

# Forestry Commission Scotland and youth employment skills training



## Introduction

The consequences of the current recession could be felt by society for years to come – perhaps even decades. But whilst the economic crisis has led to increased unemployment amongst all working ages, its effects are being felt most keenly amongst young people. On top of all the challenges of embarking upon adult life (Annex 1) today's 16 - 25 year olds are having to contend with global competition, an ageing population to support and poor work prospects. Every young person not in employment represents a significant cost to society so it is of concern to all of us that this vulnerable age group has been hit so hard by the economic crisis.

This paper describes the youth unemployment situation in Scotland and summarises measures taken by Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) to help redress this situation within the Central Scotland Green Network<sup>1</sup>.

Angela Constance  
and apprentices.

## The picture in Scotland

In Scotland around 67,000 young people are unemployed. Since the start of the economic downturn, unemployment among 16-24 year olds in Scotland rose from 55,000 to over 100,000<sup>2</sup> in 2011/12, although more recently it has fallen back towards its previous level. From 9% in 2005, youth unemployment rose to nearly 20% in 2011/12, although the recent decline in Scotland to 16.6% (compared to 20.3% for the UK as a whole) – is welcome. However, the fact remains that one in six of the economically active population aged 16-24 still does not have a job, and the unemployment rate within this group is more than twice the rate of the workforce as a whole.

Youth unemployment has longer term effects on both for the individual and for wider society. Such “scars” include impacts on future employment prospects, future earnings potential, the individual's health, wider society and the public purse. The Scottish Government estimates that the lifetime cost of this cohort of young people failing to make the transition into regular employment is as much as £2 billion.<sup>3</sup>

The highest rates of youth unemployment in Scotland are in parts of Glasgow and the Strathclyde area, Stirling and Clackmannanshire. The latest figures for Scotland estimate the level of 16-19 year olds not in employment, education or training to be 33,000 (13.3%) in 2012, a figure similar to the total number of people who are employed within the forestry sector in Scotland today. International comparisons of young people show that the UK has one of the higher NEET rates (i.e. not in employment, education or training) within the European Union.<sup>4</sup>

## Scottish Government priority

The SNP Manifesto stated that creating jobs would be the Party's top priority. So it is not surprising that tackling youth unemployment and creating jobs is a high priority for Scottish Ministers. More Choices, More Chances is the Scottish Government's 2006 Strategy to reduce the proportion of young people not in education, employment or training. It listed seven challenging ‘hotspots’<sup>6</sup> in Scotland - six of which are in

<sup>1</sup> CSGN is a key strategic infrastructure project within the Scottish Government's National Planning Framework, for which FCS is a lead body.

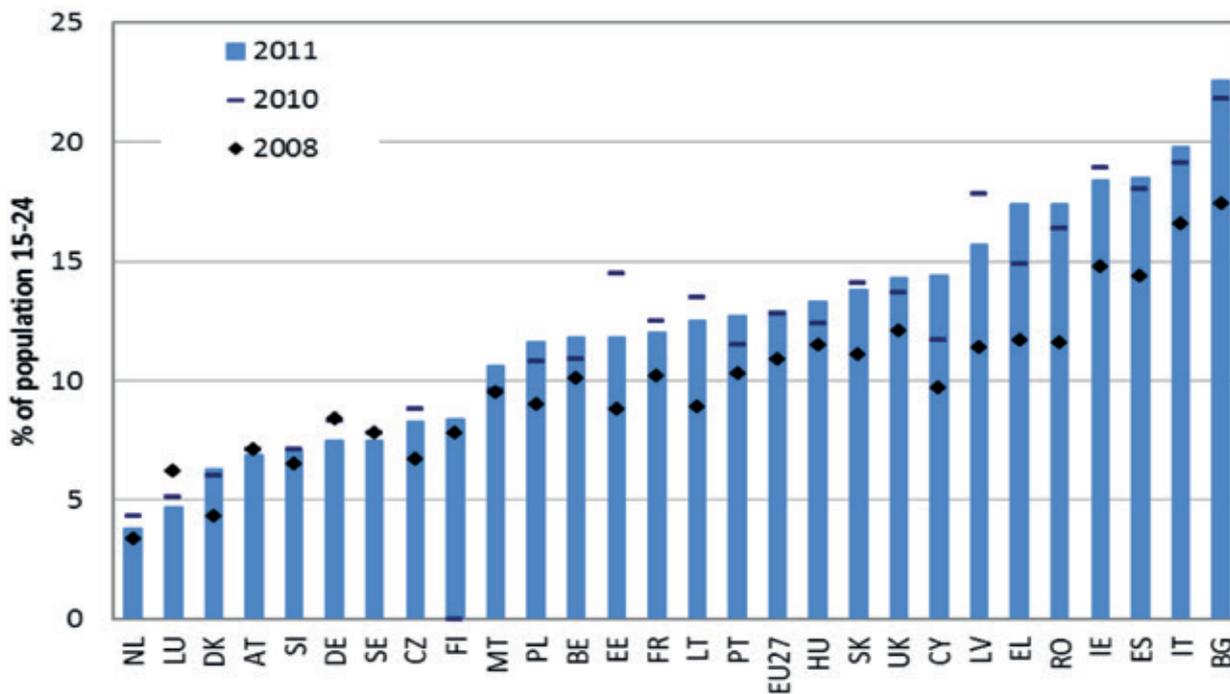
<sup>2</sup> Source: Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefingsAndFactsheets/S4/SB\\_12-19rev.pdf](http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefingsAndFactsheets/S4/SB_12-19rev.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> (note: data for 2012 are not available for all EU countries).

<sup>5</sup> Source – European Commission. [http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/themes/17\\_youth\\_unemployment.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/themes/17_youth_unemployment.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Glasgow, West Dunbartonshire, North Ayrshire, East Ayrshire, Clackmannanshire, Inverclyde and Dundee.



NEET young people for EU Member States, 2008, 2010 and 2011<sup>5</sup>

the Central Scotland Green Network area - where making inroads would be expected to have the greatest impact at the national level. The Strategy also identified a number of ‘most at risk’ groups<sup>7</sup>. In 2007 the Scottish Government gave a commitment to young people about support for education, employment and training and recognised the need to focus on young people most at risk of moving into ‘negative destinations’. In December 2011 a new Ministerial post was created - Minister for Youth Employment (Angela Constance) with a bespoke £30M fund for tackling youth unemployment in 2012/13 and in June 2012 a Youth Employment Strategy<sup>8</sup> was published.

### Employment skills training programme

A common mantra amongst young unemployed people is ‘I can’t get a job without experience, but I can’t get experience without a job’. Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) has a tradition of helping to break this vicious circle by providing vocational training<sup>9</sup> for young people through sandwich year placements and modern apprenticeships<sup>10</sup>. For example FCS currently employs 19 apprentices in several Forest Districts who are working toward a two-year SVQ level three<sup>11</sup> Trees & Timber Modern Apprenticeship in either harvesting or forest establishment. However, decreasing staff numbers within FC Scotland, combined with the need

to help address the Scottish Government’s priority of tackling youth unemployment, meant that another way had to be found to supplement existing in-house provision for training if the issue of tackling youth unemployment was to be addressed meaningfully. The answer lay in utilising the expertise of external training providers and allying this to FC Scotland’s forest resource – the National Forest Estate – to provide a package that would enable young people to gain skills, training and experience within woodland environments.

In 2011 the FCS Management Board agreed to pilot a partnership approach using the National Forest Estate and - where appropriate - non-FC woodland owned by public bodies within the Central Scotland Green Network. The aim was to attract young people mainly from areas of higher social deprivation and from under-represented parts of society such as ethnic minorities, women and those with mental or physical disabilities. It would provide them with training for work that would increase their self confidence and help them on their ‘journey’ towards employment. A Project Manager – Joneen Clarke – was appointed within Scottish Lowlands Forest District to oversee the process and budgetary provision was obtained to take this forward within the Central Scotland Green Network.

Thus commenced the FCS Youth Employment Skills Training Programme.

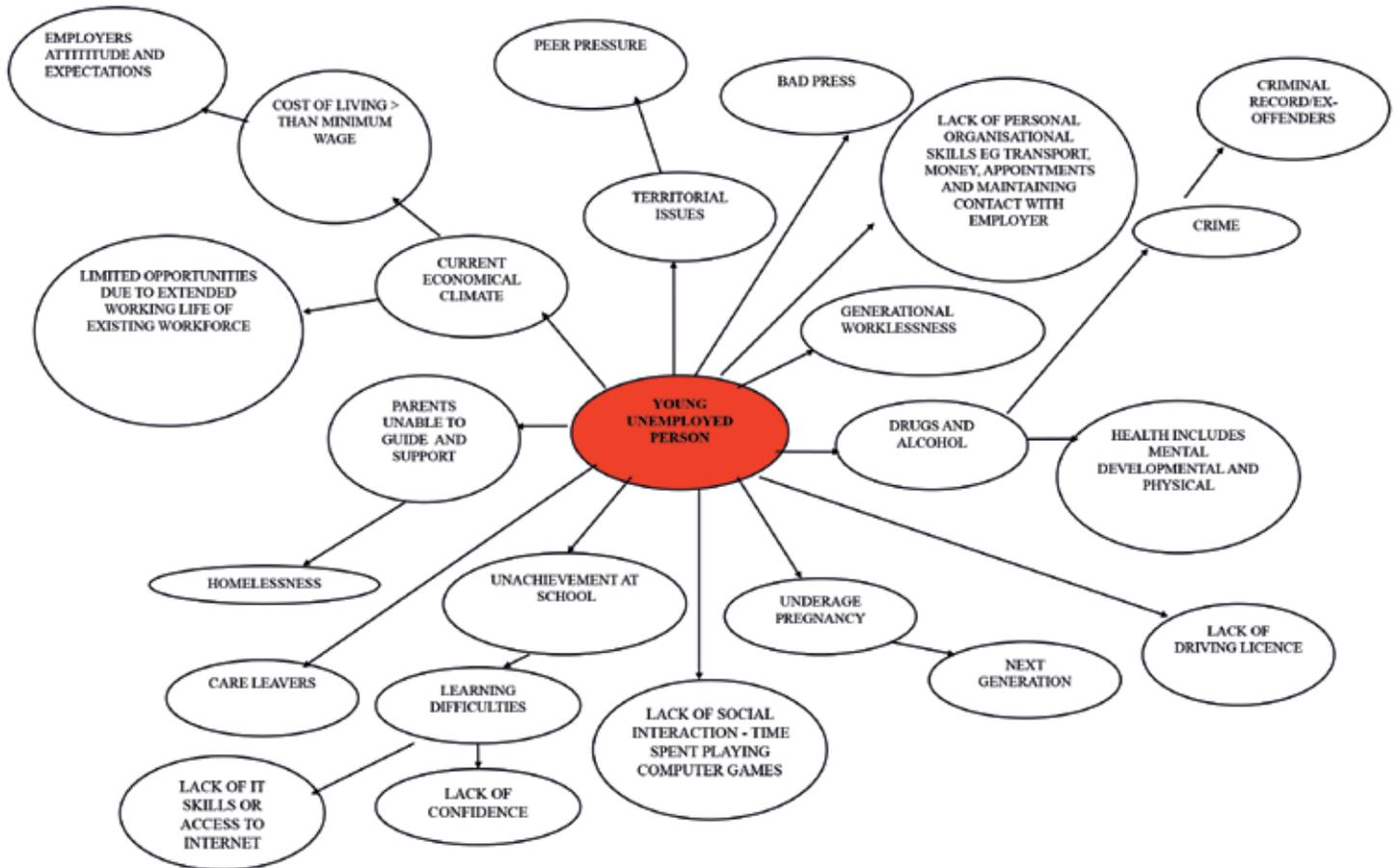
<sup>7</sup> Care leavers; young offenders; young parents; low attainers; persistent truants; young people with physical /mental disabilities; and young people misusing drugs or alcohol.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.employabilityinscotland.com/sites/default/files/articles/5737/Youth%20Employment%20Strategy.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> An arrangement that allows a school leaver to gain vocational qualifications while being trained in a job.

<sup>10</sup> Paid employment combined with skills training to gain work experience without having to study full-time.

<sup>11</sup> The Scottish Qualifications Authority list 5 SVQ (Scottish Vocational Qualifications) levels that run from Level 1 (Standard Grade) through Level 3 (Higher National Certificate) to Level 5 (Master’s degree).



Annex 1 Challenges facing young people

### FCS Programme: results

Following successful pilots with The Wise Group, BTCV and The Waterways Trust, Forestry Commission Scotland ran a larger scale procurement exercise in 2011/12 to test the market for training providers more comprehensively and to provide monitoring and evaluation measures of success. This exercise resulted in five successful bidders: Barnardo's, BTCV, East Ayrshire Woodlands, Living Solutions and The Wise Group. FCS provided £788,000 which increased to £942,000 with partnership funding, enabling training to be given to 203 young people, two thirds of whom came from the 15% most deprived areas in Scotland.

In 2012/13, under a Framework Agreement, FC Scotland provided £756,000 (matched by £222,000 external funding) to provide employment skills training for 150 young people. For 2013/14 £400k has been made available to six providers<sup>12</sup> to train 93 full time trainees. As the initiative has become more embedded in the training providers' programmes, the proportion of matched funding has increased steadily, from 15% in 2011/12 to over 24% in 2013/14.

Training and work experience programmes have varied in scope, from part time 'volunteering' (2-3 days per week) through to intensive full-time technical training (up to 26 weeks). Programmes encompass both silvicultural operations and environmental and recreational improvements. Participants are taught a range of skills (life, forestry and employability) while they carry out forest maintenance tasks that improve

woodland settings for local communities. Trainees gain certificates of achievement both in employability skills (such as work ethic, communication, time management, team participation and self-confidence) and technical training certificates (such as first aid, brush cutting, manual handling high pruning, landscaping and chainsaw operation).

Although the cost per trainee day varies significantly depending upon such things as the degree of supervision, transport and the equipment being used, it has declined overall from £115 in 2011/12, to £103 in 2012/13 to £94 in 2013/14.

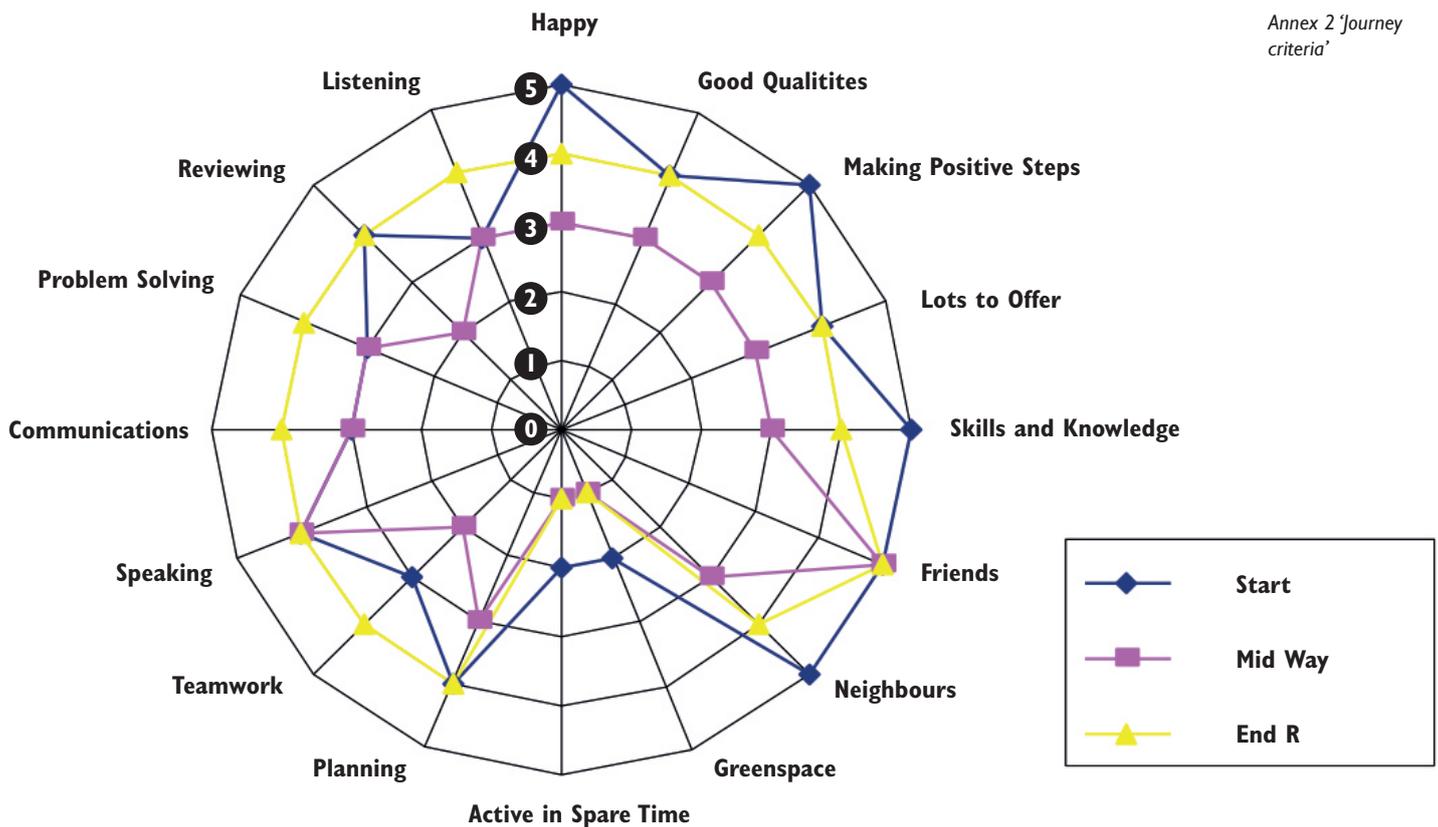
### Participant characteristics

Trainees vary greatly in terms of their background, characteristics and motivations. Those from areas of severe deprivation often experience dysfunctional or chaotic family lives characterised by generational worklessness (for the 2011/12 programme 40% of trainees were from 15% most deprived SIMD<sup>13</sup> datazones). Trainees also include those with some qualifications who have found it very difficult to obtain work experience since leaving school. Although many of the programme participants had not engaged well at school (finding learning within indoor environments somewhat challenging) they were often found to thrive in outdoor settings.

Participants have included groups of vulnerable young adults with learning difficulties - some who have served a custodial sentence - and keen school

<sup>12</sup> Action for Children, Barnardo's, East Ayrshire Woodlands, Living Solutions, Phoenix Futures, Scottish Waterways Trust.

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/SIMD>



leavers with examination certificates. As a result it is not easy to compare trainee group metrics (for example comparing a young person to whom training means a lower likelihood of reoffending, with a young person to whom training is a step towards a Modern Apprenticeship scheme). However, it can be helpful to regard participants as being on a 'journey' towards a successful destination. Therefore the training, coaching and support requirements for someone scoring low according to the journey criteria will be very different than for someone who scores more highly (see Annex 2). This raises the concept of matching training to individuals' 'journeys', starting with breaking habits that perpetuate unemployment and building up life skills, through to general skills training and finally dedicated technical training. All of this takes time and money, but – as referred to above – there is a huge cost to society if this issue is not tackled. Disengagement from working environments is linked to higher risk of drug and alcohol misuse, anti-social behaviour and teenage pregnancy, while research undertaken for the Audit Commission<sup>14</sup> estimated the lifetime cost to the economy per NEET young person at £56,000 (other studies estimate much higher figures).

As with forestry jobs, forest-related training projects tend to attract male participants, accounting for over 90% of trainees to date. In an effort to tackle this gender gap, FCS is now funding some all-female groups within the 2013/14 programme, with the aim of helping to encourage more women into forestry careers. In addition, a number of asylum seekers will be trained in partnership with the Scottish Refugee Council.

## Results/Positive outcomes

### Trainee benefits

All external providers are required to keep in touch with trainees for up to six months after completion of training in order to monitor to what extent they are progressing towards a positive outcome (a positive outcome is defined as securing further employment, further education or training). To date around half of the trainees had moved to a positive destination, the figure varying from 26% (for those trainees at the start of their employment 'journey') to over 80% (for the most motivated trainees).

### Environmental benefits

Although the aim of the programme was not specifically to improve woodland settings, this was an inevitable and welcome by-product. Such improvements included path strimming; removal of windthrown trees; de-littering; high pruning; crown lifting; thinning; rhododendron cutting; path and bridge construction; sign repairing/installing and removal of redundant fences.

### Community benefits

For many of the trainees the programme allowed them to get to know their peers and to cooperate together in a work situation. Team working towards common, shared objectives provided a taste of what 'real life' work holds. Apart from the cohesion that resulted from these communities of interest (i.e. the trainees themselves) there were also benefits to the wider communities: people living close to the work sites.

<sup>14</sup> University of York research undertaken for the Audit Commission: Estimating the life-time cost of NEET: 16-18 year olds not in Education, Employment or Training, July 2010

## Testimonials

Every participant has their own story to tell and feedback to give. Here is just a flavour of what the participants had to say.

**Craig Cessford**, 18, from Dalgety Bay, who left school at 16 because he was dyslexic and was struggling with reading and writing, said: *“The programme is all about teaching young folk to adapt to working life, helping you to understand what employers want and giving you the skills but also the confidence to make your life better. I now have a job working on the Dalmeny Estate and have also worked with Central Forestry. I hope to use what I’ve learned to set up my own business in the future.”*

**Ryan Sutherland**, 17, from Bishopbriggs, who started the Youth Skills Programme in January 2013 and is working on sites including Wester Moffat in Airdrie, North Lanarkshire, said: *“School was a bit of a challenge for me but I thrived in subjects like techie, art and anything practical. I was working on a joinery placement but when it finished, I was unemployed. I heard about the Skills Programme and knew a few boys who’d been on it. So far I’m absolutely loving it. I’ve picked up lots of new skills, used tools I’ve never had the chance to handle before and have already done my CSCS test and gained my certificates in Health & Safety and Manual Handling. The certificates will help to build my CV and I hope it will be easier to get a job when I finish. I would definitely recommend the programme. It is brilliant getting out in the forest and it looks good on my CV that I can work in all weather conditions. I’m open-minded about what I’ll do when I finish but working in forestry would be a really good job to have.”*

**James O’Donnell**, 20, from Cowdenbeath, left school when he was 15 with no qualifications. One of 18 children, he left full time education suddenly following the death of his mother and was unable to return. He said: *“After leaving school at a young age, I didn’t think I was able to do anything but I’ve come here and earned this place and I’m still going. When my mum died I blamed the school. I was young and stupid and didn’t go back. I missed out on my qualifications but thankfully I was given this opportunity to learn new stuff. I’m very happy now. I’m building a new life for myself and my family including my one year old son. It shows you that if you keep your head up and stick in then anything is achievable. I want to continue to work in forestry when I finish this contract.”*

**Samantha Hancock** (Sam), 16, from Glenrothes, who left school in October 2012 and has not been able to find work since said: *“I hate the idea of being stuck in an office all day so I really enjoy the physical parts of the job. It keeps you motivated and it’s great being outdoors. More women should think about a career in forestry. We are just as capable as the guys.”*

Often local people would take an interest in what was happening, talking with the trainees and giving verbal encouragement. Several members of the public even contacted FC Scotland or the training providers with positive comments about the environmental benefits that were happening in their neighbourhoods. Such comments not only helped to boost team morale but provided evidence to the young people that their work was valued by the local community.

## Conclusion

In seeking to help tackle the Scottish Government’s priority of reducing youth unemployment, FC Scotland introduced programmes of work experience skills training for young people in 2011. Since then established training providers have been engaged to oversee training programmes within publicly owned

forests, particularly the National Forest Estate. Two years on, the life chances of 350 young people have been improved significantly, with around half progressing to a positive destination (further education, training or employment) and a third gaining jobs. This effort will continue, with a further 93 young people set to benefit from the employment skills training programme in 2013/14.

**James Ogilvie**, Head of Social & Planning Policy, Forestry Commission Scotland

## Acknowledgements

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