

Case Study: The Mark Scott Award

The Power of Volunteering

Young people approaching the end of school face increasing pressure, uncertainty and transition at a time when many also experience anxiety, low confidence or limited access to opportunities beyond their immediate community. These challenges are often felt most acutely by young people from areas of socio-economic disadvantage, or those whose backgrounds mean they have less access to informal networks or experiences that help build confidence and aspiration.

The Mark Scott Award was developed to respond to this challenge by bringing together young people from different socio-economic, cultural and religious backgrounds, supporting them to build relationships, connection with other young people, confidence and leadership skills. In 2024 to 2025, **145 young people** from **48 schools** across the central belt of Scotland took part, with **more than half living in the 30% most deprived SIMD areas of Scotland**. Twenty-six community projects benefitted from the young people's volunteering efforts.

Schools play a key role in identifying and encouraging young people to participate in the Award. Each school has a teacher as a dedicated Community Champion who recommend pupils who would benefit from additional confidence-building experiences, opportunities to meet new people, or exposure to opportunities beyond their school environment. Young people then choose whether to take part. Through this partnership with schools, the Award is able to reach young people who may not typically access leadership programmes or volunteering opportunities.



"It brought me closer to some people that have really helped me and benefitted my life, it has brought me some really secure relationships that I'm sure will last a lifetime, this has impacted my wellbeing so significantly it has given me someone to trust and turn to"

- Young person



About The Programme

The Mark Scott Award is a youth work led leadership and volunteering programme delivered in partnership with schools. It combines intensive outdoor learning with community-based action and reflection.

The Award begins with a five-day Outward Bound residential experience, where young people take part in physically and emotionally challenging activities such as expeditions, gorge scrambling and team problem-solving. These activities help young people build trust, confidence and resilience while forming strong bonds with peers from different schools and backgrounds.

Following the residential, participants return to their schools and continue to work in small groups to design and deliver a community project responding to a need they have identified in their area.

These projects have addressed issues such as:

- Tackling social isolation.
- Improving local environments.
- Supporting vulnerable community members.
- Delivering awareness-raising activities.

The programme also introduced formal accreditation in 2024–25, giving participants the opportunity to gain recognition for their learning through the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF). Young people could achieve either:

- SCQF Level 6 – Teams and Leaders Award, or
- SCQF Level 7 – Community Leadership Award

In its first year of delivery, **64% of participants achieved the SCQF Level 7 Community Leadership Award**, helping translate informal youth work learning into a recognised qualification valued by employers and higher education providers.



“After the success of the community project, I have become more compassionate for people overall.”

-Young person



The Power of Volunteering

Through this partnership approach, the programme reaches a wide range of young people and helps embed volunteering within their educational journey.

Importantly, young people themselves shape the volunteering projects they deliver, ensuring the work reflects issues they care about and the needs of their communities.

Youth Work in Action: Why This Approach Works

The success of the programme is rooted in its youth work approach, which combines experiential learning, developing new friendships and connections, reflection, social action and focusing on strengths rather than deficits.

Community projects and social action provide a tangible way for young people to make a difference to their communities.

Young people choose to take part in the programme, increasing ownership and motivation.

Relationship-based practice - Time spent together during the residential allows trust to develop between peers and youth workers and the development of new friendships.

Outdoor learning creates a shared experience where young people support each other to overcome challenges.

Structured reflection helps participants recognise their strengths.

"Before I was sort of, all on my own, like a solo worker. But now I feel that I could work in a group, and I feel more comfortable in a group environment."

-Young Person



"These young people have proven to themselves and to their community that they can be agents of positive change."

-Youth Worker



Impact

Using the National Youth Work Outcomes and Skills Framework, the 2024–25 evaluation found:

- **68%** report **a positive change in their aspirations**
- **60%** report **improved wellbeing**
- **67%** say they are **more likely to volunteer** in their community in the future
- **72%** felt **more confident** meeting new people.
- **83%** of young people reported **improvements in interpersonal skills**
- **61%** felt **more confident to support others** in a team

Young people consistently describe increased confidence in meeting new people, expressing their views and working as part of a team.

Community Impact

As part of the Award, **26 community projects were delivered** across Scotland. These projects addressed issues including:

- Social isolation and inclusion
- Environmental improvement
- Education, wellbeing and awareness-raising

Follow-up evaluation at 6, 18 and 30 months shows that the benefits of the Award are sustained well beyond completion. Participants continue to report improved confidence, stronger relationships and ongoing community involvement.

Many describe applying their learning in higher education, employment and volunteering, using the confidence and skills developed through the Award to navigate new environments and challenges.

"When the young people take part in their community projects, they become role models. Seeing the smiles on the faces of the community they are working with, restores your faith. The projects are highly valued and it's part of the young people's positive contribution to society."

-School Champion Teacher



"It has made me aware of so many things that go in that I didn't even know existed before; it has given me a new respect for so many members of my community."

-Participant 24/25



"We wanted to create something that would help people have the support they need to settle down in Scotland... we didn't have that kind of support when we first moved here, and it felt like being lost in a completely new place. So, we wanted to create something that would help people not be in the same situation."

-Young person



Conclusion

The Mark Scott Award demonstrates the power of a youth work approach at a key transition point in young people's lives. By combining volunteering and community contribution with connection and challenge, the programme enables young people to develop confidence, aspiration and a sense of belonging.

Rather than focusing on attainment alone, the Award invests in developing relationships, lived experience and social responsibility thus supporting young people to develop resilience, purpose and belief in their ability to make a difference.