

## Thriving Places – Everybody's Learning



*By Robert Doyle, Community Worker at Thriving Places Parkhead, Dalmarnock and Camlachie*

The Thriving Places team in Parkhead, Dalmarnock & Camlachie is delighted to be working alongside CHANGE, Childcare and Nurture in Glasgow East. This is an important project that we hope will give local parents, families and childcare providers the opportunity to have their voices heard. Those who depend on childcare services and deliver them have lots of important thoughts and innovative ideas that we are sure will help transform childcare provision in Glasgow's East End for the better. Through our own conversations with local families we are aware of the difficulties that a lack of affordable and accessible childcare can bring. Opening up dialogue around this issue is an important first step towards creating a community where childcare is a viable option for everyone, and never a barrier.

Our mission is to make Parkhead, Dalmarnock & Camlachie a 'Thriving' community. We are going about this by engaging with people in a meaningful way and committing to do something about what we hear. In order to engage meaningfully, the conditions need to exist that allow it to happen. All of the project work that we carry out is aimed at creating these conditions, where people feel comfortable, important and listened to. Our Family Meal and Homework Club model has achieved this quite successfully. Simple in format, local families come along, children are offered homework support and free play and parents have the opportunity to participate in cooking workshops with a qualified community chef. When the homework, play and cooking is finished, everybody sits together and enjoys a two-course meal. Some of the best conversations are had at the dinner table or at the sink washing dishes, which has helped us forge strong and trusting relationships with children, parents and grandparents.

A successful legacy that has extended from the Family Meal and Homework Club in Dalmarnock is the Summer Club at Dalmarnock Primary School. This has taken place during the past two summers and is the result of positive and meaningful relationships with local families and strong progressive relationships between local partners; Dalmarnock Primary School, NHS Health Improvement, PEEK and Thriving Places. Another crucial partner in the development of this has been Children In Scotland. Alongside Business In The Community Scotland and food provider Brakes, their 'Food, Families, Futures' programme has helped fund, support, and evaluate this important piece of work.

It was through our engagement at the Family Meal and Homework Club that it became clear to us that school holidays are a time of financial hardship for many families. This is also backed up by a report titled *The Cost Of The School Holidays*, which was commissioned by Glasgow Life in 2015. Without free school meals during holidays, parents are expected to make up the cost of an extra meal each day, which is quite a challenge for those families who already walk a financial tightrope. Further to this, keeping children entertained can be an expensive undertaking itself – especially for larger families.

The Summer Club is focussed on the central theme of healthy homemade food. Parents are given the opportunity to prepare lunch each day – learning new recipes, skills and nutritional advice at the same time. We don't use expensive ingredients but, with the knowledge and direction of our community chef, the end product is always high quality. A variety of engaging and stimulating activities take place each day too. These are shaped by the children and parents who attend. It is important that local families have a sense of ownership at the Summer Club and influence how it develops.

The Summer Club ticks many boxes. It makes sure all families have access to a healthy meal during the bulk of the summer holidays. It gives children access to a wealth of activities and experiences, at no cost to their parents/guardians. It gives parents/guardians the opportunity to learn, relax and build connections in their community. Finally, it allows us as community workers to get to know local people in a deeper, more meaningful and most importantly a natural way. It is through building up strong bonds and more connected communities that we hope to encourage honest dialogue that leads to a real difference being made.

We are excited that the first phase of the CHANGE project is happening in our area and delighted to be a partner in it. Many CHANGE staff have already spent time getting stuck in at our regular events by helping cook, set tables and wash up. In doing so they are getting to know local families in an instinctive way, which leads to familiarity and trust. Without trying too hard,

engagement and consultation become easy. As humans we are happy to open up and keen to shape the conditions around us when we feel comfortable. Finding out how people really feel becomes effortless when the basis of a good, honest relationship exists.