



MORAY CHILDREN'S SERVICES PLAN

ANNUAL REPORT
2020/21

Children have the right to live in communities where their voice is heard and they are built up to be all they can be.



**Moray
Community Planning
Partnership**

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EXECUTIVE FORWARD

We are pleased to present the first Annual Report for Moray's Children's Services Plan 2020-2023. This report highlights our key achievements this year and our journey to further improve the lives of children, young people and their families in Moray.

This year has challenged us all like no other and in response we have witnessed some outstanding joint work between our communities, 3rd sector organisations and our statutory services.

The past year has been about reacting to the pandemic. In the year ahead, our focus will be on recovery. It is inescapable that the Covid-19 pandemic will have a lasting impact on our children, young people and their families, in terms of their financial position, health and wellbeing and many other aspects of everyday life.

Our partnership and service delivery will continue to flex and adapt as we learn about the impact of the pandemic in the short, medium and long term. Our ability to make progress against the priorities in our plan is more crucial now than ever before. We will remain agile and responsive in our work to #KeepThePromise, and continue in our commitment to hear the voices of children, young people and their families in Moray.

2021 is the year in which children's rights, as set out in UNCRC, become directly incorporated into law in Scotland and children or their representatives will be able to go to court to enforce their rights. This is exciting and important for our children and young people, and for everyone who cares about them. It means that children and young people will enjoy the same rights as adults, their views will be listened to and they will be recognised for the contribution they make to their communities. We will make sure that children and young people in Moray understand their rights, that they are supported to claim them and that they are upheld.

We remain committed as a partnership to working together to realise our vision for Moray's children. Throughout these uncertain and challenging times the determination of our third sector, voluntary and paid workforce across Children's services has remained resilient and steadfast. In particular we would like to recognise the phenomenal response from our community, it has been truly inspirational and we thank you all.

It is with this inherent passion, that we will continue to endeavour to cut across organisational and service boundaries, working together to achieve meaningful change for the children, young people and families of Moray.

Signatures:



Sandy Bond
Moray Youth Matters Representative




Simon Bokor-Ingram
GIRFEC Leadership Group



Roddy Burns
Moray Council



Caroline Hiscox
NHS Grampian



George MacDonald
Police Scotland

16,145
Children in
Moray

12,114
School Pupils

4,702
with
additional
support
needs

3,778
living in
poverty

1,930
registered in
early learning
childcare

1,639
eligible for free
school meals

107
supported as
young carers

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN MORAY 2020/21

177
living within
the care
system

26
at risk of
significant
harm

CHILDREN'S SERVICES PLAN PRIORITIES AND GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS

The GIRFEC Leadership Group is made up the senior managers from the key organisations which make up the Children's Services Partnership including;

Social Work, Education, Police Scotland, Health and the 3rd sector. On behalf of the Community Planning Partnership, they are responsible for developing, implementing, and reporting on the progress of the Children's Services Plan.

The work of the strategic groups is further supported and delivered through a substructure of operational groups. In addition, key thematic groups actively contribute to the delivery and performance of the Children's Services Plan priorities, these include the Young Carers Statement Working Group and the Children's Rights and Participation Working Group.

Our vision and priorities were developed with children, young people, and families.

Children have the right to live in communities where their voice is heard and they are built up to be all they can be.

- Improving the wellbeing of children, young people and their families.
- Children and young people feel safe and free from harm.
- The impact of poverty on children, young people and their families is mitigated.
- Improved outcomes for looked after and care experienced young people

Four key groups within the Children's Services governance structure have overarching responsibility for each of these priorities.



IMPACT OF COVID-19

“We cannot underestimate the long-term effects that this pandemic will have, especially on the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people”

– Paul Farmer, Chief Executive of Mind

Covid-19 Timeline



Throughout this year, the Children's Services Partnership have worked together to deliver tailored supports to mitigate the worst effects of the pandemic.

From the very beginning of the initial lockdown phase, there were concerns about the negative effects of increased isolation on the wellbeing of children and young people and it was recognised that there was a much deeper impact on children and young people in care or on the edge of care.

Hidden Harm

Following the initial lockdown, Moray's children's services experienced a decrease in child protection referrals and investigation activity. Whilst this drop in activity reflected a national trend, it did little to alleviate fears that children and young people were in fact at an increased risk of harm during the pandemic. Great efforts were made by professionals to work together and support those children assessed to be more vulnerable, however the ability to recognise increasing support needs for children in the wider community was more limited due to the restrictions to services and overall reduction in contact between children and their network of support. At the same time alcohol sales rose, major domestic abuse charities reported increased calls, and The Royal College of Psychiatrists raised concerns about declining parental mental health.

In addition to increasing pressures facing families, the increased time spent by children and young people online during lockdown created an environment of increased vulnerability to a number of online offences, including sexual abuse and exploitation. National data indicates that during the lockdown there was an increase in activity on known child sex abuse forums online, and since the pandemic there has been an increase in contacts to NSPCC with concerns for children experiencing online sexual abuse, alongside an increase in online child sexual abuse crimes recorded by Police Scotland.



Evidence

A review of the available national evidence on the impact of lockdown and Covid-19 showed increased pressure and significant negative impact across family finances, children's education, family health and wellbeing, safety and security and children's rights.

Following the initial lockdown, two large scale surveys were undertaken with children, young people and families in Moray to assess the impact of Covid-19 on poverty and wellbeing matters.

- Poverty in Moray – 'Impact of Covid-19 since lockdown Sept 2020'.
- The Cost of the School Day 'Lockdown Learning in Moray survey of both parents and pupils'.

In total, 150 young people, 496 parents and 28 families responded to these surveys. 24% of all respondents identified as being in receipt of benefits, or in the application process for benefits.

In addition, a survey was undertaken community organisations and the front line services who provide support to families experiencing financial hardship. They were asked to give provide feedback on the impact of Covid-19 on the families they are currently supporting. 28 community organisations who collectively support over 12,000 families responded.



Summary of the key findings:

Financial Hardships

- Job losses and difficulty accessing Universal Credit.
- Self-employed workers reported struggling businesses during lockdown.
- Families unable to work when their school age children are home.
- Significant delays or barriers to accessing grants and universal credit.
- Gaps in income as a result of the furlough scheme – Relying on the missing 20% income.
- Rise in costs and additional costs – food, fuel and other bills.
- Worry about the ability to pay bills, impact of unexpected bills.
- Embarrassment at needing to ask for help.
- Extra costs of children being at home, increased food costs and equipment required for home schooling.

Family/Individual Challenges

- Families just about coping (on the edge of poverty) but not meeting criteria for accessing services.
- Impact of schools being closed – ability to motivate children, keep them entertained and focused on learning.
- Childcare difficulties – unable to access support from family members.
- Impact of being together in cramped conditions.
- Parents of children with additional needs concerned about lack of support.
- Parents of very young children feel isolated.

Food Challenges

- Early supply issues in shops meant people were having to buy higher cost brands.
- Those shielding experienced challenges with getting deliveries of essentials.
- School meal vouchers offered support but the cost of travelling to specific shops was prohibitive.
- Parents reluctant to admit they are struggling and need to access the Food Bank.
- Lack of transport to bulk buy, meant local shopping which was more expensive.

Technology Challenges

- Internet or broadband infrastructure problems across Moray – poor connectivity.
- Home schooling without proper equipment and knowing how to use it.
- Ability to pay for internet connection.

Children, Young People and Family Wellbeing

- Difficulties in accessing health care services as measures to prevent the spread of Covid-19 meant that only essential face-to-face care services could be delivered.
- General increase in anxiety and stress, particularly in relation to fear of Covid-19 and the associated impacts.
- Increased anxiety about returning to school – concerns about the lack of transition support.
- Increase in harmful behaviours such as alcohol and drug misuse and self-harm.
- Increase in eating disorder presentations.
- Children, young people and families feeling more vulnerable having been isolated from their usual support network.
- Strain on family relationships due to Covid-19 restrictions.
- Deterioration in children's sleep patterns and behaviour concerns for the future.

OUR RESPONSE TO COVID-19

The Children's Services Partnership has worked incredibly hard with the people of Moray to protect and support our children, young people, families and communities whilst also limiting the impact of Covid-19 on health, economic and social wellbeing.

Community Volunteer Response

It is important to recognise and acknowledge the vital role that both the formal and informal voluntary community response to Covid-19 played, particularly, but not solely, at the outset of the pandemic. Communities mobilised swiftly, adapting to address needs stemming from gaps in services and restrictions on people's ability to access everyday essentials.

A partnership Community Resilience Team was formed to coordinate and support the community response. Within localities community champions were identified, providing a single point of contact for each group.

A wide range of support was provided:

- Direct support for volunteer groups e.g., provision of PPE for volunteers, production of leaflets with information on where to get additional support, information on sources of funding etc.
- Funding for children, young people, and families.
- The Community Food Fund provided funding for meals for vulnerable individuals and families.
- The Connecting Scotland IT funding provided devices to support home schooling and those isolated from their families and friends.
- In addition, community groups were successful in raising funds independently through donations and grants to provide meals, food vouchers, IT, activity packs and local initiatives such as food larders.
- Third Sector Interface (TSI) Moray rapidly produced a central repository of supports available to communities. This was made accessible to all, including providing support to children and families in Moray.

tsiMORAY have further developed this work and produced a Community Map. The map will enable families and practitioners to identify supports and services by locality and/or thematically and will be a central point of knowledge across Moray



Practical Support for Families

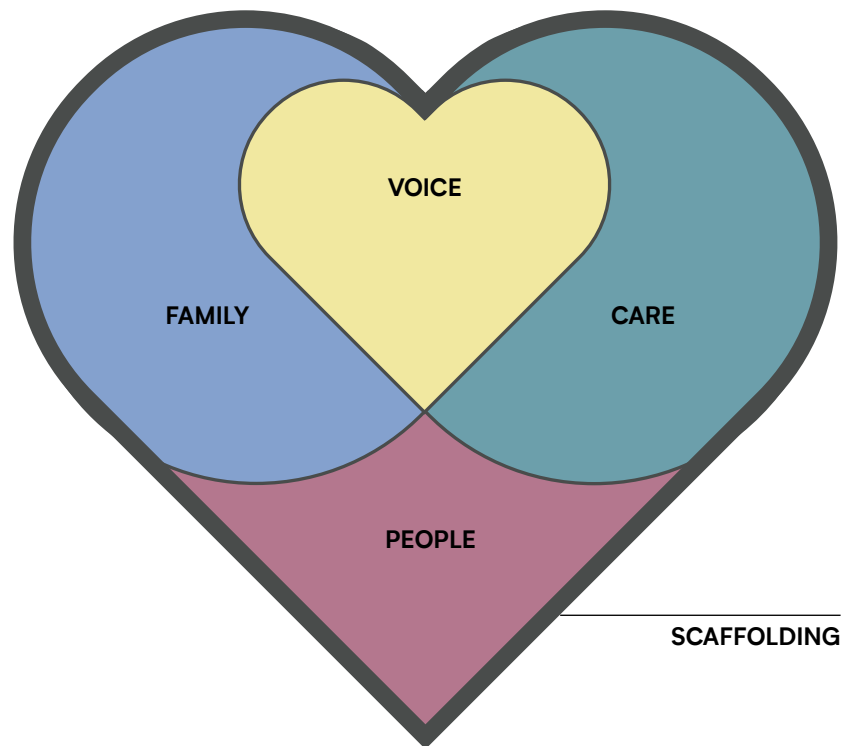
The table below outlines the nature and sheer volume of supports delivered to families and individuals throughout Moray. These needs were met by a range of services, with significant voluntary effort from both formal and informal community groups and organisations.

Support need	What was required	Number provided
Food	Food parcels, food vouchers, meals on wheels, hot meals, cooking zoom calls, baking kits	8,091
Money (fuel/ electricity costs, debt, clothing)	Fuel top ups, application to Moray Emergency Relief Fund, support applying for Universal Credit and other funding streams, signposting to financial supports, support and advice	1,456
Wellbeing (mental health, loneliness, befriending etc.)	Virtual meetings, telephone conversations, support networks, wellbeing walks	748
Technology (digital access, IT, smartphones, tablets etc.)	Access and support to enable home schooling for those that had no devices/Wi-Fi	898
Other	Community care packages containing basic staple items to give support to isolated and vulnerable families including baking kits and stationery packs	3,244

TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE

Moray is committed to #KeepthePromise

In February 2020, the Independent Care Review called for radical overhaul of Scotland's Care System. They published 7 reports called 'The Promise' narrating a vision based on 5 foundations for change, to transform how Scotland cares for children and families as well as the paid and unpaid workforce.



Working together with children and families, the Children's Services Partnership in Moray will:

- Actively listen to and hear from children – **Voice**
- Hear what support families say they need to stay together – **Family**
- Ensure that when children need to be cared for out of their family, brothers and sisters are supported to be together – **Care**
- Focus on developing and sustaining positive relationships – **People**
- Support the workforce to be accountable and to provide responsive support – **Scaffolding**

We recognise that 'The Promise' is fundamental to how we work with all children, young people and their families. The Promise requires us to deliver responsive flexible services shaped by what families tell us will make a difference to them.

A snapshot of how we have started to #keepthepromise in Moray

Voice

A range of engagement activities with children, young people and families to hear their voice and use it to shape policy and practise.

Staff workshops outlining the importance of partnering with families to produce solutions and young people presenting their views on how systems need to change.

Independent advocates for care experienced young people.

Family

Increase in provision of multi-agency wellbeing support.

Specific support for parents to feel confident and able to have discussions with young people about harmful behaviours.

Different approaches to enabling parents to identify their own support needs.

A wide range family-based activities which were sustained virtually and outdoors during lockdown.

Signposting to financial support and assistance to apply.

Care

Increased focus on supporting children to remain in their own family, including increased use of Kinship care.

Development of family group decision making to find the best solutions and keep families together.

A specific focus on brothers and sisters remaining together or being supported to have time together if they are not living together.

People

Activities and walks with young people to encourage relationships with peers.

Online engagement activities to maintain staff and peer relationships.

Specialist mental health support.

Increase in safe and welcoming places for young people, families and the people who support them to meet.

Scaffolding

Feedback from practitioners, children, young people and families has been analysed to help us to identify gaps in support provision.

Development of a community map, so that families can more easily see where local support is available.

Development sessions with staff about the Promise and the UNCRC.

Supporting staff to remain connected through the pandemic to explore and address the need for change in practice.

PROGRESS THIS YEAR

PRIORITY 1 — IMPROVE THE WELLBEING OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Through listening to children and families and by looking carefully at local multi-agency data, we know that many families in Moray have experienced significant challenges in maintaining their wellbeing over the past year.

In response, our priority for 2020-21 has been to increase the provision of universal and early intervention mental wellbeing services and supports for children and families in Moray.

£741k has been allocated by the Scottish Government to enhance the range of early intervention mental wellbeing supports available.

We have used this funding to commission two key services:

- **Counselling in Schools**

The Exchange has been established to deliver psychological support to primary and secondary school aged children throughout Moray, both virtually and face to face

- **Family Wellbeing Service**

Action for Children have been commissioned to deliver an early intervention family wellbeing support services for families throughout Moray.

Whilst the commissioning process has been underway, we funded our third sector partners to deliver a range of creative wellbeing supports for children and families.

- **Moray Wellbeing Hub**

Peer support for young people and families, with a clear focus on prevention. This included the establishment of a parent's group which has 23 members and is now parent run. 5 young people's Champions have been recruited and trained to deliver peer support. New partnerships have been established with Developing the Young Workforce Team, Children 1st and the Employability Team through which young people have been developed to deliver peer support.

- **Aberlour Youth Point**

A range of supports for young people in distress as well as parenting support and access to funding to overcome difficulties which impact on mental wellbeing.

Intensive support was provided to 9 young people and their families who reported improved wellbeing.

- **Re-evolution for Good**

Life Coaching for young people on a one to one basis to address the issues they want to change and adopt strategies to manage emotional distress.

15 young people undertook a programme of coaching sessions both online and face to face. Improved wellbeing was evidenced



- **Children 1st**

A range of interventions which focus on building and sustaining family bonds. This included one-to-one family therapy sessions, group support sessions and access to a range of further supports and funding. 32 families were supported and reported improved outcomes.

Locality Networks have undertaken a mapping exercise of existing community mental health and wellbeing services and collated feedback from frontline practitioners on services and supports they regularly access. Work is underway to ensure this information is kept updated and is accessible to children, young people, families and those who support them.

- **Mental Wellbeing Improvement Programme**

In early 2021, Moray made a successful application to Scottish Government's Children and Young people's Improvement Collaborative and Health Care Improvement Scotland to participate in the national Mental Wellbeing Improvement Programme. It aims to support Community Planning Partnerships to:

- Develop the knowledge and skills to apply both service design and Quality Improvement methods to identify, design and test system changes that transform the way we support the mental wellbeing of children and young people.
- Collaboratively develop and implement approaches to ensure the voices of children, young people and their families are meaningfully informing the design and implementation of new models of support.

Locality Planning

At the onset of the pandemic a partnership approach, based on the GIRFEC staged intervention process, was rapidly developed to respond to the escalating individual wellbeing needs of children and families in Moray.

Four multi-agency CONNECT Teams were set up. They comprised of frontline managers from key agencies, as well as a Community Learning and Development Worker who acted as the link with 3rd sector and community based voluntary organisations. The role of the CONNECT Teams was to:

- consider the needs of the children, young people and families referred to them by the Team Around the Child
- help connect children and families with the services and community-based supports best placed to meet their needs

In situations where their needs were more complex, similar support was provided by the Moray-wide Multi Agency Support Hub (MASH), which is made up of managers from across all agencies who have the authority to direct their resources within communities. 113 children, young people and families received support from MASH between April and June 2020.

During the school summer holiday period, locality planning partners came together to provide a range of wellbeing supports for individual children, young people and families. 32 children and young people were provided with individual, tailored packages of support.

A robust evaluation of the local locality planning model and learning from national best practice, has helped to shape a streamlined model which will be piloted and evaluated over the next year.

In addition a number of partnership initiatives undertaken to improve the physical and social wellbeing of children, young people and families.

Active Girls Day Initiative

As identified through extensive survey work with children and young people in Moray, teenage girls are most likely to be physically inactive. Delivered by Active Schools in partnership with Sport Scotland, this initiative focused on offering activities specifically for teenage girls to participate in. Following a range of taster sessions, they have been signposted to different community clubs/sessions.

Milne's High School (walk & talk)

This is a partnership between Active Schools and Moray Walk Co-ordinator. The aims of the project are for S1 pupils to:

- Make new friends (transition to High School)
- see the village and its facilities (especially sports venues)
- get outdoors and active
- have a safe place to talk to friends
- get to know senior pupils or staff and to create buddies for next year's S1 group

This initiative is being evaluated and the opportunity to scale and spread throughout Moray will be explored.

Foundation Apprentices are currently supporting Active Schools and Walk Moray develop a promotional film to promote Walking for Health at School, as a means of increasing physical activity amongst young people.



PRIORITY 2 — CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE ARE SAFE AND FREE FROM HARM

The partners responsible for delivering child protection services met more frequently in Moray to identify the risks of the restrictions and put measures in place that made sure the delivery of services that protect children would not be impacted. For children that were known to be at risk of harm, partners kept checking on their needs and did more home visits so that they could see them face to face and check on their safety and wellbeing. Partners made services that protect children a priority and managers supported their teams to do this.

We are pleased to say that all children in Moray supported through a child protection plan have been visited fortnightly by a social worker. Children at risk of harm had lots more contact and support which was provided by telephone call or by 'virtual' meetings online. Some children were also supported by attending the Childcare Hubs.

Beyond this, social work, and the partners around them worked hard to identify and support families early who were chiefly unknown or at increased risk as a result of the restrictions.



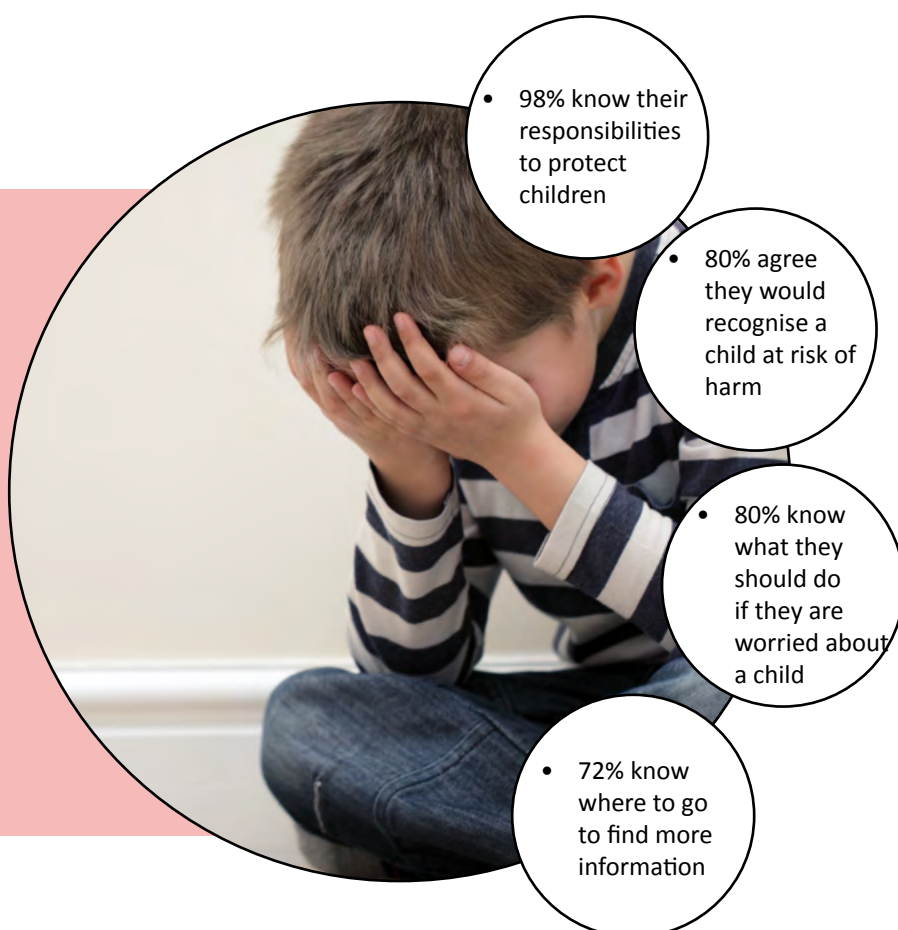
Public awareness and understanding of child protection with a focus on the pandemic

During the initial lockdown, and the different levels of restriction that followed, the Moray Child Protection Committee increased the promotion of key child protection messages to the public through press releases and social media messaging. The aim was to encourage individuals in communities to get help if they were worried about a child.

The social media content came from a suite of materials developed by Child Protection Committee Scotland and designed to be used locally and nationally to raise public awareness of the impact of the pandemic on children and families and potential for children to suffer harm when at home. Moray participated locally with the following campaigns:

- Eyes and Ears Open – April 2020
- Back at School – August 2020
- Keeping Kids Safe at Christmas, return to lockdown – December 2020 – February 2021
- Online Safety – March 2021

As part of our efforts to increase public knowledge of child protection, we published a survey in October 2020 to better understand the level of awareness and confidence in sharing concerns. Community members across Moray reported that:





"Get the message out that Moray has its issues too, and have a clear single point of contact for child safety posted in places where children are likely to be"

– survey response

We wanted to understand any reservations members of the public might have about contacting child protection services. 57% respondents identified reasons that would prevent them from making that call, these include not wanting to make assumptions without having all the facts, worries about the consequences of services becoming involved, and concerns about maintaining anonymity. This insight will help us shape future campaigns to better address these specific areas.



"More attention brought to the signs of harm or suffering a child may have, and how services should respond. I think most people assume that reporting worries is a waste of time because rarely any action is taken"

– survey response

The increased promotion of child protection messages and social media campaigns supported by Moray Child Protection Committee during the initial lockdown period may have contributed to an increase in anonymous referrals to social work services, from 14 referrals between March-June 2019 to 58 referrals in 2020 during same period.

Learning and Development

The pandemic, Covid-19 restrictions, and the need to adapt to a new way of working was, in itself, a process of learning and development. We were very aware of prioritising staff health and wellbeing and ensuring that our staff were ready to learn. Some services were better placed than others in having both the technology and culture of learning by virtual means. For others, it has been a slower process but one which has and continues to improve. We kept workers up to date with new information by sharing guidance, updates and promoting online child protection learning opportunities in regular publications 'Quick Links for Practitioners' with hotlinks to all the relevant information.

Summary of the inter-agency learning and development activities in Moray:

- 590 learners from Moray signed up to access child protection e-learning online modules covering range of practice topics such as chronologies, child sexual exploitation and parental substance use.
- 99 attended Safe and Together Model (domestic abuse) overview training over 2 days.
- 42 attended virtual facilitated workshops on neglect.

Delivery of the neglect workshops evidenced an average improvement overall across all learning objectives. In particular, Participants reported an increased confidence in their own ability to address neglect in practice.

- 25% increase in awareness of how different types of neglect can present.
- 41% increase in understanding of impact of neglect on children.
- 88% increase confidence to respond to neglect in their own practice.

"I came away much more confident in my understanding of neglect and the impact this has on children"

– neglect workshop participant



"Excellent training. It covered impact of neglect on the brain and into later life. Very clear message around communication with colleagues and chronologies being so important at establishing a picture"

– neglect workshop participant



The Child Protection Partnership on behalf of Moray, Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City Child Protection Committees, hosted 6 live webinar and one pre-recorded event for practitioners across the North East of Scotland.

- **Childhood Trauma and Adversity:** 2-part series supporting practitioners to recognise presenting issues in children and young people as related to past traumatic experiences, explore the wider impact of trauma and adversity, and the timing for different interventions that can help. 182 attendees took part from across the North East.
- **Hidden Harm – Effective Home Visits:** support for a wide range of practitioners to make the most of home visits, to be curious by asking questions and observing the child's surroundings, and to understand the impact of social distancing, use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and pressures families face because of the coronavirus pandemic, on effective home visits. This was a pre-recorded event, so no attendance figures are available.
- **National Risk Framework:** 2 part series for professionals working with children and families to enhance understanding of the 2012 National Risk Framework and how it can support the assessment of need and risk in child protection. 165 attendees took part from across the North East.
- **Contextual Safeguarding:** aimed at a broad range of professionals, managers and strategic leads to learn about the Contextual Safeguarding programme and how it can advance the protection of adolescents through changes in social care responses to extra-familial abuse. 174 attendees took part from across the North East.



"I found the events excellent and look forward to using the tools within the framework to help identify any risks for children, young people and their families as I develop in my role"

– practitioner feedback

Childcare Hubs

In line with Scottish Government guidance, childcare hubs were established for children of key workers, more vulnerable children and those with additional support needs.

During the initial lockdown phase, 280 attended the 8 childcare hubs which were established throughout Moray. From 8am until 6pm daily, paid staff and volunteers provided support to children to both engage in learning and experience a range of wellbeing activities.

7 summer holiday hubs operated out with term time. A wide and varied programme of activities was delivered by local organisations such as Active Schools and Bike Revolution.

From January 2021, childcare was provided in nurseries and schools for the same groups of children, whilst online learning commenced for all others. During this period the uptake of places rose steeply with 1140 children attending per day.

Further developments

A number of developments are now under way to improve our practice and joint approach to keeping children safe and free from harm.

Missing Children

Moray submitted a successful application for free consultancy, training and best practice sharing from the charity, Missing People.

The work has helped to increase understanding in Moray of good and innovative practice in missing persons cases. Missing People developed a [best practice toolkit](#) which will support us to continue our work and support services to work together when children go missing, understand why they went missing and develop support with and for young people to prevent them going missing in future.

Strengths Based Assessment

Moray Child Protection Committee has committed to embedding the NSPCC (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children) assessment tool, called Graded Care Profile 2 into practice. The tool to help practitioners and parents to measure the quality of care that a child is receiving, by enabling parents to identify their own support needs and chart the progress of positive changes and supports put in place.

Home Conditions Checklist

A short neglect briefing and a home conditions checklist to provide support to the workforce in early identification of support needs has been developed. During the Covid-19 restrictions, the checklist was adapted for use by Moray Council tradesmen teams who were attending call-outs to houses and therefore in a position to spot potential signs of neglect.

Relational Practice

All of Moray's social work staff who work with children and families and Youth Justice have taken part in relational practice workshops. These workshops explain the importance of working together with families when creating an assessment of the needs of a family and when providing early help and support.

Social Workers have undertaken training in family group decision making, which is an evidenced based approach to empower families in the support planning and decision-making process.

In 2021, Moray adopted the Safe and Together Model which provides tools to support practitioners to better support domestic violence survivors and their children and to engage with perpetrators to encourage a meaningful change in behaviour and adoption of positive parenting choices. So far, 20 practitioners have completed the Safe and Together CORE training. To enable the continued roll out of training across the workforce, 5 will become Safe and Together Model Certified Trainers.

PRIORITY 3 — THE IMPACT OF POVERTY ON CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES IS MITIGATED

"I live at home with my brother and sisters and my parents. My Dad is ill, and my mum does most things for us.

We don't have a lot of money. Mum tries her best to make sure we have everything we need and does her best to not show that she is struggling. It can sometimes be embarrassing when friends are making plans to go shopping at the weekend.

While making plans they say 'let's all meet up and go on the bus to have a day in Elgin, we can go shopping and go to McDonalds'. I know that I probably won't be able to do that, so I just think of an excuse not to be able to go because I don't want to ask Mum for money. I know she will try to give it to me, but I know it has to be cut from somewhere else.

When I was younger and we went shopping I used to ask for the beans in the blue tin or the digestives in the red packets like my friends have at their house, but mum would say no, we like the ones in the white packet, they taste better' or the white ones are Daddy's favourite'. Mum always had her list and sometimes we didn't get to the freezer bit and mum would say 'it's ok we have everything' but now I know that we bought the white packs because they are the cheap ones, and we didn't get to the freezer part because Mum had no money left in her purse.

We may be a family with not a lot of money, but I know we are rich because we love each other"

– How it feels in a family with not a lot of money (by a 14-year-old girl living in Moray)

(With thanks to R-evolution for Good for sharing the story above)

Tackling child poverty is one of the Scottish Governments key priorities. The Child Poverty (Scotland) Act (2017) is part of the Fairer Scotland Action Plan and provides the strategic framework for us to plan and deliver improvements in our local communities. Children and families living and growing up in poverty experience significantly poorer health, and developmental and educational outcomes. Such child health inequalities are believed to arise through a combination of low household income and the stress felt by parents and carers as they experience the impacts of living in poverty.

The multi-agency Child Poverty strategic group is responsible for making sure that our collective actions to tackle child poverty are co-ordinated and that they are driven by what children and families tell us will make a difference to them.

Moray Headlines — Child Poverty

One in three children in Moray are living in poverty compared to one in four in Scotland overall.

- The number of children living in poverty in Moray is rising.
- Only 15% of our most deprived people live in our recognised deprived areas
- Moray has the second lowest weekly and hourly wage in Scotland.
- Moray has relatively low levels of free school meal registration.
- There is a relatively low uptake of social security and maternity related benefits in Moray.
- Around 31% of families are living in fuel poverty with the national average being 16%
- More babies are born prematurely in the most deprived areas of Moray.

Over the past year efforts have been focused on increasing household income by ensuring that pathways for financial support are in place and easily accessible and providing our workforce with training and tools to help them feel more confident when discussing financial matters with families.

Embedding a financial inclusion pathway

As part of universal services, health visitors, midwives and family nurses in Moray routinely enquire about family finances with all pregnant women and families with children under five, this is called the Financial Inclusion Pathway.

Money Advice Moray (MAM) have delivered benefits, grants, income maximisation and debt advice to families across Moray throughout the last year. 960 households (1581 children) were awarded free school meals, 956 households (1596 children) received clothing grants and 86% of families claiming the Scottish Welfare Fund had children in the household.

Progressing Making Every Opportunity Count (MEOC)

MEOC encourages staff to engage in conversations with families on lifestyle and life circumstances. This could include money, housing, smoking, mental wellbeing, healthy weight, being physically active, or caring responsibilities to give some examples. The brief conversation takes 30 seconds – 3 minutes. It makes maximum use of resources and provides families with information and sign posting to relevant services for further advice or support where appropriate.

A refreshed virtual training package has been created which is flexible and can be tailored to accommodate specific team needs.

Promoting health and well-being during pregnancy

We are working with pregnant women to reinforce the importance of attending for antenatal care. The aims are to increase the number of eligible mothers in receipt of the Best Start Maternity Grant, to raise awareness of other early year's entitlements and to ensure that new and expectant mothers have appropriate nutritional support during pregnancy and while breastfeeding. Between December 2019 and February 2021 £760,150 was awarded to families in Moray through a combination of Pregnancy Payment, Early Learning Payment, School Age Payment and Best Start Foods.

Digital Inclusion

The use of the 'Near Me' digital platform has enabled health professionals to continue to engage and support children, young people and families where face to face contact may not be possible due to restrictions, for some young people this has been a preferable method of engaging. In all of the referrals made to Connecting Scotland by Money Advice Moray the clients did not have a laptop, personal computer or tablet device but they did have a smart phone and Wi-Fi. Half of applicants gave their reason for requiring a device to be for education/home schooling and the other the other half for job seeking, adult education and independent living.

Entitlements through a Single Application

In Moray the Benefits Team now administers several benefits in a single application, making the process quicker and easier for families. This includes Housing Benefit, Council Tax Reduction, Free School Meals, School Clothing Grants and Educational Maintenance Allowance. The application, once completed, permits the team to quickly assess entitlement to any of these benefits that the family may be entitled to.

Money Advice Moray (MAM)

MAM provides advice and support to maximise income through the uptake of benefits. They also provide support with budgeting, debt management and can help with appeals against disability benefit decisions. Since the Covid-19 crisis, this team have also been administering payments for support with food costs (Flexible Food Fund). The percentage claims for crisis support (Scottish Welfare Fund and Flexible Food Fund) are high for households with children which is indicative of ongoing struggles to meet monthly household costs, this is likely to be because of unstable incomes such as fluctuating earnings offset by Universal Credit, which changes on a monthly basis.

PRIORITY 4 — IMPROVED OUTCOMES FOR LOOKED AFTER AND CARE EXPERIENCED YOUNG PEOPLE

The priorities of the Corporate Parenting strategic group are based in statute. They are consistent with “asks” made by several of Moray’s care experienced people, at various Champions Board and associated engagement events.

The following corporate parents have continued to be active in the strategic group within the last year – Police Scotland; Health; Moray Council; Skills Development Scotland; Moray UHI; Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and Children’s Hearing Scotland as well as several of our third sector partners (Who Cares? Scotland; Action for Children; Aberlour Child Care Trust) who have a leading role in service delivery and development for care experienced young people.

Across Moray those working with and supporting our care experienced young people did so in ways that the young people said worked for them. Our younger care experienced young people enjoyed online engagement activities whilst our older young people preferred simple text messaging and telephone calls. These methods helped maintain existing relationships and for our younger young people the peer support and relationships have developed in ways that they say matter to them.

We marked the usual events, albeit in scaled down ways because of restrictions:

- Care day – we celebrating by flying the flag, our piper piped in celebration.
- Care packages were delivered to mark care day, summer, Easter and gifts were delivered at Christmas.
- The usual Christmas party, run by Who Cares? Scotland for our younger young people, was a great success.

In addition to the work of statutory services, Who Cares? Scotland provided a wide range of support in response to individual needs:

- 74 care experienced children, young people and care leavers received support through telephone calls, online opportunities and social contact as permitted within restrictions, and text messages to support their well-being during Covid-19 restrictions.
- 11 care experienced young people received financial support to assist with electricity, basic appliances, and amenities.
- 26 care packages consisting of food and toiletries were delivered.

Care experienced young people, working with the Social Work Team created a ‘sitooterie’ – an outdoor space where they could safely have direct contact with their supporters. This moved into small lunch time sessions, and these remain key for small numbers to come together directly.

Mentoring Young Talent workers also maintained contact with their young people through virtual contact and when restrictions eased, they undertook wellbeing walks.

Children and care leavers have safe, secure and nurturing homes

Throughout this first year of the pandemic, the Council's social work service adapted working practices to ensure that recruitment, development and support of foster carers has continued. The foster service has offered online 'skills' regularly to respond to expressions of interest in fostering. 'Skills' sessions have been with smaller numbers of potential carers, but the sessions have been held more often. One of the benefits is that the people who attend the sessions more naturally form a peer support group.

Our quality improvement project to prevent drift and delay in care planning has continued over the past year, albeit at a slower pace due to Covid-19 restrictions. Its aim is to ensure children and young people are placed at home with parents or in foster care or adoption with minimal delay.

In February 2021 Moray Council Committee approved revision to the Continuing Care Policy and approved the Transitions to Adulthood Policy, both of which were developed based on consultation with parents and young people and in response to a recent complaint. Friendly Access lead on this consultation and policy revision process.

Raising Attainment

The extent to which looked after children and care leavers were able to attend school was limited by Covid-19 restrictions. For some, this was a positive experience in that they enjoyed more time with their foster carers. This was evidenced in feedback within looked after child reviews. However, for others, the extent of impact of not being in school remains unknown. Socially children were supported through community walks, and attendance at Childcare Hubs. Through funding from Connecting Scotland, access to laptops and IT support provided to looked-after children and care experienced young people to allow them to engage in learning and support their wellbeing. Those that missed out on this funding were identified and Participatory Budgeting (PB) filled that gap.

Participatory Budgeting

Participatory Budgeting (PB) is a democratic way for people to have a direct say on how public money is spent. The Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities have made a commitment that at least 1% of local government budgets in Scotland will be subject to participatory budgeting by the end of 2021.

In summer 2020, care experienced and looked after children, supported by a range of organisations started a PB project which aimed to raise attainment in the broadest sense. This included improving health and wellbeing. 74 care experienced young people have benefited from this process. Funding has been provided for a range of supports including extra tuition, technology to engage in learning and community based activities which allow young people to engage with their peers and feel less socially isolated.

Community of School

Funding was secured in April 2020 for Moray to adopt the Community of School approach. Its aim is to support and raise the attainment of Moray's care experienced young people. There are four foundations; Individual Support through advocacy and Mentoring Young Talent; Awareness and Understanding by delivering sessions for teachers and practitioners around Corporate Parenting and the Promise; Collective Opportunity and Transitions by small group work delivered by the Youth Engagement Team. The elements of individual support and of collective opportunity have made limited progress this year, given the impact of Covid-19. However, individual support such as Mentoring Young Talent and advocacy continued.

Individual Support — Mentoring Young Talent

Funded through Scottish Attainment Challenge, the focus of this project is to support the attainment and employment outcomes for care experienced young people through mentoring.

Restrictions related to Covid-19 has impacted on the recruitment of mentors and limited the number of young people being matched with mentors. To address these issues mentor training is now online, so recruitment and mentoring activity can resume.

- 48 care experienced young people referred through 8 secondary schools.
- 14 young people have been successfully matched with volunteer mentors.
- There are currently 29 active mentors and 14 to be trained.

Individual Support — Advocacy

Consistent with The Promise, there has been increased funding for independent advocacy. The resource is now at capacity, however as the team around the child members become more consciously aware of voice and children's rights, they are ensuring that the voices of children are more obviously 'at the table'.

Within the social work service staff are being trained in family group decision making and so the voices of children and their families will be heard and active in planning their supports in ways that they haven't to date.

One key issue that our children and young people raise in their advocacy sessions, which is consistent with the findings within The Promise, is their wish to have more and/or better time with family, friends, and other trusted adults. Sustaining and maintaining relationships and enjoying time together has been prioritised over the last year. This has been achieved in a number of ways including online, through socially distanced walks, face to face meetings outside and through text messages and check-ins.

Our children and young people have told us that language matters to them and have worked on their preferred words. Family time is now more regularly spoken about rather than contact; brothers and sisters rather than siblings; under supported families rather than families in need.

Better Meetings

The Better Meetings project is funded mainly through Life Changes Trust (LCT) with some Scottish Attainment Challenge funding. This is a partnership of young people working together with Who Cares? Scotland: representatives from Children Hearings Scotland. The focus of the project is to improve the experience that young people have of meetings in general, but especially of their more formal meetings. This includes experience of the meeting before, during and after. It also relates to the physical environment in which the meeting is held.

The work of the Better Meetings group is powerful. It has been completely developed and shaped by the young people, who have made three films highlighting how formal meetings can feel and what could be done to make them better. They will be used to raise awareness and support the development of practitioners responsible for supporting children and young people in meetings.

In terms of environment, the meeting rooms used for children's hearings and those used for looked after child reviews and case conferences, are being revamped by a number of our young people, acting together with Who Cares? Scotland, Children's Hearing Scotland and reviewing officers.

20 care experienced young people, aged between 10 and 23 years were involved in the Better Meetings Project.

Awareness raising and development opportunities

There have been several awareness raising and development sessions for staff, attended by some of our care experienced young people, and one specific session for councillors, relating to the Promise and how we might embed the recommendations within it.

Immediately prior to lockdown, we hosted a multi-agency 'Voice of the Child' event which was attended by the designated leads for corporate parenting in schools; social workers; hearing members and Who Cares? Scotland. This session was designed to support designated leads to be confident in their role for care experienced children and young people and for those attending to really hear what our young people are telling us about their experiences of being cared for and the systems round them.

In late 2020, 45 staff from several organisations came together to consider the foundations of the Promise. There have been further development sessions for Corporate Parents to look at what The Promise is asking of us in terms of systems change. Feedback was returned from 20 who attended indicating an improved knowledge and understanding.

A development session to consider key issues in housing and the expectations of The Promise was attended by approx. 40 people. Various policies are now being reviewed in light of young people's feedback including the option of a single point of contact instead of differing housing officials and change to the notice period for council tax payments once young people reach 26.

Feedback and experiences of care experienced young people through the justice system are being captured through a series of interviews. Feedback from young people has resulted in a change in practice for people who complete community payback orders. Those completing an order will receive what is in effect a reference evidencing what skill and experience they gained.

LOOKING FORWARD

As we transition into the Covid-19 recovery phase, we will build on our learning over the past year, both in terms of how we work together and where we prioritise our collective resources and effort.

To do this, we pledge to listen more to the views of children, families, communities and the workforce who support them. We believe listening is fundamental to delivering the improvements we need and want to make over the forthcoming year and beyond.

We will retain a clear focus on our children, young people who are most in need of our care and attention, whilst also delivering effective early intervention and preventative support to all. The UNCRC will continue underpin everything we do.

#Keepthepromise

Over the past year our focus has been on accessing funding to support the implementation of The Promise in Moray, as well as raising awareness of both its importance and the responsibilities we collectively have to ensure that Moray's children grow up loved, safe and respected.

Our key priority over the next year will be to agree and begin implementing the changes we need to make to our systems, culture, and practice in order to deliver the outcomes outlined in the Promise Plan 2021- 2024.

Strengthening our data for strategic planning and Improvement

We recognise that we need to strengthen our partnership approach to performance and improvement. Our goal over the next year is to improve our collective use of data and strengthen the way data is used to review outcomes and experiences across all aspects of wellbeing. We will focus on connecting the data available at both strategic and operational levels with meaningful evidence about the lived experience and life opportunities of children, young people and families who live in the communities which make up Moray. Our streamlined locality planning model will be a key vehicle through which we can collect and act on emerging evidence and themes. This will be supplemented by the findings of the national Health and Wellbeing Survey which schools will undertake with pupils throughout Moray.

The 1-2 days a week support we have secured of the national Children and Young People's Improvement Collaborative (CYPIC) will help us to deliver on our commitment to adopt a QI methodology approach to test, measure, implement and spread new and better ways of working, so our services are more effective and responsive to the needs of children, young people and families.

Streamlining, improving and coordinating our partnership working

We recognise that we need to strengthen our partnership working, building on the successful partnerships developed to rapidly respond to the challenges posed by the pandemic. Over the coming year, we will review the way that groups supporting the work of the Child Protection Committee and GIRFEC Leadership Group function, both independently and together in order to improve planning and reduce duplication. This will include review of support functions required to enable them to progress a manageable number of improvements at pace.

In particular, we will strive to further strengthen partnership working with our communities and 3rd sector.

Workforce development

A strong, skilled, resilient, trauma informed workforce is essential to deliver the improvements alongside children, families and communities. A Short Life Working group has been established to assess the partnership practice development requirements and agree the specific actions required on a single agency and a multi-agency basis. The review, implementation and resourcing of these requirements is a key priority of the GIRFEC Leadership Group over the coming year.

Outlined below are the specific actions we plan to take to progress our 4 key priorities

Priority 1 — the wellbeing of children and young people is improved

- Further develop our early intervention mental wellbeing supports and services, ensuring they provide coordinated, accessible, and effective support for children and families.
- Implement our mental wellbeing improvement project, with the support of the national Children and Young People's Improvement Collaborative (CYPIC) team.
- Enable and support the development and provision of an out-of-hours CAMHS service in Moray for young people up to the age of 25yrs who may be experiencing acute distress or have a mental health condition.
- Progress with the implementation and embedding of the Young Carers Statement, to help early identify young carers and to ensure that there is a plan to help them, to work out how caring affects their life and to provide help, support and intervention(s) which will improve their health and wellbeing.
- Develop a central repository of family supports, so everyone knows what supports are available and how to access them.
- Provide school holiday and out of school activity options for children, young people and families which allow them to reconnect with one another and their communities. Ensure barriers to engagement are understood and addressed.
- Continue to monitor and address the wellbeing needs and concerns of all children, young people and their parents, as Covid-19 restrictions ease.

Priority 2 — keeping children and young people safe and free from harm

- Increase Domestic Abuse informed support for children & families through the partnership wide roll-out of the Safe and Together practice model.
- Introduce a focused approach to supporting parents through the use of the Graded Care Profile 2 strengths-based assessment tool.
- Implement an improvement project which will inform our design and delivery of holistic family support in Moray.
- Pilot strengths based and collaborative decision making through the exploration of Family Group Decision Making and/or Signs of Safety approaches.
- Develop safer spaces and places for children, through exploration of the contextual safeguarding framework.
- Continue efforts to raise awareness using campaigns through different media, working with children, families and communities to spread key messages about protecting children.

Priority 3 — mitigate the impact of poverty on children, young people and their families

- Build participation and engagement with children and families to better understand the impact of poverty and enable them to participate in shaping supports, services and investment decisions.
- Ensure that families are not limited in their ability to participate or to receive the services they need because of not having the digital access or the necessary equipment. We aim to make sure that more families have better access to devices and connectivity, and we will create opportunities to learn digital skills.
- Continue to work together to make sure that families are aware of and are supported to access the financial support they are entitled to. We will implement an improvement project to identify and address the barriers families currently face.
- Build the confidence of our paid and voluntary workforce to talk to families about financial worries. We will provide a range of training and resource materials to help them to feel more confident and better able to identify and support families experiencing poverty.

Priority 4 — improve outcomes for Looked After and Care Experienced Young People

- Continue to develop ways to ensure the voices of looked after and care experienced young people are heard. This includes coordinating the work of recently funded Promise posts.
- Address the funding requirements of the Champions Board.
- Develop a dataset that reflects the experience of Looked after and Care Experienced Young People within its systems and processes.

Through the development of our local Promise implementation plan we will identify further actions we need to take to improve outcomes for looked after and care experienced young people in Moray over the next 3 years.



