

Up Up Up Up Up Up Up Up Up Up Upside



Annual Report 2025/2026



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Foreword

Upside launched on 1 April 2025 following a three-year commissioning process. The partnership was confirmed on 21 November 2024, and governance groups were commenced to begin the planning and implementation. This model has been developed through a collaborative process, drawing on the strengths of each partner organisation and the insights of those who have experienced the challenges of reintegration. It is rooted in co-production, with input from staff, stakeholders, and people with lived experience shaping its design and ensuring it meets the needs of those it supports.

Consistency of delivery is a core principle of this national service. Wherever someone is in Scotland, they will have access to person-centred, trauma-informed support tailored to their unique circumstances. Our approach focuses on meeting people where they are, addressing immediate challenges, and helping them build sustainable futures within their communities.

This partnership reflects not just collaboration within the organisations but also an ambition to build on and strengthen relationships and capacity, through structures such as Community Justice Partnerships and recovery networks, to be able to better respond to population needs at a local level as part of a place-based approach. By working together, we aim to reduce barriers, promote effective reintegration, and support long-term positive outcomes for people and communities alike.



→ Upside, Scotland's national throughcare service was launched in Glasgow's Old Fruitmarket on 1 April 2025.



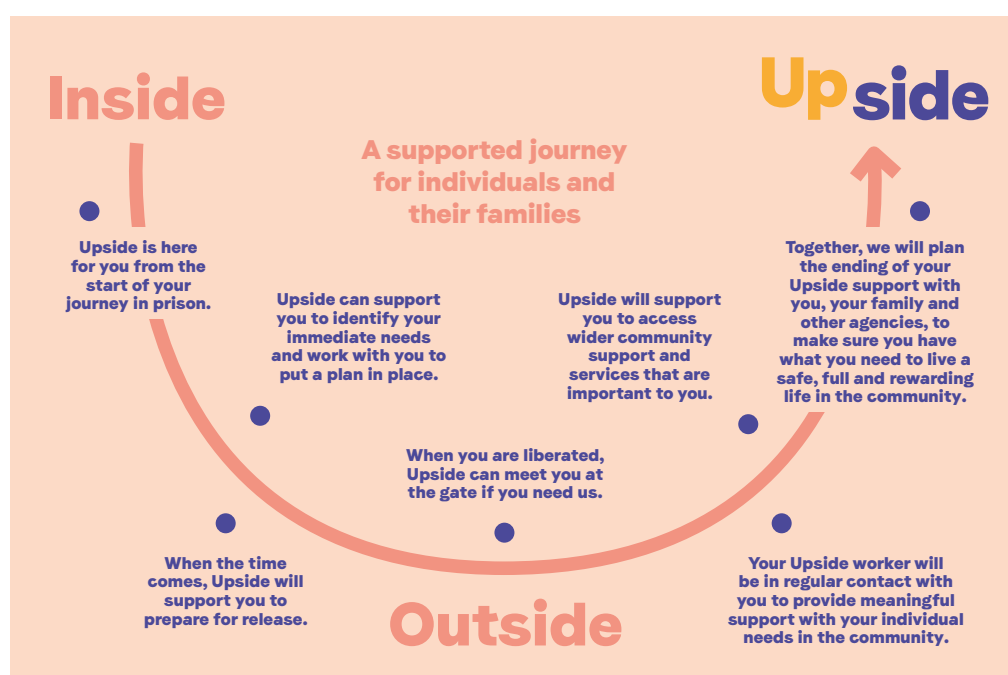
Partnership Overview

Upside is a national throughcare service, available in all parts of Scotland. Upside provides people in short-term custody, or remand with the practical and emotional support they need to transition to community life. The service is voluntary and addresses any issues they may have as an individual on release like health, housing, finance, skills and employment. Importantly, Upside can also connect people with family support if required.

As well as helping with immediate challenges, Upside also establishes the long-term support required to rebuild lives with dignity and purpose.

Upside is funded by the Scottish Government and delivered by Sacro, Access to Industry, Action for Children, Apex Scotland, Barnardo's, Circle, Families Outside and Turning Point Scotland. Each partner brings a unique expertise to the service which will function with a unified approach.

The partnership works together to reduce barriers, promote effective reintegration, and support long-term positive outcomes for people and communities alike.

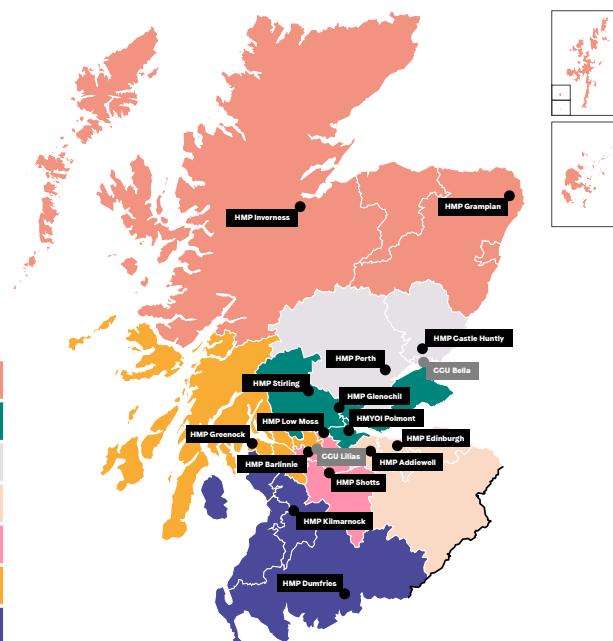


Service Approach

Although a national service, Upside is delivered locally through a system of pods. Pods serve distinct local authority areas, taking individual needs into account, while providing consistency of service across the country. A collection of organisations from the partnership operates across each pod with a shared workforce identity and delivery approach.

Upside Pod Areas and Prison/CCU Establishments

Pod 1	Northern
Pod 2	Forth Valley & Fife
Pod 3	Tayside
Pod 4	Edinburgh Lothian & Borders
Pod 5	Glasgow & Lanarkshires
Pod 6	North Strathclyde
Pod 7	South Scotland



Delivery Overview

Individualised relational support is delivered by Community Workers across Scotland. Upside has a team of 88.2FTE, with 10FTE Prison Workers embedded across the Scottish Prison Estate, and 78.2FTE Community Workers working within Local Authorities.

Support is available to individuals for up to 12 months post-release, however as a voluntary service, people can choose how long they want to engage with the service.

Referrals				
Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
*388	670	628	605	2,291

* A phased approach to referrals was commenced to support the service to embed

People Supported					
Migrated Cases	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
*453	388	670	628	605	2,744

* The actual number of cases migrated that were supported in Q1 will be higher, however because migration of cases was gradual throughout Q1 and cases were closed on interim spreadsheets, this cannot be accurately determined.

Referral Type			
	Sentenced	Remand	Total
Q1	357	31*	388
Q2	412	258	670
Q3	422	206	628
Q4	392	213	605
Totals	1,583 (69%)	708 (31%)	2,291 (100%)

* Upside launched to Males on Remand in Q2, therefore the volumes for Q1 represent only Females on Remand.

Referral Gender				
	Male	Female	Transgender	Total
Q1	298	89	1	388
Q2	569	101	0	670
Q3	515	111	2	628
Q4	506	99	0	605
Totals	1,888 (82%)	400 (17%)	3 (<1%)	2,291 (100%)

Referral Age			
	<26 (Young Person)	≥26 (Adult)	Total
Q1	50	338	388
Q2	102	568	670
Q3	86	542	628
Q4	82	523	605
Totals	320 (14%)	1,971 (86%)	2,291 (100%)

* Upside considers anyone under the age of 26 to be a Young Person. Delivery partners Action for Children and Barnardo's Scotland, work exclusively with Females and Young People.

Referral Ethnicity								
	White	African	Asian	Caribbean	Mixed	Other	Not Given	Total
Q1	356	7	5	1	0	2	17	388
Q2	650	5	7	1	1	5	1	670
Q3	609	7	5	1	1	1	4	628
Q4	590	2	6	3	0	0	4	605
Totals	2,205 (96%)	21 (<1%)	23 (1%)	6 (<1%)	2 (<1%)	8 (<1%)	26 (1%)	2,291 (100%)

Accommodation status			
Homeless	Staying with Friends/Family	Own Tenancy	Total
924 (40%)	517 (23%)	850 (37%)	2,291

* Housing status is self-disclosed at the time of referral and circumstances may change post-release.

Freephone Support (No. Of Calls)				
The Upside Freephone provides an additional pathway for people to connect with the service. Self-referrals can be accepted up to 12-weeks post-release from prison.				
Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
145	355	290	318	1,108

Emergency Early Release								
Following announcement from the Scottish Government on 02/10/2025 of the proposed Emergency Early Release (EER) of people from prison, Upside has been focused on delivering support to individuals impacted by the release scheme. There were seven tranches of release between November 2025 and April 2026. The total number of individuals released and engaged with Upside is summarised below:								
	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	T7	Totals
Released	134	82	70	142	74	53	59	614
Signed up	94	46	23	46	28	21	12	270 (44%)
GPU's **	49	20	12	23	11	14	TBC	129* (50%)

*Delivery extends into April of 2026/2027 delivery period

** GPU: Gate Pick-up Service, which individual can voluntarily request

Waiting lists were established across different Pod Areas in response to service demand.

Service Outcomes

Upside reports quarterly against a comprehensive Outcomes Framework that was co-designed with the service commissioners, Community Justice Scotland, alongside wider stakeholders. The six high-level outcomes are detailed below:

Outcome 1	ACCESS	People are able to access voluntary throughcare support and the service is accessible across all geographic areas of Scotland;
Outcome 2	ENGAGE	People can engage at an early opportunity to support with immediate identification of needs;
Outcome 3	PLAN	People are supported by the service to plan for release and identify goals for a successful return to life outside prison;
Outcome 4	TRANSITION	People are supported to return to the community and to work towards their self-identified goals;
Outcome 5	QUALITY	People receive high quality throughcare support; and
Outcome 6	PARTNERSHIP	The service works with local community partners to coordinate voluntary throughcare locally and deliver joined up release planning support.

Upside has established a rich and insightful evidence base with a combination of quantitative and qualitative data sources, including case studies, lived experience workshops, case management metrics and stakeholder feedback.



Case Study 1

Name has been changed to protect the individual's identity and photography used is for illustrative purposes only.

Background

Allie is 32-year-old women, who has accessed throughcare in the past. When she returned to custody and was re-referred, I was given her case. She has a son who is currently in Kinship care in a different country, and her goal is to one day be able to see him again.

She has used substances for years and when given Community Orders, struggles to manage these and returns to custody. Allie had some problems with other prisoners and was moved to a different prison which concerned her for getting home.

I liaised with the prison, Allie and a colleague from a different Upside Pod and ensured she would be collected. Allie had been clear from the beginning she wanted to change her life, and we had planned to utilise the Prison to Rehab project. However at court she was given a Community Order and not a sentence, meaning she couldn't access the Prison to Rehab project.

Support or interventions provided

On her Liberation Day, I met her in Dundee with the support of a colleague closer to the prison she was moved to. I had clothing, a food parcel, a phone and SIM card all ready for her. I had arranged appointments for doctor, jobcentre, social work etc.

When we returned to Aberdeen, Allie wanted to go to her Grandma's and wouldn't stay with me but promised to attend her appointments. Unfortunately, Allie did not attend these appointments, but did get in touch the following week. She had gone back to using substances straight away and after a week decided to move to Aberdeenshire and live with her dad to distance herself from associates and ease of access to substances.

I continued to maintain contact and worked with her social worker to move her Community Order and worker to that area. However, things

fell apart and she returned to the city. While there, her life became much more difficult although engagement improved. Allie's Grandma had just had a major operation, and she was caring for her as best she could. Her dad, who had previously been noted as a good support to Allie, relapsed and began using drugs around Allie and in her grandma's house. He began physically assaulting Allie and stealing from his mother. I, alongside a colleague from Families Outside (who supported grandma) put in an Adult Support and Protection (ASP) referral for both Grandma and Allie. I have been working with the care team around the ASP.

Allie was spiralling and her substance use worsened. The jobcentre had paid her money into the wrong account, then sanctioned her and generally treated her poorly. I liaised with the Universal Credit team to have her money reinstated as it had been suspended.

Due to financial pressures, caring responsibilities, pressure and abuse from her family, Allie attempted suicide and began prostitution. She called me and begged for help and still wanted to go to rehab. I contacted the prison who suggested Prison to Rehab. I got in touch with Phoenix Futures and organised for Allie to be assessed for a residential rehab programme.

During this time, I began taking her food shopping for her grandma weekly. I take her to her Community Payback Order appointments with social work, and source items she needs such as food parcels for herself, clothing, and a replacement phone. I sourced her a suitcase and toiletries for going to rehab, advocated for her with the credit union and universal credit, and arranged and escorted her to her Community Psychiatric Nurse appointments.

Allie has now completed her assessment for rehab and is working to reduce the level of Buvidal etc. that she is using. When she has completed this, I will take her to Glasgow for rehab and settle her in. I will maintain contact via phone and video. I will then continue to support her in the community and ensure she has safe and secure housing out with the city for her return to the community.

Outcomes

Allie now has a wraparound support where I ensure everyone is updated. I organise and take her to her appointments, ensuring she can be successful at her community order.

I ensure I take all the pressures away from her that I can by reducing universal credit commitments and caring responsibilities for her grandma by sign posting, and support to do shopping. I ensure that Allie eats when I see her, arrange and accompany her to appointments and make sure she is always contactable. I provide emotional support and solutions where I can.

There has been a huge improvement in engagement with services and Allie, although still struggling, knows that she is supported and feels supported for the first time.

Quotations

"I have never had a support worker who helped me as much as you. I tell you I need something and when you say you will do it, you do. Look at us on the way to my rehab assessment."

"I feel more supported by you even though you are part time, it is enough. I don't feel judged by you, and I know I can trust you."

"If it wasn't for Rebecca I don't know where I would be now, and I only engage in services because of Rebecca."

When attending the UC, a previous support worker of Allie's had made a comment about the problem being Allie never engaging in support. Allie replied:

"No not now, not since I got Rebecca."

When asked during her rehab assessment what support network do you have, Allie said:

"Rebecca, and Jessica although I only come to see Jessica when Rebecca takes me."

Communications and Media

Upside has developed a Communications Strategy that brings together the partnership commitment and approach to internal and external communications. A Communications Working Group with representation from each partner organisation supports to oversee the delivery and implementation of the strategy at an operational and strategic level.

Key activity in the first year of Upside delivery includes:

- Development of Upside materials and literature to be embedded across the operational landscape, including the prison estate and community touchpoints;
- Introduction of Upside Case Studies, Upside Moments and Feedback forms;
- Upside Voices Champions model and Media Training for key representatives;
- Media promotion:
 - Third Force News Article covering the launch of the Upside service;
 - STV News Emergency Early Release feature;
 - Holyrood Reporter Article detailing support from Upside;
 - The Scotsman Colum from CJS Chief Executive, Karyn McCluskey, profiling Upside support;
 - BBC 'Outside Barlinnie' documentary series, involving Upside staff and people supported by the service.

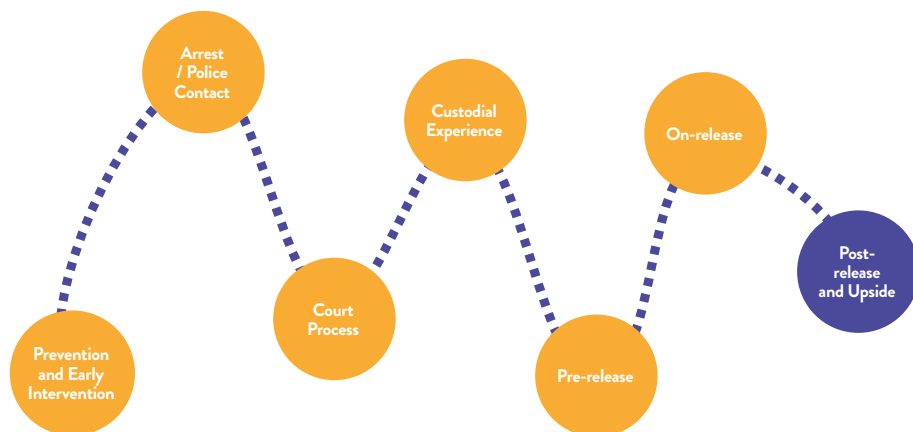


Upside Voices

The people we support are at the centre of our delivery model to ensure that Upside delivers a responsive service that meets the evolving needs of those we work with. Involvement is facilitated through structured, participatory, and continuous engagement processes.

■ *"Upside is like an anchor for me."*

Upside facilitated a series of Voice Groups across the service Pod Areas, using an 'Appreciative Inquiry' model to frame discussions positively, highlighting what works well and looking for solutions to issues experienced. This strength-based approach focuses on identifying and building upon what works well within our service. This creates a collaborative environment where participants feel valued and empowered to contribute to meaningful change. Learnings from the Voice Groups have been interwoven at all levels of the service, including reporting to our Governance Forums, as well as shared with the wider sector to drive systems improvements.



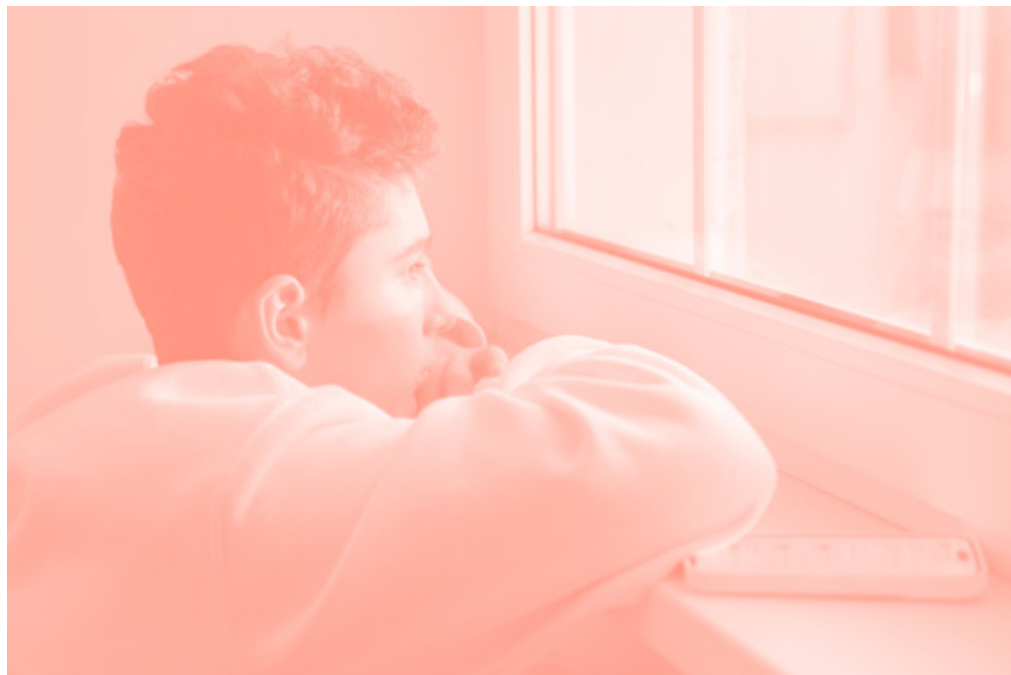
In February 2025, Upside began a collaboration with the Theatre of Oppressed Scotland, delivering a series of workshops, inviting participants to co-create a performance representing their justice experiences. The partnership remains ongoing and will build towards an exhibition to be launched in 2026, alongside a written Upside Voices Report.

■ *"If it wasn't for [Upside worker], I don't know what I'd have done."*

Governance Representation

Our aspiration is to create a safe and supported environment for people with lived/living experience to be represented at all levels of our service, including our Governance Boards.

Upside's Co-production Strategy will evolve through learning and engagement with the people we support.



Case Study 2

Name has been changed to protect the individual's identity and photography used is for illustrative purposes only.

Background

William is a young person who first came to my attention in September 2025. William was being held on remand at HMP Kilmarnock and was due to appear at court in October. William had been previously involved in the justice system while growing up.

Upon meeting with William, he was able to share a lot of information that helped myself to better understand his situation, and the nature of his re-offending. William had an alcohol and cocaine addiction, but stated he had been able to abstain from both while in custody. William also had issues from a previous relationship, which was partly the reason for the current offence. William was due to return to an address he did not want to, and this was playing on his mind pre-liberation.

Support or interventions provided

William was liberated already under tricky circumstances. He was informed a close family member was significantly unwell and that they may pass away. Further, William's mental health had hit a low, and he had suffered several panic attacks on the day of his liberation. Williams original plan was to return to his family's care, and be there for the relative who was unwell, and this is what occurred.

However, early into William's time in the community, it became clear that this would be an issue, likewise his current tenancy was also an issue. With my support, William got in contact with his housing association to discuss a move due to his poor mental health, which would only deteriorate further if returned to his previous tenancy. Thankfully, his housing association moved rather quickly, and he was moved into an unfurnished flat, not far from where he was, but far enough to limit any further trauma.

William then faced additional challenges, as he had to decorate his house, but with extremely limited funds. Family support was originally offered, but then withdrawn at the last moment. William also faced issues with the cost of living and also travelling. This resulted in numerous occasions where he had no food, and I was able to secure vouchers for shops, along with foodbank donations. Further, I was able to take William to and from certain appointments when possible, and supported William to court, where he was released pending some further checks, and additional court appearances. Although Williams house remains undecorated, it has the essentials, and I have donated some of my old utensils and cutlery, plus plates and bowls, which William has been incredibly grateful for.

William was in a good place for the most part, but unfortunately had a relapse of his alcohol addiction over the Christmas period. William knew that he had to make a change, effectively to save his life, and he, himself, began the process of a referral to rehab. William was able to secure a place to a rehab based close to his current tenancy. I reminded William of how strong he had to be to do such a thing, and how proud he should be of himself. Unfortunately, William replied "I don't know if anyone has ever said that to me".

Outcomes

William is currently in rehab. He has been able to stay clear from offending during his time in the community and is making clear strides to stay out of custody.

William has spoken positively of his future, particularly with Upsides support. He plans to fully decorate his flat, while also improving his mental health, before heading back into work. William is aware of the challenges that he will face, but feels confident in his ability to overcome these.

Quotations

"I do not know where I would be without you."

- Directly to myself from William shortly after liberation.

"All I have is my Upside worker."

- William when speaking to his CJSW & Housing.

"You're literally a lifesaver!"

- William's uncle, to myself.

"I don't know if anyone has ever said that to me."

- William after I told him he should be proud of himself.

Partnership Engagement

Training

Upside has developed a comprehensive core training matrix for staff across the partnership. This includes training on operational standards, case management, risk assessments, the Justice Outcomes Star, and Families Outside referral pathways. Additional training sessions have been procured and delivered to support learning and development. For 2025/2026, this included:

Training Course	Provider
Rough Guide to Homelessness Policy & Legislation	Homeless Network Scotland
Safe Working Practices with High-Risk Offenders	Apex Scotland
Home Energy Scotland Overview and Engagement	Home Energy Scotland
Scottish Autism Overview	Scottish Autism
Supporting People Convicted of Sexual Offences	Lucy Faithful Foundation
Call Handling with Empathy (for National Admin)	British Red Cross
Presentation Skills & Media Training (Champions)	Speak with Impact

Pod Gatherings

Two Pod Gatherings were held, bringing together all staff from across the partnership at events held in Glasgow and Edinburgh. Events supported learning and development, with collaborative sessions delivered by Scottish Autism, Mission Mindset and Families Outside. The events strengthened team connection and supported the development of a shared Upside culture.



Stakeholder Engagement

Working in partnership across the justice sector is at the forefront of the Upside model and a core objective of the first year of delivery has been establishing and embedding relationships to support service delivery and positive outcomes for the people Upside supports.

In 2025/2026, the National Team has delivered over 20 webinars and presentations, held introductory engagement meetings with over 20 individual partner organisations and joined a range of cross-sector forums and advisory boards.

At a local level, Pod Leads have become standing members of throughcare and justice forums and Community Justice Partnerships, underpinning a multiagency approach.

Looking Forward

As Upside looks forward to 2026/2027, Scotland's rising prison population highlights the importance of effective, joined up release planning and robust support provision to meet the needs of those who are vulnerable.

Our key priorities remain rooted in embedding the new national service, ensuring support is reaching those in need and delivered through a collaborative, partnership approach.

Moving beyond Emergency Early Release delivery and progressing our journey of continuous improvement will enable the service to grow from strength to strength.

Developments in our case management system and participation work will enhance the rich evidence base that demonstrates the impact of Upside support.

"Upside are a really fantastic organisation and from the initial weekly phone calls whilst in jail to the ongoing support on my release, Upside has helped me learn I actually do have purpose in life, something I've struggled with for a long time."

Statement of Compliance

Upside works in alignment with the following conditions

- a. Real Living Wage accreditation for each member of the partnership;
- b. effective workers' voice channels are in place across the partnership;
- c. processes for staff training and development are in place across the partnership;
- d. where possible, zero hours contracts have not been utilised by members of the partnership;
- e. inclusive recruitment practices are in place and all staff are trained on diversity;
- f. family friendly working practices are in place for all staff; and
- g. no member of the partnership utilises a fire and rehire practice.

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Upside is a Scotland-wide voluntary throughcare service, funded by the Scottish Government and delivered by Sacro, Access to Industry, Action for Children, Apex Scotland, Barnardo's, Circle, Families Outside and Turning Point Scotland.



Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba

