

## Access to Childcare Fund

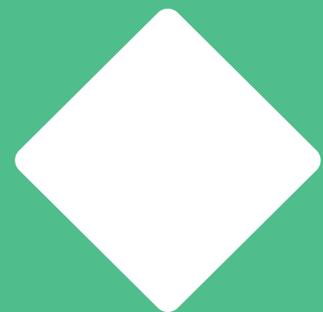
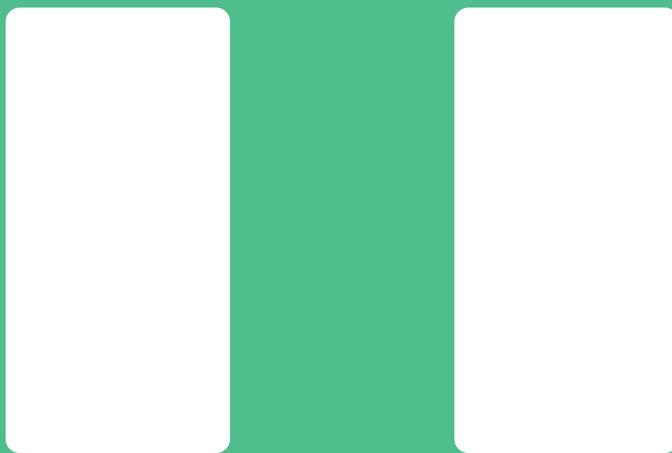
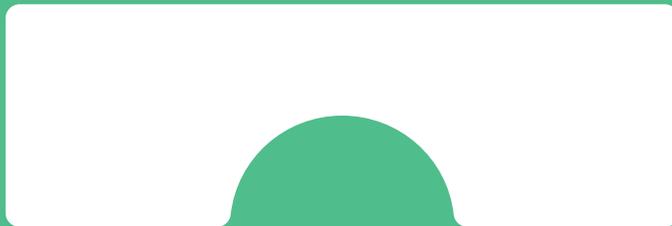
Funded by the Scottish Government  
and managed by Children in Scotland



# Access to Childcare Fund 2020-2022

## Final evaluation report

### September 2022



## Acknowledgements

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Grateful thanks to all the staff, parents and carers, and children and young people from across the 15 Access to Childcare Fund projects who provided evidence for this report.



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The Scottish Government's Access to Childcare Fund (ACF) was designed to increase access to childcare for those families most at risk of experiencing child poverty. Between October 2021 and March 2022, the fund invested more than £2 million into 15 projects across Scotland. Children in Scotland managed the fund on the Scottish Government's behalf.

The Fund supported projects to test new approaches to childcare. This included: expanding the service through providing free and subsidised places; increasing the hours and days of operation; and increasing the types of services on offer.

Approximately 1500 children from 1000 families were supported through the Fund. The Fund operated at a uniquely difficult time. The Covid-19 pandemic meant that no service was able to operate as initially planned; they were beset by long periods of closure, changes of venues, restrictions on numbers and activities and a number of staffing challenges. Nevertheless, a number of positive benefits were identified.

### Children's health, wellbeing and relationships

The projects were able to offer a safe and supportive place for children to come together. While families may have been experiencing difficult times, children were able to have fun and make new friends. They were able to go outdoors and play.

### Parents' employment status

For parents, the childcare provided them with the time to focus on other aspects of their lives, whether that was work, study, or other caring responsibilities. For some, access to childcare meant that they were able to take up new work opportunities that previously they would not have been able to access.

The family support element of some projects served to recognise that it is not just time that's needed by parents. Parents need practical support and help to build confidence and knowledge of where to go and what opportunities are available.

### Parents' health and wellbeing

Many parents expressed that they felt their stress levels had reduced as a consequence of the childcare provided through this fund. This was particularly true for parents of children with additional support needs. For them, having somewhere that their children could be safe and enjoy themselves took pressure off parents and gave them time to focus on other aspects of their lives.

## Household costs and income

Costs associated with childcare also included transport, food and refreshments, as well as the childcare itself. Through the provision of free and subsidised places, childcare costs were reduced for participating families from low incomes.

## Partnerships

Links with other services and organisations were vitally important to the projects. They acted as a point of referral in and out of the service, and helped to create a whole system that could act together to support families.

If the flexibility and accessibility provided through the ACF is to be sustained, further longer-term sources of funding will be required.

## 1. Background



Scotland has set itself ambitious targets to significantly reduce child poverty by 2030. However, the most recently available figures from the Scottish Government present a troubling picture, with approximately one quarter of children living in poverty.<sup>1</sup>

Every Child, Every Chance – the first Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan (2018-2022)<sup>2</sup> – identified six family types who are at increased risk of poverty, and towards whom specific support should be targeted. These are:

- Lone parent families
- Families with a disabled adult or child
- Larger families
- Minority ethnic families
- Families with a child under one year old
- Families where the mother is under 25 years of age.

The causes of child poverty in Scotland are multiple and inter-related, and the solutions require action across governmental portfolios. As well as action to increase family incomes, the delivery plan recognised the need for new action to reduce the costs of living for families. It highlights childcare costs as one area that can be a struggle for families on low income and recognises that childcare provision does not always meet families' needs in terms of availability or accessibility. This in turn can impact parents' and carers' ability to take up employment opportunities.

Best Start, Bright Futures – the second Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan for 2022-2026 – was published in March 2022 and again highlights the fundamental importance

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<sup>1</sup> <https://data.gov.scot/poverty/2022/cpupdate.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/child-chance-tackling-child-poverty-delivery-plan-2018-22/documents/>

of improving access to childcare to reduce poverty. It identifies school-aged childcare (SAC) as a key area and highlights the need to learn from the Access to Childcare Fund to identify how a system of school-aged childcare could look.<sup>3</sup>

This report brings together learning from the first phase of the Access to Childcare Fund and points to some recommendations for the future of school-aged childcare in Scotland. The report presents the findings from the evaluation and acts as a final report for the Access to Childcare Fund overall.

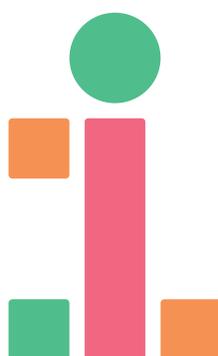
The authors hope the findings, conclusions and recommendations contained in the report inform the Scottish Government's future policy activity and provide useful evidence on how to make childcare services more accessible, affordable and flexible for low-income families.

## About the Access to Childcare Fund

The Scottish Government's £3 million Access to Childcare Fund (ACF) opened in July 2020. The purpose of the ACF was to support childcare solutions that enable more accessible and affordable childcare for families with school-aged children and to help to reduce the barriers parents and carers can experience in accessing childcare. These barriers include the cost of childcare, the hours available, and accessibility for children with additional support needs. The awards aimed to make services more accessible and affordable for low-income families, particularly the six identified priority family groups most at risk from poverty as set out in the Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan.

The fund was managed by Children in Scotland, with strategic input from an expert steering group. Both evaluation and improvement were at the heart of the Access to Childcare Fund and Evaluation Support Scotland (ESS) has provided significant input and support to services throughout. A mentoring and peer network also operated across the projects.

The fund was launched shortly after the Covid-19 pandemic took hold in Scotland, and in the context of a number of national lockdowns and ongoing restrictions. These restrictions significantly impacted the abilities of funded projects to meet their aims and ambitions, as will be described in this report.



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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/best-start-bright-futures-tackling-child-poverty-delivery-plan-2022-26/documents/>

## 2. About the funded projects



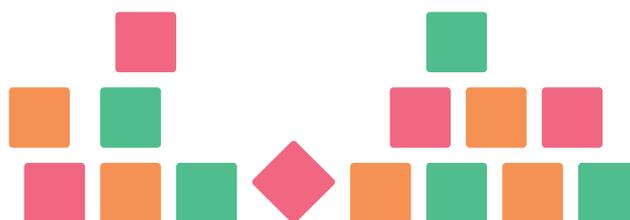
Following an open application process, 15 awards were made to projects and services across Scotland, with a total value of £2,133,798 covering the funding period October 2020 to March 2022. Initial awards ranged from £80,000 to £250,000. A further £58,861 was later given to four projects to support specific activities.

The funded services were as follows:

- Action for Children, Moray
- Clyde Gateway, South Lanarkshire
- Flexible Childcare Service Scotland, Aberdeenshire
- Flexible Childcare Service Scotland, Dundee
- Fuse, Glasgow
- Hame Fae Hame, Shetland
- Hope Amplified, South Lanarkshire
- Indigo Childcare Ltd., Glasgow
- Inverclyde Council
- Low Income Families Together (LIFT), Muirhouse, Edinburgh
- Supporting Help and Integration in Perthshire (SHIP), Perth & Kinross
- St Mirin's Out of School Care (OSC), Glasgow
- Stepping Stones for Families, Glasgow
- SupERkids, East Renfrewshire
- The Wee Childcare Company, Angus.



The funded services represented a range of different communities throughout Scotland, including urban, rural and island communities. All had an emphasis on supporting families in the priority groups identified in the Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plans, with some focusing on individual groups, such as families with children with disabilities or ethnic minority families. Appendix C includes a list of the services, their locations and their funded work.



### 3. Learning approach



The Access to Childcare Fund (ACF) was designed to enable funded services to test approaches for overcoming the barriers to affordable, accessible and flexible childcare. Learning from their experiences was therefore a crucial aspect of the process.

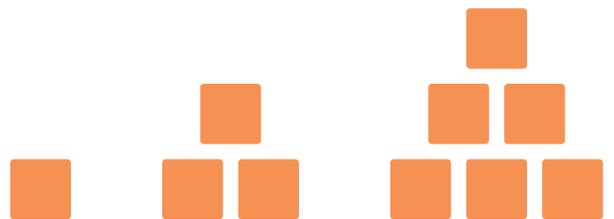
#### *A theory of change*

Evaluation Support Scotland was brought in to support the development of an overall theory of change for the fund and identify outcomes for families engaging in the funded services. This included a series of short-term, medium-term and longer-term outcomes.

The ACF Measurement Framework (p.10) outlines these outcomes and how the projects were expected to achieve them for the families involved. **It is based on Matter of Focus' framework.** In the broadest terms the outcomes relate to:

- Children's health, wellbeing and relationships
- Parents' employment status
- Parents' health and wellbeing
- Household costs and income.

Funded services were able to pick the outcomes that were most relevant to them and the families they worked with. They were then asked to report on progress towards achieving these outcomes on a two-monthly basis. An overview of the outcomes selected by the funded services is available in Appendix B.



#### *Expert steering group*

An expert steering group was established to guide and inform the fund's development and implementation. Core members of the group comprised the Scottish Government, Scottish Out of School Care Network, One Parent Families Scotland and Children in Scotland. The steering group met five times during this funding period and provided a helpful sounding board to the Children in Scotland ACF Lead throughout this time.

#### *Learning and peer support for funded projects*

A key aspect of the Children in Scotland ACF Lead's role was to support the 15 funded projects to learn from each other, work through any challenges experienced, and share their successes. While it was always anticipated that this would be an important aspect of the Fund management, it proved to be a vital component of the fund's approach given the unprecedented challenges the projects encountered due to the pandemic.

Support was provided through a variety of 1:1 meetings, online group 'coffee catch-ups', and themed learning sessions. Feedback from the 15 services indicates that the support given by the ACF Lead was an invaluable aspect of the fund.

*“Alison Hay [AH] from Children in Scotland has also given us guidance, support and encouragement especially at times when this pilot was stressful. AH is always available to discuss plans and help view things from many perspectives. Thank you so much A for your continued support and understanding of our journey.”*

**(Project Lead)**

A peer support network, with approximately 90 representatives from organisations across Scotland, also convened to share learning and offer support. This network offered the projects an opportunity to gain input from public and third sector organisations across Scotland.

## 4. Evaluation methodology



This evaluation draws on documentary evidence gathered through the course of the fund, including:

- Two monthly project reports
- Annual reviews (submitted at the end of Year 1)
- Final project reports (submitted in April 2022).

It uses the ACF Measurement Framework as a model for exploring the impact of the funded projects and the extent to which they were able to achieve their chosen outcomes for families, based on what the projects have reported themselves.

Evidence from the reports was brought together (synthesised) by the evaluation lead at Children in Scotland and analysed thematically.

This evaluation approach was agreed to minimise the requests placed on the funded projects, and with an understanding that the reporting requirement should provide sufficient evidence from which to draw conclusions. There are, however, a number of limitations and challenges with this approach, which are worth highlighting at this stage.

### *Evaluation limitations and challenges*

Completing the reporting requirements for the fund proved challenging for some of the funded services. For some, this was the first time they had been asked to provide written evidence in this way, and while they were confident that they were providing valuable support for families, capturing this in reports remained difficult.

Support was provided by the ACF Lead and Evaluation Support Scotland who worked with the projects to build skills in this area, and the quality of reporting improved over time. As a consequence, we were able to gather very rich qualitative data from the projects, which gave an important indicator of how families (and staff) valued the services on offer and felt it had impacted on their lives and circumstances. Some projects chose to submit photographs and videos along with their reports, which brought the projects to life.

## Access to Childcare Measurement Framework

	What we do (Activities)	Who with (Participation)	How we all feel about this	What we all learn and gain (short-term outcomes)	What we all do differently (medium-term outcomes)	What difference this makes (Impact – long-term outcomes)
<b>Your plan</b>	<p><b>What specifically do you want to do?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What activities you will provide and how it's different</li> <li>More or different hours/different area/different groups targeted/different approaches</li> </ul>	<p><b>The area and/or groups you are targeting</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>CP Priority Groups:</b> Lone parents, Disabled, 3+ Children, Minority Ethnic, Youngest Child Aged &lt;1, Mothers Aged &lt;25</li> </ul>	<p><b>Underlying principles. For example:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parents have access to childcare that fits their circumstances</li> <li>Children have fun, feel safe and enjoy spending time with peers/staff</li> <li>Staff are skilled, supported etc.</li> </ul>	<p><b>What short-term outcomes do you expect? For example</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To make the service more accessible/flexible/affordable for families</li> <li>To enable families to access employment/training/support opportunities</li> <li>To enable disadvantaged children to have more opportunities for fun, growth and development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parents are able to find (better paid) work or increase their hours of work</li> <li>Costs are reduced for households</li> <li>Children have improved social interaction &amp; relationships</li> <li>Children have improved confidence &amp; self esteem</li> <li>Children have improved physical health</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Household incomes increased (reduction in child poverty)</li> <li>Children's social and emotional development improves</li> <li>Children's health and wellbeing improves (reduction in health inequalities)</li> </ul>
<b>What we need to know / measure</b>	<p><b>What you actually did</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For example, number and type of sessions ran, transport provided, changes to your services and food provision</li> </ul>	<p><b>Who you worked with</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Partners</li> <li>Total number of families and children worked with</li> <li>Broad breakdown of characteristics of children/parents reached</li> <li>Can be done on a proxy basis</li> </ul>	<p><b>What feedback you got about what works and what doesn't</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Views of parents/children about what has and hasn't been helpful from their perspective</li> <li>Views of staff about what has and hasn't worked well from their perspective</li> </ul>	<p><b>How many people achieved outcomes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Which groups achieved outcomes best/more</li> <li>What factors seem to affect outcomes achieved</li> <li>Any unexpected outcomes</li> <li>Reflections on how the services could be refined and improved</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Measures of children's health and wellbeing throughout fund</li> <li>Measures of parental or carer employment status throughout fund (parental wellbeing?)</li> <li>Childcare costs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bring together measures of key fund outcomes such as child wellbeing/parental employment status and understanding of reasons for change to assess contribution fund has made</li> </ul>
<b>Example methods and evidence</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Quant. data: provide survey on number/type of activities though quality varies</li> <li>Attendance records</li> <li>Databases incl. FAMILY, Upshot and own internal systems</li> <li>Qual. data: descriptions</li> <li>Visual data: photos and videos of activity</li> <li>ACT film</li> <li>ACF film development session</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Family baseline: comparable information about households, ethnicity, disability, SIMD etc.</li> <li>Visual data: pictures of people involved (with consent)</li> <li>Case studies</li> <li>Partner feedback including testimonies</li> <li>ACF film</li> <li>ACF film development session</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Quant. data: parent surveys on views of service</li> <li>Record <i>ad hoc</i> feedback</li> <li>Reflective practice for staff, feedback included in two-monthly reporting and mid-term final reports</li> <li>Fun feedback methods, suggestion box, journals, flood books</li> <li>ACF film development session</li> </ul>	<p>Range of methods based on more specific indicators, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parents survey</li> <li>Casual feedback</li> <li>Parental case studies</li> <li>Reflection from team on learning/what is working well and less well</li> <li>ACF film</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Family baseline information about employment status, household income, childcare costs and access to childcare though quality varies and not all families participated</li> <li>Qual. data: participants/staff views on how the project has made a difference for them, what works, challenges etc.</li> <li>Phase 2 – CYPC improvement methodology</li> </ul>	<p><b>Will be covered in Phase 2</b></p>



## 5. Findings

In this section we present the evaluation findings, using the ACF Measurement Framework to provide a structure to the narrative. It focuses on the following areas:

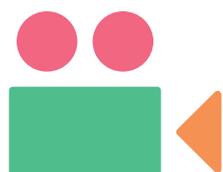
- What we did (activities)
- Who with (participants)
- How we felt about this
- What we all learned and gained (short-term outcomes)
- What we all did differently (medium-term outcomes)
- What difference this made (longer-term outcomes).

We report on 'What we did' and 'Who with' first, and then bring together the remaining four elements of the Measurement Framework and report them on a theme-by-theme basis, focusing on the main outcome areas mentioned previously:

- Children's health, wellbeing and relationships
- Parents' employment status
- Parents' health and wellbeing
- Household costs and income.

We have drawn examples from across the 15 projects in each section. For brevity, not every project is mentioned in each section, even if they have undertaken relevant activity. We have however endeavoured to ensure that all projects are represented across the report as a whole. Links to further information, videos and evidence from projects are also available on the [Children in Scotland website](#), to support readers to find out more. **Key learning points** are summarised in Appendix C (see page 51).

A final Access to Childcare Fund video has been produced with support from Media Co-op. It acts as a good accompanying resource to this more formal report and gives a more direct sense of the projects, their successes, strengths and challenges. We will come back to learning generated about childcare providers' capacity for self-reporting in the **Recommendations** section of this report.



A still from Media Co-op's short film about the achievements of the projects supported by the Fund.

## 5.1 What we did

The ACF award was intended to be used to try and expand capacity in already established services, funding modifications to add to what the projects already did. The award could also be used to add a specific extra or 'new' element to the project or service.

There were essentially three extra or 'new' elements to the services being tested by the grant awards. These were:

- Expansion of the services in new ways (e.g. locations or groups)
- The hours and days of operation of the services
- The type of service offered.

Often projects were testing out multiple new developments. All these tests were designed to enable increased affordability, flexibility or accessibility for families on low incomes. Appendix B gives an overview of the different areas of focus within each project. Appendix C provides a description of each of the individual projects.

### *The pandemic context*

The recipients of the Fund were announced in September 2020, not long before the pre-Christmas restrictions and the second national lockdown which began in late December 2020. From 26 December 2020 until March 2021, services were only permitted to open for vulnerable children and children of keyworkers.

Services were further impacted during this first year by a range of factors, including not being able to operate from their own premises, increased let costs, and transport issues and closures due to Covid outbreaks. For example:

*"We had an outbreak in our partner school in early September 2021 and, as a result, had to cease all out of school hours and blended placements for three weeks until this event passed. We also had to close completely for two days whilst awaiting PCR test results for all our staff. Our holiday period numbers for October were pretty flat and we attribute this mainly to families being able to take off-island holidays for the first time since the start of the pandemic."*

Families' circumstances were often very different to what they would normally be. For many this meant working from home while juggling childcare, home learning and other caring responsibilities, causing significant stress and challenge.

The Access to Childcare Fund Interim Report from December 2021 outlines in detail the challenges faced by the 15 projects during the first 15 months of operation and is worth reading to gain a fuller understanding of this period.<sup>4</sup>

We will return to this theme later in this report, but it is worth highlighting from the outset the significant impact the pandemic had on the projects' plans and service delivery. All the findings reported here need to be considered within the context of the pandemic.

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<sup>4</sup>Children in Scotland (2021) *Access to Childcare Fund – Interim Report*. Edinburgh: Children in Scotland

## Expanding the service through free and subsidised places

Ten projects used ACF funding to subsidise childcare costs for families or offer entirely free provision for those most in need. Subsidies ranged from 20-100% of childcare costs. The Wee Childcare Company, for example, offered a standard rate of £1 per family per session for all families on low incomes, a subsidy of between 88% and 96%, depending on the type of session.

This approach was prioritised by projects in recognition of the high childcare costs experienced by families and the barrier this could pose for adults wishing to work. Further information about the actual cost savings to families from these actions is presented in the 'What difference this makes' section (see page 44).

### Inverclyde October Holiday Hubs

Inverclyde Council delivered the October Holiday Hubs for 64 children between Monday 11 October-Friday 15 October 2021. The October Holiday Hubs provided free support to families on a low income and free lunches. Snacks and water were also provided to children during the sessions.

This service was delivered in partnership between the Inverclyde Council family learning team, sessional community team, home school link workers, active schools and volunteers and Wellington Pre-5 Children's Centre, a local third sector organisation.

The partnership service delivered a range of outdoor and indoor learning and development opportunities for children most likely to face the greatest inequalities. The families were predominately living in the localities with the greatest deprivation and living on low income.

### St Mirin's OSC

St Mirin's gave every parent/carer a 20% reduction on their annual fees. This subsidy covered a nine-month period and a total of 83 children from 79 families were provided with it.

The reduction was widely welcomed by parents and carers. However, St Mirin's reported that it was a time-consuming approach to adopt, with each family's existing costs needing individually recalculated.

### Transport

As well as supporting the costs of childcare, some projects used their funding to provide free or subsidised transport to and from childcare venues as needed. Not only was this designed to help reduce the costs associated with childcare, but transport was also offered to provide practical help for families who did not have access to their own transport, or for whom public transport options were limited (particularly in rural areas). Drop-off services taking children from school to the childcare settings were also provided to help parents who were working or studying.

Different transport options utilised by the projects included payment for taxis, use of minibuses and walking buses from local schools.

## The Wee Childcare Company

After initial attempts to agree an arrangement with the local authority proved unsuccessful, the Wee Childcare Company was provided additional funds to purchase a vehicle and employ drivers to help them reach and support their intended targeted families. They were able to offer affordable transport after the school day from four schools to their two centres.

As well as the cost of purchasing a vehicle, the Wee Childcare Company had to factor in insurance costs. Obtaining the appropriate insurance proved challenging and the project indicated that 'the pool of insurance companies for the out of school care [school-aged childcare] sector seems very shallow'.

## Hours and days of operation of the services

All 15 projects funded through the ACF were established childcare providers and sought to extend the provision they already offered, including for example after school, before school, at weekends or during holidays. **Table 1** below outlines times funded services were available through this period:

**Table 1: Times ACF funded services were available**

What	No. of projects	% of all projects
After school, evenings (term-time)	14	93%
Holidays	9	60%
Weekends	3	20%
Breakfast clubs (term-time)	3	20%

After-school provision was the most common method of childcare delivery, followed by holiday provision. Some examples of the different approaches projects took to deliver these services are as follows:

### After school

Projects delivering after-school care provided a mix of fun and educational activities, including active play outdoors for children following the end of the school day.

Established childcare models often mean families must commit to a certain number of after-school care hours over a certain number of weeks or months. Five projects used the ACF grant to increase the flexibility of their after-school care service in terms of the hours used and when. For example, families accessing FCSS Dundee were able to pick hours that suited them on a weekly basis.

## Fuse

Fuse employed a Project Coordinator to coordinate and deliver a free childcare service in Fuse Youth Café (Shettleston) and the Pavilion (Easterhouse) from Monday to Friday 3-6pm for 41 children in Primary 4 to Primary 7. The childcare service was targeted to and taken up by families where there were three or more children and/or was a single parent household, to enable the uptake or sustainment of employment, education or training.

## LIFT

LIFT provided free childcare after school for families, particularly aimed at those who needed two hours per day or less. LIFT recognised that families are often required to book for a minimum of three hours of childcare, even if they need less time. Through removing the minimum limit, they were better able to reflect families' true needs, which for most, was only one hour of childcare after school.

## Holidays

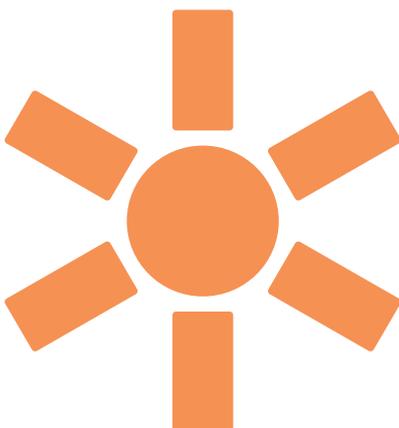
Eleven projects used their funding to offer holiday childcare options. These were provided to help support working adults manage childcare during school holidays or to provide respite, particularly for families with children who have additional support needs. Activities provided in the holiday clubs followed similar patterns to those in after-school or weekend provision, sometimes with a seasonal theme to reflect the time of year they were provided.

## Stepping Stones

Stepping Stones provided 51 full days of school-aged childcare during school holidays. This included a six-week summer holiday activity programme. This programme was supported with additional funds from Glasgow City Council and managed by the ACF funded co-ordinator. The programme included yoga sessions, circus skills sessions, themed activity weeks, crafting sessions, science activities, teddy bears' picnics, movie day and music activities.

## FCSS Aberdeenshire Holiday Playscheme

FCSS Aberdeenshire opened its holiday provision in April 2021 for the Easter holiday and again for the summer and October holidays that year. Being based in a school, they struggled with numbers as children from different schools were unable to mix.



## *Weekend provision*

Three projects added weekend activities or childcare options for families through the Fund.

### **Hope Amplified – Instruments 101**

On Sundays, children could learn to play musical instruments at beginner level. Young people learned how to play brass instruments such as trumpet, saxophone and trombone. Others received training in the use of percussion instruments such as drums, cymbals, triangle and xylophone. String instruments such as violin were also taught. The Oral History of African Dance and practising the types of motion involved in dancing, including traditional Djembe dance and Samba moves, were also part of the programme.

Parents were encouraged to attend at least one session a month with their child to support parents to become part of their children's learning experience. Participating parents in this project also had opportunities to receive employability training in, for example, CV writing and job searching.

## *Breakfast clubs*

Three projects (FCSS Aberdeenshire, Hame fae Hame and St Mirin's OSC) ran breakfast clubs as part of their ACF funded activities. These were mostly provided during term-time, before the school day, but some provision was also made during holidays. They combined breakfast with fun, play-based activities before the school day.

### **Hame Fae Hame Breakfast Club**

Hame Fae Hame used its funding to upgrade the breakfast club areas and facilities and create a breakfast-inclusive rate for their families. The club operated during term-time and over the Easter and summer holiday periods.

The Breakfast Clubs could be used together with after-school provision to provide wraparound care for children, working around parents' working hours.

## **The type of service offered**

### *Family support*

While the core business of most of the funded projects was childcare provision, eight projects added or expanded support for the wider family through the Fund. This support was aimed primarily at parents and carers. Given the high levels of need and disadvantage experienced by parents and carers accessing the projects, this was a valuable source of help, as is outlined below.

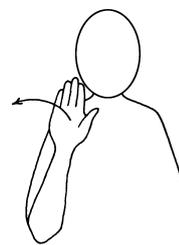


Examples of family support ranged from informal 'open doors' policies where parents could drop by for a chat to more formal advice, guidance or respite support. Four projects (Clyde Gateway, Indigo Childcare Group, Fuse and Stepping Stones for Families) created family support roles specifically using the Fund.

Some projects provided direct material support to families in need, through, for example, the provision of supermarket vouchers. Others also offered training to parents, for example in Makaton or cooking, to support their parenting skills. These were sometimes accompanied by resources such as cooking packs to enable parents to take their learning home.

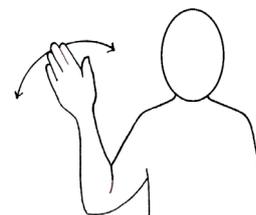
## Hello and Goodbye

Hello:



Wave in one direction at shoulder height

Goodbye:



Wave in both directions with one or two hands

Learning Makaton

### Indigo Childcare Group – Family Support

Family support was a significant component of the Indigo Childcare Group project. The family support worker worked with families to identify their strengths and goals and connected them with activities and resources to help them achieve their goals. This included referrals for benefit checks, support to access funding to buy digital devices and signposting to counselling and mental health support. In response to need, the project also set up 'Indigo Connects Carers', a peer support group for those caring for children with additional support needs.

### Clyde Gateway – Family Support Worker

Clyde Gateway recruited a family support worker to provide holistic support to parents and carers. The family support worker was able to provide different types of help, including support to access training, employability support, financial information and practical parenting advice.

### *Working with partners to increase activities on offer*

Working in partnership with other local organisations was an important feature of many of the projects. This could help extend the services, activities and resources available for children, as well as help build the knowledge, skills and experience of staff.

Some projects had established good links with local schools. St Mirin's for example took referrals from the school for its specialist support services. The Wee Childcare Company had a service level agreement with the local authority which gave access to free school-based accommodation. Schools were also able to help with promoting the childcare service to eligible families.



## Action for Children's Creative Clubhouse

Since opening the Creative Clubhouse in March 2021, Action for Children has built strong professional ties with numerous agencies and organisations across Moray. They became a core member of MASH (Multi Agency Support Hub), meeting fortnightly with Health, Social Work and Education to ensure children received the appropriate service from the appropriate agency.

On a more practical level, they worked with external partners to support activities in the clubhouse, bringing in a music specialist to teach children how to play guitar and staff how to use musical instruments in play. They also worked with REAP (the Rural Environment Action Project) to create a wormery and compost heap.



M and R playing guitar, Action for Children

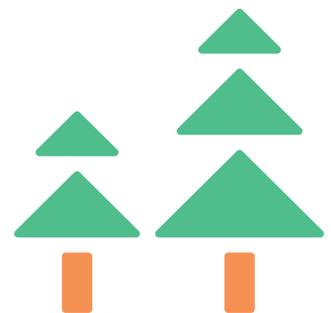
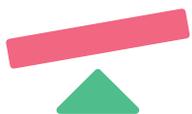
## St Mirin's OSC Specialist Support Service

Using ACF funding, St Mirin's developed a new specialist support service for children with health and wellbeing concerns. They worked closely with St Mirin's Primary School to create a referral system that permitted the school to refer children directly to the service.

The service was tailored to meet the identified wellbeing needs of each individual child. Children with trauma, adverse childhood experiences, anxiety, fears and distressed behaviour were guided to a variety of coping skills and strategies. In total 53 children were referred by the school for specialist support.

## Outdoor play

Four projects described how the funding enabled them to extend their outdoor play provision. Two different examples are provided below, but St Mirin's OSC and FCSS Aberdeenshire were also active in this area.



## FCSS Dundee 'Old Fintry Nursery'

Through a community asset transfer FCSS Dundee was given a building and grounds to regenerate and turn into a new centre. The ACF grant was used to support this regeneration and, particularly, increase opportunities for outdoor play for families on low incomes. These large-scale and ambitious plans have taken time to realise, particularly because of the pandemic. A crucial aspect of this work has been building community engagement throughout the regeneration process, using social media to reach parents, carers and the wider community. Community groups and organisations have been able to support elements of the site's development, such as producing recycled wheelchair accessible paths.

## Hame Fae Hame

Hame Fae Hame also transformed its outdoor space with the grant. Amongst the new developments were 17 raised beds for growing vegetables, an 'inside/out' covered area including water feature and climbing wall, a mud kitchen and purpose-built pirate ship. Parents' views on the changes to the door space were very positive. This is described further in our 'Project impact' section (see page 22).

A visual tour of the setting including its outdoor area can be [accessed here](#).

## Children with Additional Support Needs

Fifteen projects used their funding to support the inclusion of children with additional support needs (ASN) in their services. This could be through extending opportunities within mainstream services by adapting approaches, bringing in additional staffing, or providing specialist services specifically designed for children with ASN.

SHIP, SupERkids and St Mirin's were amongst those providing specialist services for children with ASN. With lower staff to child ratios than mainstream services, specialist services are often more expensive to operate and consequently availability and choice can be more limited for families with children with ASN. However, as we will explore later in the report, access to specialist support was valued very highly by parents for the quality of support offered to their children.

## Support Help and Integration Perthshire (SHIP)



Practitioners and volunteers from SHIP

SHIP is the only childcare provider in Perth and Kinross designed for children with complex additional support needs. They used their ACF grant to make their established services more affordable for families. This included funding transport to support children to get to and home from after-school clubs. This was particularly important for families living in rural areas.

## SupERkids

SupERkids is a parent/carer managed organisation. It was established in 2011 and achieved charitable status in October 2019. They provide supported after-school activities that meet the needs of children and young people with additional support needs (ASN) in East Renfrewshire.

SupERkids was able to buy some hours of time with high quality trained sessional staff from the Inclusive Support Team at East Renfrewshire Council. These sessional staff attend the clubs to look after the care needs of the children and young people. They support children with differing abilities and physical impairments. Some need a 1:1 support and some need 2:1 support.

With the support of the ACF, SupERkids managed to run clubs throughout lockdown and priority was given to children and young people with complex needs and those who needed additional support due to their home lives.



KK enjoying his art at SupERSaturday club

For mainstream services, funding was used to extend accessibility for children with ASN. This included additional staffing to reduce staff to child ratios, purchasing equipment or offering additional parental support.

## Indigo Contact Carers Group

The 'Indigo Connects Carers' group provided peer support for parent and carers of children with ASN who attend Indigo. This is a parent/carer-led space and facilitated/supported by the Family Support Co-ordinator and Inclusion Co-ordinator. The group aims to provide a safe space where carers can connect, share experiences and information and reduce isolation.

## 5.2 Who we worked with

The target population for the ACF were families from the six prioritised groups outlined in the **Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan**:

- Lone parent families
- Families with a disabled adult or child
- Larger families
- Minority ethnic families
- Families with a child under one year old
- Families where the mother is under 25 years of age.

Almost 90% of all children in poverty in Scotland live within these six priority family types and the projects understood that if they tailored their services to meet these families' needs, children who are currently living in poverty could benefit greatly.

All projects were asked to provide data on who from these groups had accessed their services. They were given two forms by the Scottish Government to complete at specific times to gather this evidence. The data provided varied from project to project, based on the projects' own individual pre-existing reporting frameworks. For some that meant reporting on number and type of families attending, for others this was the number of children participating and some reported on both metrics.

We understand that some families attending projects could be represented in multiple categories where they have intersectionality across the priority types. We believe these families may have been counted in different ways by different projects.

This made providing an accurate assessment of the overall number of participants difficult. What we present here is the best estimate we can provide based on the data available.

**Number of children across all projects: 1479\***

**Number of families across all projects: 1001\***

**Table 2: Families involved – across all 15 projects**

Group	Number*	% of all families*
Lone parents	351	35%
Disabilities	349	35%
Larger Families	162	16%
Minority ethnic families	151	15%
Child under 1	37	4%
Mother under 25	47	5%

\*Best estimate based on available figures.

We estimate that approximately 1,400 children from 1,000 families were involved across the 15 ACF funded projects in this phase. Of the six priority groups identified, the most reached were lone parents (35%), families with disabilities (either parent or child – 35%), larger families with three or more children (16%) and minority ethnic families (15%).

It should be noted that one of the projects (Hope Amplified) was specifically targeted at local African communities and that project alone accounts for 40% of the ethnic minority families engaged with. Hope Amplified recognised that members of local African communities could face specific barriers to accessing mainstream childcare provision. Cost, for example, could act as an insurmountable barrier to those who had no recourse to public funds.

Similarly, two projects (SHIP and SupERkids) were specialist services for children with additional support needs. While their numbers did not affect the overall statistics to

such a great extent as Hope Amplified, it is clear that specialist and targeted services have an important role to play in reaching these priority groups.

While the projects have been successful in attracting lone parents to their services, they have been less successful in reaching young mothers under 25 years of age. Some services speculated whether this was in part an under-reporting issue, based on challenges they had experienced encouraging parents/carers to fill in monitoring forms.

The low figures for those with children under one are understandable given not all funded projects were open to children that young. Services that could provide for a child under the age of one would have been all-age services (such as Indigo) where they were also providing school age childcare for a sibling but had taken a family-centred approach.

The pandemic also significantly hampered projects' abilities to engage with families through this period. Local policies on social distancing meant that the number of children that could be supported was not as high as anticipated. FCSS Aberdeenshire, for example, could only take children from one primary school, even though there was interest from families from other schools and capacity available within the service to support them.

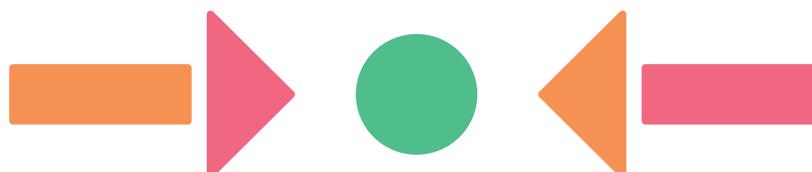
## 5.3 Project impact



In this section we bring together all the impact data from across the projects, to explore what difference they have been able to make for the families involved. This includes:

- What families felt about the childcare projects they had been involved with
- What families learned and gained through their involvement
- What families now do differently because of their involvement
- What difference this made to their lives.

We present evidence from both the child and parent/carer perspective, some additional reflections from staff and partner organisations, and numerical evidence where this was available. Fourteen projects had gathered the views of parents and carers about the services they had accessed and 11 the views of children. These were gathered in different ways including surveys, focus group discussions, feedback forms and informal feedback.



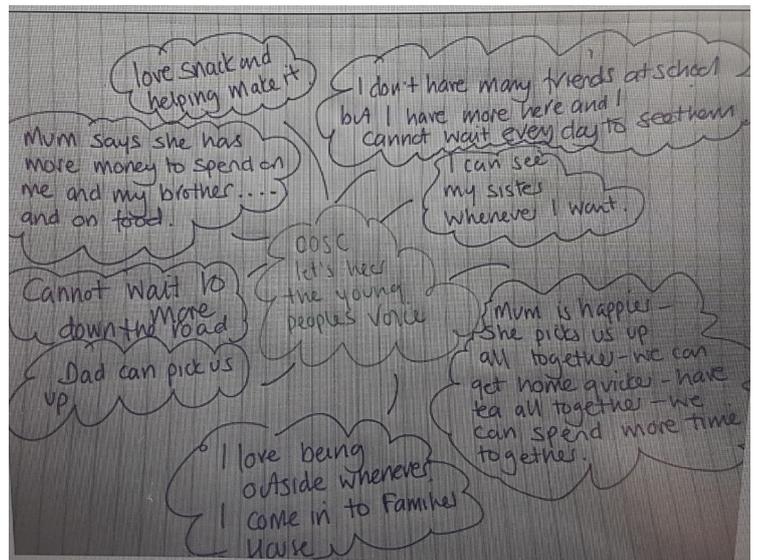
## LIFT's approach to evaluation with children

At LIFT all the children have their own journal. The journals include 'feelings sheets' where they can record how they are feeling on a weekly basis. They are given time during a session each week to fill in their journals and staff take feedback from what has been written. The children also have a suggestion box where they can add any ideas for fun activities or improvements they would like to see.

*"The journals were the children's idea, they discussed how they would like to have something to take home when their childcare ended, something that belonged to them, something they could look back at so they came up with the journal and what they would like to see in it."*

**(Staff member, LIFT)**

St Mirin's (as well as some other projects) made good use of film as a mechanism to capture and present evidence and learning from their funded activity. They produced several short films throughout this funding phase which brought together photographs and visual evidence from their activities, feedback and quotes from children and testimony from workers, managers and referral agencies. The videos not only help to give a real sense of the project but also first-person evidence of its value and impact.



Children's mindmap from FCSS Dundee

*"It absolutely works... they have been a great support to children and staff in school."*

**(Headteacher speaking in feedback video)**

## 6. Children's health, wellbeing and relationships



Eleven projects provided evidence from children and young people to inform this section of the report. We also draw on evidence from parents, staff and other professionals.

### Area One: Activities

In this section we explore children and young people's experiences of the activities on offer through the projects.

## What we feel: Children have fun

Parents understandably felt it was important that their children had a good time and enjoyed their experiences in the childcare settings. Positively, most projects were able to provide evidence that their services had been an enjoyable experience for the children involved.

*“The after-school club has been amazing for my son; he absolutely loves attending and he loves all the workers that deliver at the club.”*

**(Parent, Clyde Gateway)**

The children also had their own views about their experiences, and what they liked best and didn't like about their childcare experiences. Evidence from children tended to focus on activities they liked, the friends they made and their relationships with staff members.

*“I thought it was all so fun and enjoyable.”*

**(Child, Action for Children)**

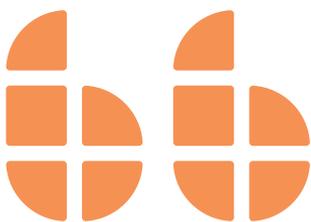
*“I like playing with my friends. I am happy. I like playing.”*

**(Child, SHIP)**

There was a huge range of activities offered across the 15 projects including cooking, music, art, sports, silent discos, movie nights, nature walks, free play outdoors and gaming. Some projects indicated that they had involved children in decisions about the activities on offer. This co-production approach would be something to encourage more widely in the future, particularly as Scotland moves towards incorporating the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

## What we gain: Children are more physically active and spend more time outdoors

While there were no specific activities that stood out as being most popular with children, playing outdoors was mentioned repeatedly across multiple projects:



*“I love being outside whenever I come into the Families House.”*

**(Child, FCSS Dundee)**

*“Being outdoors running around all night is just the best.”*

**(Child, St Mirin's)**

*“I liked playing in the garden.”*

**(Child, Stepping Stones)**

Outdoor play was highlighted as an opportunity or activity available in 12 of the projects. At Hame fae Hame parents were asked how they felt about the development of our outdoor spaces over the past six months. Of those responding, 92.86% strongly approved and 7.14% approved.

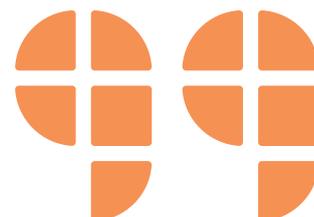


Hame Fae Hame's outdoor area, Scalloway, Shetland

We have no way of gauging overall whether children were more physically active or spent more time outdoors that they normally would have, however three parents gave examples of how projects had encouraged or supported their children to get out of the house or try new activities:

*"X has taken up golf and he not only enjoys the club but we have found out that he is talented! We would never have taken him to a golf club but felt confident to let him attend a SupERkids supported club where he would be safe and surrounded by people who know him and can cope with his needs."*

**(Parent, SupERkids)**



*"R has thoroughly enjoyed the hubs and has made good friends and speaks highly of the team working with her. After lockdown she would happily stay indoors as much as possible so I am grateful she has had a summer filled with fun and socialisation."*

**(Parent, Inverclyde Council)**

*"My children absolutely loved the climbing areas, and the staff do a super job of encouraging outdoor play."*

**(Parent, Hame fae Hame)**

While the evidence about physical activity is limited in size, we suspect many more parents valued the opportunities the projects provided to get children up, active and away from screens.

**Right: A child who uses Fraserburgh OOSC during school holidays whilst out on a trip to local playpark (Aberdeenshire FSCC)**



## What we gain: Children's diets improve

Hope Amplified was unique in having a specific emphasis on diet and nutrition in its outcomes. The Saturday sessions were focused on gardening, growing fruit and vegetables and preparing healthy meals. Some of the food-related activities were curtailed due to the pandemic, but food parcels were distributed instead.

Several other projects outlined specific activities undertaken, both with children and parents, to support better diet and nutrition in children and families. These included:

- Provision of food and drink during clubs
- Food education and cooking clubs for children
- Provision of activity and recipe packs to families, including the ingredients needed to cook a meal
- Referrals to local food banks for food parcels and other support
- Provision of supermarket vouchers.



A and K's healthy snack – an opportunity to try grapefruit for the first time, Action for Children

### Fuse Power-up Programme – fitness and food education

This programme ran twice per week and delivered fitness and food education through timetabled games, dance and exercise sessions for fitness, and cooking, food/nutrition quizzes using Kahoot. This was linked to their attainment programme and several Youth Scotland Hi5 Awards were gained by the children.

### LIFT – holiday clubs

During the summer of 2021 LIFT ran a holiday club, providing 60 children a hot, healthy lunch five days per week for six weeks. This supported a wide range of families, including working families on low incomes who were not entitled to the summer holiday food grant offered by the City of Edinburgh Council. This provided a significant cost saving for families as well as providing healthy food for the children.

Some of the food-related activities offered children and young people the chance to try new foods for the first time and extend their culinary horizons with foods from different countries:

*“Children were also often encouraged to try foods they may never have had before. For example, some of our children tried mango and papaya for the first time during one of our ‘Around the World’ summer sessions, and others tried haggis on the week of Robert Burns Day.”*

**(Staff member, Action for Children)**

However, the activities described in this section also bring into stark relief the real difficulties experienced by some of the families accessing these services. As Hope Amplified outlined:

*“Over 85% of women have no recourse to public funds due to their immigration status. Furthermore, due to the welfare reforms some of our participants have been denied access to child benefit, employment support allowance and housing benefits. Such women and their children have endured negative outcomes, with their children not having enough food to eat. Some women cannot afford childcare hence they are isolated, lonely, and locked in their houses with no social networks and support.”*

It is deeply troubling that childcare providers are referring families to food banks or providing supermarket vouchers for basic food supplies. This issue is obviously one that is too big for childcare services to resolve themselves, but clearly they can provide some sources of immediate help and support.

### **What we gain: Children experience more enriching learning experiences**

Only one project (Clyde Gateway) has an identified outcome focused on learning and attainment and it was not clear from their report whether any progress had been made in this area. However, learning featured in several other funded projects in the following ways:

- Children learning new skills in the clubs, such as playing an instrument or cooking (e.g. **Hope Amplified – Instruments 101**)
- Children working towards awards such as Hi5 or Dynamic Youth awards through taking part in project activities (e.g. **Fuse Power-up Programme – fitness and food education**)
- Children being more ready to learn in school after attending breakfast clubs (e.g. **St Mirin's**).

The learning approaches described by projects leaned heavily towards play-based approaches, where children were given a degree of choice over their activities and space to explore them with support from adults. Creative learning also featured highly, with a range of arts and music activities on offer. Some more structured learning opportunities were also available however, such as those provided by Hope Amplified and Fuse.

Some of the children attending the projects had experienced difficulties in school. It was clear that engaging and supportive childcare offered an alternative environment for them in which they could learn and flourish. The provision of free and subsidised childcare undoubtedly helped open up this opportunity to children from families who otherwise would not have been able to afford the service.

Key factors that supported learning included:

- Greater informality and less strict subject ‘timetables’
- Lower staff to child ratios, allowing more individual support where needed
- Increased choice over activities and individual autonomy
- Activities which suited children’s interests and that were considered ‘fun’.

It is also worth acknowledging that school-aged childcare does not come with the same duties to teach the curriculum as more formal education settings. This could free staff to be more creative and child-centred in their approaches. It could also make for a less pressured learning environment for children, with fewer expectations or requirements of them.

## Area Two: Relationships and Friendships

In this section we explore findings about children's relationships with project staff and peers.

### What we feel: children enjoy spending time with staff

Children's good, supportive relationships with staff were mentioned as a positive by both children and their parents/carers, particularly but not exclusively for those with additional support needs. Skilled and supportive staff helped children to feel safe and included:

*"The ladies are so nice; I like to come here."*

**(Child, FCSS Aberdeenshire)**

*"I cannot emphasise enough how lovely it is to know X is well looked after and the ladies care for his wellbeing. It's such a lovely little atmosphere they create."*

**(Parent, The Wee Childcare Company)**

We know from other research that children place a high value on kindness from the adults around them, and this appears to have been equally important within the context of these projects.



MG having fun riding the wheelchair bike, SupERkids

## What we feel: children enjoy spending time with peers

Children, parents and staff all recognised that the projects offered opportunities for children to connect with their peers.

*"Fantastic for their socialisation especially after lockdowns."*

**(Parent, Hame fae Hame)**

*"He enjoys mixing with the other kids. Especially as he is an only child, I feel this really benefits him."*

**(Parent, Clyde Gateway)**

This aspect of the projects was felt to be hugely positive with significant benefits as outlined below.

## What we learn and gain: children experience positive relationships with peers

Three projects (25%) had a specific emphasis on building friendships and peer relationships in their outcomes. However, children, parents/carers and staff across almost all projects (14/93%) were able to highlight examples of where friendships had been made within their services.

*"I liked meeting new friends. I love the club!"*

**(Child, Action for Children)**

*"Fun and met new friends."*

**(Child, Inverclyde Council)**

*"At SHIP, my daughter feels safe, included and has made some good friendships, which she struggles to do in her mainstream school class."*

**(Parent, SHIP)**

*"I made three friends and my sister is here too."*

**(Child, Stepping Stones for Families)**

This outcome appeared, understandably, to be particularly important for children who had struggled to forge friendships in schools or other parts of their lives:

*"I don't have many friends at school but I have more here, and I cannot wait every day to see them."*

**(Child, FCSS Dundee)**



**A and K planting trees, Action for Children**

This finding is particularly relevant in the context of the pandemic, when children had spent considerable periods of time isolated from their peers. As staff from St Mirin's noted:

*"We observed children come through pandemic, lockdowns, restrictions, 'bubbles'. We found children were worried and anxious about Covid. Our play nights encouraged children not only back to socialising but back to childhood; a childhood they lost for two years."*

**(Staff member, St Mirin's)**

It was acknowledged that increasing social confidence could take time as children needed to learn or relearn how to play and connect with peers. Staff clearly played a very important role in creating a safe and welcoming environment in which these friendships could flourish.

## **What we do differently: children have improved social interaction and relationships**

The many hundreds of children attending the 15 services all came with a range of experiences of friendship and socialisation outwith the projects and different needs in this regard. The extent to which social and emotional development was affected by their attendance would therefore be expected to vary considerably.

One project (St Mirin's) used a standardised measure of social and emotional development.<sup>5</sup> While it was only tested with a very small sample of children (six), initial indications were positive, with all six children experiencing positive changes in wellbeing. St Mirin's is continuing to embed this method across its work to further build an evidence base.

We therefore mostly relied on qualitative evidence from children, parents and staff.

It is clear from this evidence that, while most children had a positive experience to tell, and many had developed new friendships through attending, those experiencing the most improvement in social and emotional development were children who came to the project with specific needs or challenges.

Evidence of improvement was particularly evident in services supporting children with additional support needs:

*"X is happy to be with his peers and he gains so much more confidence as he is encouraged to socialise with his peers, with the help of staff. This helps with acceptance within the community."*

**(Parent, SupERkids)**

*"It was amazing to note the games the children learned that they took into the playground at lunchtime and played them together without adults."*

**(Teacher, talking about children attending the St Mirin's crisis and intervention strand)**

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<sup>5</sup>Glasgow Motivation and Wellbeing Profile (GMWP)

*“A village, it takes a village to raise a child, and Indigo have become this. I have seen improvements in behaviours, self-esteem, confidence, independence and overall wellbeing. They have become more resilient children, all while having a blast.”*

**(Parent, Indigo Childcare Ltd)**

Overall, there was sufficient qualitative evidence available to conclude that building and sustaining new friendships, which children would not otherwise have access to, was an important feature of the funded projects and a valuable aspect of childcare provision for children, parents and staff. For children experiencing particular difficulties in this regard the projects were often able to improve their confidence and social skills, which they could take beyond the projects into their wider lives.

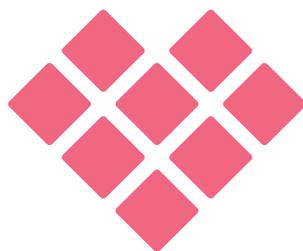


OSC young people enjoy the messy play

## Children’s Health, Wellbeing and Relationships Case Study: Fuse

Child X joined the programme at Fuse in July 2021 from a lone parent household where the child spends half the week, with the other half of the week spent in the other parent’s household. The parent told us that the child was having some issues in school with making and keeping friends and seemed to be quite shy. However, the parent said that they will miss the programme as they feel that Fuse has become a very important feature in the child’s life, telling us that child X has made new friends and talks about all the activities they are involved in.

The youth workers and project coordinator have also both provided feedback, saying that they observed positive changes in child X who did seem a little shy at first but has grown in confidence and developed their own circle of friends, often being the ringleader in influencing other children to engage in the same activities. The headteacher of Eastbank Primary school also told us that child X has mentioned Fuse and told her of the activities they have enjoyed taking part in. They have also noticed an increase in child X’s confidence and friendships.



## 7. Parents'/carers' employment status



This section focuses on the impact of the projects on parents' and carers' employment status. Fourteen of the projects gathered evidence from parents and carers to inform this section.

### What we feel: Parents have access to childcare that fits their circumstances

#### *Flexibility*

In the context of the Access to Childcare Fund, flexibility meant various things for parents, including choice over the number of hours per week, the times the service was used and responsiveness to their children's changing needs.

Parents and carers talked about how the childcare provided had fitted around their existing work commitments, including for those who were home working due to the pandemic. Families often had many things to juggle, including work, study and other caring commitments. For some, just the fact that they had affordable childcare available during the hours they worked was enough:

*"Handy, flexible worked really well to fit in with working from home."*

**(Parent, Stepping Stones)**

*"I'm a student, single mother and I work 16 hours per week. It really benefits me as it gives me time to study and catch up with things."*

**(Parent, Clyde Gateway)**

This could be particularly true for women, who traditionally take on a greater proportion of childcare responsibilities:

*"Enabling women to develop their careers is very important. Childcare responsibility usually falls to women within a family – I have a career that I am glad to be developing further due to funded childcare places being available. For many women, this is allowing them to contribute to providing for their families, knowing their children are well looked-after and having fun."*

**(Parent, The Wee Childcare Company)**

For others, the childcare on offer had given parents the opportunity to make choices that better suited themselves and their families:

*"The funded places have enabled me to have more quality time with my family – previously I used to have to work into the evenings, and now I am able to carry out my work during normal hours. I have also developed my career in new ways – by taking on work that I wouldn't have been able to previously."*

**(Parent, The Wee Childcare Company)**

Circumstances could change on a regular basis and committing to a rigid timetable of set childcare hours could be challenging. The flexibility offered by services such as FCSS Dundee, for example, meant that parents/carers could choose their hours on a weekly basis. This meant that parents with changing work patterns could be accommodated.

### *Transport*

Staff support to help children with transport was also a vital source of support on occasion. Inverclyde, for example, offered transport to children accessing the service if they lived more than one mile from the hub. However, there was also a degree of flexibility, when possible, to support parents who lived closer.

Transport provision was not without its challenges, however. The pandemic meant that the number of families that could be accommodated on Inverclyde's buses was restricted. For the Wee Childcare Company, which purchased a minibus, challenges about ongoing costs associated with vehicle upkeep and payment for drivers was also highlighted.

Nevertheless, we would recognise these adjustments offered by projects as demonstrating person- or family-centred approaches – offering families what they needed and when to support their individual situations.

### **What we gain: Parents have more time to study**

The provision of childcare undoubtedly gave parents and carers time to do other things than look after children. The data is not available to allow us to estimate how much extra time parents had to study, train or look for work as a result of support from the funded projects, although qualitative data does provide some evidence in this area.

For some, the time available because of access to childcare was used to study:

*“I have benefitted – as a lone parent it is challenging to not have support – when I can have time to get important things done or be able to simply get shopping done. I was also able to pass some exams in the time I had.”*

**(Parent, Action for Children)**

Hope Amplified reported that a parent had enrolled on a community development course at Glasgow Caledonian University due to support received from the project.

Clearly, studying with children in the house is less than desirable and potentially stressful when combined with other family commitments:

*“Mother has used the children's time at the service to support her completing her SVQ level 3 in childcare, by completing her reflective accounts within this time. She would [usually] have to do this with her children in attendance or find other times for her college work, outside of working full-time and raising her family, potentially to the detriment of her and her children's wellbeing.”*

**(Staff member, the Wee Childcare Company)**

The stress-relieving effect of good childcare for parents, including those who are studying, **is a theme we will return to later.**

## What we gain: Parents have sufficient childcare to work

The amount of childcare needed by families depended on a few variables including the age of the child, time of year, number of children in the household, number of adults in the household and the employment status of those adults. Those likely to need more childcare to support work included lone parents, large families or families with very young children, all of whom are specific priority groups for the Access to Childcare Fund.

From the evidence provided it would appear that for some parents the childcare provided was both sufficient and essential to enable them to work:

*"It enabled me to go to work. I do not have any other support throughout the holidays any more as my mum sadly passed away and she was my main support throughout the school holidays."*

**(Parent, Inverclyde Council)**

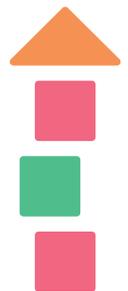
*"I use the OSC [school-aged childcare] so I can continue working and I don't need to stop to do the school run."*

**(Parent, Stepping Stones)**

*"Access to the early bird has also been a great benefit financially but also being able to drop X off earlier helped take some pressure off my work times."*

**(Parent, St Mirin's)**

As reported in previous sections, we also know that flexibility of provision was very important for some parents or carers. The number of hours needed could be quite small but some childcare providers set minimum hours per week with cut-offs higher than this number, meaning parents/carers had in essence to pay for childcare they did not need. Providing flexibility in terms of hours and days meant that childcare was both sufficient and tailored to families' individual circumstances.



## What we all do differently: Parents are able to find (better paid) work or increase their hours of work

Some projects were also able to give examples of parents or carers who had gained work as a result of their engagement with the service. Indigo Childcare Ltd told us that as a result of their support, 16 parents/carers were able to maintain their job role and/or working hours while four parents/carers increased their working hours and 10 parents/carers started a new job role or educational course. Clyde Gateway, for example, provided this testimony from a parent who had received support into work:

*"I just wanted to thank you for all the support you have given me since I first spoke to you around six months ago. You introduced Routes to Work South to me whom I had never heard of and within these few months I have landed a job as a Pupil Support Assistant and not forgetting the access to childcare course that you advised was running. Within the course I was able to gain several certificates along with the First Aid certificate. It had been two years since I was looking and applying for jobs with no success. I can't thank you enough for the support you have given me in the short period that I have known you."*

**(Parent, Clyde Gateway)**

Family support workers appeared to have played a significant role here. It is important to remember that the barriers to employment are not purely about time or money but can also include knowledge of how to navigate complex systems and the skills needed to apply for jobs.

Hope Amplified provided 19 women with job searching techniques and four families received training in CV writing. Two parents had taken up volunteering roles within the project and six were training to become parent mentors. Hope Amplified staff were keen to emphasise the positive mental health and wellbeing impact associated with volunteering and placed their success in this area on strong parental involvement across the project.

## Parents'/carers' employment status case study: SHIP

*"My son now comes to SHIP after school clubs. He has been coming to other SHIP clubs and holiday clubs and loved it. As a family we decided it would be good for me to get a job; I had not worked since X was born but I was really missing being around people.*

*"I contacted the local after-school club but they felt X wasn't ready to join their group. I knew that SHIP did an after-school club so I called Nicola to discuss whether it would be right for X. My main concern was the transport as X had never been in a taxi before especially without his Dad or me. Nicola was really helpful, and we arranged that for the first few weeks his Dad would go with him in the taxis and Nicola would then drive his Dad back to work. This really put me at ease and X started the next week.*

*"He LOVES it! He loves the taxi drive, the kids, the activities, the volunteers and the staff. I have recently been given an opportunity to increase my hours to full-time, which from April I have decided to do. I know X will be happy and well cared for so have the confidence to take this opportunity."*

**(Parent, SHIP)**

## 8. Parents' health and wellbeing



This section presents findings about the impact of the projects on parents' and carers' health and wellbeing.

### What we feel: parents feel reduced stress

Several of the funded projects (for example SupERkids and SHIP) provided specialist childcare for children with complex additional support needs. For parents of children accessing these services, having childcare that could fit around and support their children's individual needs was incredibly important. Each project was the only specialist childcare provider in its community, meaning the services were incredibly valuable to parents/carers and the children attending. Key to their success was having skilled and experienced staff, who parents could trust to keep their children safe and help them have fun through supporting their engagement in activities:

*"I haven't found anywhere else that I would trust to have my child. They have highly skilled staff and volunteers who are so skilled at supporting children. X smiles so much when I tell her she is going to after-school club. That makes me relax in the knowledge she is well taken care of."*

**(Parent, SHIP)**

*"There are no other clubs apart from SupERkids that we can send her to. X loves being at the clubs and it gives us a much-needed break."*

**(Parent, SupERkids)**

It was clear the difference specialist, person-centred childcare could make for those accessing it. Due to the higher staff to child ratios needed in specialist childcare, it can be more expensive for families than other forms of childcare. Support to meet these costs was therefore extremely beneficial (a theme we will explore further below).

More broadly, some mainstream childcare projects were also able to provide a break or respite while children were in childcare. Again, this was felt to be very beneficial for parents' stress levels;

*"My child has extra support needs, and this club gave him access to a lovely area to play with staff he has come to love seeing, and friends. It also allowed me some respite as I have my own disabilities and struggle at times as a single parent with my child's behaviours."*

**(Parent, Action for Children)**

The support provided through family support workers, where they were available, was also felt to have had a positive impact on stress and confidence:

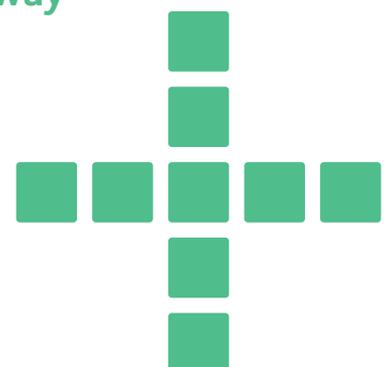
*"All support I have received has been very helpful. It has reduced stress and worry in my life. I know if Roisin can't help me she will get me to someone who will and will continue to support me on the way until any issues are resolved."*

**(Parent/carer, Indigo Childcare Ltd)**

At Clyde Gateway, parents/carers were given questionnaires to assess the extent to which they felt their health, wellbeing, confidence and self-esteem increased after becoming involved in the project. There was a marked improvement in all areas. For example, 70% rated their health and wellbeing as one on a five-bar scale before the intervention (the lowest possible answer), whereas no one rated their health and wellbeing lower than three after the intervention.

## Parents' health and wellbeing case study: Clyde Gateway

*"Margo Mooney is our family support worker and does this through a holistic approach, looking at my family as a whole then taking the individual needs and putting us onto the right services and people. She has helped me through training courses to understand the needs of my child and how to best deal with problems as they arise. Margo is happy to help and when I phone with a dilemma she calms and gives me the strength and focus to make me want better for me and my family. This is priceless and invaluable to me."*



*"I was a holistic therapist until a year ago when I had to have emergency surgery to get two discs removed from my back. I was five months bed-bound prior to my operation, and this is when my eyes where open and I could see no one could control my six-year-old child X. I am a single mother to four kids and I must have just been covering up the cracks beforehand. Now I know X has ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) and PDA (Pathological Demand Avoidance) – this is when I got through the school the help from Margo Mooney through the different services and schemes she has sent us on.*

*My self-esteem is getting there enough so that I wanted to give something back to those that have helped me, I volunteered to do Reiki treatments at International Women's Day in the church on Glasgow Road. It was run through South Lanarkshire and I loved doing what I do best, helping others. It was a great experience for me. I am suffering now with my back but that's a small price to pay to show my appreciation and help give a bit back.*

*"It has also led me to book an Angelic Reiki course which I will be doing beginning of June. If you asked me six months ago I would've burst into tears, said I'm too anxious, too depressed and don't want to be round others, but the help from Margo Mooney and her service has provided for me and my family [has meant] we are growing from strength to strength. Margo has the holistic way of making you feel better and looking at things from a different perspective – not many people have the ability to reach out and get on with people from all walks of life. Margo has this in abundance."*

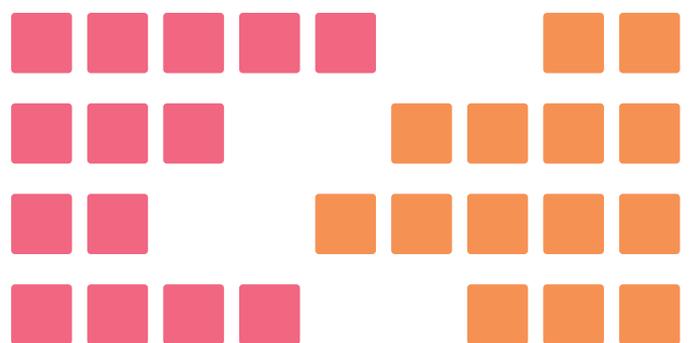


## 9. Household costs and income

### What we feel: Parents feel reduced financial pressure

As reported previously, 13 projects provided subsidised or free childcare provision through their ACF grants. The amount of subsidy available varied from project to project (from 20% to 100%), but all projects were confident that this reduction in costs had been very important to their families, particularly in the context of the rising cost of living.

Additionally, as well as providing subsidies, some projects provided other types of financial help to parents and carers including supermarket vouchers, income maximisation advice and support to access other funds, such as the Energy Matters Fund or Young Scotland's Winter Fund. These interventions could also help to reduce financial pressures on families:



*"One parent told us that her monthly phone bill had reduced by £40 per month with the iPad and Mi-Fi devices as they were no longer using her mobile data as the only source of internet access."*

**(Staff member, Indigo Childcare Ltd)**

These interventions not only helped to reduce household outgoings in real terms, but also took some of the stress off parents, carers and wider family members:

*“The hub has saved me a fortune throughout the holidays and so has my mum who is the only person I can ask as I am a single parent.”*

**(Parent, Inverclyde Council)**

## What we do differently: Costs are reduced for households

Three projects provided details of how much money families saved through the provision of subsidies. Subsidies were applied in different ways to different projects. SHIP applied a sliding scale depending on income, St Mirin’s applied a standard subsidy across the board and the Wee Childcare Company applied a standard charge for families on low incomes (see **Table 3** below).

**Table 3: Savings made through childcare subsidies**

Project	Subsidy applied	Price Before	Price After	Saving
SHIP	78-100%	£67 per session	£0-£15 per session depending on income	£52-£67 per session
St Mirin’s OSC	20% for 9 months	£3,340-£4,710 for 9 months	£2,672-£3,768 for 9 months	£668-£942 per child per year
The Wee Childcare Company	88-96%	£9.50-£28.90 per session	£1 per family per session	£8.50-£27,90 per session £38,133 for 9 families (£4,237 per family on average).

Families using the flexible booking systems being tested in some projects (e.g. the Wee Childcare Company, LIFT) were also likely to have experienced savings. These systems enabled parents/carers to book only the hours they needed, meaning that families did not need to commit to (and pay for) additional hours they did not want. A further 91 children from working families at the Wee Childcare Company were able to benefit from this system.

Undoubtedly these real savings will have helped families manage costs. There is evidence elsewhere in this report that families viewed the provision of subsidised places or flexible booking very positively and felt they made a real difference.

### Transport costs

Five projects indicated that they provided support with transport to their venues. This was provided to help families with the practicalities of getting their children to the services, but also to help with transport costs.

## SHIP's approach to transport

SHIP provided taxis for children from school to the after-school club, and 92% of families took up this service. One hundred per cent of families using the transport stated that they would not be able to use the service if transport was not available, due to working/studying commitments or not having access to their own transport.

Since January 2022 SHIP has been in discussions with Perth & Kinross Council regarding transport. They agreed that, from April 2022, SHIP can borrow a minibus to transport children to the sessions from schools across Perth. They have indicated that this should reduce transport costs to the service from £3000 per month to approximately £850 per month (including minibus driver wages and fuel), a significant saving for the service.



In Inverclyde, transport was offered to children accessing the service if they lived more than one mile from the hub, however, there was a degree of flexibility to support parents when possible. Fuse repurposed some of its original grant to support increased transport costs.

The Wee Childcare Company received an additional £15,000 funding from the Access to Childcare Fund to purchase their own transport, as other options were not practical (public transport) or financially viable (taxis). While this was seen as a beneficial solution in the short-term, there were a few concerns raised about the longer-term financial viability of owning a minibus, in terms of ongoing maintenance and staff costs:

*“Whilst we are grateful for the funding which led to purchasing our own vehicles, this will of course incur costs long-term, always requiring employment of a driving practitioner and may at some point be unsustainable if the demand for transport drops.”*

**(The Wee Childcare Company)**

## Household costs and income case study: Indigo Family Support

Family support was a feature of nine projects, of which four recruited Family Support Worker roles to work directly with and provide support to parents and carers. Indigo Family Support Co-ordinators (FSC) provided a range of emotional and practical support to parents and carers who were using their childcare services and facilitated connections for them with other local organisations. They have provided the following case study to illustrate how their FSC service worked:

X is a lone parent to her daughter Y (age 5). She was first referred by the team in November 2021, after mentioning that she was really struggling with the Christmas period and bills were piling up. X was working full-time and had full-time annual placement for Y. They had moved out this year from X's parents' house for the first time to a Housing Association flat. After speaking with the FSC (Family Support Co-ordinator), X discussed how she was feeling stressed and anxious about money, not only as it was coming up to Christmas but also because since moving out and

becoming financially responsible for a home, she was struggling to catch up every month and, due to her working hours and wage, she wasn't entitled to any support.

We offered X a break in fees to help her catch up with her other bills and debts, including rent arrears. We also arranged a Christmas food hamper for the family through a local organisation and gifts for Y. X said she felt overwhelmed with the support, and that it has been really difficult to accept as she has always wanted to demonstrate an independent, hardworking example to Y.

After the festive period, X was able to catch up with some bills, but then felt like something else always came along. X's mental health was becoming more and more affected by the financial stress, and she felt frustrated that she was working long hours, missing out on important family time with Y and still falling short of her bills every month. X went to go and see her GP and was prescribed anti-depressants for the first time.

X and the FSC had a chat about what her options were, X felt like the only financially and emotionally sustainable way forward was to cut her hours at work to 16 hours, but this was refused by her employer.

We referred her to Castlemilk Law Centre, who helped guide her through her options. X's mental health continued to suffer and she took Statutory Sick Pay to recover. X continued to seek alternative part-time employment and found a local job that fits in with her hours, while Castlemilk Law Centre has supported her to access Universal Credits and increase her entitlements. X still feels mixed about leaving full-time work but as a lone parent feels that this decision will give her and Y better financial and emotional outcomes.

X has stated that the support through ACF and family support has been crucial to helping her survive and cope through the past several months and that it has given her the information and time to make a difficult but better decision for her family.

*"Indispensable. The support I am receiving from Indigo has been life-changing. They have given me direction and plans with all aspects of life and parenting, They have eased a huge pressure I have been under for many years and given me access to so much support and information. These things wouldn't have been made possible if I didn't have them supporting me."*

**(Parent/carer, Indigo Family Support)**

## 10. Other outcomes: partnership working



While not included in the Measurement Framework as a specific outcome, it is worth noting that partnership working was a significant focus for the projects and one where they were able to see impact, if not always directly on the families, then certainly on the services involved.

As noted earlier, partnership working was undertaken to support referrals in and out of the projects, to build capacity in the projects and to ensure holistic family support was provided in local communities.

### *Supporting referrals*

Referral routes varied depending on the nature of the service and where it was located. Some projects, such as St Mirin's, were linked to a specific school and received referrals directly from it. Others, such as Action for Children, received referrals from a variety of sources, including the local social work department, as well as the school nursing team and self-referrals from families. Clyde Gateway had been so successful with referrals from local schools that a waiting list had to be introduced.

In all cases families were referred to the childcare providers from external agencies because of identified needs within that family, whether these were to do with the needs of the child, or other family members.

### *Building capacity*

Some projects had Service Level Agreements with local authorities which had provided security and a range of benefits, including financial benefits, to the service.

*"We have Service Level Agreements in place with the Local Authority which has enabled free school lets in return for high quality provision. This relationship is of high value to the OOSC [school-aged childcare] sector."*

**(Parent, The Wee Childcare Company)**

Partnerships did not necessarily mean formal relationships with established services. Partnerships with the local community residents were also important for several projects to help them grow and develop:

*"The stakeholder's group has proved to be vital to the growth of the social media group but also to the inclusion of the local community. One of the stakeholders is the CEO of Fintry Community Garden and this has proved to be a successful partnership with him being able to give invaluable advice about the garden and gardening in the future. The children have been helping and taking an active interest in the future of their outdoor area and how it is going to look."*

**(FCSS Dundee)**

### *Holistic support*

Through linking with other agencies projects were able to increase access to additional sources of support for families, as well as working with agencies to provide joined-up care.

*"A and H really enjoy coming to the sessions and I know [Mum] gets a bit of relief when they are out so it's much appreciated by the family. I also think it's really positive that H [who has ASN] has time in a different environment given most of his world is the family home. Having another set of eyes on how H is doing and what behaviours you are noticing is helpful from my end."*

**(Social worker working with Action for Children)**

Because of the value recognised by partners, Action for Children was in discussion with the Local Authority to find a way to continue the service after the ACF had finished.

Family support workers were well-placed within the projects to take this role forward. In Indigo Childcare Group, family support workers had connected families with a wide range of local services and resources, including Richmond Hope, RAMH, the Dixon Carers Centre, occupational therapy services, Visibility Scotland and Castlemilk Law Centre.

### **Partnership working case study: St Mirin's**

During the pilot we had a complete change of school leadership. A new Head Teacher and Assistant Deputy Head took the time to find out what we were offering, and they immediately became committed to our work within the school. This has become an excellent partnership and the children are benefitting from this. The mutual support and professional relationships we have built in such a short space of time have been excellent.

Mrs Flanagan meets weekly with planned meetings to review referrals, evaluate impact and discuss the way forward. But this is the set meeting; we also have such an open-door policy we can approach each other at any time. This is how all services should operate. Special thanks to Mrs Flanagan ADHT for your guidance and training, teaching and sharing your vast knowledge with us.

## **11. Summary of key learning**



Most of the parent/carer and children and young people's feedback reported on by projects was very positive in nature, indicating that the childcare provided had fit family circumstances, and offered helpful support to them in their wider lives, even in the unusual context of the pandemic.

Taken together, key learning from across the projects can be identified as follows:

### **Giving children a positive experience of childcare is paramount**

Parents, carers, staff and children themselves all recognised how important it was that children felt safe and had fun while they were attending the childcare provided by the ACF projects. It was important that children's needs and enjoyment were kept at the centre.

### **School-aged childcare provides the opportunity for informal, play-based and creative forms of learning that can provide accessible and inclusive alternatives to formal education**

This may be particularly important for those children who struggle in mainstream school settings. Where there is the opportunity to support children and young people to have a say in the activities on offer, this should be encouraged. This includes evaluating the service as well as deciding on the activities on offer.

## **Relationships were at the heart of all the project successes**

This included relationships between staff and children, staff and parents and children and their peers. The importance of good relationships appeared to be particularly evident in specialist services, where it was necessary to understand and respond to the individual needs and experiences of families.

For children, fostering good relationships with staff and peers was seen to have a range of mental health benefits that could be felt beyond the childcare setting. The knowledge that children were happy and supported also benefitted their parents.

## **Family support adds a valuable additional dimension to traditional child-orientated approaches**

The family support element of some projects served to recognise that it is not just time that's needed by parents. Parents need practical support, help to build confidence and knowledge of where to go and what opportunities are out there. With this holistic approach, family support can have a positive impact on the whole family.

## **Flexibility was a crucial aspect of the childcare provided by the ACF projects**

For some it was about choice of childcare hours, and the options for support in evenings, at weekends and during the school holidays. For others, flexible payment options really helped with their individual circumstances. For some families, flexibility meant that childcare in and of itself allowed for greater freedom and flexibility within families' wider lives that could open up new choices and opportunities for them.

## **The funding provided through the Fund to provide free or reduced cost childcare was a real benefit to many, with important savings for families, many of whom were living in low-income households**

It is important to recognise that financial support for associated costs, such as food, drinks and transport was also an important part of the picture. Without this free or subsidised provision it is likely that some of these families would not have been able to take up a childcare offer.

## **Accessibility requires additional investment**

Finding inclusive and affordable childcare that supports the needs of individual children is a challenge for some families, particularly those with children with additional support needs (ASNs). It costs more to staff ASN-inclusive services and this can be a barrier for some families if the costs are not subsidised for them.

## **Childcare providers provide an important service and role in their communities. Partnerships, particularly with schools, are important to extend reach, both into and out of the service**

This can also help to provide a more holistic, family-centred approach. Specialist and targeted services have an important role in reaching priority groups. This was particularly true for projects supporting the engagement of children with ASN and those from ethnic minority communities.

## It took time for many of the projects funded through the ACF to build momentum

Working through the pandemic did not help this, but more generally building a new service or approach takes time. Longer-term consistent funding is required to really support change.

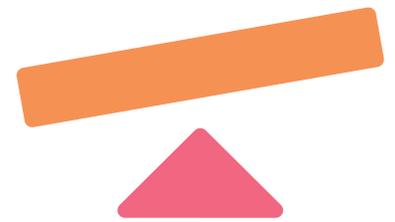
Childcare services may also need help with how to report their findings, particularly in the use of quantitative data, if we are to truly understand the impact of their work with families. This requires centralised support and investment.

## 12. What difference this makes



### Poverty

The theory of change behind the Access to Childcare Fund Measurement Framework suggests that, through increasing access to affordable childcare, families should experience increased opportunities to work and study, which in turn can contribute to increased household incomes and a reduction in those at risk of child poverty.



In reality of course, poverty is a complex problem, affected by many different factors beyond the control of childcare providers alone. The services could provide employability support, for example, but could not control employers' decisions to reduce staff hours. They could help with the cost of childcare but could not influence rising energy bills or food prices.

What was in the power of the 15 projects was to reduce the extent to which childcare was a burden on household incomes or acted as a barrier to earning. They could also work with families to make sure they were getting all the financial support to which they were entitled.

Across the 15 projects, evidence suggests that services were able to successfully support these goals.

### Children's social and emotional development

Children clearly benefitted from the company of their peers across the 15 projects. There were countless examples of friendships being forged and sustained which without subsidised funded places would not have had the chance to flourish. The experiences of children in this regard were further confirmed by staff and parents who described the differences they felt friendships had made for the children involved. This could be seen in terms of increased confidence and social skills, which were often taken beyond the childcare setting into other parts of the children's lives.

The skilled staff, who helped to create safe and supportive environments, combined with fun and engaging activities, played an important role in supporting friendships to develop. It was positive to see that all individuals – children, parents and staff alike

– valued friendship and peer relationships so highly. The fact that these services were operating after a number of national lockdowns undoubtedly contributed to the desire to support children’s connections with their peers. They were particularly important at this unique time.

## Conclusions

The Access to Childcare Fund invested more than £2million into 15 projects across Scotland. When combined with the hard work and dedication shown by staff, this constitutes a significant investment of time, energy and money.

The Fund operated at a uniquely difficult time. The Covid-19 pandemic meant that no service was able to operate as planned. They were beset by long periods of closure, changes of venues, restrictions on numbers and activities and a range of staffing challenges. The projects have shown considerable creativity and perseverance to work through these challenges and provide examples of much-needed and valued support.

What stands out from this evaluation of the projects’ evidence is the invaluable role of childcare provided in this context. Many parents involved in the projects were experiencing real challenges during this time, whether supporting children with complex ASN at home, dealing with rising costs, home working, poverty, or other personal crises. We should never become inured to the examples services gave of referring parents to food banks.

As we hit what looks to be an extremely difficult winter for many families, the availability of affordable, supportive childcare will be more important than ever. The lessons learned during the Covid-19 pandemic, in terms of reacting to rapidly changing circumstances and adapting accordingly, will remain relevant for childcare providers as they support families through this time.

What services were able to do during the pandemic was to offer a safe and supportive place for children to come together. While families may have been experiencing difficult times, children were able to have fun and make new friends. They were able to get outdoors and play.

For parents, the childcare offered provided them with the opportunity to get on with other aspects of their lives, whether that was work, study or other caring responsibilities.

The family support element of some projects served to recognise that it is not just time that’s needed by parents. Parents need practical support and help to build confidence and knowledge of where to go and what opportunities are out there. They also need help with logistics, such as transport, which can act as its own barrier if not available.

Childcare does not sit in a vacuum. Links with other services and organisations were vitally important to the projects. They acted as a point of referral in and out and helped to create a whole system which could come together to support families.

Each family involved in the project came with their own individual circumstances and the childcare providers had to be responsive to their needs. The funding provided by the Access to Childcare Fund gave them the opportunity to increase flexibility, offer financial support and try new approaches. The costs associated with these changes

were borne by the Fund, rather than the families and this was widely welcomed. If this flexibility is to be sustained and to remain accessible for those on low incomes, further sources of funding will be required.

Even though progress was not as fast as projects would have desired, and they had to operate in the most challenging of circumstances, the Access to Childcare Fund experience has shown that our vision for childcare as a service that nurtures the child and the wider family, sitting as part of a wider community and responsive to individual needs, is indeed possible.

## 13. Recommendations



1. The high costs of school-aged childcare mean that these services are not open to everyone. Funding must be available to subsidise the cost of childcare (and associated costs, such as transport) to support families on low incomes to access these services, and obtain the associated benefits outlined in this report.
2. Longer funding periods are required for childcare services to enable them to develop, plan, deliver and evaluate their approaches. The Access to Childcare funded projects received their first payments of the fund in October and November 2020. They were then in various stages of lockdown and restrictions until June 2021. This has given them a very short period to demonstrate outcomes and sustainability as the project funding ended in March 2022.
3. Specialist services for children with additional support needs are particularly expensive because of the greater number of skilled staff required. Additional funding must be available across Scotland to ensure that children with ASN get equal access to school-aged childcare.
4. Support for targeted and specialist childcare providers must be given to help all families access these services. Targeted services for minority ethnic families, for example, really help to foster inclusion.
5. Childcare, including school-aged childcare, can provide a valuable source of support for the whole family. Analysis of how investment in family support services is allocated is needed and this must be aligned to the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund. The evidence provided by the projects should be explored to demonstrate how incorporating whole family support into services throughout the child's journey, from early years to school age, can increase uptake of places and may empower families to improve their quality of life and enable sustained progression from poverty.
6. Childcare should be recognised as an important part of the wider children's services landscape, and childcare providers should be included in children's services planning processes.



7. Transport arrangements must be viewed as part of a holistic childcare offer. The provision of transport can help families overcome a number of barriers to childcare, including cost, lack of public or private transport options, and parents' / carers' work or study commitments.
8. Children and young people have had a lot of valuable things to say about their experiences of the childcare provided through this fund. Childcare providers should consider how they incorporate children's views into service design, delivery and evaluation. Scotland's move towards incorporating the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child will provide further impetus for this.
9. Projects have struggled at times to gather and present evidence from their services. Evaluation and reporting can be daunting, and further support should be given to help childcare providers understand what to gather when, and how to report on it, to ensure the impact of their services is fully recognised. This includes building on pilot initiatives, such as St Mirin's use of the Glasgow Motivation and Wellbeing Profile.



## Appendix A: Funded project outcomes

There are a range of short, medium and longer-term outcomes listed in the ACF Measurement Framework. These relate predominantly to outcomes for parents and carers (with a focus on access to work/study and household incomes) and outcomes for children (with a focus on wellbeing, social connections, physical health and attainment).

Funded services were able to select from these outcomes those that best fit their projects. The number of outcomes chosen per project ranged from two to eight. They could be grouped under the four overarching themes:

1. Outcomes for children
2. Outcomes for parents/carers and whole family
3. Service outcomes
4. System outcomes.

### Outcomes for children

Nine of the projects identified outcomes for the children who were expected to engage with the service (see **Table 4** below). The projects varied in terms of the specific outcomes mentioned, but many could be broadly grouped under physical and mental wellbeing. It was nice to see that 'fun' was the most common outcome.

**Table 4: Children's outcomes**

Children's outcome	Number of projects
Fun	4
Growth/development	3
Wellbeing	3
Social skills/relationships/friendships	3
Confidence and self-esteem	2
Physical health	2
Educational attainment	1

### Outcomes for parents/carers and whole family

Ten projects identified outcomes for parents/carers or the whole family engaging with the service (see **Table 5** on page 49). Organisations believed that by increasing access to affordable childcare through the project, parents would have more time and resources to take up employment or learning opportunities and that family financial burdens would be reduced. These both in turn could have a positive impact on mental health and wellbeing.

**Table 5: Parents/carers and whole family outcomes**

<b>Family outcome</b>	<b>Number of projects</b>
Access for parents to employment/training/support opportunities	7
Financial stability/income maximisation	5
Wellbeing	4
Physical health	1
Skills	1

## Outcomes for organisations

Eight funded projects described outcomes they foresaw for their own services / organisations as a result of the ACF funding. These focused on the areas of increased accessibility or affordability of services, increased service capacity (through staffing /hours available or types of services available) or service quality through improved systems and structures.

**Table 6: Parents/carers and whole family outcomes**

<b>Organisational outcome</b>	<b>Number of projects</b>
Service accessibility/affordability	5
Service capacity	5
Service quality	2

## System outcomes

Four funded projects described wider, system or community level outcomes they hope their funded project would achieve.

**Table 7: System outcomes**

<b>System outcome</b>	<b>Number of projects</b>
Access to childcare across community	3
Relationships between services	1
Wider support for families	1
Understanding of OSC need within community	1



	Holiday club	Breakfast / lunch club	Flexible hours	Outdoor play / increased outdoor activity	Rural provision	Subsidised / free places	After school activity	Weekend	Family support	ASN	Transport	Third sector partner
Action for Children (IV30)	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	**	✓	✓		✓
Clyde Gateway	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
FCSS Aberdeenshire	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓			✓		
FCSS Dundee				✓		✓	✓			✓	✓	
Fuse						✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
Hame Fae Hame	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓			✓		
Hope Amplified	✓			✓		✓	✓	✓		✓		
Indigo						✓	✓	*	✓	✓		
Inverclyde Council	✓			✓		✓		*		✓	✓	✓
LIFT	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓		
SHIP					✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
St Mirin's OSC		✓		✓		✓	✓		✓	✓		
Stepping Stones	✓					✓	✓	*	✓	✓		
SupERkids	✓					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
The Wee Childcare Company			✓		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	

\* Unable to deliver weekend provision due to Covid-19 restrictions.

\*\* Action for Children only delivered weekend provision for a short period.



### Clyde Gateway

**Local authority area:** South Lanarkshire

**Type of service:** Regeneration

**Focus of funded work:** After-school activities/Holiday provision/Weekend provision

#### Test of change

- Family Support/Employability and Training package (SAC)
- Fully subsidised places (SAC).

#### Main components

##### Planned activities and/or expected outcomes

- To work closely with families to deliver holistic support to enable participation and engagement in local services and activities to suit their needs
- Providing a Family Support Worker (FSW). It was expected that the FSW would work closely with all referred families delivering holistic support to enable participation and remove barriers to opportunities
- Increasing educational attainment with the uptake of library cards for families
- Increasing and promoting opportunities to access local green space
- Family Support/Employability and Training package (SAC)
- Fully subsidised places (SAC).

##### Outcomes

- Increased access and improving health and wellbeing of families
- Increased educational attainment
- Increased opportunities to move into achieving coaching qualifications to provide employment or volunteering opportunities
- Increased opportunities to access local green space
- Family Support/Employability and Training package (SAC)
- Fully subsidised places (SAC).

#### Progress

Supporting Families (SF) is an established model, focused on improving and integrating with existing services.

In addition to providing direct support, the FSW approached partner agencies to look at delivering bespoke interventions for families. Without the development of these valuable partnerships, the project could not have provided the high level of support it has for families. Partnership links are vital to the sustainability of the project. Below are just a few additional relationships that have been forged over and above the lead partners through the ACF project:

- Routes Work South
- Skills Development Scotland
- NHS Lanarkshire Health Promotion Team
- Youth Family and Community Learning
- Trussell Trust Food Bank
- Money Matters
- Thistle Credit Union
- Healthy and Happy
- South Lanarkshire Leisure and Culture (SLLC).

The SAC strand of the project has been provided through delivery partner South Lanarkshire Leisure & Culture (SLLC).

## Data

### *Childcare – Afterschool provision*

- Thirty-nine families have been referred in total for the SAC provision with only three families declining support. Fifty-two children in total have been referred with 63% (33) accessing weekly sessions across three schools. Eighty-eight per cent of children have accessed after-school or holiday provision throughout the project.

## Barriers

- Direct after-school service is a high priority for parents. However, the pandemic restrictions had a profound impact on the level of school-aged childcare offered. Despite challenges, SLLC now has school clubs running weekly with a cohort of families regularly attending
- With changing restriction guidelines, using schools has now been identified as a way forward to provide out of school care which meets the needs of some families and SLLC is working with schools directly to provide this support. They have also begun providing weekend childcare provision
- When starting to deliver groups face-to-face there were challenges around numbers attending, which they managed to overcome by securing larger venues
- There is also the question of future capacity to meet the needs of families being referred for support from the project.

## SHIP (Support, Help, Integration in Perthshire)

**Local authority area:** Perth & Kinross

**Type of service:** Youth clubs, play schemes and other activity-led opportunities (for children/young people with ASN)

**Focus of funded work:** High quality School Aged Childcare (SAC) activities for children and young people with complex additional support needs, across Perthshire.

### Test of change

- Free/subsidised places

- Rural provision
- Extended opening hours
- Transport provision.

**Issues:** For much of the duration of the project they were not able to operate from their normal venue.

### Main components

- Run groups five days a week 3-5.30pm (starting September 2020)
- Support 15 families per day from across Perthshire
- Provide transport to the clubs and if necessary, home
- Subsidise the cost of groups to ensure cost is not a barrier for low-income families.

### Planned activities and expected outcomes

- Ensure children and young people have the same opportunities as their peers in mainstream education. Offered an inclusive service that allowed children opportunities to make friends and learn life/social skills through play activities
- Give families flexible school-aged childcare to allow them to work/study or care for other children in the household
- Make the service affordable to families. Local authority Perth & Kinross Youth clubs, play schemes and other activity-led opportunities (for children/young people with ASN).

### Progress

SHIP has given families a chance to go out to work or study or access some much-needed respite. Some families have used the service for respite and been collecting other children from school, doing homework with them and starting dinner before collecting their child. They said it has made home time much calmer and less stressful and helped to build stronger relationships with their other children. It is invaluable for these young carers to have a chance to be with their parents without being a carer at the same time.

Other parents/carers simply would not have been able to work if the school-aged childcare had not been running as there are no other organisations within Perth & Kinross supporting children with complex additional support needs.

\*It has not been possible to test rural provision. Plans to support rural families have not been possible due to Covid-19 and the restrictions faced with transport and venue access.

### Data

The School Aged Childcare (SAC) service runs Monday to Friday 3–5.30pm term-time with 27 children attending (25 families). The Thursday session is currently full. Transport has been given to all families that require it. The parents/carers rely on the sessions to work, study or collect/care for other children in the household.

## *Transport*

SHIP has provided taxis for children from school to the after-school club. Ninety-two per cent of families have taken up this service.

The need for transport has increased from the original plan due to the change in venue. If the clubs had been run from Fairview, pupils attending Fairview would not have required transport and children attending adjacent schools could have been walked to the sessions.

## *Accessing respite, training or work*

Thirty-four per cent say they use the service for respite and 66% for working/study. Of the families that have stated they use the service for respite, two of them are classing working as respite.

When asked, of those who are using the service for respite, three have stated they would like to look at doing a course or get a part-time job. However, they are worried that if they do and the club closed, or their child's behaviour becomes too challenging for staff, they would have to stop work/study, causing more disruption. This can only be rectified by families using the service and gaining confidence.

Reasons families are using SHIP ASC: 16 families to retain employment, one family (two children) for study, nine families across the project for respite. The majority of those using SHIP ASC to work was to retain employment, however two families are using the service as they have gained employment.

## **Barriers**

- SHIP has a service level agreement with the council and part of that means they have access to specific Perth & Kinross Council buildings to run the services. Due to Covid-19, SHIP was unable to access the buildings because of the increased risk of spreading the virus
- To rectify the situation, SHIP searched for a local community building that had suitable facilities to support their young people. It took several months to find temporary premises. However, this added additional costs of £400 per week to the project, and this cost is not sustainable long-term. Before starting at Letham St Marks, the Care Inspectorate had to agree the building was suitable and added it to their Care Inspectorate Certificate – this took only took a few weeks to approve.

## **Hope Amplified**

**Local authority area:** South Lanarkshire

**Type of service:** Community-led Organisation

**Focus of funded work:** Afterschool activities/Holiday Club

## **Test of change**

- Opening more days per week
- Sessional staff from pool of volunteers
- Digital training

- Creative art
- Gardening activities
- Free places.

**Issues:** Still to become a registered OSC

### Main components

- To enable the service to expand current provision by making school-aged childcare more accessible and affordable for families from the African community who otherwise would be unable to afford childcare costs
- Address the additional costs for families, particularly over the six-week summer holiday and at Christmas
- The project provides an after-school and holiday club with activities such as gardening, creative arts, and digital skills

### Planned activities and expected outcomes

- Increase inclusion for a minority ethnic community to access school-aged childcare provision
- Make the service more accessible/flexible/affordable for families
- Increase the organisation's capacity to support school-aged childcare opportunities
- Enable children/young people to have more opportunities for fun, growth and development, including nutrition
- Enable families to access employment/training/support opportunities.

### Progress

Kush Childcare Project provided after-school and weekend activities to make this support more accessible and affordable for families from the African community who otherwise would be unable to afford childcare costs due to poverty. The project provided a range of activities that met the needs of local residents. These included multimedia training, digital training, gardening activities and creative arts.

### Data

Saturday sessions delivered: 414

Sessions delivered during the week: 324

The project stated: Sixty-three families reported increased access to out-of-school activities.

Fifty-nine families reported increased access to more flexible and affordable childcare. Hope Amplified has increased staff capacity to support these opportunities.

Eighty-four children and young people from disadvantaged households have more opportunities for fun, growth and development.

Nineteen women received focused job searching techniques where parents searched their specific level of skills and experience.

Four families received digital training and CV writing skills.

In line with the wider aims of the project to develop the skills of adults as well, two parents agreed to become volunteers, six are undergoing training to become learning coaches to mentor parents, and many parents are looking forward to starting their own learning journey with the project. In addition, parents are invited to meet with volunteers and sessional staff to discuss their children's progress and specific needs and how they can support their progression and learning. Volunteering improves the mental health and wellbeing of those who undertake it.

### **Barriers**

- Sessions were partially moved online during the pandemic
- Families and practitioners believe longer-term funding would help to sustain the work of the project.

## **Action for Children**

**Local authority area:** Moray

**Type of service:** Childcare/Family support/Employability

**Focus of funded work:** After school care/Out of hours flexible childcare/SAC into established family support service base.

### **Test of change**

- Family support
- Subsidised/free places
- Rural provision
- Employability Training Programmes by providing out of hours flexible childcare (including evenings, weekends and school holidays).

**Issues:** Weekend service has currently stopped.

### **Main components**

#### **Planned activities**

- Expansion of the AB56 Futures Children and Families Community Support Service alongside the ELC Employability Training Programmes by providing flexible childcare (including evenings, weekends, and school holidays) so families can better utilise the Family Support Service, parenting sessions and employability courses
- IV30 Family Futures – Creative Clubhouse to deliver a wide range of structured, educational activities, including special themed days, arts and crafts, music, library and sensory rooms, cooking and outside play/activities
- Providing a variety of tasty and nutritious food.

#### **Expected outcomes**

- Low-income families to be able to access flexible and affordable childcare that met their needs

- Disadvantaged/vulnerable children to have more opportunities for fun, development and growth, including nutrition
- Parents to have increased access to learning development and employment opportunities.

## Progress

The project was an expansion of the AB56 Futures Children and Families Family Support Service alongside the Early Learning and Childcare Employability Training Programmes. The aim was to provide out of hours flexible childcare (including evenings, weekends and school holidays) to enable some of their disadvantaged/vulnerable families to better utilise the family support service, parenting sessions and employability courses.

They were able to extend support for children with ASN by offering 1:1 sessions to children who may have been unable to attend school full-time and required support with transitions and adjusting to new situations.

Since opening the Creative Clubhouse in March 2021, they have built strong professional ties with numerous agencies and organisations across Moray. These include departments of Moray Council, in particular Social Work (Children and Families), Education, CAMHS, Health Visitors, Community School Nurses, DWP, SDS (Skills Development Scotland), Action for Children's Sonas service and local schools/college and nurseries. They further developed professional working relationships with other third sector organisations. They became a core member of MASH (the Multi Agency Support Hub).

Refurbishment of the premises continued with works finishing in October 2021, so that both the indoor and outdoor spaces had all the equipment/activities in place and were fit for purpose. The outdoor space gained a useable summerhouse and parents and carers often positively commented.

## Data

### *Numbers of children and families*

Since the opening of IV30 Creative Clubhouse they have worked with 61 children aged between 5-12 years across 52 families. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic and restrictions, the reach was less than expected.

The need for transport has increased from the original plan due to the change in venue. If the clubs had been run from Fairview, pupils attending Fairview would not have required transport and children attending adjacent schools could have been walked to the sessions.

Between 29 March 2021-31 March 2022 they delivered the following to their children and families:

- Twelve weeks holiday clubs with two sessions each day over five days (total of 120 sessions)
- Forty weeks of after-school club sessions including at weekends (total of 260 sessions). This included making use of our facility in Buckie for families at weekends and outwith Elgin

- Delivery of activity/family meal ingredients and recipe packs: Easter holiday period – 86 packs weekly for six weeks and a further 52 packs per week for six weeks during the summer holiday period
- Provided transport to and from sessions at Winchester House to 14 children.

### Barriers

- The service has had to be adaptable and flexible to operate over the past year. Staff had to work together to generate new ideas and solve issues relating to the service due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the often changeable restrictions
- Families from low-income households, families with children with ASN and families that have become isolated report they need help and support as well as development opportunities for themselves. The Creative Clubhouse provided an essential service to children and families and offered parents the opportunity to start to address their own development needs.

## Fuse

**Local authority area:** Glasgow City

**Type of service:** Youth service

**Focus of funded work:** Afterschool/holiday provision

### Test of change

- Developing services in more locations – community centre
- Family support
- Free places
- New project co-ordinator and additional sessional staff
- Free P4 provision five days a week
- Staffing /transport.

**Issues:** Pavilion sessions have needed to operate from a local community centre due to Covid-related restrictions.

## Main components

### Planned activities

To develop a model where families are encouraged to 'piggyback' on existing free services in their community which provide some form of childcare, thus allowing childcare to be sourced at low additional cost and at zero cost to the family.

- Recruit and employ a Project Coordinator to act as a link worker
- Create a total of 40 additional 'full-time' out of school spaces over the periods of operation
- Engage with schools, youth organisations and other third sector organisations to provide a targeted support

- Employ a consistent approach across Fuse and Pavilion by extending the time of service in Pavilion to match Fuse and extend the age range in Fuse (to P4 school age) to match the current provision at Pavilion
- Pay for additional sessional staff to ensure a full programme of developmental activities can be offered safely in a ratio of 1:10 people in settings that include outdoors
- Implement a monitoring and review process.

### **Expected outcomes**

- Offer a free alternative to childcare to lone parent families and/or larger families (three+ children) to enable families to work/extend their working hours or study towards a career of their choice
- Maximise the earning potential of the parents and mitigate the costs of childcare
- Enable children living in disadvantaged areas to access more opportunities.

### **Progress**

Fuse developed a model where families are encouraged to 'piggyback' on existing free services in their community which provide some form of childcare, thus allowing childcare to be sourced at low additional cost and at zero cost to the family.

They employed a Project Coordinator to coordinate and deliver a free childcare service in Fuse Youth Café (Shettleston) and The Pavilion (Easterhouse) from Monday to Friday from 3pm-6pm for 41 children in Primary 4 to Primary 7. The childcare service was targeted to and taken up by families where there were three or more children and/or a single parent household to enable the uptake or sustainment of employment, education, or training.

They created a 'piggyback' service which ensured that all children participating in the childcare service had the same opportunities to engage in activities as the children in the existing drop-in service. For example, a full timetable was developed each month to ensure a variety of indoor and outdoor activities was provided and included access to the following Fuse power up programme, oral health programme, Hi5 and Dynamic Youth awards.

### **Data**

Following on from the annual review to September 2021, they continued to support a total of 41 individual children from a total of 32 families.

### **Barriers**

The challenges in the programme were largely Covid-related. Trying to provide a Covid-19 safe service proved difficult while trying to provide meaningful youth activity in the early days of delivery last year when they separated the afterschool care from the drop-in services.

Other challenges were in trying to manage the numbers coming in to Pavilion within the Covid-19 guidelines and therefore hiring an additional community hall situated directly across from the main Pavilion building.

## Flexible Childcare Services Scotland (FCSS) – Dundee

**Local authority area:** Dundee City

**Type of service:** Childcare

**Focus of funded work:** Expanding service

### Test of change

- Developing services in more locations, including more use of outdoor space
- Subsidised transport
- Employ senior practitioner.

**Issues:** Delays with outdoor area and vandalism.

### Main components

FCSS Dundee had secured approval for a community asset transfer enabling a move to another building within the Fintry community. The Access to Childcare Fund project was to create additional spaces and provide new opportunities to bridge the timespan until the new property was ready.

### Planned activities

- Create eight additional out of school care places, meaning there would be capacity for 24 children (already capacity for 16 school-aged children)
- Use the substantial outdoor area within the new space to offer access to a beautiful green space in the middle of the community in Fintry (an interim license to use this land was requested)
- Operate this as an outdoor satellite to the current registration.

### Expected outcomes

- A SAC service that engages all children, including those with ASN, and caters for their needs and development within a specialised area
- Invest in staff training and looking to employ people locally
- Offer subsidised out of school care services for families who need it and struggle with the cost of living.

### Progress

Despite the challenges they faced, the new building/pods were launched in May 2022.

The project started a new social media group. There is a lot of interest in what is happening within the whole complex of the 'old Fintry Nursery' and there has been significant engagement from the local community. The group now has more than 500 members and is continually growing.

The stakeholder group has proved to be vital to the growth of the social media group but also to the inclusion of the local community. One of the stakeholders is the CEO of Fintry Community Garden and this has proved to be a successful partnership with him being able to give invaluable advice about the garden and gardening in the future. The

children have been helping and taking an active interest in the future of their outdoor area and how it is going to look.

The service has been in conversation with Fare Share about restarting to provide surplus food when they are established in their new building and families can come into the building as previously it would have been difficult to give out the surplus with restrictions in place.

### **Data**

There are 24 children registered with the service.

### **Barriers**

Covid-19 has been a huge challenge. Brexit has contributed to the shortage of materials that has slowed down the building of the PODS and has put the price of materials up.

- Qualified staff are in shortage, and there is a staffing crisis within the industry
- The engagement of the families was at times challenging and when asked about completing questionnaires they told FCSS that they had other priorities. Survey Monkey ended up being the best way to get feedback from the families and more than 20 replies were received – another positive indication that the service is going to be using in future for family engagement.

## **Flexible Childcare Services Scotland (FCSS) – Aberdeenshire**

**Local authority area:** Aberdeenshire

**Type of service:** Childcare

**Focus of funded work:** After school care/Holiday childcare/Breakfast club

### **Test of change**

- Developing services in more locations, including more use of outdoor space
- Employ manager/after-school practitioners
- Rural provision.

**Issues:** Difficulties with premises and getting operational. Substantial increase to let costs expected.

### **Main components**

#### **Planned activities**

- To have a breakfast/after-school club/holiday playscheme in Fraserburgh.
- Employ a manager and childcare staff to work in the setting.

#### **Expected outcomes**

\*The project experienced difficulty in becoming operational due to Covid restrictions.

- A service accessible to all regardless of individual needs playing a vital role in addressing economic and social inclusion, to support parents to access employment or sustain employment

- Focusing on lone parents, families affected by disability, parents under 25 and ethnic minority families.

## Progress

They aimed to increase childcare in Fraserburgh to reduce barriers for single parents, low-income parents, larger families, and minority ethnic families in gaining employment. This would be done by providing a Breakfast and After School Club as well as day-care during school holidays. Covid restrictions greatly affected the ability of this project to reach its potential.

The service:

- Completed registration paperwork to operate a new service for day care of children
- Set up gazebos outside the school to be able to talk to parents and share information with them
- Placed information in local papers
- Met with the local job centre online
- Held meetings with the headteacher
- Placed information on the school website and had information shared in school newsletters online
- Provided breakfast club every morning during school term from January 2021 until the end of March 2022. They started with three children, but this then reduced to one child
- Held playscheme for school holidays in April, Summer, and October 2021 and had four children during holiday periods.

## Data

Provided childcare for two children with ASN and three other children.

## Barriers

- Finding premises that the Care Inspectorate would deem suitable. Many viewings took place and multiple phonecalls were made to other professionals already working in the area
- Time taken to register with the Care Inspectorate for a new service to operate in Day Care of Children
- Impact of Covid-19
- The school they were finally able to use closed twice due to the Covid guidance
- Guidance from the local authority was that schools could not mix only lifted close to the project's completion date. This reduced the opportunity for the neighbouring school parents to use the club
- It was difficult to recruit staff due to the national shortage of staff in childcare
- Spread of Covid-19 infections was ongoing for staff and children
- Let system for booking premises changed and there were issues with the new system
- Increase in the let costs which would leave many groups unsustainable.

## LIFT

**Local authority area:** City of Edinburgh

**Type of service:** Community-led organisation

**Focus of funded work:** Holiday provision/Flexible hours

### Test of change

- Developing or testing a more flexible payment option
- Testing lunch club
- Free childcare
- Extended hours.

### Main components

The service is offering a flexible childcare service with families only paying for the time they need (in 30-minute blocks).

### Planned activities

- Employ new highly experienced staff from the area who are aware of the needs of the children in Muirhouse
- Work closely with the local school to see what would assist them and the children who attend both the primaries and secondary schools
- Run a homework club with schools
- Run outdoor activities within the centre by the school PE staff
- Monitor and review the services together as the children would come to the clubs while the parents were supported by LIFT staff.

### Expected outcomes

- Offer a free SAC service that helps families consider training and employment opportunities
- Offer a homework club that reduces the tension within the household and allows families to work the essential few hours after school
- The after-school club and summer club to offer the families the opportunity to work and know their children are in a safe environment.

### Progress

The project offered flexible childcare to families who they had identified were working and financially struggling to pay for childcare. They identified that some families only needed support for less than two hours per day.

- Employed three staff and a bank of four sessional staff. This enabled them to support children who had additional support needs
- They opened five afternoons and during the holidays, offering a fun-filled, educational and practical programme for the children. The children came from school and stayed for the period of time mum, dad or carer required

- Project reports household incomes have increased; feedback from families has told them they have more income and have been able to sustain their work and not worry about where the children would go after school
- The project reported a great improvement in children's health and wellbeing due to attending flexible childcare sessions. Children had a safe nurturing place to go, could interact safely with their peers and have some food every day which also assisted the family's income
- Children's social skills improved as they were able to take part in activities within a safe environment. Social distancing and safety measures were in place, so parents and children knew they were safe during the lockdown and restrictions were in place.

### Data

- Twelve children required less than an hour; these were siblings, from eight families
- Staff used feedback from parents to gather the information. This was then saved on the team's shared files
- Thirty-five children were registered
- Most families only needed an hour or less so paying for the minimum three hours would not be cost-effective for them. The free childcare has allowed them to continue to work or return to work.

### Barriers

Due to Covid 19 they had to change their plans from their original application. Adapting has become the normal for them and they managed to deliver everything they wanted to, although at times remotely.

## Hame Fae Hame

**Local authority area:** Shetland Islands

**Type of service:** Childcare

**Focus of funded work:** Breakfast clubs/Develop outdoor provision.

### Test of change

- Developing /testing a more flexible payment model for parents/carers
- Developing services in more locations, including more use of outdoor space
- Strengthen management capacity
- Rural provision.

**Issues:** Restricted ability to travel to the Scottish mainland to visit other outdoor nurseries and learn from them because of Covid restrictions.

### Main components

#### Planned activities and expected outcomes

- Strengthen overall management capacity, with particular emphasis on the SAC provision
- Develop the internal management of flexible bookings and payments

- Overhaul the existing outdoor areas to allow greater scope for outdoor activities for more weeks of the year, including a new covered area
- Liaise with all partner organisations to identify target families for Access for All, aiming to gradually increase numbers over the next 18 months
- Begin planning and design for a new outdoor nursery annex, in conjunction with our local Housing Association and community partners.

## Progress

- They have created the post of Assistant Manager and promoted a long serving member of staff to the role. This has been complemented by creation of a Senior Practitioner post to support the management team
- They implemented full entry point digitising of the sign-in/out process via their Family system. This in turn is linked to the Family booking system and allows them to make any adjustments for actual times attended. They have given one of their apprentices a specific role to assist in full implementation of our Family management system
- They promoted their flexible booking offering to their service users and also to their partner organisations and this is regarded as a highly beneficial element of our provision, allowing people to tailor their actual childcare use to what they need to support working arrangements as well as what they can afford on a weekly or even daily basis
- They have upgraded their breakfast club areas and facilities and created a breakfast inclusive rate for their OOS users. Again, this has been hampered at times with lockdown restrictions meaning attendance has been curtailed. However, this was very successful during their holiday period provision, both at Easter and summer sessions
- They have completely transformed their outdoor spaces and successfully implemented their plans to create areas that allow for extended periods of outdoor activity. Feedback from users is very positive
- They have worked closely with a variety of partner organisations to identify how they can assist families. These include their local school, Scalloway Primary, and its early years department with which they have a range of split placements, the LA ELC team who they say they have great working relationships with, Children's Social Work team, Family Centre team, local Health Visitor services, as well as employability services including the Moving On project and Bridges.

## Data

The project reports that the overall number of children accessing the OOS service has been highly variable due to Covid restrictions. They have struggled to increase the numbers from all the target groups, again mainly due to Covid. However, the numbers during the holiday periods have been particularly strong. During the Easter 2021 holiday they had a total of 28 school-age children (up from an average of 22 in their baseline survey), and through the summer 2021 holidays they had a total of 30, plus some day visits or extra siblings (again, baseline average was 22).

Families brought the children back amongst their peers to socialise again. Many parents knew their children were more withdrawn and needed some normality. Parents also needed some relief, having been home working and home schooling from December to March or longer.

Data showed their holiday numbers were higher due to ongoing travel restrictions, meaning holidays weren't being taken.

The breakdown of families and children:

- Lone Parent: 12
- Additional need/vulnerable: 15 (10 families)
- Parent under 25: 10 (7 families)
- Large family: 12 (5 families)
- Child under 1: 4 (3 families)

\*Note – some children in more than one category.

They undertook a survey of their OOS families in August 2021 and had a reasonable return (68%). Key questions relevant to our project were:

- How well does Hame Fae Hame operating hours meet your needs? Response was: A great deal (92.86%); A lot (7.14%)
- How much does our childcare assist you in accessing work or education/training? Response was: A great deal (85.71%); A lot (14.29%)
- How do you feel about the development of our outdoor spaces over the past six months? Response was: Strongly Approve (92.86%); Approve (7.14%)
- A comment from one of the larger families in the target group was 'My children absolutely loved the climbing areas, and the staff do a super job of encouraging outdoor play'
- Has Hame Fae Hame Out of School and holiday provision helped your child(ren)'s wellbeing during the past year? Response was: A great deal (85.71%); A lot (7.14%); A moderate amount (7.14%)
- From the comments, one parent said 'Fantastic for their socialisation especially after lockdowns'
- Do you find the Family system useful to you? Response was: A great deal (61.54%); A lot (23.08%); A moderate amount (15.38%).

## Barriers

The project reports the challenges of the past year have been mostly Covid related although they have been able to remain open, often at reduced capacity, for all but two days (they had to shut at the end of August 2021 due to staff being contact traced and told to isolate), and this has allowed them to continue to deliver the key objectives of the project.

A further impact of Covid has been the plans to visit other outdoor settings in Scotland, both within the ACF project and further afield. They had to remove plans to do this activity and repurpose the funding within the project.

Initial scoping of the outdoor nursery annexe has taken place so they end this stage of the project with a great platform to build from.

The pandemic has made them more conscious of the sustainability of the services they provide.

They have implemented the Real Living Wage, which they successfully achieved and became accredited for in October 2020, however this has meant further increases to charging rates.

For 2021, this means a further 4.4% average rise in staffing costs as they come to the end of the project. In the current cost of living climate, they don't intend to increase charges and will look to absorb these costs by reducing expenditure on consumables and new equipment.

## Indigo

**Local authority area:** Glasgow City

**Type of service:** Childcare

**Focus of funded work:** Introducing or expanding weekend services/Family support linked to current childcare model

### Test of change

- Free/subsidised places
- Family support
- Employed Family Support Coordinator.

**Issues:** Unable to start weekend service.

### Main components

- Family support linked to current childcare model

### Planned activities

- To provide 32 FTE/16 PT subsidised places across out of school care and Indi Youth, delivering safe and stimulating environments to children and young people from P1 to S4
- Piloting a weekend service with 16 places over 12 months of the programme
- Establish a family support programme. The Family Support Coordinator (FSC) promotes the service and connects with referrers, enhancing relationships with key stakeholders and partners
- Stakeholders will work with families with the support and coordination of the FSC, to identify their strengths and goals and connect them to activities and resources (delivered both internally and community based) that will enable them to achieve those goals.

### Expected outcomes

Increased accessibility, affordability and flexibility of childcare to families by providing the:

- Ability to engage in learning and/or employment
- Opportunity to improve household finances

- Sense of family wellbeing
- Access to childcare for low-income families.

## Progress

Indigo offered subsidised places across OSC and Indi Youth. By providing childcare that is free or subsidised at the point of access, they made their service more accessible and affordable to families in the Castlemilk area.

As a result of the demand for services and support for families who have a child with ASN, they have launched 'Indigo Connects Carers' group, a peer support group for parent carers of children who attend Indigo. This will be a parent/carer-led space and facilitated/supported by the Family Support Co-ordinator and Inclusion Co-ordinator. The group aims to provide a safe space where carers can connect and share experiences and information and reduce isolation.

A 'Family Matters' action plan has been developed and is underway to provide a strategic approach to family support, information, learning and engagement.

The project participates in a number of networks that have enabled them to source local information and resources for families as well as highlight their ACF work. The impact of ACF and family support has been felt beyond their families and the Indigo staff team has also noted positive changes.

**Emotional support:** families have been able to access regular contact and emotional support from the FSC and Indigo team members.

**Community connections:** they have connected families with other local services and resources – all the referrals are now at the contact stage of the process and some families are already receiving specialised support.

**Digital inclusion:** they have supported 14 families registered with Family Matters to be more digitally included.

**Living essentials:** they have made successful applications to BBC Children in Need's Emergency Essentials and Glasgow Care Foundation.

## Data

Despite the limitations of the pandemic, Family Matters still received 53 referrals. Not all referrals were appropriate for the service and were therefore signposted to other routes of support.

- The project has worked with **41** families including **50** children since December 2020 who have received a blend of childcare funding and family support
- **32** families and **43** children have been able to benefit from subsidised fees, allowing them to start or maintain childcare access to help improve the families' financial, physical and emotional wellbeing
- **Nine** families who did not access childcare funding received family support and information including e.g. food parcels, digital device access and community information.
- Providing subsidised fees has meant that:
  - **18** families have been able to maintain their placement

- **10** families have been able to gain a new placement
- **Three** families have been able to increase their hours
- **13** families have used the childcare services as a form of respite.

## Barriers

The weekend pilot was unable to proceed due to several external factors; primarily Covid-19 restrictions and national recruitment challenges. However, Indigo took all possible steps including venue research, two demand surveys, promotions and interviewing candidates. Small demand exists which may grow in time and once people became familiar with the availability of the service. However, continued challenges around recruitment make it very difficult to secure the qualified and experienced staff needed for such a service, especially given it would be operating in isolation from all other Indigo services at weekends, and therefore would not have access to that support infrastructure.

There has been a high demand for services from families where there is a child with ASN. This has presented a challenge in balancing staffing ratios to maintain the usual level of service delivery expected and take enough time to understand the often-complex needs of the child/young person.

There has also been a very high demand for support from families with children with ASD/ADD/ADHD across the community. This has been confirmed by the HSCP as a significant issue and has led Indigo to begin work on exploring potential solutions with families and partner agencies.

Recruiting qualified, experienced staff across services has continued to be a significant challenge.

Most families who are eligible for support such as Universal Credit childcare have raised the issue of being unable to pay upfront for fees and having to wait for the partial refund in their next UC payment as their budgets are usually already allocated to other essentials, leaving them with little disposable income and/or saving ability.

Families engaged in the service often face multiple and complex challenges and barriers, with 63% of families experiencing five or more challenges. These complex challenges and barriers, e.g. long-term/chronic health conditions, mean that families may have to access services and support for longer before seeing any positive impact and achieving outcomes. Some outcomes related to ACF may be more complex for these families, e.g. securing stable employment in a post-Covid economy.

## Inverclyde Council

**Local authority area:** Inverclyde

**Type of service:** Local authority

**Focus of funded work:** Holiday provision including ASN

### Test of change

- Free places

- Supporting children/young people with ASN with the support of a third sector partner
- Focus on creative play, outdoor play and health and wellbeing.

**Issues:** Unable to start weekend service.

## Main components

### Planned activities

- Deliver two holiday hubs within two localities across Inverclyde during the school holiday periods, October 2020 and 2021, Easter and summer 2021 with the Access to Childcare Fund
- Each hub could provide a service for 60 young people each day and could still keep children and young people safe within the Covid pandemic guidelines
- Tackling child food insecurity is a priority for Inverclyde Council, therefore the Summer Affordable Holiday Hubs would provide free lunch and snacks at both hubs and free transport would also be offered to families with no access to a car.

### Expected outcomes

- The hubs provided opportunities for low-income working parents to increase their working hours, to increase overall household income, and reduce worry regarding the cost of support for their families whilst they are working
- The affordable holiday hubs also provided enriched activities for children and young people to play and socialise with other children after lockdown because of the pandemic
- These activities improved children's social interaction, confidence and self-esteem. The service targeted the Child Poverty Priority Groups (those who were most likely to be living in poverty), e.g. lone parent households, families with disabilities, families with three or more children and families where English is an additional language.

## Progress

Inverclyde Council developed its existing provision to meet local needs whilst developing accessible opportunities to support local families as detailed in the Inverclyde Child Poverty Local Action Report 2019/20.

- The Affordable Holiday Hub provision was delivered from October 2020 until October 2021 in two local 'hubs', Clydeview Academy and Port Glasgow Joint Campus. The provision was available for children aged 5-16 years during the October, spring and summer school holiday periods, from 9am until 4.30pm Monday–Friday
- The Affordable Holiday Hubs were offered to parents in employment, training or learning and living on a low income. Priority was given to families most likely to be living in poverty as defined in the Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2018-2022. Parents were invited to apply if they met the initial criteria
- Transport was offered to children accessing the service if they lived more than one mile from the hub, however there was a degree of flexibility to support parents when possible
- The Affordable Holiday Hubs were initially staffed with employees from Inverclyde Council Communities Team, Active Schools Team, Youth Teams, Family Support

Workers, Early Years Practitioners and Teaching staff. However, a dedicated team of 12 sessional staff and a project co-ordinator was employed for the summer session. The service was supported by local partners such as library services, Action for Children, Morton Community Trust, Inverclyde Athletics and the Beacon Arts Centre

- Not only did the Affordable Holiday Hubs support parents and families on low incomes, but Inverclyde Council also adopted a flexible approach to attract and employ a dedicated affordable holiday hub team. This included working with West College Scotland to promote the opportunity for people who had completed their final year in Early Years qualification, many of whom did not have the opportunity to gain experience within an early year setting because of Covid and the lockdown
- The staff employed for the Holiday Hubs received a range of training both prior to starting and throughout the seven-week service provision. This training included Child Protection, Covid Guidance, First Aid and Communication Skills to ensure that the service met the needs of the children who attended
- Wellington Pre-5 Children's Centre offered support to families on low incomes who were working during the Christmas break. This service was offered to the 14 families, who received the support in October, to offer consistency and develop relationships.
- Wellington Pre-5 Children's Centre was open for two days during the Christmas holiday period (23/24 December). A total of six children used this service at this time
- The same service from Wellington Pre-5 Children's Centre will be offered to families during the February mid-term break, once again to provide consistency to the families that require the support. Nine children registered for this service.

## Data

Attendance at the Holiday Hubs was low in October 2020, with 23 children in Clydeview Academy and 10 children in Port Glasgow. Anecdotal information suggests that this is mainly due to the Covid-19 restrictions at this time. Parents advised that they were nervous of their children mixing "bubbles" with children in other schools and many parents were still on furlough.

The number of registrations for a place at the Spring Holiday Hubs had increased to 104 children (58 children registered for Clydeview and 46 registered for Port Glasgow). Seventy-four parents registered their child(ren) for a place, 38 (51%) of the parents were in employment, 96% of them were females, and 62% did not register a partner within the household. Household income was not recorded at this time of the project. Many parents advised that they were still nervous and concerned about their children to attend the holiday hubs in the Spring 2021 due to Covid-19.

Data collected from the applicants for both the Summer 2021 and October 2021 Affordable Holiday Hubs reaffirms the findings from the spring session and highlights that the majority of applicants were from low-income households (less than £25,000p/a), lone parent families and predominately women. Many of the families also meet additional criteria that indicated they would be more likely to be living in poverty, including English as an additional language, disability in the family and three or more children. It can be concluded therefore that the Affordable Holiday Hubs are supporting some of the most disadvantaged families in Inverclyde to enable them to continue to engage in employment or training.

Twenty-three (19%) children with an ASD diagnosis attended the Holiday Hubs.

Wellington Pre-5 Children's Centre offered support to families on low incomes who were working during the Christmas break. This service was offered to the 14 families who received the support in October to offer consistency and develop relationships.

Wellington Pre-5 Children's Centre opened for two days during the Christmas holiday period (23/24 December). A total of six children used this service at this time. The same service from Wellington Pre-5 Children's Centre was offered to families during the February mid-term break, once again to provide consistency to the families that require the support. Nine children registered for this service.

### **Barriers**

At the time of applying for the funding it was expected that there would be capacity for 60 children in each of the hubs, however this was reduced to 30 children per day to ensure they were safe and protected.

**Staffing:** the dedicated Holiday Hub support team was employed on a sessional basis for the seven-week holiday period, with an opportunity for further employment for the October 2021 hubs. However, of the 12 people employed for the summer only three members of the team were available to re-engage in the service in October. This is due to many factors, including employment into other posts, returning to education and changes in family circumstances. This had an impact on the capacity to deliver the Affordable Holiday Hubs in October, which led to the establishment of a new partnership.

**Children:** there seemed to be more children requiring more intensive support and nurturing. Some of them had ASD/ADHD diagnoses but many did not have the diagnosis or were awaiting diagnosis.

**Transport:** buses were offered to parents to reduce the barriers to employment, training or learning, however the numbers were restricted because of the Covid pandemic. Many of the parents were supported but this was also a challenge for the project.

**Parents:** the expectations and demands from parents increased as the project continued to be delivered and many of them returned to work. However, the family stress of the previous year was apparent through the informal conversations with parents requiring support for their child during the school holiday period. The service targeted families on low incomes or living in poverty.

## **St Mirin's OSC**

**Local authority area:** Glasgow City

**Type of service:** Childcare

**Focus of funded work:** Breakfast clubs/evening clubs

### **Test of change**

- Extended daily opening hours
- Subsidised places
- Developing services in more locations, including more use of outdoor space.

## Main components

### Planned activities and expected outcomes

- To make Out of School Club more accessible and affordable to families by offering 20% subsidy to parent fees
- To increase accessibility to out of school club by extending hours by opening a breakfast and play club
- To increase play opportunities for children in the evening by opening “Simply Play” nights, helping address the impact of loss of play within a pandemic
- To facilitate a specialist wellbeing and play service to address needs of children requiring targeted specific support
- To create a natural outdoor play and learning woodland area in partnership with the whole school community to enable children to benefit from outdoor play and learning.

### Progress

- Every parent/carer was given a 20% reduction on their annual fees. This subsidy covered a nine-month period. It applied to the period of July 2021 to March 2022 (funding end date)
- Early Bird and Play Breakfast – was initially for 16 children per day (80 per week), but the uptake was much greater, so this was raised to 24 children per day (120 per week). To accommodate the higher numbers, they required a new sessional member of staff
- Simply Play Nights – they provided play spaces for children to come along, play spontaneously, follow their own interests and desires enabling them to reconnect with friends (especially during Covid) and this has also exceeded all expectations. Their initial hope was to have a maximum of 16 children per night. They immediately had a waiting list and were then able to expand to 24 children per night. Feedback demonstrates these are the type of ‘clubs’ children want to attend. They have very few opportunities for unrestricted, self-directed play and the play nights have accommodated that extremely well. They now have another waiting list for Monday nights which is for the younger children
- They engaged fully with their school partners and colleagues from education. Together they created a referral system that permitted the school to refer children for health and wellbeing input/concerns. Equally, OSC was able to refer to children for consideration to this service. They have just agreed an evaluation strategy that enables the school and OSC to evaluate the impact of their work on the child. This involves a Glasgow Motivation and Wellbeing Profile (GMWP)
- They have turned an unused derelict woodland within the school into an exciting, stimulating, engaging and intriguing play and learning space. They have four tree houses which house 32 children around a courtyard for play and learning opportunities. The ‘peace hut’ provides a place for meditation, chatting, relaxing or small group work for targeted children and/or activities. They collaborated with more than 300 children to design the new play and learning space. Everything being built is a direct result of children’s input and voices.

### Data

- 98 children from 95 families attended

- Early Bird Breakfast & Play Club (55 sessions): 86 children from 72 families attended
- Simply Play Nights (18 sessions) : 98 children from 95 families attended
- School specialism (144 sessions): 64 children from 62 families attended.

### Barriers

St Mirin's was careful not to have an unintended consequence of making families dependent on short-term support. They detailed the weeks of support they could provide in blocks, then assessed the situation. It also became apparent that the families had a wide range of complex needs, some of which had never been disclosed or highlighted before. Covid obviously increased this and to an extent created or contributed to some of the issues they became aware of and responded to.

This meant a time-consuming process for preparing contracts and costs. They did not fully charge back the hours attributed to this strand of the pilot. The hours taken to recalculate fees of 82 children were significantly higher than those they anticipated. They also required to highlight to families that this was a short-term support so it would not create a false sense of financial security as next year this subsidy will most probably not exist.

If funding wasn't secured in future, it would be doubtful that the early bird offer could be covered solely through parents' fees.

Covid was a major challenge in getting the play nights underway. Incorporating Covid guidance and bubbles with the need for children to be outdoors playing with friends – and the benefits that brings – helped to drive this forward.

Outdoors progress was time-consuming and those hours were never reflected within the hours costed and charged. There were also the costs of building materials which rose by up to 40%. At times the weather halted the build.

## Stepping Stones for Families

**Local authority area:** Glasgow City

**Type of service:** Family wellbeing

**Focus of funded work:** Introducing weekend services/Holiday provision/Out of School Care provision into established family support service base.

### Test of change

- Subsidised places
- Opening more days per week.

**Issues:** Unable to deliver weekend provision.

### Main components

#### Planned activities and expected outcomes

- To have evidence of unmet need/demand for SAC in the Canal ward
- To have evidence that the cost is a barrier for parents on low/no income by offering discounted places

- To have evidence of the need and demand for school holiday and weekend SAC
- To have evidence of the difference increased physical play and outdoor activity make to children's mental health and wellbeing.

## Progress

- Established a network of contacts to inform knowledge of the need/demand for SAC and created seamless referral routes into the service
- Launched a community marketing plan advertising the school holiday service at a discounted rate and expanded the geographical spread for advertising
- Developed a more robust community partnership working network
- Provided 51 full days of school-aged childcare during school holidays at a discounted rate, £11.40 per day
- Provided 56 sessions of OSC at a discounted rate through the smaller pilot, £5.70 per session
- Provided 284 healthy packed lunches and 578 healthy snacks
- Increased the amount of outdoor play and physical activities by using the school's large gym hall, football pitch and playground, delivering six yoga sessions, 18 highballs low sessions and linked in with Stepping Stones for Families Outdoor Play Project
- Provided specialised art activities; two Make Do and Grow sessions and seven B-Rox crafting sessions
- Provided a Cold Cooking programme with cooking activity bags for each of the children. Coordinator developed a cold cooking equipment box to be kept in the project for further activities
- Delivered a growing themed programme: children participated in planting activities, received growing kits and Coordinator developed a growing equipment box to be kept in the OSC for further activities
- Provided a six-week summer holiday activity programme. This programme was supported by funds from Glasgow City Council and delivered by the Access to Childcare funded project. The programme included yoga sessions, circus skills sessions, themed activity weeks, crafting sessions, science activities, teddy bears picnic, movie day and music activities
- The Access to Childcare coordinator developed and collated financial support information for families to use to help to subsidise childcare fees and sustain their childcare care provision, plus other aspects of family support.

## Data

Eighteen families and 24 children were supported directly by the fund.

## Barriers

Due to the national Covid-19 lockdown and restrictions, the service's engagement with others had to be carried out remotely with very limited face-to-face contact. This meant that different methods had to be used to engage with families, other networks and the wider community.

Evidence gathered from all of the families supported by the Fund did state that the reduced fees had an impact on their household outgoings. However, when we asked more about the fees we found that the families' views were:

- "If lower could be better as I'm a single parent"
- "I feel that if the cost was discounted more that would be better for me as a support."

## The Wee Childcare Company

**Local authority area:** Angus

**Type of service:** Childcare

**Focus of funded work:** Expansion of SAC in rural communities

**Test of change:**

- Transport
- Rural provision
- Minimum cancellation fees
- Ad-hoc spaces (flexibility).

### Main components

**Planned activities**

- Expand service to start up in an area of high deprivation and poverty – Arbroath Abbey View Campus
- Expand service to start up in a rural location and reach families experiencing rural deprivation and hidden poverty – Monikie Primary School
- Provide local job opportunities for both services – one Manager, four qualified EYPS and two Support Workers (or two trainees)
- Hire qualified staff to offer and facilitate quality play
- Provide training opportunities for unqualified staff.

**Outcomes**

- Offer subsidised places for individuals to help facilitate better access to employment opportunities, training and improved financial status
- Offer flexible booking/minimal cancellation fees for all families
- Arrange transport for cluster schools accessing rural provision
- Collaborate with the Local Authority, schools and community (i.e. Family support workers, Health Visitors, Social workers, Education and Local Authority staffing).

### Progress

- Affordable, subsidised childcare has been offered to families who meet the criteria
- They have opened two services (rural and town) and included transport for surrounding schools that are run by qualified childcare staff
- Affordable, subsidised childcare has been offered to families who meet the criteria, along with flexibility of booking and free cancellation for paid-for spaces

- Children's wellbeing is supported as qualified staff provide fun, stimulating experiences in a safe and secure setting
- They signed two new service level agreements with the Local Authority (LA). LA partners requested partnership working with the service to support holiday provision and worked with the LA employment team to provide information to parents on employment opportunities.

## Data

The Abbey view service offers 10 paid spaces and 10 free childcare spaces. Fifty-six have registered to use Abbey View since it officially opened in September 2020. They have improved accessibility of childcare spaces by completing the set-up of rural provision at Monikie primary School with additional transport. This service offers 10 paid and 10 free childcare spaces. Thirty-eight children have registered to use Monikie since officially opening in March 2021.

At **Monikie** they have had five families accessing the funded spaces with a total of 13 children between them. They were able to access approximately 200 sessions of after-school childcare between March 2021 and March 2022 for £1 per family, per use. This is an approximate saving of between £18.60 and £27.90 per session for these families, totalling a waived amount of £24,180 in childcare fees.

At **Abbey View** they had three families accessing the funded spaces with a total of six children between them. They were able to access approximately 270 sessions of after-school childcare between September 2020 and March 2022 for £1 per family, per use. This is an approximate saving of between £8.50 and £25.50 per session for these families, totalling a waived amount of £13,770 in childcare fees.

At **Kirriemuir**, they later accepted another eight children. However only one began to use the service – a lone parent with additional support needs. They had 21 sessions totalling a waived amount of £182.70.

## Barriers

**Recruitment:** The requirement for remote recruitment procedures led to a delay in achieving pre-Covid timescales. PVGs took considerable time to be returned and two lockdowns had new employees waiting a long time for a start date, resulting in them seeking employment elsewhere. Recruitment had continued to be an issue until September 2021 when they completed the teams. However, recruiting qualified relief staff and retaining them continues to be challenging. The SSSC requirements for temporary and bank staff to be registered and qualified can be a barrier.

**Unexpected insurance issues:** The insurance company had more than doubled the price. This resulted in a delay and a rather difficult search for insurance that catered for out of school care, despite seeking support from the SOSCN and other online platforms.

**Flexible childcare services software:** They had intended on using this platform to enable parents' easier access to booking places for children. However, the software does not account for monies due or paid quite as well as a Google spreadsheet can and so until this feature is enabled, they are still booking and invoicing for fees manually which takes up a huge amount of staff time.

## SupERkids

**Local authority area:** East Renfrewshire

**Type of service:** Afterschool/Youth Group ASN

**Focus of funded work:** Holiday provision (ASN) and introducing or expanding weekend services

### Test of change:

- Free/subsidised places
- Opening more days per week
- Increased access.

**Issues:** For much of the time the project wasn't able to operate from its normal venue.

## Main components

### Planned activities

- Offer weekend provision to families, using experiences and trips to give their children experiences they otherwise would not have had
- Weekend clubs and holiday clubs of various types suited to children and young people with a wide range of disabilities and suited to different age ranges. SupERkids is a beneficiary-led, controlled and managed organisation providing activities for children aged 5-18 years.

### Planned activities

- Young people with additional support needs have increased independence and confidence
- Young people with additional support needs have increased social connectedness
- Parents of young people with additional support needs feel less overwhelmed by their 24/7 caring responsibilities.

## Progress

SupERkids reports as an organisation that they have increased their confidence in a large part due to ACF funding. They were especially proud of the ability to react quickly, providing an immediate response to the needs of ASN kids in East Renfrewshire as Covid restrictions evolved.

SupERkids is a parent-led organisation and required the support of sessional staff so that the children and young people in the club can attend independently of their families. They have achieved the outcomes that they expected and, in some regards exceeded, albeit not in the manner they envisaged in their initial ACF application due to the effects of Covid.

Activities included:

- **SupERSaturday club: 1,800 Hours.** Young people attended themed activities each week in the afternoon. They purchased some disability trikes to allow more outdoor cycling at these clubs. These have been hugely successful and they are delighted to be able to provide the wheelchair companion bike as a result of the ACF

- **Glee club: 1,032 Hours.** Drama-based clubs with a performance at the end of the year were provided virtually and then face-to-face when restrictions eased on a Saturday morning
- **Holiday club: 1,602 Hours.** Half-day clubs over the 2020 festive period, 2021 February half-term and the 2021 summer holidays. In 2022, half-day clubs over the February half-term break
- **Wee Glee and Music Club: 368 Hours.** Music and dance-based clubs for kids with complex needs, primary school-age at Wee Glee and secondary school-age at Music Club on Monday nights
- **SupERtrips: 732 Hours.** SupERkids days out with support staff where they visited attractions for four-six hours with transport and lunch provided
- **Outdoor Clubs: 558 Hours.** Held fully outside in a secure forest area. Tree climbing, cooking food on fires and being independent, allowing the children to run about and get muddy in a safe environment
- **Golf Club: 450 Hours.** Ran at a local golfing facility on Monday then Tuesday evenings with a coach and support staff
- **Minecraft club: 266 Hours.** Supported game play and coding on Thursday evening by high school students for teens who love gaming, sharing tips and tricks and making friends
- **Silent Disco Club: 96 Hours.** Young people attended Silent Disco Clubs in January and February 2022, which worked for so many children with varying levels of need
- **Makaton.** Whilst their SupERkid was at the Silent Disco, their parents/carers/siblings were invited to learn the Makaton Sign language (level 1). This was a huge success and level 2 is being arranged at the time of compiling this report
- **Cooking club: 264 Hours.** Young people attended cooking club on Tuesday nights in January and February 2022 and this was extended to 31 March due to high numbers
- **Sign and Sing Club: 60 Hours.** Children/young people attended a club where songs are sung and signed by the Makaton trainer and a singer (both educators in an ASN school) with each week being themed. They had a 'Sign-Song' as well as a sing-song!
- **Festive Clubs: 16 Hours.** In November and December 2021, they ran Christmas Craft and Bake Off clubs over five weeks. Also organised an "Elf on your doorstep" as this was more accessible than a visit to Santa's Grotto
- **ASN family movie nights.** SupERkids liaised with the East Renfrewshire Council (ERC) trust and Leisure and were offered three evenings with free use of Eastwood Theatre. SupERkids provided staff and snacks and families came and watched a family movie
- **Tennis Club: 416 Hours.** Ran at a local tennis facility on Saturday mornings with coaches
- **Archery club: 125 Hours.** Short block of archery ran on Wednesdays with coaches and support staff
- **Pool parties: 47 Hours.** Sole use of Neilston pool for family swims with siblings on Saturday afternoons. SupERkids had 80 people who wanted to attend pool parties with a maximum of 20 per party. Their response was to increase the number of parties from four to 16 to allow all beneficiaries monthly swims as the pools and changing facilities had been shut for 18 months

- **Easter activity packs.** Online clubs worked for a smaller number of young people, as many ASN children needed high levels of parental involvement. SupERkids ran 30 Zoom-based Glee and craft-based sessions from September 2020 to April 2021 at which time many kids who attended were shielding.

SupERkids spends a great deal of time liaising with suppliers to ensure that the projects are adaptable to the needs of the children

## **Data**

One hundred and five ASN young people attended 401 activities totalling 7,832 hours of supported activity.

## **Barriers**

Face-to-face engagement with parents/carers was not possible at the height of the pandemic and following a period of transition most parents/carers are comfortable that communication is now by email which is more efficient in many ways. However some parents/carers struggle to communicate in this manner and ensuring they are included and informed has taken a great deal of administrative effort.

The non-availability of facilities during Covid restrictions meant that they needed to adapt to provide the support that families needed. SupERkids ran clubs outdoors, in a forest, on tennis courts, at a golf driving range, and on day trips away on school buses.

Many staff need to attend training which will hopefully lead to more staff being available to support certain children with complex medical needs in the near term. The combination of reduced staff availability and training dates are an immediate concern but they continue to provide activities as often as staff are available.