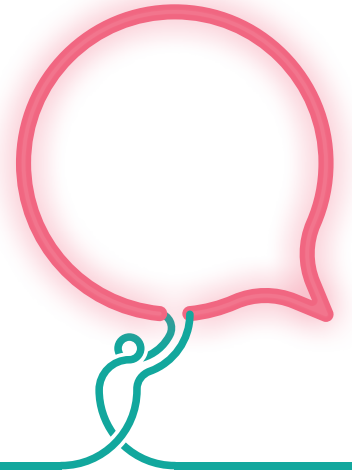


# Participation through the Pandemic

## Case Study Report



### Peer Researchers:

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### Children in Scotland:

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Funded by Young Start

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## Background

Children in Scotland delivered the Participation through the Pandemic project from May 2021 to June 2022. The project aimed to explore the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on how children and young people engaged with different projects and services that affect their lives.



Funded by Young Start, we used a peer research approach to explore how different organisations engaged with children and young people across the pandemic. We aimed to explore how projects changed and developed their approach when traditional face to face methods were not always available.

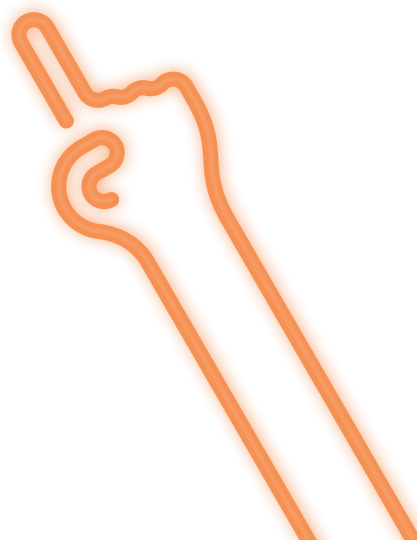
This project was delivered by our team of peer researchers: Ellie, Emma, Ishan and Katie. With support and guidance from project staff, they have engaged with projects across the country and developed six case studies based on the experiences of children and young people who had been involved in participation and engagement work since the pandemic began in March 2020.

We believe the learning gained from this project can be used to improve participation and engagement work with children and young people as we move beyond the pandemic.

The report has been written by project staff but is based entirely on the work of the peer researchers.

The case study report highlights the six case studies our peer researchers developed through the project. It is directly linked to our main project report which details our research findings and approach. You can access the [main report here](#).

The case study report gives you the opportunity to learn in detail about the six projects and their work. It provides you with evidence and examples of work that went on during the pandemic.





This section includes our six case studies. Case studies have been listed alphabetically.

### CAMHS Participation Project

The CAMHS Participation Project was delivered by NHS Dumfries and Galloway with support from SAMH to engage young people in a creative art project with the aim of improving the delivery of mental health services for children and young people in the area.

The project worked with young people aged 12-24 who lived across the region. This fun, friendly and inspiring project brought together a group of young people who had experience of mental health issues to discuss their experiences and to use these to improve the services available in the area.

The group started working together in 2020. Their work initially took place online, however as the restrictions changed the group began to work together in person more regularly. Online sessions for the project took place on Zoom and people would attend when they felt comfortable. Before getting involved in the group work aspect of the project, the project worker met with all the young people one-to-one to ensure they felt comfortable to take part. Meeting the young people individually beforehand meant that staff could get to know young people and understand their needs and boundaries.

The group kept in touch by using Instagram direct messages, a platform which lots of young people use, meaning that people could chat easily without having to always be on video calls.

The changes in restrictions that meant the group could start to meet in person posed some challenges for the project. One young person couldn't attend as they were at a high risk from coronavirus. The group had to find different ways to make sure they felt included in the group and in the activities. For example, even if the group met in person, this young person always joined virtually.

It was clear that the group benefitted a lot from getting to meet in person. Members of the group felt that they got more work done when working online but that working together in person was much more social. The participants clearly valued this as they had a lot of fun. We heard that for some members of the group that the highlight was when they had noodles and milkshake together when they met in person.

It was also evident that across the project, the young people built important relationships with the other young people and with project staff. They had kept in touch outside the project, and we felt this meant that the project had also become a way they could access some peer support. Participants could ask peers for help. This was particularly helpful/supportive because they were working with other young people with similar experiences to them. This meant people could share freely and know that people would be understanding.



The project appears to have created a safe, supportive but fun environment where people felt included. The group would adapt their sessions based on how people were feeling. Young people would also turn up to the online sessions with blankets and pillows to ensure they were always comfortable.



As part of the project, the group have worked together to create an animation that will be shared with professionals to improve how they work with young people in mental health settings and to raise awareness. The animation used the young people's views to develop the story script and also their artwork. You can [click here](#) to see the final "Be Kind" mental health animation.

Having an opportunity to create change through the project, particularly through the animation, was a key factor for the young people involved. The empowering environment that was evident during the project supported young people to feel like they could make a difference and created opportunities for them to do so. All members of the group were clear that they did not want others to have similar experiences to their own and to use what they had been through to improve the delivery of mental health services.

It was clear that having opportunities to meet with decision-makers had a big impact on the young people. They have worked directly with professionals, spoken at events and met with government ministers. Having these opportunities meant people felt listened to and like they were making a difference. The project worker felt that providing as many of these opportunities as possible was a key part of her role on the project as a member of staff.

Young people involved in the project have also taken on a role of providing support to other young people. They have shared their experiences of social media and offered a chance for people to reach out to them if they were facing difficulties and needed help.

Being involved in the project gave the participants structure during an extremely challenging time. While they worked hard, they felt it had made them feel better. It was productive and they felt they were achieving something.

The group are aiming to continue to meet and to improve services in the area. This will likely take forward a 'hybrid' approach where some meetings happen online and others are in person. Staff on the project felt that the use of online sessions was going to be needed as members of the group live far apart and so meeting in person can be a challenge. However, the young people on the project clearly enjoyed meeting face to face and want this to continue to be a key part of how the project works. They did feel

though that having regular online check-ins was good as it gave some structure and that this should continue.

*“This whole experience has been incredible, with so many more opportunities that we have been able to get involved in, speaking with policymakers, sharing our experiences within a national webinar, co-producing and designing resources alongside health professionals. I am excited about being a part of the change.”*

**(Young Person)**

*“This group has honestly been one of the best things that has happened. Without it, I don’t know where I would be! Being involved has improved my mental health and my confidence. There is now way even a couple of months ago that I would have talked in front of as many people, I would have been scared that people would judge me.”*

**(Young Person)**

Since speaking to us, more than 51 people attended the project’s online launch and we hear that the young people were fantastic! They have been able to print 500 copies of their workbook which has begun to be disseminated amongst primary and secondary Schools and given to young people referred to CAMHS.

## Carers Trust Scotland

The Media Ambassadors project was created by Carers Trust Scotland, a charity who provide support services to carers across Scotland. The aim of the project is to raise awareness of the experiences of young carers in Scotland.

The project brought together a group of young carers aged 17-21 who took part in filmmaking training with the participatory filmmaking company to create a film that raises greater awareness of the experiences of young carers in Scotland. The project was entirely led by the young people who got involved. Staff gave them the choice to do what they wanted with the project and provided any support needed.

This project started before the pandemic and met fortnightly, meaning that they had to adapt from being able to work in person to having to work online. They used a range of methods to engage with young people such as Zoom and WhatsApp as they tried to accommodate everyone’s needs. The young people on the project found these platforms easy to use and staff also tried different platforms to see if they worked better for everyone. Using apps that young people are used to helped it feel less structured or formal and supported input and participation. Some participants shared that, despite these changes, they would still prefer to work in person as they could go to events together.

One thing about the project that really stood out was the flexibility given to the young people. Young people were allowed to participate in the way they wanted and could join and leave sessions whenever they needed. This meant that the young people did not feel pressured to do things and that the atmosphere was comfortable and relaxed. This is especially important for young people who are taking care of family members as they already have other responsibilities and should not face added pressure. It was clear



that the staff were supportive and encouraged feedback. They then took this on board and changed things to fit what people had on.

It was clear that the young people gained a great deal from being part of the project. Firstly, it gave these young people the chance to have a break from their caring roles and socialise with others during lockdown. It was valuable for them to have something to do outside of caring and they felt some normality through getting the opportunity to socialise with other young people (who have similar experiences). It was also evident that the young people enjoyed what they were doing and felt proud of what they had achieved. The young people were happy to work on the project as they were working towards something that would help them. The relevance to their lives made the work feel important to them and they valued the chance to share their experiences to help others in similar situations.

They were particularly interested in having a chance to support other young carers. They wanted to do something that would support other people. They hoped that seeing the video would make people feel less alone. The young people felt a sense of pride about trying to support others in the same situation as them.

[Click here](#) to watch the Media Ambassadors 2021 short film.



The staff's plans for future work were interesting because many participants favoured a "hybrid" format, where they would use online and in-person meetings. They thought this could improve balance and make it easier for people living in rural areas to get involved because they wouldn't need to travel from more isolated areas.



Since we spoke to them, the Media Ambassadors created a short presentation and presented to Carers Trust staff across the UK. The aim of the session was to share the film with professionals and inspire them to use the film in their own work. 22 professionals attended including staff working in policy, communications and fundraising. One Media Ambassador said:

*“Thank you for allowing me to be part of the Media Ambassadors. I've really enjoyed being part of it and I think the film was really successful and can definitely facilitate change. I found the presentation to Carers Trust Scotland good. I liked that we prepared beforehand with roles and scripts, this helped me be less nervous.”*

## CELCIS Participation Project

This project is delivered by CELCIS in partnership with the Care Inspectorate, Clan Childlaw and Liminal Studios to co-produce creative and interactive digital resources for young people to access and increase their awareness of their rights in relation to continuing care.

It works with young people with experience of care aged 17-26 from all over Scotland. This creative and thoughtful project brought young people together to develop resources that support other young people to be aware of their legal rights.

The group started working together after March 2020 and due to Covid-19 restrictions had to have all their sessions online. Project staff made use of various online platforms when working with the group, which allowed the young people to join from wherever they were (even on the bus back from college). This made being involved easier for the young people and ensured that they could juggle their other responsibilities at the same time.

The team made use of various communication methods for working together online, such as Miro board and voice messages. We felt that this adaptation was important because they were seeing what works when developing the project in a new online space. It was clear from our discussion with the young people involved that the interactive aspect was appealing for them.

The project staff did not place expectations on the young people involved in the project to ensure they did not feel pressurised; participation was more about relationships and sharing experiences. This made young people feel at ease and allowed them to not feel scared of turning up or feeling like they would be judged at sessions.

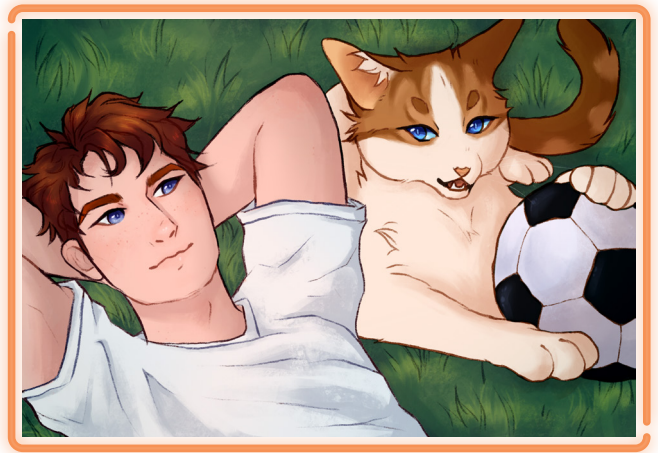
Members of the group told us that young people with experience of care often get asked to share their experiences and contribute to this sort of project. This can be both draining and time-consuming for them. Like all young people, they also have lots of other things going on in their lives.

The project staff have made sure to be considerate of this and took care not to overload the young people who were involved. The staff also shared with us that they were always mindful of the young people's time and energy and continue to amend deadlines to work around them. The needs and wishes of the young people themselves continue to be the priority. The relationships established between the staff and the young people were personal and rooted in trust. The young people felt comfortable informing

staff of when they needed something and that if they had concerns or suggestions they would be listened to.

It was explained to us that young people with experience of care often have decisions made on their behalf by adults and can feel that they have no say in these. The staff on the project actively seek to make sure the young people involved were aware of the power that they had over this project and how it is delivered.

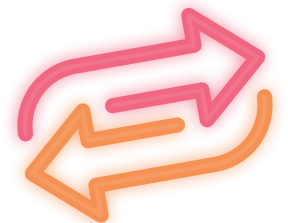
The young people designed the project, brought ideas, and told the project team what they wanted. They were able to contribute in ways that worked for them and utilised their skills. For example, one of the young people is artistic and carried out the animation design work for the project whilst other project participants voiced characters. The young people also had the final say on what information the postcards included and whether the wording was clear and understandable.



*Project artwork*

The project staff also participated in the project as equals. They provided voice-overs for the animations and made sure young people knew they were committed to being involved. This increased the strength of the relationships and trust between the young people and the staff.

The sessions were informal and fun – some young people called from their bedrooms with their pets with them! There was a focus on building relationships with young people who were involved at the start, which was important in making sure everyone was comfortable sharing their lived experiences.



It was clear to us that young people gained personally from being involved. They felt proud of what they were doing as they are helping others in similar situations. The project helped provide something to focus on during a challenging time and made them feel part of something. The project provided these young people with an outlet and a space where they could interact with other people around their age who have some semblance of understanding of their experience due to it being shared – something that they may not have had access to before. The sense of community and partnership is one that cannot be taken for granted; being a part of something larger than yourself can grow self-esteem and confidence.

The support provided is accessible but not patronising, in a way that ensures young people felt heard and included. Some young people may need support from adults when working on a project like this as they may not have done some of the things it entailed before. It was also particularly important for this project as the young people were dealing with an area associated with complex law and policy; the adults have a key role in making sure information about this was accurate and straightforward.



The postcards are currently being piloted with young people to sense check them. This is being done to make sure they meet the needs of the young people involved and that they get the opportunity to feed back on them – an important stage of any project. Once they have been checked and any changes are made, the postcards and animations will be published.

A webpage to host all the resources in one place has also been created. Having this online will mean people can access them whenever and may be particularly important given it is still harder to meet up online due to coronavirus.

## Scottish Badgers & Scottish Wildlife Trust

The Earn Your Stripes project is delivered by the Scottish Badgers and the Scottish Wildlife Trust. Scottish Badgers are a charity who promote the study, conservation, and protection of Scotland's badgers. The Scottish Wildlife Trust work to ensure healthy, resilient ecosystems across Scotland's land and seas.

The project worked with young people aged 16-24 with additional support needs in Glasgow, South Lanarkshire, North Lanarkshire and West Dunbartonshire. The aim of the project was to build knowledge and awareness on environmental issues and to work with the young people to develop techniques they could use to act on the issues that mattered to them. Online sessions included live tracking in the woods, wildlife crime scenes and how to make your garden more wildlife-friendly.

This project was very creative and adapted available technology, such as video calls, to suit the project. During some of the sessions, a staff member would bring her camera so they could watch her going out on a live trail, which brought fun and different types of interaction to the online sessions. The young people engaged enthusiastically in the online sessions, whilst welcoming any chance to meet in person.

The young people enjoyed learning about the environment and were taught a variety of skills that they could put into practice outside of the meetings. The project provided them with fun activities to do outdoors – which was important for these young people, especially during the pandemic. We thought this was important because it is stressful to just stay in the house while doing online school. Being outside helps your health (both physical and mental). Staff ensured that they provided a range of potential activities for young people to try so that they could pick one that suited their comfort level, ranging from activities that could be done by looking out a window, in a garden or in a nearby park/forest. Having this choice was important because the activities available to young people depend on where they live and this flexibility meant that the project was accessible for everyone.

Relationships between project leaders and participants made the group feel like a safe space in which the participants could feel comfortable contributing. This is important because the young people then felt comfortable asking staff for support, which they did through email or the Facebook group. Staff also provided mentoring and tailored support for young people to help them explore what they wanted to do in the future. Young people shared how support from staff helped them feel less nervous about speaking in sessions and that they valued the opportunity to socialise during lockdown.



The project itself acted as a form of support for the participants. They had the chance to meet other young people who share their experiences and interests, offering a respite from any worries they might have.

It was clear that the young people had gained and learned a great deal from the project. One young person brought a feather to our discussion and told us in detail the types of things she had learned about different types of birds, using the feather to explain, and was very passionate about the project. She aims to become a falconer in the future and has gained a lot of knowledge and support from the mentoring available through the project.

Future work may take a “hybrid” approach of working both online and in-person. Young people said that they liked learning things online as they could make use of other resources and learn at their own pace but wanted to also meet up in person to put this knowledge into practice outdoors and socialise with other young people.

Since we spoke to them, the project has spent four weeks working face to face with a group of young people from Easterhouse with learning disabilities. Members of the group told project staff about how they did not feel safe going out and that they didn't participate much in their community. Staff used the fact that they were back working face to face to get people out into local woods to do a wildlife tracking session where the group got to see animals including a deer. The group really bonded through these types of shared experiences. Since then the group have been identifying issues in the local woods and trying to tackle them through awareness-raising TikTok videos. They did litter picks, wildlife surveys and erected nest boxes and habitat piles.



## St Columba's Hospice Care

St Columba's Hospice delivers a bereavement support service for children and young people aged 4–18 across Edinburgh and the Lothians who have experienced a bereavement or who have a family member with an incurable illness.

The service aims to provide support to help children and young people deal with grief and to explore the impact of this on their lives. During the pandemic, this positive, supportive service was working with young people at an extremely challenging time and provided a vital support to the young people using it.

The service offers a range of one-to-one and group support for young people depending on their needs. Young people accessing the service initially receive one-to-one support and move into a group setting as and when they are ready. The service uses a range of creative and art-based methods to engage young people to process their grief and to cope with loss.

Pre-pandemic all of their support took place in person but due to the ongoing Covid-19 situation, they had to move both their one-to-one and group work online. Despite



working remotely, the service continued to use creative approaches, however the way these were delivered had to change and service staff had to ensure that they were sent out to young people's houses in advance. Sending out materials and reminders of appointments ensured everyone could participate regardless of income or other barriers. It also showed their dedication to delivering the art-based parts of the service. We thought the creative activities were important as they helped young people take their mind off things and feel a bit happier.

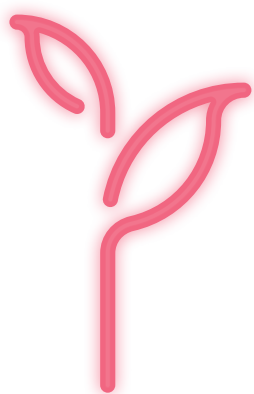
St Columba's used the NHS's Attend Anywhere platform. This platform is similar to Zoom but has some stricter security settings. These security settings help people feel safe to participate in the service, which is especially important for meetings where young people will be talking about personal experiences. We heard that one benefit to working online was that attending in-person meetings at a hospice could be a barrier for some due to the memories associated with the location, so working online could be easier and give the young person more of a choice.

The staff on the service used creative therapeutic activities such as memory jars and mental health boxes that gave people resources that could be used to process grief in their house outside of the sessions. These interesting approaches clearly worked for the young people we spoke to as it allowed them to think about their feelings and cope with the demands of the pandemic.

It is clear that the service has supported the young people accessing it to build connections and relationships. Despite the fact that the activities were taking place online all participants and staff said they had a strong connection because they had helped and supported one another in a challenging time.

There was clearly a very welcoming atmosphere which made people feel included and supported them to take part in the creative activities. Within these activities and the group calls more generally, an important aspect was the community the young people felt with one another throughout the entire process. Despite them not meeting in person, they still became friends and helped one another to process their grief. We thought this was significant as, during parts of the pandemic, young people were not able to see anyone apart from those in their household, so it was useful to have other people to keep in regular contact with.

Staff on the service also were able to give tailored support to the young people involved as they built these relationships. They were able to check in after sessions if they could sense something was up or if someone might want to chat about an issue. The young people were also clearly aware that they could reach out to staff to chat if they needed to. This was valuable as it meant that young people had a system to reach out to someone and talk to during the pandemic.



It was clear that everyone we spoke to benefitted from being involved in the service. It provided key support during the pandemic at a challenging time. It was interesting to see how the methods were adapted to be used in a different setting. However, it was also obvious that some young people felt it would be better to be able to engage with the service in person as there would not be technological differences and they could connect more easily with people.

It is also important to recognise that some young people did say that in-person meetings might make some young people anxious.

While meeting in person may provide more connection and support for young people, it is important to consider the needs of all young people attending and recognise that different young people may have different comfort levels or health issues.

## The Place

The Place is a youth club in Alness, Ross and Cromarty that provides support to young people aged 12-25 in the area. The Place has been supporting young people for more than 30 years and provides a range of youth work opportunities. This exciting project has found different ways to provide support to young people in challenging circumstances.



In early 2020, The Place was told that it was losing access to its usual building where it delivered youth work services. The Place engaged with its young people to respond to this issue and as a result of a period of consultation secured a 99-year lease on an outdoor space – a field on which they've set up a large tent to provide protection from the elements.

The young people who are involved in The Place also have a key opportunity to design, develop and deliver the services on offer so that it is designed to meet their needs. It provides an inclusive place where they can take on new responsibilities, learn, have fun and make new friends.

Young people who use The Place have the opportunity to undertake a youth work qualification and lead on the programme that is on offer. The pandemic initially affected the support and services that The Place could offer as face-to-face youth work was not possible. However, there was still regular communication with the young people who accessed The Place, with a lot of work moving online. Online sessions for the group we spoke to were not structured activities but were more catch-ups to support people with their Youth Work qualifications.

Young people also used the online sessions to co-ordinate work in their local community during the pandemic. One group made up resources to give to their local food bank. Having these opportunities made them feel good as they were able to provide support to others during the pandemic.



*Youth work delivered outdoors at The Place*

As restrictions eased, The Place moved back to face-to-face youth work services. As part of this they provided a play scheme in the new tent for younger children in the area. Many of the young people we spoke to helped deliver the play scheme as part of their youth work qualification. This allowed them to take an active role in their youth club, ensuring all the activities were designed to accommodate young people's needs. They helped come up with ideas for a series of fun activities and tried to make sure these were as varied as possible so that they suited all children. We heard about

how they put on a Santa's grotto for younger children and a visit from a world's strongest man competitor, from the Highlands, who came along to talk about his achievements. Meeting successful people from their area gave the young people role models to look up to and experiences they could aspire to, which could help them think about how to achieve their goals. Over the summer play scheme, they had more than 2000 attendees, highlighting the popularity of the club.

As part of the play scheme a hot meal was also provided for free to ensure that everyone could access The Place. People could make a donation if they wanted. The young people also had to make sure that the play scheme was safe and followed the government's guidelines. This included making sure that the younger participants maintained social distancing during the activities. This provided challenges for the leaders of the play scheme as they were restricted in what activities they could provide. However, they were still able to think outside the box and provide a broad range of ways to allow the young people to have fun.

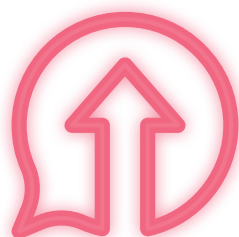
It was clear that The Place provides a key support to young people in the area. Young people were able to contact staff at any time due to the 24/7 support policy and felt they could stay on the phone all night if they needed. The young people we spoke to said this made them feel like there was always help available. It was clear that the support recognised the needs of the young people and was designed to suit them, rather than what was easiest for The Place to provide. Going forward they plan to always have further discussions about the sort of support that young people want to have available through The Place to make sure they can meet everyone's needs.

The young people we spoke to were happy with the support and communication when they couldn't meet in person but did say that it was much easier to open up with someone when you were with them in person, so it was good when they could get back to meeting at The Place.

It was interesting to hear that The Place kept in contact with some of the young people through messenger and Instagram. Using apps that lots of young people used meant that people could more easily keep in contact with support workers if they needed them.

The young people involved in the project would like to see The Place develop an additional service on the local high street so that more people can benefit from it. They wanted this to be a drop-in centre where people could come in and chat but also access more formal support.

Since we last spoke to them, The Place opened its drop-in on the local high street in February 2022 and this has been very busy. The drop-in is open five days and five evenings per week. They have also recently entered into a partnership with a project called the Dandelion project which is a national initiative encouraging young people to get involved in growing things, culminating in September 2022 with Harvest Festivals throughout the country.





## Summary

In our research we have explored how six projects and services have adapted to the coronavirus pandemic and how this has affected children and young people.

The pandemic has clearly been an extremely challenging time for children, young people and the organisations that work with them. Children and young people had many concerns to deal with such as education worries, Covid anxiety and feeling like they had no choice or control.<sup>1</sup> Staff also faced difficulties in adapting their work quickly so things could be delivered online, seeing what worked and coping with drop-offs in sessions.

All six projects responded to the changes brought about by the pandemic and all adapted their ways of working in inspiring and creative ways. We heard about people doing live nature trials on Zoom, developing care packages for their communities and collaboratively creating things together online. It is clear that all six have had a big impact on the children and young people they work with. They have provided support, allowed them to access relationships and provided a range of outlets.

While our research only looks at six examples, we received many more through our survey and are confident what we have heard illustrates examples of good practice from across Scotland.

In the **main project report** you can find out more about the implications of this research and the peer researchers recommendations for decision-makers.

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<sup>1</sup><https://syp.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/lockdown-lowdown-final-report.pdf>

