

IMPACT REPORT



09/2024



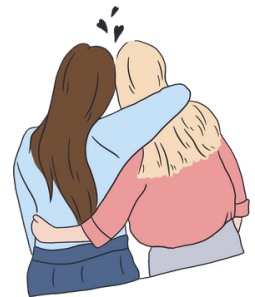
ABOUT UPPERTUNITY

Uppertunity is a charity based in Dundee focused on empowering our community, working with individuals (16+) with learning disabilities, autism and mental health barriers. We provide a range of inclusive activities to nurture personal development, confidence, and social interaction. Through this we can reduce social isolation as we build a community that's based around every individual's right to thrive, not just survive.



We run therapeutic, creative and skill development-based workshops each week; offer creative mentoring and 1-2-1 art therapy; support meaningful volunteering roles and paid employment; offer formal and informal skill development; and host community events.

Our services are consistent and long term, not drop-in. We strongly believe in building and nurturing relationships, and this takes time. We work with over 85 unique individuals on a weekly basis, and then also work with people who use our services as a stepping stone into other services.



We've been running for 9 years, and have supported over 200 people through our workshops, volunteering opportunities, inclusive placements, and paid employment. We have engaged with many more through our social events. We have built up a reputation and track record for enabling people to achieve things that they and those closest to them never thought possible. We have demonstrated that we do not seek to exist in isolation: we support our community & other organisations.

We have established ourselves and have proven that our services can help prevent and relieve isolation by: increasing confidence and helping individuals from marginalised backgrounds to have a purpose; connecting isolated individuals with their local communities; educating individuals on their rights to be heard; developing the unique skills of individuals and using them in meaningful volunteer roles or employment; and educating individuals on what good health and wellbeing is and how to achieve it.



OUR SERVICES

Weekly Warriors

Weekly therapeutic and creative based workshops for adults with additional needs



UppSkills

Weekly cooking and upcycling skill based workshops for adults with additional needs



Social Butterflies

Various inclusive weekly social activities ranging from group outings to bigger events



Big Best Life

Personal development opportunities including life skills groups, therapy & skill programmes



Catering

Climate conscious catering for everyone and all occasions, also offering inclusive skill opportunities



Mini Take Away Café

Café based in Dudhope Castle for members and other tenants



Volunteering

Meaningful volunteering opportunities for all: supporting groups, cooking, gardening, events and more



Growing Places

Garden project at Dudhope Castle, involving a trail and growing. Open to all to get involved in



Bowling Stones

Inclusive bowling league for adults with additional support needs across Dundee



Changemakers Hub

Community hub run by 5 local organisations, helping to amplify and link existing projects



THE NEED WE MEET

Personal development and positive destinations for young people and adults with learning disabilities and additional support needs is critically needed, within Dundee in particular. Dundee has the highest proportion of adults with learning disabilities in Scotland (9.5 per 1000, 2017). Yet there are minimal services for adults and young people within this population to maintain community connections. Two thirds of the population with learning disabilities also live in the most deprived areas of the city. Through our services, we support mental and physical wellbeing, connections, and personal development.



The greatest challenge the people we work with face is isolation. Poor health can result from social isolation and deprivation. Many people with learning disabilities have experienced lifelong exclusion resulting from lack of choice and opportunity as well as experiencing significant barriers to access.

Through our services, we help reduce social isolation and empower individuals to live lives that are rich in love, value and potential. Stigma and lack of community support contribute to the statistics outlined in The Keys to Life, which state that the life expectancy of people with a learning disability is 20 years earlier than the general population.



Research has shown that two thirds (67%) of the British public feel uncomfortable talking to disabled people; over a third (36%) of people tend to think of disabled people as not as productive as everyone else; and a quarter (24%) of disabled people have experienced attitudes or behaviours where other people expected less of them because of their disability. It is such prejudice that results in oppression of people with learning disabilities and creates segregation. Aiden and McCarthy (2014) argue that greater inclusion in mainstream activity and more opportunities for people with disabilities and those without disabilities to interact is the way to challenge such prejudice and fear. We aim to help with greater inclusion through our catering service, volunteering opportunities and external events.



VISION AND MISSION

AIMS

1. We believe in equality for all. We aim to help individuals with additional needs, and who feel marginalised, to feel more empowered and have increased self-worth.

2. We help individuals with additional needs develop growth mindsets. We use a mixture of methods that bring about an inner resilience, challenging people's perceptions of themselves and their own capabilities of shaping their world.

3. We aim to create social change by demonstrating that everyone has strengths and skills to offer their world. We all have a calling and a purpose we can serve that provides self-fulfilment.

4. We aim to create environmentally sustainable communities through community partnership, creative waste reduction methods and educating people about their role in the world.

ETHOS

Creativity

We believe creativity engages the mind, enables broader thinking and problem solving, and connects us to hidden parts of ourselves

Empowerment

We 'work with', not 'do for'. We support individuals to develop confidence to lead the life they want to lead.

We do this through mutual respect, and by encouraging individuals to take ownership of their own lives

Curiosity

We advocate progress not perfection, encouraging individuals to explore and learn, and to always give something a go

Community

True change happens when the community and its members take action and responsibility as a collective. It is the responsibility of all of us to build our community

Sustainability

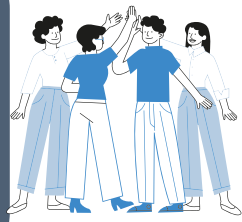
Everything we do is in the aim to create social, economic and environmental sustainability. We do this through practical environmental activities, support, and engagement with our community

HOW WE MEASURE SUCCESS

- Improved mental wellbeing including confidence, self-esteem and self-respect
- Improved community connections, support networks and healthy relationships
- Individuals making more positive life choices, including using a service consistently
 - Individuals learning new skills and feeling like they have a purpose
- Individuals attending permanent volunteering, and working towards employment (if this is the person's goal)

OUR IMPACT SINCE 2015

We work with over 85 individuals on a weekly basis. We started with just 2 back in 2015! We work with additional clients who attend our events, but not weekly services. We have worked with over 200 clients over the 9 years, with many having attended since 2015. Some have used our service as a stepping stone to further destinations, some have moved away, and some attend monthly.



Since starting, we've supported 54 paid job opportunities. 70% of current paid staff at Uppertunity have barriers to employment. Many started as volunteers and are now acting as role models.

We've supported 50 placements, through universities, schools, colleges and career mentoring programmes.



We have received over 21,000 volunteer hours from volunteer members, volunteer facilitators and community volunteers for events. This equates to over £252,000 if paid the living wage, or 11.5 full time staff members.

We help fight climate change by using items that would otherwise be thrown away such as fabric, old duvets, furniture, clothes, paint and much more. We also take food that would otherwise be discarded and turn it into meals. Since September 2019, we have prevented 26,000kg of food going to waste (approx 80,000kg of CO₂, equivalent to the emissions from manufacturing 5 new family cars.)



Our clients report an increase in their confidence, independence, social circle and skill level. Clients have reported that they now attend other services in their community after starting with Uppertunity.

We ran a successful café, Serendipities, for 4 years, where we supported over 50 volunteers, created 25 paid jobs, and offered a safe space for the community. We also ran an upcycle shop for a year and half, ReBoutique, supporting over 30 volunteers, created 8 jobs, supported local creatives, and met so many wonderful people. We made the difficult decision to close both outlets in August 2023.



OUR IMPACT IN 2024

09/2023 to 08/2024 has been another exciting and learning filled year at Uppertunity. We started our 9th year by unfortunately closing our two shops. It was very emotional, but it made us think about how we can still do what we want to do in new ways.

We navigated this new chapter with excitement, and have spent the last year testing new projects and activities with our members, volunteers and team. We now have... a jam packed events calendar; an inclusive skills programme where we can capture and acknowledge our volunteers' achievements; additional weekly groups, including new subjects; a stronger catering service; and a new wellbeing book on the way!



We added additional art groups, cooking & baking groups, as well as a new music and singing group! With our added groups, we ran **25 different** skill, therapeutic or creative based workshops each week, offering **158 spaces** for individuals with additional support needs to attend routinely. Our weekly creative groups include different art, craft, sewing and drama based activities. We offer different activities in each group, where we learn new skills. The groups also offer safe ways to socialise and make new friends.

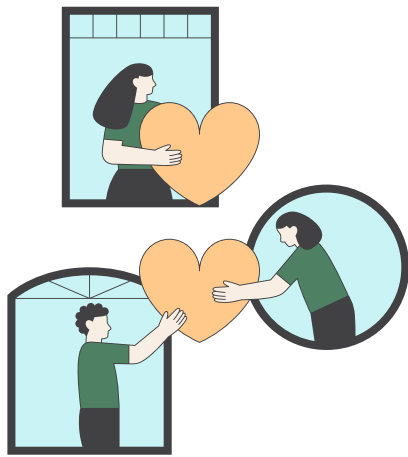
We expanded our daily lunch group and created a mini café. We now run a daily lunch club where individuals either order food made by our kitchen volunteers or bring their own lunches. Between **8 and 25 people** come each day for lunch, where we enjoy time to socialise. We make, on average, **40 lunches** each week for our members and other users of the building we're based in. We use excess and climate conscious food in our prep, and offer healthy options...that are still tasty and exciting!



Over the year, we have developed our social calendar, Social Butterflies, and offered an event almost every week. Events involve connecting with the wider community in various ways. We ran **44 events** during the year, welcoming over **1,200 attendees**, and working with over **20 different** delivery partners.

OUR IMPACT IN 2024

Two of our 2024 events were week-long exhibitions, based in nearby locations (Scrapantics' Wellgate Centre space, and various empty units in The Keiller Centre). Both incorporated a programme of workshops run by us and other local facilitators. These community-facing events help bring people together and demonstrate that, no matter their abilities, everyone has something unique to offer.



We worked with **50 volunteers**, who contributed over **3,500 hours**. Our volunteers run our catering service, upcycling and garden projects, support our art groups and our events programme, all while learning and gaining new skills. Some of the exciting events our volunteers have run are Dundee's Hooley, two weddings, and Dundee's Food Festival. Our new skills programme, Big Best Life, helps us all recognise and celebrate the contribution that our volunteers make. Volunteers are central to Uppertunity: we want to support different opportunities for development, and we all learn from each other.

Alongside our weekly activities, we also offer one-to-one check ins and art therapy, all free. Our wellbeing support has equated to over **300 hours** for 2023/24 alone. Uppertunity wellbeing checks are an organic and on-site service facilitated during regularly scheduled activities by our trained staff members. Our staff are mental health first aid trained. Clients have also shared that they enjoy being able to interact freely without judgement from others around them, and that Uppertunity staff are understanding, genuinely interested, and are there to help.



We asked our clients how Uppertunity has made a difference. The themes were:

"Uppertunity helps Improve my self-confidence, as well as my confidence to socialise and speak to others"

"Uppertunity gives me new opportunities to learn new skills"

"Coming to Uppertunity encourages me to get out of the house, as I have something meaningful to go to"

"Uppertunity gives me a safe space to meet new people and make friends"

HOW WE SUPPORT WELLBEING AND HEALTH

Our activities are long term and consistent, i.e. not drop-in.

Strong routine helps mental health by: lowering stress levels; forming good daily habits; taking more ownership of one's health; feeling more productive; and feeling more focused. Routine activities also help reduce isolation. The impact of isolation increases risks of: heart disease and stroke; type 2 diabetes; depression and anxiety; addiction; suicide and self-harm.



We believe, and experience first-hand, in the **power of creativity**. Not only can art be used to challenge misconceptions and support the wellbeing of the wider community, but it can be used to support individual wellbeing, which ultimately impacts the wider community. Research has also shown that participation in creativity helps to develop new friendships, learning new skills, promotes resourceful thinking, curiosity and problem solving, and reduces stress and anxiety (Gillam, 2012). People with learning disabilities and/or autism can experience high amounts of anxiety. Our creative activities help reduce anxiety and stress, and promote calm. We work with smaller groups over a longer period to work with deeper emotions, and create safe spaces to explore inner creativity even further.



We develop and **build transferable life skills** in our clients, and empower individuals who are underestimated. By being empowered, they can then give back to their own community. Our clients benefit from increased confidence, creativity, motivation, skills and a sense of achievement as well as feel more engaged with their community and society.



We **reduce social isolation** by providing safe and consistent opportunities to meet new people, form relationships and nurture connections.

OUR TEAM AND WIDER NETWORK

We have a diverse range of members, volunteers and staff, who all bring different perspectives and thoughts. We strongly encourage these to be shared. This not only challenges thinking, but encourages new thought processes. The team has regular visual brainstorming sessions, and we also have a timeline of future ideas. This helps us celebrate successes and learn from 'failures'. We also believe that by having staff with varied lived experiences, we can cultivate a culture of respect, empathy, and collaboration, which contributes to the overall success of the organisation, and all team members.



As well as supporting creativity in our members, the core team at Uppertunity is able to generate and develop ideas and practice through our networks. Uppertunity is one of 5 organisations that lead a community and climate hub in Dundee. We meet regularly when, as well as meeting the aims of the hub, we share ideas and support each other. The other organisations are also community and creativity minded, and we support each other to achieve our particular aims.

Uppertunity is also part of three other large networks (community gardens, food network, and learning disabilities forum), which we regularly attend and take part in. We gain new ideas and perspectives from these networks, as well as ensure we are staying informed.



We make sure we are achieving our aims of equalities, diversity and inclusion, by taking part in regular networking events, being part of wider forums, obtaining feedback from members, volunteers and staff, having regular reflective board meetings, and inclusive leadership where managers and the board take an active approach in support, and not just from the side lines.

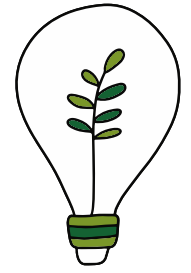


TEAM

All staff, whether paid or unpaid, are part of Uppertunity and its development. At Uppertunity, we do not believe in hierarchies. We are person centered, placing an emphasis on mutual respect and trust.

HOW WE PROMOTE SUSTAINABILITY

We are carbon footprint conscious. We aim to create a circular system. We follow a non-violent approach, providing alternative positive ways of thinking. We build confidence in individuals to make a change through a supportive and non-judgmental environment.



We have our own gardens where we maintain green spaces, fruit trees, pollinator friendly plants and herbs. This provides an opportunity for our members to get in touch with nature and develop skills in plant care, planning and teamwork. We also encourage birds and insects to our garden to help biodiversity. We have sections of our gardens separated for rewilding with long grass, bug houses, rocks and wildflowers.

We follow a circular economy model, where waste is minimised as much as possible and all resources are reused as much as possible. We upcycle various items such as jewellery and candle wax into new items. This also provides an opportunity for people to learn new skills and learn about the impact of waste, and how to prevent it. We also use waste products in our groups, such as duvets, fabrics, bottles etc.



In our main base, we have a Swap Shop, where everyone is welcome to take or swap different items. These items include secondhand clothes, books, jewellery, and household items. Everyone is encouraged to take, borrow or donate items. ALL FREE! We also have a community food cupboard, where we sell excess food items at reduced cost, to help prevent waste.

We work with FareShare, and receive food that would otherwise go to waste. We then use this food in our cooking skills groups, lunch groups and mini café. Our catering service further aims to be green by offering reusable items such as plates & cups instead of disposables, and by only offering vegan food, combatting the pollution and harm associated with the farming industry. We help prevent waste, and teach skills and share knowledge on these subjects.



FUTURE PLANS

WELLBEING BOOK



We are creating a wellbeing book that will include fun and easy recipes to follow at home. The aim is to work with existing lifestyles and include easy changes towards healthier ones.

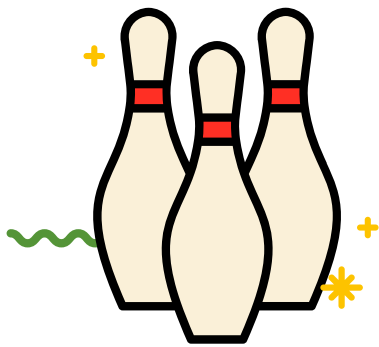
The recipe ideas will be created by adults with additional needs, ensuring relevance and a sense of ownership. The book will include more activities that support mental and physical health, inspired by the real life experiences and suggestions of our members and attendees of the external workshops we plan to run. The book will be led and designed by individuals with lived experience and include mindfulness activities, exercise ideas, and information on healthy eating

DUDHOPE CASTLE TRAIL

We are designing and creating an interactive trail around Dudhope Castle and the surrounding gardens, encouraging people to connect with nature, culture and local history. We are working in partnership with Scrapantics and other local groups to make this happen. The project will also involve a booklet and map.



BOWLING STONES



We are starting an inclusive bowling league in November 2024 specifically for adults (16+) with additional support needs! The league is made up of various teams from local organisations in Dundee and surrounding areas. We'll play once a month, with scores added up over the year. This will offer a fun opportunity to meet others and for different services to connect. We will also have an annual awards ceremony!

CHANGEMAKERS HUB - SANCTUARY GARDEN

Uppertunity is part of Dundee Changemakers Hub, and we are helping to create inclusive gardening spaces that bring people together and inspire locals to love their neighbourhood. We have already transformed one space and will be creating more. The project is aimed at local organisations and community members, who will grow, learn and collaborate.



CASE STUDIES

We spoke to 'A', a volunteer about how they felt before attending Uppertunity and how they felt things had changed for them since then. Before volunteering, 'A' would mainly spend their time wandering around. For a period of time, 'A' volunteered at another organisation but felt that they were only there to do a job and then go home again. Since starting at Uppertunity, 'A' said they feel very supported here by staff and other members and said, "it's a community". They expressed that attending services at the Uppertunity has been good for their health and for their brain. 'A' stated that Uppertunity: "...gives me purpose. It gives structure in my life, makes me feel good about myself when doing projects, and gives me a positive mindset". 'A' they said they have had the opportunity to meet new people and be sociable, and that Uppertunity has made a "positive difference" in their life.



We spoke to 'B', who started with Uppertunity in 2021 and now attends multiple days a week. When speaking with 'B' about their experiences at Uppertunity, and how things had changed for them since attending classes here, 'B' expressed that: "This place saved my life". 'B' expressed that they struggled when they left college and said that they went from having routine and structure, to nothing. They did not feel there were many services, then COVID struck which made things harder. 'B' said that there was nothing to do, and that everyday felt the same, like someone was "pressing the rewind button". 'B' went on to say that Uppertunity greatly helped them mentally and helped regain structure back into their life. They enjoy coming to their classes and like the variety on offer and being able to interact with their peers. 'B' expressed that at times they can still struggle mentally if they are not having a good day when they wake up, however coming to Uppertunity gives them something to focus on.



CASE STUDIES

We spoke to 'C', who began attending Uppertunity in 2021. 'C' stated that they really struggle with their confidence and find it difficult to start a conversation with people, however they really enjoy coming to Uppertunity and enjoy that the group is sociable. They really feel that their confidence is growing, and they just want to keep getting more confident around people. 'C' had tried attending other services in the past but felt quite isolated at these which further negatively impacted his confidence. 'C' has started attending some of Uppertunity's social events. 'C's carer expressed that this was 'totally out of their comfort zone' and that they have seen such a difference in their confidence since starting at Uppertunity. They stated that in the past, 'C' lacked so much confidence and social skills, that they would avoid sitting with family at times.



One member of support staff from another agency shared that they have seen a positive change in the people they support. They expressed that Uppertunity is an agency which is fundamental to their clients as it creates a community and a safe space where people can have fun and express themselves. They have seen a notable change in a number of their clients' confidence, seeing them become more sociable and interactive with their peers. They can also see their confidence grow through them wanting to try new things since attending Uppertunity and having such a positive experience here. They expressed that the social aspect of Uppertunity is central to the positive changes that they see in some of their clients. They went on to say that Uppertunity's consistency in providing structure, a variety of projects, and a good friendly environment really helps clients' mentalities and improves their confidence and ability to be more independent.



OUR JOURNEY SO FAR

2015

Uppertunity was set up on the 15th of September 2015 as a Community Interest Company by our two founders, Danielle and Darryl. In October 2015, the first therapeutic art group, Scribbles, was set up! This was based in Douglas Community Centre. We started this with no funds, just an idea, passion and a 'let's go for it' attitude. Our numbers grew over the year, and we started to make connections with the wider community.

2016

We held our very first social event, Oor Burns Lunch, in January of 2016. Our numbers grew, and we started our second art group, Doodles, at the Ardler Community Centre. We spent the first year making connections and finding out what was needed in the community. Danielle ran the groups for the first year and a half, unpaid, within Dundee based community centres, travelling with all the materials in her car. We started receiving volunteers from January 2016.

2017

We started exploring different types of art, and started a textiles based art group, Totally Stitched, at Menzieshill Community Centre in March 2017. We also started Growing Places, our garden project, having been given a garden plot at Tayview Community Gardens in March. 2017 was also a big year for us, as we received funding to begin to pay Danielle as well as pay for a permanent space. We moved into our first permanent premises in July, at the Circle. This meant we could offer more workshops, and support more individuals, as well as run our skills development programme, Daring for Development Program. This was a 12 week programme that involved cooking, socialising, goal setting and other life skill based workshops. We ran this programme for 3 blocks, supporting 12 individuals. We then integrated these workshops into our weekly timetable as we found that more consistent support has more impact. We also created a larger garden space at The Circle. We also held our first arts and crafts fair in December.

OUR JOURNEY SO FAR

2018

In 2018, we received funding to employ our second paid staff member, helping us to offer more workshops and events. In February 2018 we held our Two's Company event, giving a chance for individuals to socialise. We also held a Bake Off in June, and our first camping trip to Fife with some of our members in September. We held more events including craft fairs, Oor Burns, games nights and more. To ensure we were delivering the right services, we held 'have your say' events in 2018, which was open to all people with a learning disability or additional support need, and was largely attended by people with a wide spectrum of support needs. We also undertook stakeholders interviews with different groups of stakeholders.

2019

2019 was another exciting year for us, we opened our café, Serendipities, at 12 Union Street! We ran various evening workshops here for the public, and supported various local artists through our busker nights and pop up gallery. We received funding to employ more staff for Uppertunity's base, and employed new staff for the café.

We launched our Energising the Everyday training program, which is our hospitality based skills programme.

We held our first inclusive trip away for 2 nights in a cottage, where members in wheelchairs could join as well. We also started our catering services at the start of the year, testing the waters.

2020

The year many of us remember, the year covid happened. This year we really learnt the importance and value of human connections, and the wider impact of isolation. We received funding to launch online activities, supporting our members and the community through social distancing. Union Street, where our café was located, became pedestrianised, allowing us to have outdoor seating and host street events. We launched UppMakes, our upcycling and refurbishing project to teach our members new skills and help tackle waste.

OUR JOURNEY SO FAR

2021

We received funding from Community Job Scotland and the Kickstart Government scheme to employ 6 additional staff members, offering more supported employment opportunities for our volunteers and the wider community. We gained access to additional space at The Circle, allowing us to offer drama based activities, as well as a dedicated sewing room and woodworking space. We started a new set of groups called Freestyle, which is not dedicated to one specific art form. In November, Unique Beats performed their first play at our end of year celebration! We also had our first wedding catering order!

2022

At the start of 2022 we made some major developments. We moved with The Circle from Staffa Place to Dudhope Castle, and took our garden with us! We also opened a second shop in March, ReBoutique, an upcycle shop on Castle Street in Dundee. This was a space to offer an alternative sustainable shopping opportunity, use up waste, and offer creative volunteering and job roles. We began renewing the castle gardens, and running some of our workshops in the outdoors. We performed our second play, "The Greatest Show", and Unique Beats began production of a long-form film featuring Gio the alien!

2023

In 2023, we added more groups and expanded our garden project. In June we took part in Big Garden Open Day, working with Art Night to get people involved in Dundee's Gardens. To celebrate our progress we held an open-to-all pot luck garden party in partnership with Fighting for Fairness! This included the showing of Unique Beats first short film. We converted to a charity, and sadly had to close Serendipities and ReBoutique in August due to rising costs. Not before Serendipities was mentioned in National Geographic's places to eat in Dundee! Our attendance numbers grew, and we started hosting monthly themed events.

SUPPORTING US

Ideas and feedback

The activities that we deliver have been thought up by and developed from the ideas of our clients. The range of activities we offer is down to them and their success is due to their willingness to participate in shaping the future. Our clients guide what services we run. We only start new groups and run events on the suggestions of our clients.

We regularly ask our clients for their feedback and opinions. We do this informally, such as during groups, lunches and through check-ins, as well as formally through questionnaires and visioning events. We also have an anonymous feedback and idea box available at all times.

If you have ideas, please share!

How to get involved

If you would like to use our services, get involved in one of the projects, refer someone, or just support us to make things happen, we encourage you to come and see the space and have a chat with us. Everyone is unique, and we want to make sure we're working together in the best possible way.

If you would like to donate any items, we would be grateful. Please get in touch.

Contact info

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Ground Floor Left, The Circle at Dudhope Castle, Barrack Road, Dundee, DD36HF

