

1 May, 2020

**Press Release: Ecologia Youth Trust is awarded more than £78,000 by Young Start to continue its youth-led community programme in the Highlands.**

Scottish charity, Ecologia Youth Trust, has been awarded more than £78,000 from Young Start, the grant programme from the National Lottery Community Fund, for its innovative youth-led Growing2gether In the Community programme. The two-year grant will empower up to 140 disadvantaged young people to research and deliver fourteen youth-led community projects in the Highlands. These projects will improve mental and emotional wellbeing and connect the young people to their community. In addition, this generous grant will give eight young people the opportunity to have paid roles as Young Leader facilitators on the Community projects, boosting their employment skills.

The young people who create and deliver these projects develop important work skills, commented Duncan Wilson, Community Partnership Officer for Growing2gether. "These projects enable young people to develop all the 'soft skills' that employers want, such as communications and teamwork skills. There is also an immense amount of creativity that comes from these projects." Our own research backs this up: More than 90% of young people believe that they have learnt valuable 'life skills', as a result of participating in the Growing2gether In the Community programme.

Previous projects have seen young people collaborating with Birchwood Highland service users to design tote bags with positive affirmations to promote mental wellbeing, as well young people writing a hard-hitting book on self-harm, which will be exhibited at the Scottish Mental Health Arts Festival this May.

Working in a small group of 8-10 participants, to design their own project helps disengaged young people collaborate in a team with peers and their community mentors, coached by facilitators who help them build their self-confidence and develop their strengths. "For our young people, this group is a shock. To be properly consulted, listened to and given free rein to create for their community is highly unusual," remarked Gordon, Stewart, Head Teacher at Charleston Academy. Adds Joshua Williamson, aged 15, Charleston Academy.



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"I decided to do the project again as I thoroughly enjoyed the last project and it gave me a sense of fulfilment as well as the opportunity to make friends, new and old. I would wholeheartedly recommend the programme. With the last project I learned so much about homelessness and how many people are affected by it. This time, I would like to make a bigger change in the community and I have high hopes for the new project."

### **Notes to the Editors:**

1. After Growing2gether, a programme where young people mentor children in a nursery to learn life skills, young people asked for the opportunity to create their own youth-led projects, based on the needs of their community. This led to the development in January 2019 of Growing2gether In the Community. To date, young people have delivered seven projects reaching more than 14,000 people and focusing on community issues such as mental health, homelessness, teenage pregnancy and drugs. All projects have included working in partnership with community organisations and charities such as Mikey's Line, Birchwood Highland and Ross-shire Women's Aid. 100% of young people said 'In the Community' helped them become more engaged in their community. We hope to start the new projects in September (depending on the Covid-19 crisis).
2. For further information about the Growing2gether In the Community Programme, please contact Community Partnerships Officer, Duncan Wilson on: [Duncan.Wilson@ecologia.org.uk](mailto:Duncan.Wilson@ecologia.org.uk)
3. Growing2gether and Growing2gether in the Community in Scotland are the main programmes of Ecologia Youth Trust since 2017. Founded in Scotland in 1995, Ecologia Youth Trust has worked internationally to give marginalised young people/children everything they need to thrive. This includes a decent education, the confidence/skills and resources to shape their own future and the family support vital to their health and wellbeing. We transform the lives of children affected by poverty, with poor family support and low social/emotional skills. We want all young people to realise their potential and to contribute to stronger communities
4. Young Start aims to create opportunities for Scotland's children and young people aged eight to 24 to help them realise their full potential. Young Start is a grants programme run by the Big Lottery Fund, which is distributing money from dormant bank accounts. Dormant accounts are deposits of money in bank and building society accounts where there has been no activity for 15 years or more.

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