



CCPS Family Support Research Project - Part 1

# What families think about family support services



## Background

The 12 organisations\* from the Coalition of Care and Support Providers in Scotland (CCPS) children's committee came together to agree how they could address a gap in evidence about 'what works' in family support services. Organisations developing and delivering family support services felt this would help them strengthen their work and make a better case for maintaining or increasing resources for these kinds of services where they are achieving the priority outcomes identified by both Scottish Government policy and local government objectives.

This report was prepared in conjunction with a scoping review of family support research commissioned by CCPS from the Centre for Child Wellbeing and Protection at the University of Stirling ('Centre for Child Wellbeing'). It is designed to complement the scoping review, by focusing on the voices of young people and families in describing the impact and what, for them, are the important features of their engagement with family support services.

## Study Aim

The wider aim of the study is to help us understand:

**What does existing research tell us are the most effective elements of community and strengths-based family support services?**

The engagement with young people and parents explored what they have been doing with the organisation they were working with and what their views were about this. This will then be shared with the Centre for Child Wellbeing researchers to compare if the themes identified through discussion align with the themes from research literature.

Once findings from this report and the wider scoping work by the Centre for Child Wellbeing have been reviewed, we will look at how we can use the findings to improve our existing family support services; to promote good practice more widely; and to advocate for better support for services that demonstrate the key effective elements we've identified. We will also consider whether a further research phase is required to address any identified gaps in evidence.

## Methods

Semi-structured group interviews were undertaken in a selection of settings which were recruited by the CCPS member organisations involved. These sessions took place between June and September 2017.

Organisation	Location	Type of service	Number of people
Action for Children	Tullibody	Family centre	7
Action for Children	Upper Nithsdale	Family centre	9
Includem	Possilpark	Outreach service	2
Barnardo's	Greenock	Family Centre	4
Aberlour	Dundee	Family support	3
			<b>Total 25</b>

The following guide questions were used to ensure we gathered consistent data which linked to the wider research question:

**What does existing research tell us are the most effective elements of community and strengths-based family support services?**

- Tell me a bit about why you are involved with this organisation?
- What types of activities have you been doing together?
- How has it been for you?
- Was any of the support you received helpful?
- Was any of it unhelpful?
- What was the most helpful or unhelpful?
- If you could ensure every family / child / young person received one thing from the service what would it be?

Prior to commencing the discussions we shared information about the research project and offered people the opportunity to ask questions. Following this informed consent was sought from all participants.

## Limitations

This study was conducted over a short time (3 months) with a small number of organisations through informal group discussion and therefore is limited in scope. Those participating were all people who were currently engaging with services. We did not have the opportunity to meet individuals who had not managed to access support: those who were dissatisfied with the services offered; or to engage directly with children.

## Findings

Four main themes emerged from the discussions:

Theme	Overview of theme
Supportive Relationships	Young people and parents/carers articulated the critical importance of building trust through positive relationships over time.
Flexibility and responsiveness	Young people and parents/carers stated the need for services which were consistent but also flexible and responsive in times of difficulty and crisis
Non-judgmental approach	Young people and parents/carers valued support which is attentive and attuned, allowing people to feel listened to in a safe space without judgement
Practical support to enable participation	Young people and parents/carers identified the importance of hands on help in overcoming the financial, emotional and practical barriers they face.





## Introduction

This report seeks to explore with parents and young people their experience of the family support they have received from different voluntary sector providers across Scotland. We recognise the critical importance in ensuring parents and young people themselves are given a voice to support our collective learning about ways we can maximise our effectiveness and impact.

Many of the people involved in the discussions stated they had accessed support after issues had been identified in their contact with other services including Health Visitors, GP practices, Social Work and the Police.

“ I’ve got no family up here, all of my family are down in England and obviously once I had my youngest I done the form for depression and anxiety and it showed I had postnatal depression.

*I started here with my son, he’s now four. I went because he was very clingy so I brought him here.*

*I started the ante-natal group when I was pregnant and I’ve kept coming since I have had my baby.*

*I became involved last year and it was actually because I had had a relapse with drugs.*

*I don’t get the chance to go anywhere so we come here and she gets to interact with other wee people.*

*I was referred to get the kids to bond...its good it get them ready for going into nursery and learning to share.*

*I came here because like it gets me out the house. Like I used to be quite depressed sitting in the house just basically doing nothing. I felt it was harder sitting in the house than just getting out for a couple of hours. And like coming here I get my time on my own. I love my son but I like love being able to have a hot cup of tea without having to microwave it.*

*I basically started because I was going through a bad bit of depression and anxiety... I had no confidence and I basically wasn’t really going out... so I was brought here to build confidence and do things with [baby’s name].*

However, a number of people identified as ‘return’ users of the services, getting back in touch after a change they felt they needed some help with or another new baby. A few of those interviewed had had contact with the services as children and had returned as adults after they had had children themselves.

*I used to use the service with my second son... I then went on to have another two kids... so I am returning back. I use the service for support for me and the kids and a wee bit of time too.* ”

The services ranged from support that was available universally to more intensive models where children and young people are known to be at risk.

There was a wide spectrum of approaches, including the use of tried and tested programmes and interventions with an established evidence base, to more community based co-produced activities.

Most services had a geographical 'patch' and this was seen as a way of strengthening the connections for people locally. A number of the services have had long histories in their local community and demonstrated understanding of the complex issues affecting those who lived there.

## Supportive Relationships

The significance of the need for supportive relationships for improved outcomes cannot be overstated with all group discussions referring to respectful engagement and connection with others. The benefits of sustainable, consistent (sometimes persistent) relationships were identified by all as something they collectively both valued and viewed as essential to the effective delivery of services.

“ Everyone is allocated a family support worker so that would be your main point of contact if you are having a bad day or if need help or advice with something you would go straight to your family support worker.

*[Staff member's name] is absolutely brilliant... she's more like my grannie than anything else, (although I probably wouldn't tell her that) I can tell her anything, I can be totally open with her but with most people I wouldn't be like that... Like I know if I have a problem I can just go across and speak to her and I know she'll sort it out if she can sort it and if not she'd try and make me feel better about it.*

*If you need anyone to talk to or anything at all just send a wee text and they'll call you in the morning. She's just somebody to be there on the end of a phone if your day is going hard and things aren't going to plan or you get a bill in and you don't know how to deal with it you just phone [staff member's name] and they listen, tell you to 'calm down, calm down, get a wee cup of tea, you'll be awright'.*

*Having somebody you can come to and talk to no matter what it is. There is always somebody you can go and see and they'll help you as much as they can.* ”

“ If I was sitting in the house and like [child's name] had had a meltdown or whatever and I was like 'fuck it, I'm going to use', I know I'd be able to phone [staff member's name] and say to her this is how I am feeling and I don't know how to get out of it and I know by the end of that phone call she'll have made me say to myself 'no you dinnae need to use', or 'you dinnae want to use'. So [service provider] are honestly way up there in my estimation, definitely.

*The people here are friendly, there's lots to do, you can sit and have a cup of tea, your child is your responsibility but the staff will watch the children if you need 5 minutes and there's other rooms if you need a one to one chat with no one else there.*

Young people and families shared some of the barriers they faced and how long term investment was sometimes needed before they would manage to engage.

*They [the staff] just kept turning up, so I knew they really meant it when they said they wanted to help me.*

*If they hadn't kept coming obviously it wouldn't have worked, but they kept coming and coming so I just had to obviously know them.*

*It's quite daunting sometimes like going into new groups; it's pretty daunting for me just not knowing who else goes to it.*

However, there was evidence barriers can be overcome with effective support from staff,

*It's one of the best group's I have come to. I just know that I am going to be ok. Like most places I am scared because of my past, and all the bullying and stuff. I was always scared of that but I know there wouldn't be anything like that here.*

Disruptions, including staff leaving and changes in key worker, irrespective of how well this was managed by the service, were felt acutely.

*The hardest thing about the place is the constant staff turnover because of funding. Like we've all had family workers at one time and we've worked with them for x amount of months and then they've lost the post or brought in somebody else... it can be unsettling coming in and it's like oh no it's a new member of staff, they don't know me, they don't know the kids. You feel like you are starting from the beginning all over again.* ”





“ That’s the biggest thing, building up that rapport and relationship with someone and then you find out they’re leaving or they’re going to a new job or somebody else is coming in. That can be very, very daunting.

It can be very difficult, especially like if you are kinda nearing the end of maybe your assessment or whatever reason that you are involved with a service and a change in worker it can take you right back to the very beginning because rather than them sitting reading your file you’ve to sit and tell them everything you’ve done wrong in the past and it takes you right back and people wonder how parents relapse and whatever else, and it’s because of things like that taking the person right back to where they were when they were in that situation and it can be very, very difficult.

I had one worker for three years and she knew exactly when I walked in how I was and she knew exactly how to deal with me and then obviously it changed so that was a struggle for me. Maybe it would have been better if I had chopped and changed.

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Those who had experienced a change in worker described their feelings about this:

“ It’s hard, very hard, especially when you get to know someone and put all your trust in one person. I had told my worker every secret I had and then right out the blue ‘I’m leaving’. I felt like I was going to be on my own with this wee baby and then right away I got a new worker, who stepped in but it was very, very hard.

It was just knowing I had a bond with her and I was able to tell her anything, like anything about my mum, anything about my past, like anything that was happening there and then and then she just disappeared and now there was somebody else coming in d’you know what I mean and I just didn’t like it.

I find it hard enough to like build up like a bond with someone or just trust even... so it’s difficult knowing it can chop and change and that’s why sometimes I cancel appointments, d’you know what I mean, cause I just feel like I’m gonna get close to someone and then they’ll just go away again.

I was raging, absolutely raging, I felt as if I had been built up and just left. The rest of the workers stepped in and said ‘don’t worry you are not going to be left on your own, you are going to have a new allocated worker’... I felt everything had backfired on me so I didn’t know what it would be like with a new worker.

At first I kind of struggled, I was used to [staff member’s name], I was open with her and then when I got [different worker] I kind of pulled back into myself... and gradually I picked myself up and got into it again.

Those who had histories of significant loss or painful breaches of trust said they found it very difficult to start again with a new worker and they needed to be allowed time to do this.

Like building that trust back up because you know you need that certain amount of trust to be able to divulge like stuff that’s going on in your life. It’s like starting from the beginning again.

It’s not even a personal like bond, it’s just you know they are there and they know how to deal with you and your problems and then somebody new comes in and they’re maybe not wanting to deliver your care plan in the same way and you are sitting like ‘oh no, can I really see this’, and if you are maybe going through a bad patch you are sitting there like ‘do I really want to do this?’

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Groups offered friendships and helped to build confidence and reduce isolation amongst young people and parents / carers. Different groups had evolved differently. Some had established a network outside the service through social media; others linked in a more informal, organic way. A significant number of people who participated talked about their experiences of having low mood, poor mental health and social isolation. For many, the focus of attending groups, appointments and having a friendship network was a huge incentive for getting up in the morning and continuing participation over the longer term.

“ *It's no just all about the kids like we can come here and use it as a social experience as well which I think makes a difference if you've got low moods or low self-esteem and you are sitting in a room, like we all talk openly about our problems and just to know that somebody else is maybe going through the exact same as you makes you feel a wee bit better.*

*We have got quite a strong wee group here. We are all really close.*

*If they have gone through similar they give their advice as well. Like you go in a full circle helping each other because normally at least one person in the room has gone through something similar and obviously has come out the other end and can give you advice.*

*We have our own WhatsApp group and we meet up for days out and stuff.*

The interpersonal connections they had with staff were highly valued and seen as much more effective than transactional relationships they had experienced in other settings. People talked about the importance of the warmth and openness of staff and the impact this could have on ongoing engagement and mental wellbeing.

*When I first got referred I wasn't really needing that much support back then but then when I had my relapse I was needing a lot more support and one thing that [staff member's name] used to do when she was coming out to do home visits was to give me a hug before she would leave and that made me feel, for her to recognise I was needing a hug at that time, it was like well, how can I say this, I thought it was really special.* ”

There were a lot of comments about how nice it was to be welcomed into the service, to be met by a friendly, smiling face or to have the door opened and assistance with a buggy or managing small children.

“ *There is always someone at the door like waiting for you, obviously there needs to be as you need to be buzzed in. They always stay for a couple of minutes to make sure you are ok, it's not like you never see them.*

*It's coming into a friendly face, a big smile if your day is dark makes a wee bit of a difference to your mood, it helps lift your mood and it's a bit lighter.*

Conversely parents stated they didn't like being 'buzzed in', with no one to welcome them and show them where to go. This often triggered anxiety and a desire to leave before even having any contact with the service staff.

Staff engaging with children to enable parents and carers '10 minutes' peace' was cherished.

*Just to be able to come in and sit and get a wee cup of tea, somebody to take your wean for ten minutes.*

This hands-on help from staff was evident in a number of the sessions we attended with staff nursing children to sleep, making people a cup of tea and generally modelling warm, nurturing behaviour which created the conditions for a positive experience of the service.

*The staff go that extra mile to get to know the kids, to play with them, bringing new toys out, which makes a big difference to their [the children's] confidence and stuff as well.*

This proactive engagement with children also meant many parents said that they were aware of and able to recognise the benefits for their children in being in a different environment and meeting other children through play and arts activities available. Some participants stated this helped in preparing their children for nursery or school, reducing parental anxiety about the children managing new experiences.

*It helps them like build up for their nursery and that as well. It gets them used to being around other folk.*

*Before I started coming doon my lassie was really clingy because it's always just been me and her. I couldn't do anything, I couldn't take two steps away from her or she'd be screaming.* ”

Given the well-established evidence base which tells us parenting is a major, if not the single greatest influence on early development, increasing parental confidence in their own skills, abilities, understanding and attachment with their children was an aspiration in all the services we visited. This was nurtured through a wide range of approaches including parenting groups, baby massage and Book Bug, all encouraging connections and interactions between parents and their children.



“ It changes the way you parent, like... I never went out 'cause I felt I'd be judged being a young mum and then coming here I met new people and gradually I could get myself out.

*I like the interaction with other mums and babies. My baby has come on leaps and bounds.*

*I had nae pals or anything like that and nobody to talk to and so when I came here it kinda helped to make friendships for us, no just the child.*

*It encourages you to be much more of a positive parent or gives you the confidence to be a positive parent.*

*I had anxiety when I came here and I was also scared about groups, I didn't want to be in groups but the people here make you feel more relaxed, like it's your own home, they make you feel welcome, make you feel peaceful.*

*The service provides support with parenting by tackling negative behaviour in a positive way.*

*It's kinda brought my confidence out too actually like me going up and speaking to people and everything. I just used to bottle everything up and just take my wee meltdowns and everything like that but then it's kinda built my confidence up to go and speak to other people and if you do speak it is going to get better, getting the help you need.*

There was a belief that being involved in the service had often strengthened bonds within the family. Increased parental sensitivity and awareness of the developmental needs of their children helped them have the confidence to engage in their child's learning and access more opportunities for play and other enriching experiences. Parents talked of watching others and learning new ways of looking after their children, which for some was essential as they were single parents with no previous experience of caring for children and often felt afraid or out of their depth.

*In the prenatal groups, we were all wee young lassies who didn't have a clue what we were getting ourselves in for... and then when reality set in we were all going just as well we went to those wee groups because we learned how to bath the wean, use a steriliser, make a bottle, all wee tips like that helped me build up my relationship with [baby's name] too.* ”

In addition to the group support there was also often help to develop relationships with other organisations in the wider community. A number of people cited examples of this including help to access benefits, manage debt, or secure a training course.



“ Helping you fill in forms or whatever, I don't know how to do that and how to go around things and get training courses. That was the most helpful thing and motivating you and all that. Telling you 'you could be driving' or whatever, 'you could have your own things or a job'. Telling you all that stuff.

*[Staff member's name] has been fantastic, she helps me with like housing, benefits, everything you need help with. That's one great thing they don't just do mother and baby groups to interact with other babies, they help with stuff outside as well for people like myself who need help... when you are feeling down or you need someone to turn to just to say 'I am struggling'.*

*I find it hard filling in forms... they are telling me to gie up the brew and start looking for work on a computer. I mean I have never worked a computer in my life, I've no got a computer in my house, I know a lot of people have but the brew will say you need to dae it on a computer but what if you don't have a computer? How are you supposed to dae this kind of work? I don't have a clue about the benefits and they help me.*

*If they can't help you themselves they'll sign post you or refer you on to get another service or organisation who can help with whatever you are struggling with at that particular time.* ”



## Flexibility and responsiveness

The ability to be responsive and address a range of often complex issues through adapting approaches and tweaking content to accommodate the specific needs of individual people or group worked well.

Consistency was described as very important:

“ Everything they say they're going to do happens.

*Having one person to be there as and when you need them, don't take that away, knowing that there's someone there to turn to makes a huge difference.*

*It's no as if they tell you one thing and then dae another. If they are going to be there they're there and they're there to help.*

*And if you've got a problem and you can't get your worker you can always leave a message and someone gets back to you as soon as they get the message and they visit your home and come to see you to sort it out.*

The participating services were described by respondents as being structured around the needs of the people using them and this was felt to reduce many of the barriers experienced in accessing help. Responsive services which can adapt and be available in times of crisis were viewed as essential. This included things like access to out of hours phone support, home visits on days when leaving the house was incredibly difficult, staff staying on after hours with people to see something through rather than referring people on to someone else.

*They worked round us, they knew we had wee babies and sometimes it's a struggle if you're a single mum or if you have no family. If it's an appointment and it's at 9am then they'll say I tell you what I'll pick you up and take you there. There's always something going on.*

*You can phone the helpline and you can speak to any of them... well one time he ended up in the hospital and I phoned and got support off them... and I had no money and they said they would come and take me home and give any other support I needed... I went in the ambulance but I didn't get paid until the next day and they said if I needed the money they would come and get me home but my daughter came up, but they are good that way.*

*[Worker's name] doesn't have a finishing time...She'll be there and support you whenever you need her.*

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“ Staff do their best, even with the activities that aren't actually within their remit.

*They were always there at stupidoclock at night and the support was brilliant.*

Delivery approaches were broadly described positively, however, it was acknowledged that there were external factors which could sometimes change service design. An example cited was that of funding being reduced which resulted in an end to outreach work. Families felt this was a great loss, especially for those who may be having such a difficult time they were unable to leave the house.

*They cut that extra outreach, it wasn't just them coming in and doing wee jobs it was being able to have an adult conversation.*

*I liked the home visits like so if you were having say a bad week or that you can't leave the house they would come and sit with you, however much you needed to discuss your problems and things like that if you didn't feel you could walk into the building at least you still had somebody there.*

*I used to get book bug, there was a big book sack and she used to come in and she used to show me how to do it and sit with me for half an hour... so it was everything you needed to do activities.*

All of the family support delivered by voluntary sector providers was positively endorsed. However, people did share frustrations about their experience in other contexts where they had received support. They talked about a lack of flexibility, high levels of scrutiny and a perceived power imbalance which impacted negatively on their investment and engagement in the support offered.

*I'm never late for appointments so why should they be. Like if it was us that were late then we would get into trouble.*

*When I was five minutes late for an appointment I got sent back to the reception to make another appointment because she refused to see me because I was five minutes late and I was sitting there thinking to myself wait a minute you were an hour late the other day and I didn't kick up a fuss.*

*It's hard for mums too, especially you've got buggies, trying to get on a bus do y'know what I mean, you'd think they'd give you that wee bit of leeway, but do y'know what, see when it's them that's late, that's ok for them.*

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“ So like rearranging appointments and stuff it's like alright for the professionals but as soon as the client does it it's like 'what's wrong? Is something going on at home? Is there a problem?' they automatically assume that it's something wrong...

*It's one rule for them and another for us.*

Some participants expressed concern about the size of the caseloads in some statutory agencies and felt at times organisations over committed which led to people feeling let down when support wasn't delivered.

*Being told you are going to get a phone call that day, not getting a phone call the next day then you phone back and get told you're going to have a phone call that day or they're not in the office... I am sick of waiting and waiting... I can't handle it.*

*I have contacted [service] numerous of times, I get an answer machine and nothing back.*

*Because they take on too much, too many people they're like 'we're just trying to fit you in', don't take so many people if you can't accommodate them.*

*I know there's not that many worker's out there but like when you have a worker that has like 40 people on their caseload that's not good for the worker or the people who work with them because you can't get a hold of them half the time.*

*The people that they do have are not getting the support that they want or need because they are splitting their time between so many people.*

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## Non-judgmental approach

Being listened to was identified as one of the most important supports any service could provide for the children, young people and parents/ carers.

“ To be listened to. I know obviously the job can be stretched but you do always feel like you've been listened to when you go out the door. I think that's most important, at least it's not like it's gone in one ear and out the other you actually feel like it has sunk in and they actually did hear.

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“ Definitely the worker's, their approach, not being so formal... they dinnae seem like, I know that they are professionals, but they dinnae seem like they are there to look down their noses at you or judging you. You can see that they are genuinely, genuinely wanting to help and support you and I think that's a quality that all professionals should have.

*Just having somebody there to talk to. What we find is that a lot so the staff have went through maybe similar problems or know somebody who has and it's always handy to be able to sit down with that member of staff and talk about what you are going through and get a different point of view on it. When you've got depression you don't think rationally so it's good for to come across and talk to someone who can help you to rationalise.*

*It's different talking to somebody else and no just like your mum for example, it's like you are getting different opinions and different ways to help you with what you are going through at that specific time.*

*The most important thing for me is having the constant support there. I do have family in the area but I am not close to my family... sometimes you don't even have to phone up or come across, it's just knowing someone is there can be a big help.*

*If you ask a family member they have normally got an emotional head on as they are normally in the situation... in here they'll give you strategies, they have their professional heads on so they can see past the emotional connection.*

*The feeling of always kenning there is somebody there. There are a lot of folk who'll no have that. Somebody to listen to your problems.*

*It's even the wee things as well, like picking up the phone and just venting really, we're all parents, I think we've all kinda been at the end of our tether at one time or another and as I say phoning them to have a rant and a rave, they are there.*

*It doesn't have to be your keyworker to talk tae. So like my son was really bad as a baby and constantly cried and never slept so I would always come here feeling upset and shattered. If you are needing 10 minutes you can put the kids in the crèche and you can sit back and talk your way through it and calm yourself down but it doesn't need to be your keyworker it can be any member of staff that can help you. There is always somebody there to talk to if you need to.*

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There was substantial discussion about how important it was not to be judged by staff members as this would result in withholding information or feelings and therefore not getting the support really needed. The participating young people and parents / carers valued 'down to earth' staff who listened, understood their situations and were able to communicate honestly.

“ You come in here and you know that you are no going to be judged for anything, which I think is a help when you have got low confidence and low self-esteem. Sometimes I worry about when I speak that I'll say something really ridiculous, there have been times I have walked in here and I probably have said something ridiculous but it's not picked up on or pointed out. It's just having an extra set of ears here and somebody to be there if you need that help.

*It's not being judged. You come in here and you are not judged by what you say like if you said something to one of your friends they'd be like 'I can't believe you just said that, what you doing?' but in here it's like they help you through the problem and don't judge you. I think people can be very judgemental outside of this place cause if they've not had problems and they're lives have sort of been perfect, it's easy to judge isn't it.*

*Coming here and feeling really safe is probably the most important thing. I get really bad anxiety outside just everywhere I kinda look is kinda like people watching me and looking at me. So coming in here I can be myself.*

*You don't have to sugar coat anything, because you speak to somebody else and you don't give the full story because you don't want to be judged, but in here you'll get help if you actually be honest.*

*It's just how down to earth the staff are, they are no like above us in any way, it's like talking to a friend... The fact that they don't judge.* ”

Ultimately, open and frank discussion was seen as hugely effective in bringing about positive change.



## Practical help

The range of practical help available across the participating services was extensive. Children, young people and families had access to support to:

- use public transport
- access training
- learn how to cook
- play and care for babies and young children
- attend appointments
- access benefits and specialist money advice where appropriate
- learn about gardening
- participate in parenting programmes
- try different arts & crafts activities
- and much more.



“ Right there’s parenting groups, craft classes, every four weeks there’s a reiki session, there’s two ‘play togethers’ per week where we go into the playroom and we can play activities with the kids, there’s been cooking groups, there’s been groups where people come from outside and give talks and stuff, parenting classes, we’ve signed up to the incredible years... child development and child behaviour. There’s always something on.

Most of the cooking we do in the group is with a slow cooker... You also get a slow cooker at the end of the course which is really good. We’re doing it all here when the staff have got the kids so you’ve got peace to prepare veg and the best thing about it is that you can put vegetables in it but in the slow cooker it all disintegrates so the kids don’t know what’s in it so they’re eating things they’d normally say ‘eww, I don’t like that’. It’s good getting fussy kids to eat things that they wouldn’t normally eat.

I go to the stay and play group on a Tuesday... it’s a small group, sometimes it can be busy. We do all different activities, we do messy play, soft play, we do lunchtimes there and all the kids sit together and have lunch together.

In addition to the group activities a lot of practical support was bespoke and tailored to individual needs.

When I was potty training a member of staff went and got loads of stuff from the internet like how to potty train them and reward charts and all that got printed out and laminated so I could like reuse them.

If you can’t get to an appointment the staff here will take you.

I had a problem with my washing machine and it was faulty when I got it. I was fighting with the welfare fund for months to get this washing machine repaired. I went to citizen’s advice to try and get some help got nowhere and [staff member’s name] came over and phoned for me and two days later I got a new washing machine... and I thought ok I can phone you whenever I have got a problem... ”

Many of the planned activities were co-created with participating children, young people and parents/ carers. Participants talked about the culture of trying new things and having access to experiences which they would be unlikely to ever have without engagement and encouragement from the services they are involved in.

Day trips and celebrations to mark significant events like summer, Halloween and Christmas were highly valued. Parents talked of the many barriers to doing these activities with their children due to a lack of access to transport, money, and as well as a lack of experience and confidence at times. Sports days, summer fete’s, trips to the Christmas pantomime or wildlife park were highly anticipated and appreciated. The sharing of the memories from these events was on the walls around many of the services we visited and everyone talked warmly about their involvement in these.

“ We get panto tickets at Christmas. It gives us outings whereas normally like in the summer holidays it’s like a long eight weeks. It gives us sort of something in the middle to look forward to that we probably couldn’t afford to take our kids to do ourselves.

We went to [wildlife park] last year, there were two big buses. We spent the whole entire day there. It was brilliant.

We took picnics and we were all sitting in the park with our picnics and the kids were running about. There is just so much you can do.

They get a Christmas Eve shoebox with jammies and hot chocolate.

It gives the kids something to look forward to. If you don’t drive you can’t get to those kind of places. I can’t drive so I wouldn’t be able to take [child’s name] to those places. It’s good going with all your friends as well in one big bus, meeting up and having a picnic.

We had a really good time; it was a really good trip.

Having access to services and activities at no cost means there was no financial barriers to families engaging and receiving support. Given the evidence that poverty and hunger are extremely damaging for children and families, it was clear all service providers were mindful of this, offering respectful access to food, facilitated through cooking sessions, food packages and foodbank referrals where appropriate.

Well when the weans are through there we take turns to help. We make the snacks every day; it could be pasta or scrambled eggs. ”

One service had a whole room of second hand clothes available at very low cost.

“ Folk hand clothes in here... there's a room through there and folk hand clothes in and you can go through there and pick up stuff. Lots of it is brand new.

It was apparent across all organisations that every effort was made to try and ensure economic barriers were addressed as fully as possible and immediate concerns regarding benefits either dealt with by service staff or through partnership with specialist money advice agencies.

*It's hard going for someone with bare brew money, it's only about £60 per week for gas, electricity, to feed you and anything else you need, it is hard going but [staff member] helps with trusts and other funds.*

*My benefits stopped awful quickly, I mean really quickly... I was getting carers allowance and he was getting DLA and the whole lot of it stopped and I am up to there in debt. They came out to the house and then they took me to get it sorted.*

All services invited feedback and there were numerous mentions of involvement in programme development and invitations to share feedback.

*It all just kinda fits in weekly you have kinda got half a week planned here and then they'll get you together and try and change it and see what you want to do...*

*We constantly give feedback forms at the end of every group... so they can see if there are things they need to improve.*

*Like you don't really see bits of paper here, I got a bit of paper last week but that was just to say how I felt coming into the group, like that is good so they can see if you actually felt comfortable or not and if you had not felt comfortable then they can then talk to you about it, do y'know what I mean, they can try and sort that out for the next week.*

*They've got a thing in the playroom like what kinda stories you'd want to read and all of that, so they've covered likes of you can write it down and they'll look into adding it in.*

*They quite often ask the kids, they ask if there is anything they can do in the playroom to improve, but they sit down with the kids as well... and ask what they'd like to do in the playroom, if they'd like more painting, more colouring, deciding what happens as, at the end of the day, they are the ones in there playing so it's nice that it's not just the parents that get asked the questions, the children get asked as well.* ”



## Impact of Family Support Services

The feedback from young people and parents told us a lot about how we should deliver family support rather than what that support should be. The study found that where services gave people opportunities to access a wide range of supports, retaining flexibility and integrating different approaches at different times this enhanced family wellbeing. However, this does present a challenge in advancing our understanding of the particular contribution of individual components. This may be an area worthy of further study.

However, it is important to note that the richness and breadth of help available was seen by those participating as invaluable in making a difference to their day to day lives as demonstrated in the personal testimony of participants below.





“ I feel a lot better now I have had the help... I would have sat in that room and drank myself to death I think, because I did hit the drink an all with all that was happening.

I know for a fact if [staff member's name] hadn't done any of that work with me I wouldn't be sitting here right now and I certainly wouldn't have my son at home. I probably would have been rock bottom, if not in the gutter.

Just knowing that one person is there if you can't get a hold of anyone else... you're sitting there greetin' in a corner and thinking there's nae help there and ken, it is there!

For all we are in an isolated toon we're no like isolated folk, if you ken what I mean. We have got everything we need here. Especially because of this building and that goes for your mental health and that tae. I would rather come here than anywhere else.

There are so many things they have helped me with, I know I gab and I talk but I am not a confident person at all, but see coming up here and meeting other mothers and other babies and interacting tae, it gives me that wee push to get up out my bed and get ready for the group.

The weans love it, we love it, everybody's happy!

Put it this way they'll need to try and evict me out of here.

”

## Conclusion

As we have heard from young people, parents and carers, effective family support can have an enormously positive impact on the wellbeing of children, young people and the wider family and community.

Where it works well, it is likely to involve a number of key elements;

- **supportive relationships**
- **flexibility and responsiveness**
- **a non-judgmental approach**
- **practical support to enable participation**

Participants consistently reported the need for supportive relationships as the bedrock of all good practice in a family support context. They shared the impact of disruptions in relationships with key staff and how this can be a stark reminder of previous losses in their lives. This should encourage us to consider how we further embed a trauma-informed approach to transitions within family support services.

Parents and carers also stated they valued flexibility and responsiveness. Consistency, alongside availability of outreach and out of hours help were identified as desirable components of family support provision. People also valued approaches which could be adapted to their individual circumstances. Some participating families felt that at times they were asked to adhere to unattainable standards around timekeeping and participation. This reinforced their sense of an inequity in the distribution of power between those who use services and professionals who deliver them. Reflection on current culture and practice which supports power being shared more equally is worthy of consideration by all service providers.

A non-judgmental approach was seen as essential. Participants stated feeling listened to was a powerful act of support in itself, resulting in an increase in connection with others, including staff, other parents and their own children. This was also seen as a way of service providers communicating a sense that all people are valued and respected.

Finally, practical support to enable participation was identified as important. Participants highlighted the positive impact of engagement in asset focused, playful, creative activities which strengthened the cultural capital within families and communities. An area of focus in all of the participating family support services was work to actively mitigate against the impact of poverty. This conscious attempt to reduce financial barriers to engagement was seen as critical and hugely appreciated by participating families.

The compelling contributions from young people and families suggest we need models of family support that balance meeting the needs of people while also nurturing their individual and collective strengths and resources. The key themes identified by participants in this study



give us valuable insight into finding that balance. They provide a useful framework we can use to reflect on our current practices across the full range of family support services. Where they are absent or less well developed, we will want to determine the reasons for that, what barriers are preventing their full achievement, how those barriers can be removed, and who can help remove them.

Crucially, we want to ensure people involved with services have the opportunity to be included in discussions about how we find the right balance and, by implication, in the design and delivery of support. It is only through sharing with us what success looks like for them that we can understand the difference effective community and strengths-based family support services can make.

As noted in the beginning of this report, we plan to work with children, young people and families, alongside colleagues in academia, to take forward the findings of our two studies. Our goal is to collectively develop best practice in family support and address the identified gaps in research in order to lead us to a fuller understanding of what works.

## Acknowledgements

Thank you to all the young people, parents and carers who participated in our discussions. We are very grateful for the time you gave and your openness in sharing reflections on your experience of receiving support. We hope to make use of this in the wider research as well as influencing how we shape and deliver family support services both now and in the future.

## Appendix 1 Service Information

### Aberlour, Dundee

Aberlour can help your family recover from drug and alcohol addiction so your children can thrive. We can work with your whole family as well as your children from birth. We can work with you at home or in the community to help parents create a safe environment for their children. We also offer group work sessions in a supported environment. We give children a trusted person they can talk to as well as practical support at home, in school or in the community.

### Action for Children Clackmannanshire

Our centre is suited to the local community they serve providing the best place to help families flourish.

We make sure we include everyone, and encourage parents to participate. We see the best results for children when more individuals pull together, putting their energies, skills and time into a child's development and well-being. We know every family is different, and we tailor our approach to each one. We take a 'whole family approach', developing a relationship that works for the individual needs of each family member and child, taking care to listen and value everyone's needs. We help under-fives get ready to start school. Children need social and communication skills to do well when they start school and early years services are crucial. We provide extra support services such as play sessions, speech therapists, health intervention and parenting programmes.

We partner locally with health visitors, midwives and other professionals to ensure we have a huge pool of resources, knowledge and experience to make sure we provide the best places to help families flourish.

### Action for Children Upper Nithsdale

We use a system of whole-family support, providing an intensive relationship and support to contribute to the wellbeing of families we work with; this can stabilise families and enable them to overcome their difficulties and live happier lives together.

If families and relationships are strengthened, children who were previously on the edge of being placed in care are able to stay at home. We work with each member of the family with all children in the household receive care and attention, and where necessary we work with other significant members of the household if we believe this will help.

Our work helps:

- Keep children out of care;
- Help parents towards employment;
- Reducing children's involvement in crime;
- Making more confident parents;
- Helping families to better mental health.

## Barnardo's Inverclyde

Barnardo's Nurture services in Inverclyde provide a wide range of universal and specialist opportunities on site to promote family wellbeing. Our staff are skilled in delivering services to children at different ages and stages.

Children and families are at the core of everything we do, we have space to accommodate group work activities and individual one to one support.

Individual packages of support are based on a GIRFEC wellbeing assessment and delivered at the service base within the family home or in school. We have offer specialist support in line with children's development and life transitions. Service design and the range of activities offered to children and parents reflect the identified needs of families as follows:

- Pre-natal group programme
- New parent group
- Mother and Toddler child development group
- Dads support group
- Children's development groups
- Children's Steering group
- Family support to close the attainment gap for children in Primary and Secondary Education who experience a range of adversity
- Family support for children in kinship care
- Family support for children affected by parental substance misuse

Colleagues from key agencies in Inverclyde including health care professionals, social work staff and education staff, co deliver specific programmes and work in partnership with the family's keyworker to deliver individual packages of family support to meet the identified needs of families.

## Includem Glasgow

At the heart of what we do is 1-to-1 relationship-based support for young people and their parents or carers. Whatever time of day or night, 7 days a week, we're there when they need us most.

We also offer a free 24/7 Helpline, giving them a practical way to get in touch. This means we can intervene at the point of crisis, reducing immediate risk of harm as well as developing trust and learning opportunities for young people and families.

Our transitions support helps young people aged 16-24 who have been involved in one of our other programmes previously. Our aim is to help them make a positive transition from adolescence into adulthood.

By working with other agencies, we try to increase young people's employment and education opportunities. We also help young people to access services that they may not know about, such as housing providers, health, education and employment support services.



## About CCPS

CCPS is the Coalition of Care and Support Providers in Scotland. It exists to identify, represent, promote and safeguard the interests of third sector and not-for-profit social care and support providers in Scotland, so that they can maximise the impact they have on meeting social need.

\*The 12 organisations involved in our work on family support services are:

**Aberlour**

**Action for Children**

**Barnardo's Scotland**

**Children 1st**

**Crossreach**

**Down's Syndrome Scotland**

**Includem**

**Kibble**

**National Deaf Children's Society Scotland**

**National Third Sector GIRFEC Project**

**Quarriers**

**Sense Scotland**

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