

Our future. Now

Supporting a generation of young people to flourish.

Investor Report 2022/2023



Photo: credit to FARE

INSPIRING SCOTLAND

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Introduction



Whatever your start, you should get a fair chance to enjoy a happy, healthy life free from poverty or disadvantage.

Our Future Now is here for young people whose start in life isn't equal. Affected by poverty and disadvantaged by where they live or their family circumstance they must work unfairly hard to overcome a wide range of challenges.

We have always been concerned for this group of young people, however, their challenges are now unprecedented. They are among the worst affected by the Covid-19 pandemic and have not been able to bounce back. The constant references to the pandemic in this report is a reflection of the severity of the impact of this event on the OFN cohort of young people.

The 12 ventures that Our Future Now invests in are best placed to support this group of young people. I hope this report demonstrates their understanding of the needs of young people, their effectiveness in working alongside them and their unstinting commitment to them.

We know that with access to the right support young people can change the trajectory of their lives. We can help them to equip themselves with the resilience and skills required and open up better opportunities to succeed and live a happy and fulfilled life.

Our Future Now is a 10 year commitment to Scotland's young people. Now in its fifth year of operation, it is continuing to prove its effectiveness in changing the life chances for young people but also as long term investment model which delivers results. Our multi-investor model ensures that every £1 invested goes on to leverage £4 across the Fund.

Thank you for your commitment to young people in Scotland which is reflected in your investment in Inspiring Scotland. Along with the portfolio of ventures, we are deeply focused on the next five years and beyond of Our Future Now.

We know that with time and support, we can improve the life chances for these young people. Thank you for your support.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Celia Tennant'.

Celia Tennant
Chief Executive

The Impact of Covid-19

2022/23 began with a sense of relief that the worst of Covid-19 was over. However this was not the end of the problems for young people and the past year has arguably been the most challenging that the Our Future Now (OFN) portfolio has ever faced. The ventures reported that young people presented in circumstances far worse than anything that they had seen in their entire history of working in the field.

During 2022/23 the OFN portfolio worked with young people among the worst affected by the pandemic. Already living in some of the most challenging circumstances they are not able to 'bounce back' having missed out on two years of vital development. Young people who were 14 years old when the first restrictions were introduced, are now 17 years old but lacking the fundamental skills to transition to adulthood.

Disrupted and disengagement from education; limited access to nature and physical activity; reduced interaction with peers and the opportunities to form trusting and lasting relationships; freedom of choice and the opportunity to develop vital skills for life were lost. As a society we focus heavily on providing these opportunities which are recognised as a human right for children and young people.

Photo: credit to Street League





Photo: credit to Hot Chocolate Trust

In addition, a large proportion of young people experienced trauma in their home environment. Exposure to violence, mental and physical ill health; bereavement; poverty; caring responsibilities; poor nutrition; abuse and lack of nurture. Families were under acute pressure and young people were essentially stuck with no access to services or guidance out with the family unit.

“ We have seen increases in self-harm, suicidal ideation, and isolating or destructive behaviours, rooted in strained and broken relationships and a growing sense of lostness. ”

- Venture Leader

During this time when the majority of other services closed, the OFN ventures provided a lifeline. They maintained contact with young people by pivoting services online and using a range of ways to sustain relationships whilst adhering to restrictions. The portfolio has therefore been ideally placed to continue that support during 2022/23.

Despite these challenges, the OFN portfolio is proving that with skilled staff, commitment, and by building trusted relationships with young people, recovery is possible. **Venture staff have focused on ensuring that the negative impact of the previous two years is minimised.** This is reflected in the following summary of performance for the year and gives hope for the future.

2022/23 Key data



£13.1m combined investment



12 ventures



4,292 young people supported



29,329 soft outcomes achieved



10,331 progression milestones achieved



77% of young people (3,311 young people in total) progressed to work, education, training or volunteering

Portfolio performance 2022/23

The OFN portfolio has risen to the unprecedented challenges of the past year and achieved a remarkable impact on the lives of the most disadvantaged young people in Scotland.

The system of young people being referred to the portfolio was de-constructed during the pandemic years and has not fully recovered. Ventures have developed their own ways of finding and engaging young people who were more isolated and withdrawn than ever before. This is taking additional time and resource but is possible through their community networks, skills, and commitment.

4,292 young people were engaged and supported

29,329 soft outcomes (which are shown below) were achieved by young people

The portfolio has focused on developing fundamental skills (measured in soft outcomes) to address the gaps in development through loss of vital opportunities. Ventures report that young people's soft skills were lagging two years behind their chronological age.



Resilience



Self-belief



Aspiration



Responsibility



Motivation



Wellbeing

“Meeting the challenges young people face requires skilled, holistic support, building trust and collaborating both with the young people themselves and with other services. At the same time as the demands have risen, available funding for the sector has shrunk and become highly unpredictable putting immense stress on the organisations who could make a difference.”

- Venture Leader

**10,331
progression
milestones
achieved**

Once their fundamental skills have been developed, young people are supported to undertake work/skills-based activities that are tangible steps towards employment, training or further education. Once achieved, these are recorded as progression milestones.

77% of young people supported achieved a positive destination in the year. Many of the young people who have not yet achieved a positive destination are continuing to receive support by Our Future Now ventures.

**3,311 young people
successfully progressed into
a positive destination - 77%**

Photo: credit to Enable



Young people disengaging from education

Ventures have reported throughout the year that more young people are disengaged from education than ever before. The Department for Education in England states that absences in the Spring term of 2023 were still 50% higher than before the pandemic. Given the feedback from our ventures, we believe it is likely to be the case in Scotland too, but the data is not available. ¹

66% of young people supported through OFN disengaged from school before 16 years old

The importance of young people remaining engaged in education at least until the statutory leaving age cannot be overstated. Premature disengagement results in lack of qualifications and can have long term consequences.

“*We are working with a number of young people in S3 who have not engaged with secondary school at all. Several factors are at play - for some, it is the physical environment, large, noisy, crowded places that create an anxiety response. For others, it is the social aspect - being around and interacting with peers - that presents the barrier. Missed education due to online learning, which presented many with a variety of challenges, has resulted in young people falling behind in their work, creating a loss of confidence in their academic abilities.*”

- Venture Leader

The OFN portfolio has a strong track record in working with young people to support them to remain engaged with school in some capacity and to undertake qualifications within or out with the school environment.

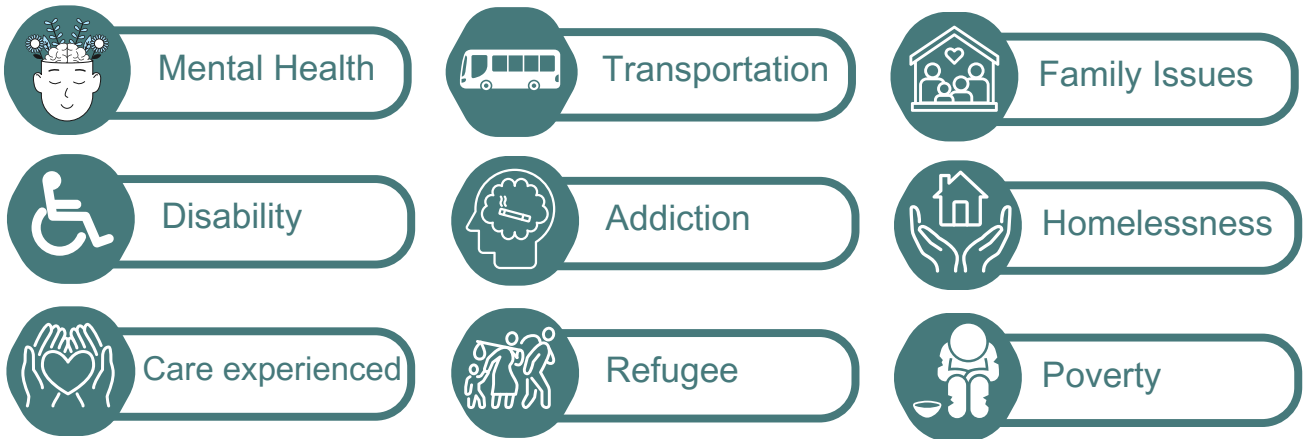
The OFN portfolio supported young people to achieve 2,996 qualifications

In response to the issues around reduced attendance and attainment, OFN is focusing on early intervention as a key feature of the fund. Pro-actively targeting young people from 14 years who have disengaged from education will allow them to be supported to re-engage with school or an alternative learning environment. This will avoid a delay in offering support at school leaving age (16 years old) when it is often too late and they are at greater risk of being lost in the system completely.

1. Department for Education, 2023

The breadth and depth of the challenges young people face

A sample of the wide range of challenges faced by young people supported through OFN is shown below. Young people typically experience multiple challenges. However, poor mental health is the most commonly cited and by a significant margin.



The cost of living crisis has exacerbated existing inequalities, with low-income families being disproportionately affected, creating additional pressure on young people and families. 59% of young people supported through OFN live in the most deprived areas of Scotland (as per the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation).

The compound impact of the pandemic and the cost of living crisis, particularly on young people that were already disadvantaged, has resulted in an exponential rise in mental health issues among young people. Mental wellbeing is a priority for the OFN portfolio and is becoming a key feature of the support provided to young people.

It is widely accepted that the situation over the past few years has had a significant negative affect on young people's mental health with some studies reporting that one in six young people are likely to have a mental health condition and that this is an increase of 50% in the last three years.

For young people supported through OFN, the impact is likely to be even greater, with more than 1 in 3 of our young people disclosing a mental health issue to our ventures.

It is only through the trusted, consistent relationship that OFN venture staff form with young people that they will disclose the challenges that they are experiencing. This is often sensitive, personal information but can help build an understanding that can inform the nature of the support that is required.

The portfolio has been delivering a whole new phase of support to young people at the point of engagement which was not required previously. There is now a need for more one to one, wrap around support before a young person can begin to look forward. This support is focused on:

- Re-building young people's confidence to leave their home/local area.
- Training to travel independently.
- Developing their ability to communicate.
- Improving their reliability and seeing through commitments.
- Developing a healthy routine – sleep pattern, diet, getting outdoors and being active.
- Offering support to the wider family.
- Crisis interventions – ensuring safe housing, food, financial advice.

It is only once this ground work, over several months, has been carried out that young people can begin to plan for their future and set goals.

“We are supporting an increasing number of young people struggling with anxiety and depression and even more young people with additional support needs. Building trusting relationships with each individual is taking longer. In their everyday lives, young people are facing crisis, setbacks, low mood, bad days and ill health - all of this disrupts progress and causes delay in reaching final destinations. ”

- Venture Leader

Using data to improve outcomes for young people

We are committed to developing our data systems to gain deeper insights into the reality of the lives of the young people supported through OFN. We have done this through the creation of The Matrix. An ambitious and challenging project which we have designed using our knowledge and experience to bring insight and inform action which will help more young people on their journey to reach and sustain a positive destination.

The Matrix is a performance management tool which enables ventures to see where their programmes are working, where they need to be improved, and where they should be changing direction to achieve greater impact. This results in improved performance and reduced costs. Ventures can quickly respond and adapt to the changing environment in real time. This helps them to build successful and innovative programmes which delivers the best possible outcome for young people.

This has been an ambitious undertaking but central to our commitment to continuous improvement and ensuring that we are responding to the evolving needs of young people as they emerge. We are pleased with progress at the midpoint of the fund (year five) and look forward to using the insights that The Matrix provides to maximise the impact of OFN during the remaining years of the fund.



David's story

David is 17 years old and has lived between his home with his mum and his grandmother's house since a very young age. This unofficial kinship care situation has caused conflict within the family. David has had addiction issues with alcohol and substance misuse for a number of years but with support, has developed some coping mechanisms. Through counselling, he has come to understand that his behaviours are the result of childhood trauma including witnessing domestic violence, parental addiction, lack of peer socialisation and education as he disengaged from school at the age of 13.

David faces additional barriers as a result of living in a rural village. There is a lack of opportunities locally and travel is expensive. It is a 2.5 hour round trip to bigger towns on public transport. David also has a criminal record with 3 spent convictions for theft, however he feels that this was something that he had to do as he would take food from the local shop in order to have a meal. Most recently David's younger siblings were taken into the care of the local authority. He has found this difficult and is experiencing loneliness. However, he feels that they will have better life chances now. The pandemic has made David's already difficult life circumstances even worse.

David saw a flyer and contacted the OFN venture which was targeting young people in rural areas with little or no services. An initial meeting took place and David was supported to begin addressing the multiple complex barriers that were preventing him from progressing. Over a period of several months, David was supported to:

- Gain ID and open a bank account
- Build his confidence
- Obtain a travel card
- Develop positive peer relations
- Learn conflict resolution skills
- Participate in discussions with Social Work around access to his siblings
- Complete accredited training
- Achieve an SQA Level 4 Wellbeing Award, Manual Handling and Health & Safety Certificates
- Make an application to college
- Attend open days
- Attend interviews
- Navigate the process for a bursary

David required intensive, personalised support to overcome the significant challenges that he faced, despite only being 17 years old. As a result, he has secured an unconditional offer of a College place.

David's life has been transformed and although he will require ongoing support, he has increased his resilience and is able to contact his Key Worker to talk situations through that he would have previously left until crisis point before seeking support.

David said: *"I am glad I called you, don't know what I would have done without this"*.

Our commitment

The damaging effects of the pandemic, the cost of living crisis, associated poverty and soaring mental health issues make the future ever more challenging for the young people OFN is supporting.

But the OFN portfolio is proving to be very effective in working with young people who would otherwise be at significant risk of disengaging in the long term. The model is flexible, and the Inspiring Scotland Fund Managers work with the ventures to ensure that OFN investment is put to best use and achieves the best possible outcomes for young people. The need for OFN has never been greater and the portfolio has adapted to respond to the new issues that are emerging for young people very effectively.

“The fallout of Covid-19 and the economic uncertainty we face has pushed our client group further to the bottom of the pile.”

- Venture Leader

Our ability to support young people will be crucial and as a result we are redoubling our fundraising efforts to ramp up support to prevent lifelong scarring of young people and to avoid a potentially lost generation. We know that with time and support, we can succeed. We know that the challenges will continue during 2023/24 and we will draw on our experience and expertise to continue to respond to the needs of young people OFN is here to support. We have a deep understanding of the existing problems facing young people and foresight of those that are emerging.

We believe in the potential of the young people that we support and are committed to enabling them to seek out and secure the opportunities that will undoubtedly arise in the post Covid-19 economy. Thank you for being with us and making such a difference to so many young people across Scotland.

“Whether our end goal is higher employment and a stronger economy, reducing what is becoming a costly physical and mental health crisis, or simply compassion for a generation increasingly in pain, we must recognise the need to invest in the opportunities to support young adults to build full and flourishing lives through which all of society will benefit.”

- Venture Leader

The OFN portfolio



“It does give me confidence, the fact that I know there's people there who genuinely do care about me instead of people who have to care about me.”

-Young Person, FARE

Inspiring Scotland

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