush cutter/trimming.
- A community woodland was established in Stranraer, 65,000 trees were planted and protected with vole guards, and a path network was constructed including a path for less able people.
- Fencing, dyking, path clearance and habitat improvements were all undertaken.

## Final project budget;

### Anticipated Costs:

Forestry Commission	£65,800
Project Scotland	£57,200
Leader award	£ 82,000

### Actual Costs:

Forestry Commission	£65,800
Project Scotland	£57,200
Leader	£51,441.60

The total spend over the two years was less than the amount original offered by Leader £82,000 offered  
£51,444.60 claimed

63% of the money granted by Leader was claimed; this left £30,555 unclaimed (37%). The grant money not claimed was for the fuel costs of the mini buses. The Forestry Commissions systems for recording the actual costs of fuel acquired for the running of the mini buses were not compatible with the recording systems required for leader. After many attempts and negotiations with the Forestry Commissions Mechanical Engineering services a system that would work for both Forestry Commission and Leader could not be found so we had to give up on the costs of the fuel incurred for the transportation of the volunteers.

Other areas within the project costs that were not fully claimed were Training and power tools. The reason for this was that the volunteers did not undertake as much training as anticipated and the need to renew power tools were not as great as expected.

## How the project addressed the leader issues selected

The Galloway Forest District Volunteer Project tackled the Leader issue of “**promote a learning and skilful region**”.

The project offered young people that have had negative impacts on their community through crime, drug or alcohol abuse, a means of turning their lives around and

become positive contributors to society. The training and experience that was offered to all the volunteers improved their personal development, communication skills and self-esteem, this in turn created constructive young people that contribute to society and set a positive example to their peers.

One of the ways that we tackled this issue was to involve the volunteers in the creation of the Gallowhill Community Woodland where they worked closely with the woodland management group and in this way they were actively involved with the community which all helped in building mutual trust and respect. This important step built trust in the young people and greatly enhanced their sense of purpose and hope for the future.

A key aim of the project was to provide disadvantaged young people with the skills and personal ability to find employment and this was achieved with great success:

15 went into full time employment

7 received training and NPORS qualifications in Digger, Dumper and Roller.

17 received training in brush cutter, strimming, chainsaw, manual handling and risk assessment.

Through working in the forest environment where working as part of a team is required to get the work finished on schedule, the young people developed their communication skills, self-confidence, team working and understanding of others which all led to them becoming employable young people.

## **Lessons learned and the Future for the Galloway Forest District Volunteer Project**

Volunteers have varied greatly in terms of background, characteristics and motivations. On the one hand are those with dysfunctional or chaotic family lives characterised by generational worklessness. On the other hand are volunteers with some qualifications who have found it very difficult to obtain work experience since leaving school.

While it is commendable to work with all diversities and is the ethos of the project, it is important to recognise the limitations of the project.

The volunteers each have individual “journeys” towards a successful destination and training, coaching and support requirements were geared to each volunteers needs to help reach a successful outcome. It is important to understand and not to be seen as a “failure” when an individual volunteer fails to respond and a greater degree of support is required from outside organisations.

Forestry Commission Scotland has now taken over the Employment Skills Programme covering the Central Scotland Green Networking Area. They are moving away from Forest Enterprise delivering this type of project to third party delivery. They are currently tendering for service providers to deliver these types of projects. They are looking at expanding in to Dumfries and Galloway in 2013; the Stranraer area will be part of this process.