

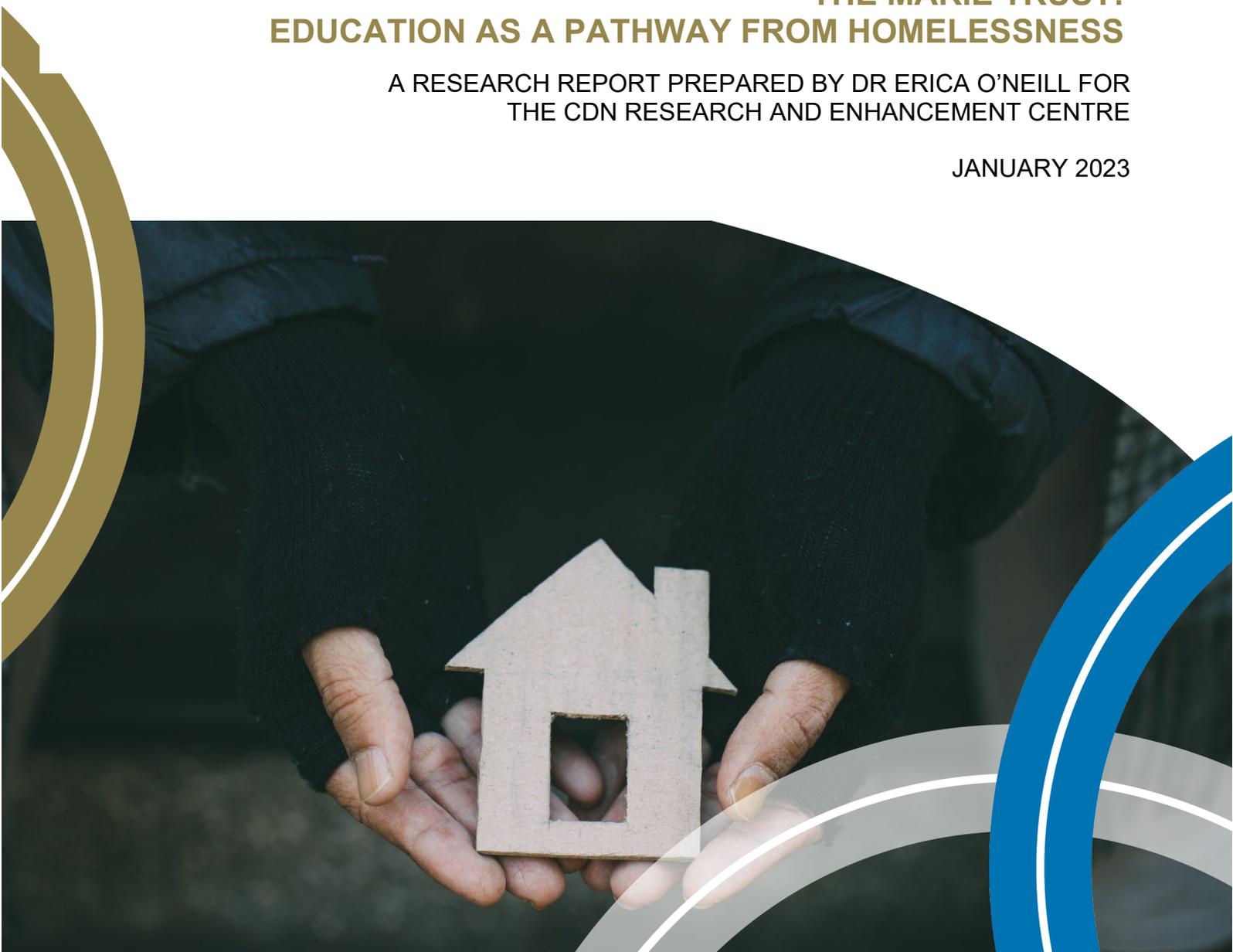


PATHWAYS FROM POVERTY CASE STUDY

THE MARIE TRUST: EDUCATION AS A PATHWAY FROM HOMELESSNESS

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Since 2009, The Marie Trust¹ in Glasgow has responded to the complex and often challenging needs of people in the local community who experience homelessness, addiction, poverty and social exclusion. In addition to providing crisis intervention, counselling, health and social care, The Marie Trust's College Education Programme aims to widen access to education and use learning as a pathway out of homelessness.

The Marie Trust College Education Programme is delivered in partnership with City of Glasgow College and Glasgow Kelvin College. As part of The Marie Trust's initiatives to support employability, recovery and rehabilitation, the education programme supports learners with complex issues, who have previously experienced barriers to education, to gain accredited qualifications in college. The Marie Trust's tutors deliver six to twelve-week non-accredited courses in psychology, sociology, first steps into education, literacy, ICT, core skills, and criminology on campus at Glasgow Kelvin College, a codelivery model with the college in the Access to Social Subjects programme where college lecturers deliver the accredited courses as part of the program with Marie Trust tutors.

The Marie Trust partnership with the City of Glasgow College Expressive Arts programme provides SCF level 5 and 6 courses in printing and arts to support learners to progress into HND levels in the college.

The programme also includes a core skills module, which enables learners to identify their level of literacy and numeracy. This allows the learner to build a profile of strengths and abilities and highlight areas where they may require additional support. The courses taught are benchmarked at SCQF levels 5 and 6 and there are no entry qualifications. On average six eight-week accredited courses are offered each year on a rolling basis. While the intention is for learners to progress from the Marie Trust College Education Programme to more advanced programmes in the mainstream college system, the rolling programme of courses enables learners to stay in education, providing them with the motivation and ability to keep learning.

The Marie Trust also provides non-accredited programmes in their Glasgow centre on Albion Street as a springboard to entering the college system, these include twilight art, SAIFE Project (gender-based violence women group) and photography classes.

The Marie Trust's College Education Programme is the only community adult education curriculum in Glasgow specifically designed to widen access to mainstream education for homeless people and those at risk of homelessness.

¹ <https://www.themarietrust.org/>

Impact factor: pathways from homelessness

The Marie Trust College Education Programme began as a traditional community education programme offering cooking classes and IT courses. When Frances McKinlay joined the Trust as Skills Development Coordinator in 2005, it was with the intention to grow the educational remit of the Trust and provide accredited courses for adults experiencing homelessness.

We started teaching people about homeless rights and housing options. Where to go to access support, how to overcome isolation. We delivered those as workshops to provide short taster courses and to trial the learning program when it was in pilot stage. Then we did an Open University course, 'Coping with Change'. The Open University allowed me to teach it as a taught course for 12 weeks, which was great using their materials. I signed up as a learner and they all signed up 12 learners with me, but they allowed me to teach it so it became practical and so people wouldn't drop off. Asking people who were living in hostels to be independent learners, that wasn't going to be achievable. We want people to access education and coping with change is really important. People have to think about that and plan or be prepared for change if they take that step. What we wanted most of all was to instil a passion for learning, planting the seed and showing people what they could do, let them surprise themselves by completing a course and gaining a qualification – sticking with it till the end.

Frances McKinlay, The Marie Trust

From this initial education programme, the programme's remit expanded to provide other opportunities for people experiencing complex issues who would not normally have the chance to access education. In doing this, the Trust developed new routes into community education and college for homeless people.

For people to get into college, it's not going to happen if they don't have the opportunity. At that point, the opportunity for people in community education, it was not great. The community provision that was offered at that time was very low level, and we knew that we were teaching subjects that nobody else was teaching. And people were achieving really well, and we were sustaining education and there was nothing like that about. And also, the provision offered by colleges at that point was very low level academically for people, and there was a lot of the same stuff happening everywhere. And it wasn't what I wanted to do, we could see aspirations and set about to develop a curriculum which meant something to the people we support and would get them into further education (if that's what they wanted) but also helped them develop their sense of self and not be identified or stigmatised by their experiences. Identify was so important, and still is in how people see themselves. being taught in the college, having a student card and using college facilities the same way in which you and I would if we were a student broke down so many barriers for people.

Frances McKinlay, The Marie Trust

In collaboration with the learners studying on The Marie Trust's programme, Frances introduced tailored courses for adults who wanted to use education to transform their lives and find a pathway out of the difficult situations they were experiencing.

Talking to people and having the conversations we were having with people; we knew that they were much more able. People don't want the same. They don't want the same old stuff that's always happening either. And to be honest, literacy and those other courses that we were delivering at that time would not have moved anybody away from a homeless environment. And I don't think we were brave in any way with the subjects we were teaching. I just felt strongly that it wasn't right. I've tried sociology, I've delivered it, I've delivered history classes, and we know that people engaged in it. It's something different, it gets them out of that homelessness headspace, people were living in homelessness hostels. It gives people something different, something to look forward to, discussing, debating and having different conversations out of their norm, that they could come and learn and feel good about themselves.

Frances McKinlay, The Marie Trust

The Marie Trust understands that education is a pathway from homelessness, and that it's important to differentiate between stages of the learner's journey: from a place of crisis to stability in education. The Trust aims to create a positive and stable environment for someone to move to another stage of their rehabilitation journey. Therefore, the educational programmes offered at the premises on Albion Street (previously Midland St) are separated from the crisis intervention services.

If you're working in education, you want to move them away in a different journey because they're in a different stage in their life. People have to be abstinent from drugs or alcohol when they're involved in education. But somebody could be very early in their recovery and still come onto the programme because they're not using, that's absolutely fine. It's about catching them and keeping that structure going so it helps their recovery as well. Every evaluation we've done for the courses people have said it's improved their mental health, the structure really improves it, it reduces people's offending behaviour. Helping people in their recovery. People have sustained recovery because they're in education.

Frances McKinlay, The Marie Trust

Frances recognises not only the educational attainment potential, but the personal and social growth experienced by learners. Education positively impacts the life of that individual, enabling them to change the trajectory of their life journey.

Impact factor: social justice

It is crucial to The Marie Trust that the choice of subjects studied on the educational programme is complementary to the experience of the learners they support.

We're working with a lot of people that have come through the social justice system. So, should we not teach criminology, should we not talk about the victims of crime about perpetrators, about the effect it has on the community? You're just shying away from the subject and you're also undermining people's ability to be able to reason and understand about rehabilitation. That should be open for everybody. You're attacking equality and discrimination by teaching things like this so that people can think. We'd not done that before. So even through the mental health courses, we'd pick subjects, you might talk about Alzheimer's, you might teach about schizophrenia, or OCD as well, and people were saying, 'we didn't realise that was a mental health issue'. So, we were teaching people. Just trying to expand people's point of view, but also tackling discrimination as well especially when we're talking about race. With a lot of the courses, we're teaching people a subject and the theories of this, but we're aiming for the impact to be wider than that.

Frances McKinlay, The Marie Trust

The embedded nature of education and social justice is crucial to the success of the Trust's education programme. Encouraging people who have experienced complex and difficult situations to talk about their life journey fosters growth in the individual. When learners reflect on their life experience in an educational environment, they develop self-awareness, and a new set of educational skills, opening opportunities for further growth.

Success factor: partnership

Realising that there was a lack of accredited learning modules provided by community education programmes, Frances McKinlay aimed to create an accredited educational programme in partnership with local colleges in Glasgow for learners who have experienced homelessness. From providing these courses which will be delivered at the Marie Trust, the programme expanded to college delivery. In partnership with Glasgow Kelvin College and City of Glasgow College. Frances was able to continue the positive trajectory of The Marie Trust's learners. For Frances, it's about making the learners aware that there is another path to follow. Once learners progress to mainstream college programmes the benefits continue.

What we've seen about people that go into the mainstream college is that they use our other services less because the support's happening at college and they're not coming here. It means they're moving away. When we're moving you into college, we're moving you away from homelessness. They build up better social circles, new friends and are able to start that building of self-esteem. So, they're not coming back all the time, they're not always in crisis. We want to keep that support going while they're there [in that difficult place] until they move away.

Frances McKinlay, The Marie Trust

It is crucial for the Marie Trust that their learners are not separated from the mainstream college system, and learners receive the same access to college facilities as other college students, including a student card, library access, and student services. Enrolling in college programmes gives learners an opportunity to re-establish themselves in an environment where they're treated in the same way as any other student, without any discrimination.

I don't think our client group's any different from any other in the college. They're anonymous, they're able to wander round the college like everybody else and use the facilities. You're a student, in every sense of the word of being a student. You're not somebody who's in homeless accommodation [...] It's someone's current accommodation status but it doesn't define you as a person. That's what's really, important. It's been really good to be able to work with the colleges who are able to see that. And see that education needs to happen in the college environment.

Frances McKinlay, The Marie Trust

The Marie Trust's staff handle the enrolment and other administrative processes for learners on site at the Marie Trust and in the colleges. By welcoming learners to the college, The Marie Trust assists in overcoming barriers to institutional education. Furthermore, The Marie Trust's staff were provided office space at Glasgow Kelvin College's East End campus pre pandemic for the delivery of the program there. This enabled a smoother transition for the Trust's learners to progress to Glasgow Kelvin College programmes, but also has widened the reach of the Trust to other learners. The embedded nature of relationship between the Trust and Glasgow Kelvin College has enabled learners studying on mainstream college programmes who are at risk of homelessness, or who become homeless during their college studies, to access external support from the homeless charity.

Sometimes in the staffroom you'd overhear someone talking about homelessness, and we'd be able to help them with that. It ended up we were getting referrals for students who were at risk of homelessness or just became homeless, someone they were really concerned about, so we were getting referrals internally from the college for people who wouldn't normally be our learner, who hadn't come through our route and that was really good. It meant that we had a bigger impact in the college. We could definitely see the need for the service to be there and to support homelessness within learning support in the college.

Frances McKinlay, The Marie Trust

This unexpected positive impact results from the close partnership between The Marie Trust and Glasgow Kelvin College staff. The benefits are reciprocal. The integrated relationship enables the college to provide additional support to their at-risk learners and allows The Marie Trust to expand their provision of support for people at risk of homeless in Scotland.

Success factor: ongoing support

The goal of The Marie Trust College Education Programme is to encourage learners to progress on to mainstream college programmes. After completing the programme, many learners progress to higher education or employment, but The Marie Trust continues to provide advice and guidance to learners beyond their time with the Trust.

We had a man who did an SVQ and was going on to do an HNC in social care and he phoned and said: 'do you remember me? I did all my courses with you. I then went into a job'. He's working as a support worker at an organisation in Glasgow. But he needed some help with SAAS. Being able to give that kind of support and link him in with the college is important to us. The support's always there. It's about making sure we're catching people before they fall. And even if it doesn't work out or there's a break, it's about helping people get back on track.

Frances McKinlay, The Marie Trust

The ongoing support provided by The Marie Trust staff means that no learner is left behind when they need support. With the dedication, commitment and care of The Marie Trust staff, one learner's extraordinary journey has led them to The Glasgow School of Art to study a Degree in Sculpture and Environmental Art. The learner in question had experienced significant trauma before coming to Scotland over a decade ago.

When I came to Glasgow as an asylum seeker, I knew that I could not overcome both the negative effects of my experience in my country and the difficulties I would face here alone. I was like a stranger on a new planet and did not know how and from whom to get help and support. I had no plans or goals but just to survive and protect myself. I felt like I was in a dark tunnel and did not want to move. Even after starting psychological treatment, I still could not feel comfortable.

Anonymous learner

But The Marie Trust was there to support the learner, and eventually to help them to enter the education system. But it was a considerable struggle at first. With the Trust's staff, the boundaries to education and integrating in social life were overcome.

I was confused when I met Frances [McKinlay] to join the art class at The Marie Trust. Because new places and people I do not know always mean anxiety and potential danger for me. My feeling was like going there first and see if I would feel comfortable or not. I mean I was ready to leave if I would not feel ok. For a few months, I have observed the other course users, staff and especially The Marie Trust art teacher, Noreen. I tried to understand what was going there and to make sense of why I was there. My first impression was very positive and relieved me. Although it took me a long time to socialize, I could feel that it was a safe place for me. I can say that my confidence improved a lot and I got to know the people. Staff and my course fellows were so nice and friendly. I would like to point out Noreen's contributions and encouragement in my development

and achievements in art. But above all, I am really happy to have met such a wonderful person like her.

Anonymous learner

Becoming comfortable with the learning environment enabled the learner to consider other possibilities for life after trauma and homelessness.

I think the impact The Marie Trust had on me that I could never expect is about my art experience. Although I loved and had an interest in art, I have not had a serious goal or plan for it. Being there and feeling safe was more than enough for me. Just like my starting there, my journey there developed spontaneously too. The place, where I went to just relax and keep my mind busy, became a place I have learned a lot, developed my skills, and been inspired by the work of my course fellows. Of course, our course teacher, Noreen, has had a big part in all this. I think meeting Susan and working with her alongside Noreen helped me expand my knowledge and experience new techniques and materials in art. I could feel like I was getting more and more into art. Since Susan is a lecturer at the City of Glasgow College, we started to do printmaking classes there and this allowed me to see the college environment.

Anonymous learner

This initial college experience led the learner to enrol on a HNC in contemporary art practice at City of Glasgow College. And while this was a significant change in the learner's experience, The Marie Trust staff were always available to help and support the learner to stay in college. To support this transition, the learner initially studied the HNC part time, and continued their connection with the Trust:

With the encouragement of Susan, Noreen and Frances I was persuaded to apply to City of Glasgow College for HNC fine art. I was told that I did not have to leave The Marie Trust and I could attend Noreen's class whenever I want. I also got help from Frances when I had a hard time at college. So, I have done both of the courses together. It was really great chance to have a space there during my part time college courses. Because they provided me with materials, a space to discuss, develop and work on my projects.

Anonymous learner

The college further expanded this learner's abilities, and they entered the mainstream college system to complete a HND in contemporary art practice. And with further coaching and guidance, they are now studying at degree level at The Glasgow School of Art.

To be honest, I did not have an expectation and a feeling to study. Because I was quite confused about the pandemic. Somehow, I have been offered a space by the GSA for sculpture and environmental art. I could not even imagine something like that. It was a long and interesting journey and now, I will try my best to get to another point. In this extraordinary journey, I am quite aware of how things have changed for me. I know I would not have been able to achieve

this if I had not met The Marie Trust and the wonderful people there. This is why I like Glasgow... as it's said: "People Make Glasgow"

Anonymous learner

This learner is one of many who have transformed their lives through education with the support of The Marie Trust. Belief in people's ability to attain in formal education is the heartbeat of The Marie Trust staff, and with their tenacity, patience, and ongoing care, they are improving the lives of people in Scotland who have experienced complex and difficult situations.

Impact factor: raising aspirations

For many learners, The Marie Trust College Education Programme provides a fresh start in life, and the opportunity to advance their educational and employability potential. The benefit of the programme is the subjects taught. Learners experiencing homelessness may have very low educational aspirations.

What it does for people's expectations, and sometimes people's expectations are not very high. And we always say that we should never underestimate people's expectations, they've got the potential to do greater things. But if the opportunity's not there, they're not going to be able to achieve that. So, it's trying to break away that boundary by delivering psychology, sociology, criminology, counselling, mental health courses. They're subjects that we all know a bit about (but don't realise) because we live in society. So, for people that are excluded, it's very much so that they should be part of those courses and we should be offering those at an accredited level that people can join in. Start with a non-accredited level and people can work towards that, to be able to do that. I always say that cooking classes are great, and community IT, but they don't get people from the community into the college. There needs to be a far more integrated approach. And the colleges must be committed to that, you know, to be able to do that for people.

Frances McKinlay, The Marie Trust

Studying subjects such as psychology and criminology – established and regarded academic subjects – positively impacts motivation, and self-esteem and raises educational attainment aspirations.

We had a man come to see us, it was his first time in education, he'd been involved in addiction all his life and he'd had a really traumatic life but he came in – he was doing the psychology class – and what he was saying was: 'nobody ever talks to me, people walk past me in the street, nobody gives me any value whatsoever, my family don't talk to me'. But studying psychology [changed that]. He was at a bus stop talking to a woman and telling her he was studying psychology, he was a student in college, and he was telling her all the things that he was learning about himself, just having a talk with people. He said that normally he wouldn't get into a conversation like that, but she was talking to him, and he said: 'I felt so proud being a student, I'm studying psychology'. It was a SCQF level 5 unit he was doing, a 12-week course, but it was massive

for him because it changed how he felt about himself, gave him a bit of identity, you know, whereas before he saw himself as being somebody who used drugs and he was in recovery and that stigma, he felt shame, he felt embarrassed about that and felt that [college] was something that he couldn't move towards, but when you're in the college you're the same as everyone else, your identity is unknown, you're a student the same as everyone else. Standing and talking to someone about him studying psychology it just made him feel so important and valued as well.

Frances McKinlay, The Marie Trust

Removing stigma about homelessness and addiction is key to the success of The Marie Trust programme. Raising the educational attainment aspiration for homeless people positively impacts the person's mental health, well-being, and self-esteem.

Barriers/Challenges

Frances McKinlay's initial intention to provide accredited education programmes for learners who have experienced homelessness, was initially received with scepticism. It was felt that individuals who have experienced homelessness have lives that are potentially too chaotic to commit to formal education. With support from the National Lottery Community Fund, the programme was inaugurated in 2008 at what was then the Stow College campus. After a successful roll out of the programme. Since the college mergers of 2014, Glasgow Kelvin College and City of Glasgow College have been running the programme with The Marie Trust.

I initially approached Stow and said I've got two years of evidence, we know that people who are homeless can achieve far more, we need to help them move away from the environment they're in, they need to be in a college environment. They came and delivered sociology for us. And we started teaching alongside them and it was great, it just felt like the right place for us to be.

Frances McKinlay, The Marie Trust

By overcoming challenges to get the college education programme up and running, Frances and the Marie Trust staff are changing the remit of community educational and college education for disadvantaged learners in Scotland.

Moving forward

The Marie Trust intends to continue to grow their educational programme. It is hoped that, upon seeing the success of the programme at Glasgow Kelvin College and City of Glasgow College, other colleges may be inspired to participate. Through hard work, dedication and belief, Frances and the Trust have demonstrated the learning capacity of people who have experienced homelessness and disruption in their lives. By showing optimism in what this group of learners can achieve, and now with the data to prove it can be done, The Marie Trust is enhancing the learning, employment, and life experience of people who have experienced homelessness.

Note of Thanks

The Marie Trust would like to thank the partnerships with the City of Glasgow College and Glasgow Kelvin College for their tremendous support in widening access to education. Without these partnerships, we would not have been able to have developed the program so extensively.

Glasgow Kelvin College - Maggie Murphy, Craig Green and Alan Sherry for believing in the programme, and the wider support staff – too many to mention but they have all been brilliant!

City of Glasgow College – Eddie Carr, Susan Bryson, Lisa McGovern, and Nicola McTaggart – utterly amazing!

The Marie Trust would also like to thank their own brilliant team and Lynn Rae, who has been instrumental in the delivery of social subjects.

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