

Intro: We are Addictions Support and Counselling (ASC) and we work with adults who have mental health and addiction problems. Our holistic approach to recovery aims to empower people to become active and contributing members of their communities. We do this through key activities including community and peer recovery projects such as Recovery Cafes and Recovery Olympics, education, training and employability and counselling. We currently work in Forth Valley and North Lanarkshire.

The problem: In Scotland, we are facing an ever-exacerbating mental health and addiction crisis due to the ongoing pandemic. Latest figures for the UK have shown that one fifth of people have reported experiencing mental health issues with one third feeling isolated. This is impacting on addictive behaviours with the British Liver Trust reporting a 500% rise in calls to its helpline since lockdown and a 20% increase in new adult cases accessing drug treatment services. At ASC, we are experiencing a surge in demand for our services, for example over 6,000 visits to our online Recovery Cafes March-September, compared with 5,000 visits for the entirety of 2019. This has been further compounded by a financial crisis impacting both education and entry level employment opportunities. The individuals and families we work with are one of the most stigmatized, excluded and disadvantaged in society with in the region of 85% of service users in Forth Valley being unemployed with no real pathway back into economic and social life, often due to their lack of self-confidence, fear of rejection, lack of qualifications and basic work skills.

Our solution: We believe the people we work with have huge potential to add social and economic benefit to their communities. This significant life change cannot be achieved without a specific and structured programme of learning and support to give them the foundation on which to build upon to make the transition into further education, volunteering and employment. For individuals who are at a more advanced stage in their recovery, we have been working collaboratively with Forth Valley College, testing approaches and initiatives to support the people we work with. Building on this, and in response to the massive challenges brought on by the pandemic – we are committed to providing further opportunities for positive change by extending and expanding the reach of our *Go Forth – Forth Valley College Course*. This innovative project enables our service users, many of whom would normally be unable or unready to access mainstream education within a college setting, to study alongside their peers and achieve formal qualifications, building self-esteem, confidence and unlocking their potential for life-long learning, many who then go onto higher education and employment, leaving behind a past of poor mental health, addiction and social isolation. The academic and support elements of the course have enabled participants to sustain and maintain their recovery, rebuild trust and family relationships, achieve qualifications (often for the first time). Some have moved on to start their own businesses, undertake university degrees, become addiction support workers and some become staff here at ASC as recovery coordinators.

We are grateful to our partner, Forth Valley College for contributing to the project through course delivery/teaching via the provision of teaching credits.

The dedicated Recovery Worker will work with an anticipated 48 students each year by providing key working sessions to support and address students mental health, wellbeing, alcohol and substance use and studying needs, to assist them with developing positive strategies and progressing their recovery plans. Our support worker will also work with employability providers, housing, social services and treatment services, enabling a package of support for students to work towards positive outcomes that will not only benefit them but also their families, local communities and wider society.

What is ASC's Go Forth – Forth Valley College Course 2021?

An 18-week course in an informal, welcoming non-further education setting, designed specifically for people in recovery from addiction and mental health issues, caused by or exacerbated by the pandemic.

For 2021 – we aim to quadruple our provision by working with 48 students and extend our reach to also serve people in Stirling for the first time, alongside Falkirk, with four intakes of 12 students.

Includes five accredited units and students can achieve certain Scottish Qualification Awards (SQA) including Scottish Higher Grades.

Also includes classes on questioning morality, health and wellbeing, developing communication skills, teambuilding, employability and IT.

Due to the nature of the challenges faced by the students such as stigma, low self-confidence, mental health problems combined with addictive behaviours – a key element is one to one and group key working support, this being central to the success of our outcomes:

70% will improve living conditions;
70% will improve mental health;
70% will improve physical health;
80% will improve social skills;
40% will improve employability skills;
70% will reduce harm and improve stability;
80% will reduce offending behaviours.

"See before I came here, I didn't want to come out of the house, I only came out when I had an appointment. That's all changed now, I'm doing well."

"After coming for a while, I'm seeing how this course helps me each day. My home life is easier, I'm not drinking and coping differently. It makes me want to keep going and gives me confidence."

Previous Go Forth participants.