

I WASNAE  
EXPECTIN'  
THAT  
STORIES OF  
the **GK** experience



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# Introduction

theGKexperience is an organisation that works with young people in some of the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods in Scotland, using a model of locally based youth work and outdoor residentials. 'I Wasnae Expectin' That' brings together the stories of some of the young people involved with theGKexperience, and is based on the knowledge that every young person has a perspective that is worth hearing. The challenge on the part of others, whether reader, researcher, or youth worker, is that they should listen well.

'I Wasnae Expectin' That' brings together different elements to enable readers to get the most out of engaging with the crucial part – the stories of the young people, told in their own words. These stories take the form of interviews, which were conducted informally by two researchers between August and December 2013, in locations the young people were familiar with. The interviews vary in length, and respond to what the young people were most interested in speaking about, whilst largely being focused around their experiences on theGKexperience residentials and life in their communities. The young people also chose pseudonyms to be known as for the purpose of the stories appearing in print. More details and reflections on the process of the interviews are given in the concluding section of this booklet. Some of these stories also feature alongside them 'I AM' poems, written as creative explorations of their identity, by the young people on Arts Residential in Summer 2013.

In addition to these stories, 'I Wasnae Expectin' That' features community profiles from three of the areas that theGKexperience works in. Using statistical information, these provide a picture of these communities and outline some of the prevalent issues that the young people live with and respond to.

'I Wasnae Expectin' That' also provides introductions to various aspects of theGKexperience, which act as a guide to some of the features that the young people speak about in their interviews, from the locations and types of residentials, to the young leaders programme.

The emerging themes section draws out some of the key insights shared by the young people, namely: community life; residential experiences; making changes; belonging and making a difference; and developing resilience.

The title – 'I Wasnae Expectin' That' – emerged as a recurring experience for many of the young people, as well as the leaders, volunteers and researchers involved in theGKexperience. The young people are often surprised at encountering experiences of natural beauty and community on residential, or by their own capacities for developing relationships, for trying new things, and for supporting other young people. Some have been surprised about what they have learnt about themselves and how much they have developed as they look back and tell their stories. For the staff and researchers involved in this project, there was uncertainty about how the young people would respond to being interviewed, yet almost always there was unanticipated humour, openness, and insight in these encounters.

Others reading this resource may be surprised about what the young people choose to say about themselves, or at the skills and resilience these young people possess. Readers may not expect that the neighbourhoods represented, whilst facing challenges are also places of deep belonging and community, with incredible gifts – such as these young people. There are many sources in our society that shape our expectations of young people, and their expectations of themselves. That 'I Wasnae Expectin' That' can become an often used phrase indicates the importance, and the power, of listening to the stories the young people tell about themselves, and the ongoing work of theGKexperience in developing these stories.

Being interviewed, being willing to tell 'your story' is a brave thing to do; nervous fingers tap at the edge of chairs, or trace round the rim of a glass; there are worries about saying too much or too little; or that something might open up a well of emotion. Yet, without fail, each of the young people who took part were not only willing to share their thoughts and experiences, but were willing to share the reality of who they are. Whether that was in the soft-spoken, thoughtful, straight to the point answers, or the funny, fast-paced responses, each of the young people were willing to let themselves be known as an individual. For this, the young people – known here as Frank, Thea, Harley, Dave, Chris, Kerry, Ringo, Becca, George, and John – are due a massive thank you, for their willingness not only to take part in telling their story, but for their presence in ways that are hopeful, honest, hilarious, and heart-stopping. The hope is that by reading this, you will get a chance to meet, even in a small way, some of the particular young people who make up the story of theGKexperience.







## Foreword

theGKexperience is a small and relatively new organisation but with a huge ambition – not for itself but for the people and communities it works alongside.

'I Wasnae Expectin' That' tells the story of some of the young people whose lives and aspirations are being broadened, deepened and measurably enhanced as they encounter theGKexperience.

There are many themes and stories that jump off the page as you read. Amongst the key ones are:

- **The resilience of the local community.** Like any group, the young people have different views of the neighbourhoods they come from – the good and the bad are shared openly. Overall, there is a sense that these places are home, which is not to deny the challenges. They run as a constant theme through people's stories. However, in an environment where people continue to talk primarily about what is wrong in our poorest neighbourhoods, the positive experiences of the young people (and their families) that we are working alongside stands as an important antidote.
- **The power of the residential.** The model which underpins the work of theGKexperience – working with young people over a sustained period of time in their local settings and then allowing the outdoor residential and wilderness experience to help them to soar – is affirmed through the young people's stories. Young people love the outdoor experience even if it is a bit scary. It helps them to bond, to trust and to thrive. You can almost feel the extra energy which arises as they share their experiences not just of trying out new things but experiencing community in a more profound way.
- **The brilliance of the young people.** A significant percentage of the young people who share their stories in this report could easily be dismissed as 'problems', 'no-hopers' or, at worst 'a waste of space.' And yet their stories articulate the very opposite. Here their strength, their potential, and their capacity to make a difference shine out of every page. That is not to say that there are no problems – of course there are. But it is surely time to celebrate their brilliance and to build upon that capacity.

theGKexperience wants the young people we work alongside to be Scotland's next generation of leaders. As I read 'I Wasnae Expectin' That' I can see that aspiration becoming reality.

A big thank you to those who helped to put this booklet together – to Clare Radford and Andy Whittet from Faith in Community Scotland and to our immense team of staff and volunteers at theGKexperience. A huge thank you is also due to the network of youth workers and volunteers in our local communities who show dedication and passion in developing long term relationships with young people, their families, and their communities. Deepest thanks go to the young people who tell their stories. Thank you for your passion, humour, commitment and for just being so loud and so hopeful!

Martin Johnstone  
Chair, theGKexperience





## theGKexperience: the story so far

theGKexperience has the huge privilege of working with some of the most incredible young people from Scotland's most disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Through its integrated model of locally based youth work and outdoor residentials, it offers such young people the chance to be part of shaping superb experiences of community, and a context which builds long term, supportive relationships, encourages growth and change, fosters leadership and develops resilience.

Locally based youth work is existing and established youth work run by community projects and faith organisations, and takes place in the communities we seek to work in, taking different forms in each context. It takes place through theGKexperience's established networks of youth workers and youth work projects in the poorest areas of Scotland, and offers bespoke, specialist support to existing youth work. Experienced volunteers support an individual young person or small group of young people who struggle in wider youth work settings due to behavioural difficulties. Where suitable, these young people will be encouraged to take part in the residential programme, where they will join with other young people from similar communities for an experience of community living and self-development. This residential is an opportunity for the young person to engage in healthier patterns, which will be supported by long term relationships with other young people, volunteers and staff in the context to which they return. Young people have the opportunity to return frequently to residential experiences to continue building on their self-development.

Residential experiences model community living, and use the arts, cookery, development of life skills and issue-based working, as well as traditional outward-bound activities. The Glen Kin Centre near Dunoon, Argyll is the primary base for the residential activities. Camas, on Mull, is run by the Iona Community, who we partner with to offer a more isolated residential experience for the young people. Additional locations are used for residentials, including running an 'Expedition' type residential, with walking, sailing, and camping. The 'Arts Residential' offers the opportunity to try different creative expressions, from film-making, music, dance, photography, graffiti, and poetry. Solas is a Christian Arts festival where some of the young team volunteer. theGKexperience also uses regulated providers for licensed outdoor designed activities, such as high ropes courses and gorge walking. Each of theGKexperience residentials are bespoke, designed to support and develop the specific group of young people attending.

The Young Leaders are between the ages of 16 and 21 and volunteer with theGKexperience on residentials, in local settings, and with the administration and running of the organisation. They receive supervision and support from theGKexperience, and bring energy, enthusiasm and a diverse range of skills and insight to the organisation.







## Community Profiles

Developing community profiles is a useful way of creating a picture of any community using statistics and information. There is a wealth of information out there and by pulling it together into a community profile it can tell you a lot about your community: who is there? what is there? and what are the main issues? These issues might be unique to that particular community or may be common across different areas. You can gather information for almost anything ranging from population to income levels or from health issues to education. In fact, name a social issue and there will most likely be a statistic out there for it. What statistics do not tell us however, are the stories, the anecdotes, and the knowledge that each person living in the communities have.

There is a face behind every statistic and an individual who has thoughts, feelings, ideas and concerns. Not to mention families and relationships. In one way or another we are all statistics but we all have a story that is much more than just a number. An often-used quote attributed to Albert Einstein states: “not everything that can be counted, counts, and not everything that counts can be counted”. This is true of community profiles and what has been discovered during the research for ‘I Wasnae Expectin’ That’. Facts and figures go a long way to outline some of the concerns in our most deprived communities but how do you measure or count the resilience shown by young people in the challenges they face; or the leadership of young people and the respect they command of other young people; or the long-term relationships built on trust and mutual respect; or the uniqueness of every young person in our most disadvantaged communities? As useful as community profiles are, it is in these factors that they must also be considered.

Over the page you will find three community profiles for the Glasgow communities of Ruchazie, Blackhill and Milton - three areas that theGKexperience has been greatly involved with. theGKexperience works alongside young people in the most deprived communities, which is why each of these three communities are found within the most deprived 5% communities in Scotland. The majority of young people who engage with theGKexperience are from the most deprived 5 or 10% in Scotland. It is within these communities that levels of poverty are highest and social issues such as income poverty, crime, territorialism, and drugs and alcohol misuse tend to be higher than the Scottish average. Through reading the profiles you will see that it can also be where gang violence can be found and where prisoner population tends to be highest. Importantly these statistics you will read are not meant to be used in isolation but to accompany the stories by those who live there. It is only then that a clearer picture of community can be made.

“I think that if you were to ask the majority of parents if they would like to bring their kids up here they would say that they wouldn't like to bring their kids up here, but I would like to bring my kids up in here if you know what I mean. ...the good thing is that there's loads of kids, and they all know each other.”  
(T, Milton)

The statistics are not intended to shock or paint a bleak picture of community life in these areas. Instead they are intended to outline some of the issues prevalent in some of the most disadvantaged communities and to highlight some of the inequalities that exist in Scotland today. What is important to remember is that each statistic has causes and effects. When reading the community profiles think about what the impact each statistic has on the local community and on young people in particular growing up there. What are the implications for young people? It is by asking those questions that we can begin to appreciate some of the struggles that young people experience but also help us to see why young people in our most disadvantaged communities are amongst the most resilient, awe-inspiring and thought provoking members of our society.



# Ruchazie

“I have this theory like...see the East end...it has community...if one family breaks down, then all the other families are there to support them, but see like if you are someone in the West end...if one community breaks down...there's no community...nobody's there to help you, except your own family. I'd love to move away from the East end, but deep down, I don't because I love the sense of community, people are always there for you. So no matter what it looks like, what the people in it are like, you know deep down that they are always gonna be there for you, and support you, cos they know where you're coming from.”

As a community, Ruchazie is an exciting place for any youth worker to be part of. Not too many communities in Scotland can boast having 20% of the population under the age of 16. One third of this 20% is aged between 10 and 15. Like young people in communities everywhere, the young people of Ruchazie face a number of challenges growing up. Issues such as income deprivation – sitting at 42% of the population of Ruchazie being income deprived – and alcohol related hospitalizations – which is double the national average – are just some of the challenges facing the community as a whole.

Through the young people's stories, and external reports, violence and territorialism emerge as one of these issues. Recently Ruchazie was highlighted as one of six “problematic gang fight locations” in a report by the Glasgow Community Safety Partnership. Gang membership comprises of usually 13-17 year olds with territorialism and rivalry still existing. Statistics show that there are over 100 youth gangs with approximately 2,000 gang members currently active in the Glasgow area with behaviour ranging from hanging around street corners to violence and organised criminal activity.

The prisoner population of Ruchazie continues to be around 3 times higher than the Scottish average whilst the number of patients being hospitalised after an assault in Ruchazie is 4 times higher. The year 2011-2012 saw Strathclyde Police record 649 domestic violence incidents in the council ward where Ruchazie is found.

In Ruchazie there are also issues for young people around education and employment. Secondary school attendance is much lower than the Scottish average whilst 30% of the working age population are deprived of employment. Approximately 87% of the population in Ruchazie are dependent on out of work benefits or child tax credits compared to 47% nationally, and it is argued that this is the best indicator of child poverty in Scotland. Current levels of child poverty in the Glasgow North East Ward where Ruchazie is located stands at 38%.

theGKexperience exists to work in some of the most disadvantaged communities to offer opportunities and new experiences to young people. Through working closely with the Church of Scotland which has a strong presence in the community, which itself is found within the most deprived 5% areas in Scotland, it allows us to identify struggles and issues that young people are experiencing.



# Blackhill

“I'd like it to be a happy place...where all the streets are clean...and all the parks are lovely”

Blackhill is a community in North East Glasgow that although unique in some regards also shares a lot of similarities with many communities that the GKexperience works alongside. Poverty, poor health and lack of opportunity are some aspects of the community. With double the national rate of 16-24 year olds receiving job seekers allowance there are significant issues within the area in relation to young people and income. On average 35% of the total population in the community are income deprived - rising to 41% in some smaller areas. Unemployment is prevalent with a quarter of the working age population in the area being out of work.

Arguably one of the most significant issues involving young people in the area relates to the secondary school attendance rate, which at 85% is significantly lower than the Scottish average. Some studies have shown that a young person's failure to attend school can have an impact on their opportunities and life chances. It is within the area of opportunities and life chances that the GKexperience seeks to have an impact whilst working together with the youth group in the local Church of Scotland.

If you use the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation, a measure used by the Scottish Government to measure deprivation, it becomes clear that 65% of the population in Blackhill and Barmulloch East neighbourhood live within the most deprived 5% of communities in Scotland. Looking further it emerges that 82% live in the most deprived 15% communities.

Blackhill also has a significantly higher rate of patients being hospitalised after an assault which indicates that violence is an issue in the community. These hospitalisations are 4 times higher than the Scottish rate. The prisoner population also continues to be around 5 times higher than the Scottish average rate.

Early death, violence, alcohol and drugs as well as deprivation are all issues found within Blackhill where theGKexperience has been working with young people. Sadly these issues are not uncommon in many of the communities that theGKexperience seeks to work. What emerges from the stories of the young people though is a sense of community that despite the recognition of some struggles existing it is a place where people stick together.







## Milton

“To me home is like an open door, ‘cos it’s like my friends can be there as well, and my mum and dad and my other family, so it’s really just like a playpen full of family.”

Up at the north of Glasgow is the community of Milton where life expectancy for men is up to 10 years less on average than the Scottish national average. Ill health in the area, both physical and mental, often appears high when studies on Glasgow are made. In east of the area over 19% of patients have been prescribed drugs for anxiety or depression whilst illnesses such as diabetes, asthma, heart disease and cancer statistics remain significantly higher than the Scottish average for the whole of Milton.

Drugs and alcohol and the social issues that come with misuse are prevalent in Milton. In the east the rate of drug related hospitalisations is over three and a half times that of the rate for Scotland. In the west both alcohol and drugs related hospitalisations are over double the national rate.

Young people under the age of 16 make up 20% of the population in Milton. Child poverty figures for the council ward of Canal which covers Milton currently stands at 43%. Income and poverty are two social concerns that can be found in Milton where on average 84% are dependent on out of work benefits or child tax credits and approximately 42% of the population are income deprived, which rises to almost 50% in some areas of the scheme. As a result of low levels of income 45% of pupils in one of the local primary schools are eligible for free school meals.

Crime and violence in the form of assault in the area is highlighted by the fact that hospitalisations for assault in the area is three and a half times higher the national rate whilst the prisoner population of Milton east and west is over 4 times higher than that of Scotland’s average. Through talking to the young people and hearing their perspectives it emerged that issues of territorialism exists which has an impact on where some people can go and the activities they can engage with.

theGKexperience has worked very closely with the Church of Scotland in Milton and other organisations in the area to engage with young people who are more than just statistics but have experiences and insights that numbers simply cannot explain. The values of theGKexperience are centred on this: the recognition that each young person is full of potential no matter where they are from. We exist to help each of them realise and release that potential. Like one young person said; “the purpose of theGKexperience is to help and support young people in some of the tough things that are happening”.







## Young People

The next few pages feature the stories of some of the young people involved in theGKexperience, told in their own words. They are all young people who are involved in some way with youth work in their local communities, and, as a result of our links with their youth workers and projects, have become involved with our ongoing programme of residentials and locally based support work. All of them have been part of the work of theGKexperience over the past two years, and we hope they will continue to develop their involvement with the organisation over the next few years.

The young people interviewed reflect a variety of perspectives and personal situations. Some of them are young people who have faced significant challenges in their own lives. Others are individuals for whom school and other formal settings have proved challenging, and yet who possess great potential for brilliance. Two of the young people represented here do not live in the areas theGKexperience focuses on, but participate due to their regular involvement in youth work in those communities. They are invited to take part as they often have strong ties to those communities through family and relational networks. Some are also young people for whom their involvement with theGKexperience's programme has clearly impacted them positively and this has been apparent to those around them who know them best- youth workers, families, teachers and friends. We are honoured to be entrusted with such stories, told with such honesty.





# Frank

“I think theGKexperience has done a lot for me, helped me, gave me hope...lots of experience.”

**Can you tell us about your times on residential with theGKexperience?**

“I started coming to activities at the church when I was about nine, and then, I think it was round about May, the youth leader from the church asked me if I wanted to come up to Glen Kin, so I said yes, and the church took me to Glen Kin with lots of people who stay round about here and it was just...I wouldnae say it was a riot, but I would say it was just...put it this way, I wouldnae think that I'd ever get to go on another trip again 'cos I was just full of carry on and all that, running away all the time. But then that summer, a leader I knew from theGKexperience came and says 'do you want to go camping with other people', and I says 'aye'. And so I went camping and I enjoyed camping, but I wouldnae do the exact same thing again. And then I went camping this summer and it was brilliant, 'cos we went fishing and all that, it was the Ross of Mull and it was just beautiful, and you really don't see that in my area, 'cos the nicest thing you're going to see here is someone getting a nice dog – you don't see good stuff round about here.”

**What was life like before you went on residential with theGKexperience?**

“I'd been hanging about with pals and that...I wouldnae call them pals but the people I hang about with, and if you are hanging about with them, you're involved in something. And before I went to Glen Kin, I got kicked out of school, and I remember I was just sitting there flying my pigeons and no long before that, I found a dead body...and I was just crazy, I was into everything, doing stupid things, but when I went to Glen Kin, it was different, just the scenery. It was something I'd never done before. I love Glen Kin and I think I would love to go back there.”

**Can you tell us more about your first time on residential?**

“The way I got told about it, I thought it was just going to be this big massive place, and lots of people round about...but there was nobody round about, and I'd never been anywhere where there was nobody round about...the minute I saw it, I thought...I didnae know what to say, am I gonna love it, am I gonna hate it...but when I was there, I was saying I didnae like it, but I actually loved it, but the stuff we did, walking through rivers and all, it was amazing, and I wish I never behaved the way I did because the way they treat you and that. I think theGKexperience came into my life just at the start...before I got into all the drink and that, but I will be honest, I have drank and I have done stupid things, because lots of people say drinking is their livelihood round here, and I think when I got kicked out of school, and not having a school from October to August...one of the best things for me was getting involved in theGKexperience. A couple of my pals have been getting into trouble, and when your pals are doing it, you kinda have to, so I probably wouldnae be sitting here if they hadn't taken me away on the most recent trip and started this club every Thursday.”

**What do you mean by 'the way they treat you'?**

“The way the staff and volunteers looked in, and took me places, and dealt with my behaviour, and they still come back and take me places.”

**Do you feel different being on residential with theGKexperience?**

“When I'm away from hame...but I feel safe, 'cos when I'm back hame, and something happens, usually my name gets put in, and then when I'm away...I'm always frightened that one day, someone gets killed or something, and I get the blame for it...I'm always...if I'm away, I know that's not going to happen because there are people who can say 'well he was with me at that time'.”

**Does it make you feel different about yourself?**

“Lots of people slag me round here because I've got ADHD and I take tablets, but lots of people who really, really know me who go about with me since I was 7 and all that...they don't because I have a laugh with them and all that...but it's amazing just getting away from that.”

**What's it like coming back to your community each time?**

“When you are away for 4 days, I know some people say it's a terrible place to live, but when you are away for a while, you miss it.”

**Do you think you have seen any changes in yourself from going on residential with theGKexperience?**

“What I've kinda realised is that I know how to respect other people, if someone is helping you or taking you somewhere, you know...you respect them and be good.”

**How would you describe your community?**

“People would say you don't really want to go here, but being in this place all my life...I wouldnae say it's amazing, but I know people would say there's no gang fighting here anymore, there's no that much junkies...my Ma says there was a lot more of that, you couldnae probably even leave a pair of shoes out in your garden, get nicked probably. So it's got better. A lot of the older ones say that if there wasn't the church here, they wouldnae be the way they are now.”

**What's the best thing about your community?**

“Everybody sticks by each other...all the young ones...they stick by each other.”

**What would you want to change about your community?**

“Lots of people I've seen change, and I wouldn't like to see that happen to my pals...he learnt me how to play football, he learnt me how to stick up for myself, and I wonder what would happen if he was no caring, smoking his life away.”

**Why do you think the staff and volunteers from theGKexperience do what they do?**

“Because they obviously really love it, and all they see...they go places, they get lots of time on Mull, but they must also get to see lots of people growing up, changing, not being what they were at the start.”

**How would you describe theGKexperience to someone who doesn't know it?**

“When my pals were coming up, I said to them respect the staff and volunteers and that because they are really nice people, and if you carry on and that, they won't take you anywhere. I think theGKexperience has done a lot for me, helped me, gave me hope...lots of experience.”





# Thea and Harley

'You learn about just getting along with people, being 'you're alright.' You learn about them, and you're from the same Glasgow as them, so you have that in common as well.'

## How would you describe yourself?

H: "Way too obsessed with superheroes...quite chatty...what else am I...I wouldn't hurt a fly...unless it's an annoying fly. I don't like it when people are upset, cause if they start crying I'll start crying...dunno...that's probably it."  
T: "I'm funny and sometimes I can be very impatient, especially with people as well, and once you get to know me I'm actually quite hyper...sometimes I can't be bothered with anything, I'm lazy. And...I can listen to people. And do what I'm told."  
H: "What about the biggest thing about you?"  
T: "Oh yeah, I love Harry Potter!"

## What is life like for you?

H: "Not very interesting...wake up, go on the laptop...go to school...go home...go on the laptop some more...it's not that interesting."

## What was your first time on residential with theGKexperience like?

H: "It was scary because I didn't know what the people were going to be like, but they were alright."  
T: "I think the bad thing is that you start feeling really comfortable with everybody in like the last two days, and then you have to go home."  
H: "Yeh, in the bus there, everybody's like silent and saying 'I'm not gonna speak to that person, I'm not gonna speak to that person', and on the bus home, everyone is like jumping and singing and saying 'I love you man!'"

## What did you learn while you were on residential?

T: "I could get on with people more, people who are totally different to you, but you can still get on with them, know what I mean...and people accept you as well, I think that's good."  
H: "With other people, I'm either gonna like them or I'm gonna hate them...but you learn you can just talk about random stuff with people."  
T: "Aye, you learn about just getting along with people, being 'you're alright.' You learn about them, and you're from the same Glasgow as them, so you have that in common as well."

## What's life like in your community?

T: "People will either want to stab you or try to help you."  
H: "Yeah, it's two very different sides...like walking around at night...someone might be like 'are you alright, do you need an umbrella?' or they might try and stab you or steal your money."  
T: "That's what it feels like. I cross the road...sometimes I just run away."  
H: "I put on loud, scary music, or phone someone."  
T: "Sometimes I pretend to be on the phone to a friend or something, having this long conversation even though nobody's there."  
H: "Yeah, you never really know what someone's gonna be like. And when you say to somebody that you come from my community, they'll just be like 'get away from me!'"  
T: "Yeah, you get this look."  
H: "Yeah, like 'what's wrong with you'."  
T: "I think that if you were to ask the majority of parents if they would like to bring their kids up here they would say that they wouldn't like to bring their kids up here, but I would like to bring my kids up in here if you know what I mean...the good thing is that there's loads of kids, and they all know each other."

## What does 'home' mean to you?

H: "Wherever my Mum is, cause she feeds me, she irons my clothes 'cos I'm a failure with an iron, I can talk to her and stuff."  
T: "To me home is like an open door, 'cos it's like my friends can be there as well, and my Mum and dad and my other family, so it's really just like a playpen full of family."

## How would you describe a residential with theGKexperience to someone who has never been?

H: "You should go because you get to meet funny people, and you get to see what it's like away from home."  
T: "You learn a lot about yourselves as well as others. That you don't need certain things that you think that you need, like internet, you don't need it, it's not a life priority, there are other things that are important, and it helps you talk to other people, and you can be an adventurer for the weekend."

I am Thea  
I am quiet and happy  
I wonder what happens once we're gone  
I hear each day pass  
I see memories happen  
I want to live in Florida  
I am quiet and happy  
I pretend I am in Florida  
I worry about what happens next  
I cry when my baby nephew is in hospital  
I am quiet and happy  
I understand someday it all comes to an end  
I say try again tomorrow  
I dream about my future  
I try to work better in school  
I hope my future is what I dreamed  
I am quiet and happy

I am Harley  
I am giggly and lost in my own little world  
I wonder if aliens are real  
I hear the flickering sound of flames causing destruction  
I see society collapsing and buildings becoming rubble  
I want to design video games when I'm older  
I am giggly and lost in my own little world  
I pretend to be happy when I'm upset around people  
I worry about the zombie apocalypse  
I cry at the start of finding Nemo  
I am giggly and lost in my own little world  
I understand that I'm not the best at Maths  
I say that everything happens for a reason  
I dream that I will marry Tom Hiddleston  
I try to make people smile  
I hope to find true love  
I am giggly and lost in my own little world





# Chris

'It's a great chance, it's an amazing thing to do, you have loads of fun, and you meet great people as well.'

What was your first time on residential with theGKexperience like?

"I thought the centre at Glen Kin wouldn't be the way it was, I thought it would be nearer, I didn't think it would be so secluded. It was good because we got to do lots of activities, we went and did gorge walking, it was good."

Why do you keep going back?

"I love it...I think it's amazing, it's just the leaders are great, and the stuff you get to do is brilliant as well."

What stands out as a highlight?

"Probably Camas, that trip, it was good, we were away for ages, and there were loads more people than there are when we are normally at Glen Kin, so I made loads of new friends. The leaders at Camas were really good, they were really nice and that, and it's a nice place."

Do you feel like life is different when you are away on residential?

"Sort of, I don't know how, I'm away on my own, and I come back, I don't know the word for it. Away, there's loads of new people, just young people...and then I go back, I'm back in school and stuff...so it's different."

What do you like about your community?

"Probably my school, the facilities and stuff, I can go and play football with my friends, there's a big Astroturf pitch and a grass pitch as well, sports stuff. I go to the BB (Boys Brigade), I really like it, you get people in talking to us about sports stuff, like the Commonwealth Games, and we do sports, and trips."

What do you think the purpose of theGKexperience is? How do you think it does that?

"To help young people in difficult areas. Some people live in difficult areas, there are a few gangs, and being part of theGKexperience stops you from being involved in that, because you could end up in prison, or something, and it can help you."

What is it about theGKexperience that can help people?

"It can show people how good their life can be, because if they are having a really good time, they don't need to do anything bad in their life, they can have a good life."

How would you describe a residential with theGKexperience to someone who has never been?

"It's a great chance, it's an amazing thing to do, you have loads of fun, and you meet great people as well."



# Dave

'You'll have good fun, you'll have a laugh, you'll enjoy it...you'll want to go back.'

So how many times have you been on residential with theGKexperience?

"About eight or nine."

What was your first time on residential with theGKexperience like?

"It was 2011, it was an outdoor camp. I remember arriving at the Glen Kin centre, and all the trees were there, but now they've all gone. I didn't think it would be that far away from everyone else...I got there, and it was up the dirt road, and then, when we got there, it was just quite far away from everyone else. I think it's better like that, 'cos you don't get interruptions...it's just better."

So what have the different residentials been like? And why do you keep going back?

"I just like it...I think it's quite fun. On the outdoor camps you do climbing and gorge walking, but on the arts one they normally make up a story and you stick with the story, and you make up different things to help with the story."

How would you describe a residential with theGKexperience to someone who has never been?

"You'll have good fun, you'll have a laugh, you'll enjoy it...you'll want to go back."

How would you describe your community? What's good about it?

"I think it's got more things to do than other places in Glasgow...you can you out to the football pitches, or go and play squash or something. I'm in the BB (Boys Brigade), and I help out with some of the younger boys – I like that we always get to do different things, and people come to talk to us about different things, this year it's the Commonwealth Games, so there was a guy in last Friday to talk about that, and we also do sports and stuff."

If you could change one thing about your community what would it be?

"I don't like the park, 'cos everyone just hangs about and drinks and smokes and all that...so I'd fix the park."

What do you think is the purpose of theGKexperience?

"To help people...if they are...not if they are behaving bad, but to try and make them feel better."

What does it do to help people feel better?

"Takes them away from the cities and all that...and gives them stuff to do that they don't think they could do or they don't...it makes them not think about being back in the city."

I am Dave

I am small and energetic

I wonder what I will do when I leave school

I hear songs in my head

I see fire

I want loads of money

I am small and energetic

I pretend to do my homework

I worry I haven't done my homework

I cried when my uncle died

I am small and energetic

I understand what will happen if I don't do my homework

I say we are the people

I dream that Messi will sign for Rangers

I try to behave at school

I hope I get a job when I'm older

I am small and energetic





## Welcome to the Young Team

One of the most amazing things about being involved in theGKexperience has been witnessing young people growing and developing. theGKexperience has a strong belief that young people from Scotland's most disadvantaged communities are some of the most gifted, talented and brilliant', skills and qualities that are exclusive to them. It would be naive to suggest that the tough and often chaotic environments that many have been exposed to have not had an impact on them, shaping who they are today. It could be assumed that this would lead to a deficit model - and yet what we encounter tells a different story. The evidence of the assets of their childhoods spent in such communities sat alongside their natural potential for resilience, if nurtured, is incredible. This is seen most clearly in their potential for leadership, both within their communities and beyond.

At its outset, theGKexperience set out to foster leadership in such young people. This was borne out of youth workers working in many different contexts across such communities in Scotland witnessing this potential and recognising its need for nurturing. The organisation was literally overwhelmed by young people who had grasped the vision and seen themselves or their peers change by their involvement with youth work at a local level, and as part of theGKexperience's ongoing programmes, and wanting more for themselves. They were every youth workers dream - time and energy rich and bounding with enthusiasm.

From these roots 'The Young Team' was born - interestingly, its name an attempt to reclaim the negative connotations of this term associated with groups of young people involved in Glasgow gang culture. The Young Team is a young leader's programme that runs alongside the work of theGKexperience - where young people are identified and invited to be part of an intensive period of training and self-development, whilst learning alongside others more experienced and re-employing their new found skills and confidence in local community settings, as well as team on theGKexperience's residentials. The programme is open ended, with no set time frame, although commitment is considered on a yearly rather than monthly basis.

The young people who make up the team come from a range of backgrounds and situations, and some do come from out with the communities in which theGKexperience focuses its work. This makes for a fascinating, dynamic and eclectic bunch! What they do have in common is a passion for change and to use their skills to support and lead young people from such communities, and in turn to encourage them to be leaders.

In the following interviews, you will meet some of our Young Team who live in the communities in which we seek to work. They are truly some of the most inspirational people you could meet. Often, they will reveal little about the personal challenges that they have had to overcome. This, in itself, is telling. Their perspective on themselves and what life has thrown at them is fascinating - if nothing else because they rarely allow it to be an excuse. Instead, given the right tools, they use it as a springboard.





# Kerry

“It grows me more as a person, and I realise more as a person that I’m capable, and I like it. I’m capable of doing good stuff, and I’m proud of myself.”

## Can you tell us about the first time you went on residential with theGKexperience?

“I do volunteering in my local area, so I got recommended to as a young leader, and the first time I went was on the leader’s training weekend. I didn’t know anybody. I didnae expect to be part of a team like I was...I thought I was gonna be treated like a young person, but I wasnae, but I still get to have fun and do all that, but I still get to help people and talk to people. I felt nervous at first, but now I’m proud of it. I was gonnae back out of it, but I feel proud that I didnae, and I done all that stuff. theGKexperience’s grew on me, and I’ve grew on it.”

## What’s it like being a young leader?

“It’s good...I didnae expect to feel that much of a team. Knowing, when you go to Camas, that each and every one of those young people has problems, and that’s kinda why you have wee talks with them, and try to get them to open up, and know you are there to support them...as a young leader knowing that they can open up to you a bit more because you might understand a bit more, a bit more of where they are coming from. I like that buzz you get from helping somebody, you kinda see them grow in theyself.”

## What is it like being part of theGKexperience?

“Being part of theGKexperience has meant a lot to me. I’d never ever have thought that I was capable of some of the things that I’ve done, and I’ve done it good, and I’m proud of myself. I’ve never been proud of myself. I’ve actually played a part this summer. Everything, even the small stupid stuff grows me...even coming here and talking about it...it grows me more as a person, and I realise more as a person that I’m capable, and I like it. I’m capable of doing good stuff, and I’m proud of myself. I see how good I do when I’m away on residential...I see how good and how mature, and how I can go fix situations...and when you’ve had that buzz from helping somebody, nothing can make you go back to how you were, like nothing...you couldnae give that up just to go back and be this destructive wee person.”

## Do you think that being a young leader with theGKexperience helps in your local volunteering?

“Everything I do with theGKexperience goes back into my local volunteering, and I just think it’s made me better as a person, it’s made me stronger as a person, made me realise how good I am at some things, and how to tackle obstacles. On residential I was in situations...like if two young people are arguing, then you would just have to say, ‘Right! Enough!’ but normally if that was happening at youth club, I’d be like ‘what do I do here?!’ Now I’m more hands on about stuff...I will take time to think about it, but I can go ahead knowing I’m going to make the right decision.”



## What is life like in your community?

“Pigsty! Hunners of screaming weans! But, I have this theory like...see the East end...it has community...if one family breaks down, then all the other families are there to support them, but see like if you are someone in the Westend...if one community breaks down...there’s no community...nobody’s there to help you, except your own family. I’d love to move away from the East end, but deep down, I don’t because I love the sense of community, people are always there for you. So no matter what it looks like, what the people in it are like, you know deep down that they are always gonna be there for you, and support you, ‘cos they know where you’re coming from.”

## Is there anything you’d like to change about your community?

“There’s no enough opportunities for young people. My community is in three parts...and most of the opportunities are in the high end...but because of gang fighting and that nobody can mix in together, apart from the lassies and that...’cos the lassies are acceptable to walk about different schemes...don’t know why. So I’d change...more opportunities in all places...youth clubs in all areas, not just the one that only the people in that area can go to. And you just see people disintegrate...just because they’ve nowhere to go.”

## Have you seen any changes in yourself?

“If somebody had come to me with a problem, I’d try to help them, but I’d be all like ‘I’ve got problems of my own’, but now, if somebody is needing help, I give them the best support and best advice that I can, and I can put people first...I’ve always put other people first, but now I’m learning to put myself in front too...I used to be extremely immature, and a pure...one of they people that look for trouble, and then I started volunteering and that, and then theGKexperience has made me part of the team, and I never ever expected to be...glued to them...and all the obstacles that I’ve faced, that has made me stronger as a person. I’m learning that I’m no just a stupid wee lassie anymore who is a troublemaker. I want to make something of myself, and I think it’s through theGKexperience I’ve realised what part I want to play and stuff like that...theGKexperience made me realise that I want to, actually deep down, do youth work, and help people, help them in the best way that I can...I’m passionate about that. I honestly think that if it wasn’t for theGKexperience then I’d go back to being a troublemaker and all that, and I don’t really want to...because...I don’t like being a horrible person...I’m no a horrible person...I’ve got a big heart. I found confidence in myself to let people know the real me, like, that extremely bonkers person, that’s the real me...and no very many people get to see that, ‘cos normally I’m a wee shy girl...but I’m no really, deep down, I’m off my head! I’ve grown in confidence, I’m no that lassie that’s pure a girlie girl anymore...I don’t care anymore, If you are gonna like me, then you are gonna like me.”







## Ringo

'When you are away you could be anybody...and your past and things won't affect some of the things that you do, or what you say to people.'

### How did you first get involved in theGKexperience?

"I got involved with theGKexperience because I applied for college and they said I had to do volunteer work, so I asked to do volunteering, and they said yes. But if I'd have known about this before, which I probably should have, then I would have done it before now!"

### What are you involved with as a young leader?

"Well, we do locally based youth work every Thursday, with some of the boys, we help them cook dinner, and show them how to cook and eat properly, so they aren't just having chippys and stuff. And I've been on three camps...I went to Solas and basically we helped play rounders and stuff with teenagers, and I've been to Camas, which was brilliant, and it was good 'cos by the end of the week, people had experienced a good time, and getting away from some of the tough stuff in their own home. And I went on October camp."

### What was it like when you first got involved?

"I felt a bit out of place...because of some of the people I already knew being there...and it was just a bit

weird...but once we got up to Glen Kin for a training weekend and everything, it was good. And then, when we went away on camp, that was so good, and it was good to help people get away for stuff, and forget about it for the weekend, and enjoy stuff. It's good because none of my Mum and family and friends would have expected me to do this, but I'm definitely going to keep doing it."

### Why do you think they didn't expect it?

"I don't know, just because it's a bit out of my comfort zone, going away with a group of random people, and then needing to adapt to certain ways and rules...but aye, I never expected myself to do it to be quite honest!"

### Do you think you have surprised them and yourself?

"Yeh, I wouldnae have expected to...so I went away to Solas and I didn't know what to expect, and I didn't really want to go, but I really enjoyed it. And I always said that I was never going back to Camas, because I'd been before at a different time, and it was horrible and rubbish, and I didn't want to go back, and the leaders were surprised when I said I wanted to go back to Camas, and I went and I loved it, and it was great, and I want to go back next year."

### Have you seen any changes in yourself?

"Yeh, but only when the young people are being cheeky and aggressive, and I've kinda got better at being patient, 'cos before I would just have told them to shut up. But it's good the whole theGKexperience thing, because it makes you think about others and what they've got going on, and makes you think about how lucky you are in some aspects. It's good."

### How would you describe your life when you first got involved?

"I've always been lucky in the family I've come from, but I've done a lot of stuff, certain things that I shouldn't have...but I'd say it was a wee bit hectic maybe...alright with family, but the stuff that I chose to do was stupid."

### Would you describe your life differently now?

"Well, I still do stupid stuff, but no as bad!"

### Do you think being involved with theGKexperience helps you to deal with things better?

"Probably just being involved with some of the leaders and people...obviously they are no telling you what to do, but giving you advice about don't do certain stuff, don't get in with the wrong people, which, stupidly, I did, and ended up getting myself into all sorts of trouble...but aye, if it wasn't for my mum and some of the leaders I know, and immediate family, I don't know where I'd be...probably in a council flat, selling something...or in the jail. So I wouldn't say theGKexperience as a whole, but some of the people involved in theGKexperience, like leaders, have made me change, and think about stuff I've done, and what not to do and stuff."

### What would you say that you've learnt about yourself?

"I can be patient, and that I can do what I want to do, I just need to stick with it."

### Do you feel different when you are on residential with theGKexperience than you do at home?

"Yeh, because when you are away you could be anybody...and your past and things won't affect some of the things that you do, or what you say to people."

### How would you describe your community? What do you like about it? Not like about it?

"What I don't like about it is that because of where it is and what's round about it, people would say it is a rubbish area, and like, there's nothing to do there or whatever, and they will just turn to drink and drugs. I don't like that there's not a youth club, there's nothing, and I'm being honest when I'm saying that there's nothing there for young people to do, unless you want to learn to play the guitar or the drums, there's nothing...where I stay is the back end, and there's the front end, and in the front end there's like a club type thing, but people from my bit cannae go there, because there'd be fights and that, because of



where they are from, it's stupid. I don't like that because it's rubbish, people are just gonna sit back and take it, that they're no gonna try and do well for themselves, or try and get out of there, or get a decent job, they're just gonna happily sit and just get money off of the social. The only good thing is that its close to everywhere, and some bits of it are alright, and some of the people that are there are alright."

#### What would you change about your community?

"I would set up a police task force, and sit in a car, and look at people's houses and arrest them for selling drugs or whatever they are doing, and just clear the place of drugs, alcohol abuse...everything, and I would have a youth club, for stuff for young people to do, instead of turning to crime and drugs, and just a place where they can go and escape their own home, what's happening. Change the people, half the people would go! I would change who is the MP, so that they would no...I would chose somebody who would no just care about the money...and don't care about the people."

#### What do you think the purpose of theGKexperience is?

"To help and support young people in some of the tough things that are happening."

#### Do you think it is good at doing that?

"Aye, definitely, definitely! And I've seen that in my own experience with people that've had stuff going on, and then coming away, and being completely different and enjoying theyselves, and forgetting about stuff, but it's been good."

#### What do you think it is that makes the difference?

"The people who are involved in it. And, that they realise that they are kinda here to help instead of trying to put them away or get the family into trouble or whatever, definitely the people who are involved in it."

#### Can you give some examples of seeing this happen?

"So when we were in Camas, one of the wee boys threw a big cup of tea over another boy, and I was sitting there, and I just picked him up and took him and put him under a cold tap, and this wee boy would never say thank you or anything, he was just be cheeky or whatever and play up, but after it, he completely changed, and says thanks, and completely changed the way he was with me. And in the last camp we were on, he was really thankful for stuff that had been done.

And another of the wee boys who had been away on camp, he is completely different with me as he is with other people, I think because of the way I am with him, and I've kinda been in his footsteps, involved in the same kinda stuff as him, and I can get along with him, and he'll listen to me if he is doing something wrong, and I'm just like 'calm down' or whatever, so it's quite good, it shows that theGKexperience is working, it's getting young people to show respect to people who are trying to help them, instead of swearing or shouting at them.

And when we were away on Solas, this family was there, it was a mum and dad and two wee boys, and when we came back, one of the people that we were away with was talking to him, and he says it was amazing how close you get to people when you are away, and he says that he loved it, and his boys loved the whole weekend, they were just so happy being there, and the guy sent a text saying that he doesn't think they'd ever been so happy...so I think it works in that way...it's good, but not a lot of people know about it, which is a bit rubbish. And I don't think that the people who are involved in theGKexperience, like the board and that, they don't get enough recognition from funders, or the government...they should send somebody from the government to come on camp, and see how much they would enjoy it, and see how much it can change a young person, change a life. And it would make them think about some of the decisions they are going to make in the future."

#### How does it feel seeing that change in young people?

"It's great knowing that you are part of it, and it's good, knowing that they are enjoying themselves."

## Becca

'I'm starting to cope more with stuff than I used to, because I used to not cope. I've had bad times and good times, and now I'm mostly having good times, I'm just looking ahead, not looking back, because there's no point in looking back because you've got a big future, I just look forward..."

#### What was it like the first time you went on residential with theGKexperience?

"I went on a camp with a group that specialised in people that don't really fit into the bigger clubs. It was really good because it was for different people...people that didn't really fit in, so...we got to go somewhere. It was a wee bit outside by comfort zone...and I was a wee bit sceptical because I didn't know who anybody was, and it was my first time away with a group, so it was quite scary...but once I got there and started doing activities and stuff, I felt a sense of belonging, and I just felt good. "

#### What did you enjoy about it?

"Everybody was equal, you could wear what you want, and you weren't really picked on for what you wear, like you would in your community."

#### What's it like being a young leader?

"It's really good, because you've got lots of support off the older leaders and that, and you have a mentor, and you can watch over how they do it. It's just different from being a youth, completely different, because when you are a youth you've no responsibility, and then when you become a young leader you've got lots of responsibility, and you've got to be positive, and you can't be like 'I'm no doin' that', you've just got to join in, and suck it up, as they say...you've just got to suck it up and let it go. It's different because you're not like fully taking part in the activities, but you've still got to take part so that the youths know 'oh, she's taking part, maybe I'll take part and it will be fun.' So, it's different, a lot of responsibility...but not too much!"

#### What's good about being a young leader?

"It's just...having people support me more, now, than what I used to...it's just helped me get on...having a lot of support has been really good, it's amazing, because I don't think I'd be here today if I hadn't had that support. I felt really pleased to be asked to be a young leader...but then I didn't know anybody, so I was having to meet new people, but now I feel like I know everybody, because it's really good, it's a sense of belonging...now I belong somewhere."

#### Have you seen any changes in yourself?

"I've learned that I can be patient and I can talk to people and resolve situations, and just be positive, I can be more positive now than what I used to be, because I used to have a horrible life and I was always negative...I was always over-thinking things, but now I don't. I just stop and know that there is no point in over-thinking things. If something happens, it happens. Now I'm just like 'why am I thinking that, because if it happens, there will be a way to resolve it'...instead of over-thinking things, and then not going, because that's what I used to do, I used to over think things and then say 'I can't go, I can't'. I'd get myself all worked up, and anxiety...it was quite stressful. Now that I've changed, my life has totally changed, my life is happy, amazing, no really any fear...I just feel amazing, comfortable, and...I don't know...just a sense of belonging somewhere...just knowing that I belong there, I'm happy where I'm at, I'd like to stay where I'm at and no go back. I'm starting to cope more with stuff than I used to, because I used to not cope. I've had bad times and good times, and now I'm mostly having good times, I'm just looking ahead, not looking back, because there's no point in looking back because you've got a big future, I just look forward."

#### What is life in your community like?

"Yeh, I've seen a lot in my community...I've seen a lot that I shouldn't have seen when I was younger, like people getting stabbed in the street right in front of you...that's what happens, just walking down the street and somebody pulls a knife...it's just what happens in the community. People getting their



house raided constantly...that's what happened in the street I used to stay in...four times a week, people getting their house raided. But now where I stay it's totally different, completely quiet...it's just a street away, but it's totally different, it's so quiet, you can go to your bed without being scared, because you know nothing's going to happen. It's crazy...my community is a mess. My experience with theGKexperience changed what I see in my community, to what I want to happen in my community, but I know it probably won't happen because there's not enough people in the community to support it."

## George

'Some of the stuff we do on camp, I try to find ways of doing that back in my community, all you need to do is get the weans to participate..'

### How did you first get involved in theGKexperience?

"I first got involved with theGKexperience through relations with the church, they were just asking if people were interested and I was. So I went up with a few folks from my community... and we just got a few activities going. It was a good experience...getting to talk to everybody. I keep going back because the stuff you get to do is brilliant!"

### What was your life like at the time?

"It was alright, but not much going on."

### What is it like being away on residential?

"I'm helping out more, helping with all the stuff, and then when I'm back I'm no really helping out at all...I feel good about helping out."

### What is it like when you come back home after residential?

"I didn't really talk to people that much, but now 'cos I've been away with them a few times, I'm getting to know them."

### What have you learnt about yourself?

"I've seen behaviour changes and that...like when I was staying in my community and that I wasn't going anywhere, and I wasn't getting on with my Ma and that, and going away and then coming back, I just get on with her better, speak to her more and that."

### What is life like in your community?

"It's not really a good place...I mean it is a good place to stay, but there's not much to do, you've got to like go into different areas to find stuff to do, like there's only one park, and it's for the wee weans. The best thing is knowing everybody there, you feel safe walking through the area because everybody knows each other 'cos they've stayed there for so long...and the worst thing...I could say too many fights, but there's not that many any more...nearly every weekend there's police patrolling, so people don't do it anymore."

### Has being involved with theGKexperience helped with life in your community?

"I do voluntary work in the church...working with the weans...we do street play, just take them into the park, and then there's an arts club with them. Some of the stuff we do on camp, I try to find ways of doing that back in my community, all you need to do is get the weans to participate, and then if they don't take part, they don't...but most of the stuff we do gets them involved."

### What do you see yourself doing in life?

"I want to be a joiner...and still do my voluntary work. It's like giving the younger ones something to do so that they're not sitting about with nothing to do."

## John

"I'm no a daft wee boy anymore, I've matured a lot. A, like, I've been a lot more responsible. It's good helping people and all."

### Can you tell me about the first time you went on residential with theGKexperience?

"I think it was Easter camp, a group from the church went and that's when I met everybody. It was a good weekend, we got to help cook food, we sang songs, had a campfire. It was good to get away from everything, and good to meet everybody, the leaders, and getting to do different stuff."

### What was your life like at the time?

"I was always in trouble, for fighting basically, and then going away I realised it was stupid, and I needed to change myself. It was pointless what I was doing, I was getting in a lot of trouble."

### What was it like when you went back home?

"I decided that I was no gonna go about with people any more, all those pals, I decided to make new pals, and I just changed...a lot more mature and that, stop being silly, doing stupid stuff. I made new pals, and they are probably better pals than what it used to be. It's good. And like, in the community, I help in the clubs, I help with the young people down there."

### What did you learn when you were away?

"I was having a better time of it on residential than getting into trouble...that was it, a change about."

### What has it been like being a young leader?

"I showed a lot of potential on the camps, so I was asked if I wanted to do more stuff with theGKexperience and be a young leader. I'm responsible for helping out the young people, making sure they're all fine and that, helping them through tough stuff. Like on the expedition, there was rock climbing and some of them didn't want to do it, so help them through it and they done it. It's good, it makes them feel better about themselves."

### What have you learnt about yourself being a young leader?

"I'm no a daft wee boy anymore, I've matured a lot. And, like, I've been a lot more responsible. It's good helping people and all."

### What do you think is the purpose of theGKexperience?

"Basically for young people who don't get the best in life, help them out. Letting them get away from their community, where it's all violent, to somewhere they can meet new people, doing something that they've never tried before."







## Emerging Themes

### Life in Local Communities

The communities that theGKexperience works in are complex places – full of gifts and assets, but also challenges. This complexity is reflected in the way that the young people talk about some of the difficulties in their neighbourhood, but also about their own sense of belonging to their community. This is most evident in Kerry's detailing of her theory about the East end having community, of people supporting one another, in comparison with the West end of Glasgow. She goes on to say that:

'I'd love to move away from the East end, but deep down, I don't because I love the sense of community, people are always there for you. So no matter what it looks like, what the people in it are like, you know deep down that they are always gonna be there for you, and support you, 'cos they know where you're coming from.'

This sense of belonging, despite knowing the difficulties of a community, is also seen in what Thea says about wanting to bring up children in her own neighbourhood, even though she thinks that a majority of people would not. Additionally, George speaks about the benefits, the feeling of safety, from knowing everybody in a community, whilst a number of the young people comment on seeing and feeling improvements in their community.

However, the young people also spoke about the impact that a lack of facilities and activities in their community - the sense of 'there's nothing to do' - on the youth in their neighbourhoods. Ringo comments that 'because of where it is and what's round about it, people would say it is a rubbish area, and like, there's nothing to do there or whatever, and they will just turn to drink and drugs', whilst Kerry comments that because there is nothing to do 'you just see people disintegrate.' This is further highlighted by the fact that the two young people who live outside of the areas in which the theGKexperience works identified the range of facilities and activities on offer to them in their community as a positive about where they live. Both Ringo and Kerry, in speaking about this lack of activities, stated that whilst there are youth clubs in their areas, they are prevented from going due to territorialism; the youth club is a different part of their community and there would be fighting if young people from their area tried to go there. As a result, the young people most often chose to speak about creating youth clubs or parks or football pitches as being the things that they would most like to change about their communities, which appeared to be linked to stopping alcohol and drug abuse by providing young people with something interesting to do.

As well as the impact of territorialism, young people identified other ways in which violence, and the threat or witnessing of violence, in their communities affected their lives, for example in Becca saying:

'I've seen a lot in my community...I've seen a lot that I shouldn't have seen when I was younger, like people getting stabbed in the street right in front of you...that's what happens, just walking down the street and somebody pulls a knife...it's just what happens in the community.'

Here, whilst Becca identifies that this is something that she shouldn't have seen, she also somewhat resigned to the sense of the way things are. In each of the situations where the young people were speaking about violence, it was all said without drama or attention, in a way that none of them tried to glamorize, show off, or embellish their experiences; rather it was in the quiet, matter of fact way in which it had become simply part of their life. Another powerful description is in the interview with Thea and Harley where they speak about the fearful uncertainty they experience when they are out in their community:

T: 'People will either want to stab you or try to help you.'

H: 'Yeh, it's two very different sides...like walking around at night...someone might be like 'are you alright, do you need an umbrella?', or they might try to stab you or steal your money.'



They go on to detail how they respond to seeing someone in the street - avoidance tactics such as listening to 'loud, scary music', being on the phone, or simply crossing the road and running away. This sense of fear can also present itself in the fear of being accused of a crime, such as in Frank speaking about the positives of being away on residential because he knows he can't be accused of anything, whereas 'when I'm back home, and something happens, usually my name gets put in, and then when I'm away I'm always frightened that one day, someone gets killed or something, and I get the blame for it.'

The result is a complex picture of what life is like in local communities for these young people, what they like and don't like, and the different emotions that they feel for the same place, and for the different sides of the same community. Many of the young people speak about the advantages of 'getting away' to Glen Kin or to Camas on residential. However, it is also clear that the benefit of the residential is not just in the 'getting out', but also because it enables young people to make changes in themselves and their local communities. So whilst she is uncertain about whether it can be achieved, Becca says that her involvement with theGKexperience has lead to a change in how she sees her community, and that she is able to see positive possibilities for her community. This is why it is important that theGKexperience balances both residential camps and locally based youth work, and highlights that the ongoing supportive relationships through youth workers, youth clubs and volunteers is crucial to enabling young people to continue developing healthy patterns that are often kick-started by residential experiences.

## Residential Experiences

Many of the young people identified the remote nature of Glen Kin and Camas as being central to their positive experiences on residential. Chris spoke about not expecting the Glen Kin centre to be 'so secluded', and Dave said that he liked it being 'quite far away from everyone else' because 'you don't get interruptions.' This sense of remoteness influences the sense of being able to get away, as Ringo mentioned 'people had experienced a good time, and getting away from some of the tough stuff in their own home'; whilst Dave identified that theGKexperience 'helps people' by because it 'takes people away from the cities and all that'.

For some of the young people, the residential setting and activities provided a contrast with what is happening in their own communities, such as John talking about theGKexperience being for 'young people who don't get the best in life' by 'letting them get away from their community, where it's all violent, to somewhere they can meet new people, doing something that they've never tried before.' Experiencing the beautiful natural surroundings was also important as Frank commented that the settings of both Camas and Glen Kin were beautiful, and not something that he was used to seeing in his community: 'the nicest thing you're going to see here is someone getting a nice dog – you don't see good stuff round here'!

For others, being able to meet new people and make new friends was a key part of the residential experience, especially as this provided the opportunity to get to know people who didn't have a prior judgement of them. Frank talks about being teased in his community for having ADHD, but being well treated on residential, whilst Ringo speaks about 'when you are away you could be anybody...and your past and things won't affect some of the things that you do, or who or what you say to people'. Becca also speaks about learning about her own confidence, and that she can be patient, positive, and can talk to people, and that this has helped her to cope more with difficult situations that she faces. Harley spoke about the change in the course of the residential from not wanting to speak to others, to saying 'I love you man!' on the bus home! Additionally, the young leaders Kerry and George talk about what they are learning about developing relationships with young people and their own leadership going back into improving their locally based volunteer work. This highlights the way in which theGKexperience uses residential to give young people the chance to shape experiences of community that then enable them to continue shaping their relationships and aspects of community living in their own neighbourhood, as seen in the following section.

## Making Changes

The residentials provide spaces that enable young people to make changes and develop healthier patterns in their lives and in their local communities. John speaks about realising that he was having a better time when he was away on camp, and that this enabled him to reflect on his life and to make some changes to his life, to become more mature, and to make a new group of friends. He says:

'I was always in trouble, for fighting basically, and then going away I realised it was stupid, and I needed to change myself. It was pointless what I was doing, I was getting in a lot of trouble.'

Other young people spoke about recognising that they would have previously been considered 'troublemakers', but have chosen to make changes to their lives. Frank talks about being removed from school, and 'acting crazy' prior to his first time on residential, as well as being 'full of carry on' during his first residential, but now having regrets about saying he hated being there when he actually loved it. He goes on to speak about his awareness that without his involvement in residential and the locally based youth work, he would be getting into trouble. He also recognised that it was important for him and others to 'respect the staff and volunteers' based on a sense of loyalty to the way they had treated him well in the past and 'dealt with my behaviour.' Kerry comments that 'if it wasn't for theGKexperience, then I'd go back to being a troublemaker and all that, and I don't really want to.' Having reflected on previous negative behaviour, both John and Kerry are able to go on to speak about themselves positively having made these changes. Kerry talks about recognising who she really is, as a good person, as someone with a 'big heart' and the confidence to be known as the 'bonkers' person she feels that she is deep down. John says:

'I'm no a daft wee boy anymore, I've matured a lot...I've been a lot more responsible. It's good helping people and all.'

These changes also impacted on the young people's relationships, as John in the example above talked about making new friends who are better to him, whilst George spoke about being able to get on better with his Mum. For others, the changes in relationships were about learning to get on well with others on residential, such as Harley saying that she learnt to get on with people who are different to her and learning that people will accept her, with Thea articulating that she learnt that others are 'from the same Glasgow as you, so you have that in common as well.' Additionally, young leaders like Becca and Ringo spoke about their developing sense of patience and confidence in supporting other young people on residential.

## Belonging and Making a Difference

The young leaders reflected on what it meant to them to be part of theGKexperience team and involved in youth work, and spoke about gaining confidence in their own identity as well as a sense of belonging. Kerry identified that she hadn't expected to 'feel that much of a team', whilst Becca said that she had been nervous about meeting new people, but 'now I feel like I know everybody, because it is really good, it's a sense of belonging...now I belong somewhere.'

Many of the young leaders felt that this sense of belonging was about participating in making a difference to young people. In speaking about locally based youth work, George said that it was important to him in life to keep going with his voluntary work, because it is 'giving the younger ones something to do so that they're not sitting about with nothing to do', and he said that he feels good about helping out. Commenting on seeing changes in young people on residential, Ringo said that he felt it was 'great knowing that you are part of it, and it's good, knowing that they are enjoying themselves'. Becca stated that being part of making a difference to someone else had given her confidence to keep going with the positive changes in herself, and realising that deep down she is passionate about 'helping others in the best way that I can':

'I see how good I do when I'm away on residential...I see how good and how mature, and how I can go fix situations...and when you've had that buzz from helping somebody, nothing can make you go back to how you were, like nothing...you couldnae give that up just to go back and be this destructive wee person.'





Additionally, Ringo and Kerry felt that they made a specific contribution to theGKexperience, as the young people might feel that they could open up to them as young leaders more because they had been in similar situations, and could identify with the difficulties they were facing. As a result, both spoke about being more patient and more willing to be able to listen and support the young people in making changes in their own lives. This sense of pride and achievement for themselves came across in all of the stories of the young leaders, especially in how they chose to identify themselves as helpful, as volunteers in their local communities, as part of something. As Kerry summarised:

‘Being part of theGKexperience has meant a lot to me. I’d never ever have thought that I was capable of some of the things that I’ve done, and I’ve done it good, and I’m proud of myself. I’ve never been proud of myself. I’ve actually played a part this summer. Everything, even the small stupid stuff grows me... even coming here and talking about it...it grows me more as a person, and I realise more as a person that I’m capable, and I like it. I’m capable of doing good stuff, and I’m proud of myself.’

### Developing Resilience

Many of the young leaders who spoke about the importance of belonging and making a difference also spoke about the changes in their confidence and developing resilience from being involved with theGKexperience, for example in Kerry saying:

‘theGKexperience has made me part of the team, and I never ever expected to be...glued to them...and all the obstacles that I’ve faced, that has made me stronger as a person.’

Becca also spoke at length about being able to be more positive about life now than she had been in the past, and realising that there wasn’t any point in over-thinking things, knowing that now she will be able to find a way to resolve any problems. She goes on to say that:

‘I’m starting to cope more with stuff than I used to, because I used to not cope. I’ve had bad times and good times, and now I’m mostly having good times, I’m just looking ahead, not looking back, because there’s no point in looking back because you’ve got a big future, I just look forward.’

Additionally, Ringo spoke about surprising himself and family members by sticking with theGKexperience, and going away on residential, due to it being ‘out of his comfort zone’ to be away with new people and ‘adapting to certain ways and rules.’ He went on to say that being involved in theGKexperience had been good for making him think ‘about others and what they’ve got going on’, and how lucky he feels about some aspects of life. Kerry also shared that being involved in theGKexperience has ‘made me better as a person, it’s made me stronger as a person, made me realise how good I am at some things, and how to tackle obstacles.’ As many of the young people who spoke this way about resilience would be the same young people who spoke about developing a sense of belonging to a team, and being part of something that is making a difference to others, theGKexperience is continuing to explore the factors that help to unlock this resilience within the young people they work with. theGKexperience is beginning to develop therapeutic understandings and approaches across the range of their work and relationships. For some, this is in resourcing an already incredible ability to continue moving forward despite setbacks, as Thea wrote in her poem: ‘I say try again tomorrow.’ Whilst for others, it is about supporting the ways in which their outlook on life is changing, such as with Frank saying, ‘I think theGKexperience has done a lot for me, helped me, gave me hope’.





## Conclusion: Listening to Young People

The work of theGKexperience is rooted in the hearing, valuing and developing of young people's stories. Whether that is in the creative exploration of identity on the Arts Residential, or asking for feedback from residential programmes, or the storytelling approach taken in supervision sessions with the young leaders, the locally based youth work and residential programmes are adapted around the young people's stories. At its most real, and often most challenging, listening is about being with young people in a way that recognises how they are already owning, sharing and reflecting on their experiences. As a result, the capturing of these stories, such as here in this booklet, must be done with a level of awareness to enable these young people to be heard well, to be heard as themselves, ensuring that their stories both represent and belong to them.

All of the young people and young leaders represented in this booklet were invited to take part in an informal interview conducted by two researchers who had existing connections to theGKexperience. These interviews used a series of open questions, with space for the young people to ask questions of their own, or share any thoughts or stories about theGKexperience that were important to them. These interviews were then transcribed, and edited for clarity and anonymity. These edited pieces were then returned to the young people who had the opportunity to discuss them and make any changes with the researchers.

This process brought up some interesting questions about representation and expectations of young people. For example, the interviews were transcribed in the vernacular, however in the editing process some young people chose to change some of their slang words and phrases. There is a tension here between emphasising the belief that the young people sound good as themselves, and ensuring their control over how they are represented - especially if they are expressing concerns about sounding other than they would like to be heard. On the other hand, it was often the case that the young people were pleased with how they came across, with one saying specifically 'that's my voice, that's how I sound, that's me on paper'.

Gathering these stories requires valuing the emotional vocabulary of the young people; whilst some do not have the precise words for their complex range of emotions and experiences, this often leads to a more detailed description. For example, when the young people speak about the changes they made in their lives and their relationships, their descriptions have a depth and a wisdom that would be lost if they simply summarised it as 'I'm more compassionate'.

Another consideration was what the young people chose to say, and what they chose to leave out. Many of the young people who tell their stories here have lived through, and continue to live with, difficult circumstances, yet none chose to go into detail about those challenges. This is to say that these were not the stories that they wanted to tell about themselves. Some young people chose to edit out these details in reading over the interviews; some chose not to speak about them at all. Part of this is that the young people don't need to emphasise the positives in their lives now by contrasting them with difficulties in the past. Many of the challenges are still present in their lives, but what they often have described is having been resourced with an ability to react differently and to make the changes that are within their power. The key change is their perceptions of themselves, and how they choose to respond to external circumstances. It is their opportunity to describe themselves, and the choice of what to leave out or detail only lightly is a choice about using an alternative lens to the 'troubled' label that others often use for young people from their background. Key to the young people's ownership of their stories, and their lives, is being able to describe themselves in different ways – helpful, clever, kind, funny, big-hearted.



These descriptions are truths that run alongside other, often challenging and complex truths about each of these young people's lives. The risk is that we can often create a one-sided narrative where unhelpful expectations – either positive or negative - are placed on the young people, creating a feeling that they have to live out a story of which they are not the authors. There is an awareness here that these are not completed stories, catching only a specific point in time with young people who are rapidly developing, reflecting, and making changes in their lives. The young people represented here have more to anticipate, experience, and share, and several spoke about looking forward and having dreams for their futures. The hope is that the stories here are part of the ongoing work of theGKexperience, by creating a space by which young people reflect on and shape the positive changes in their own continuing stories.



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