

Aberdeenshire Year-3

Joint Child Poverty Local Action Report

April 2020 - March 2021



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Foreword

Local Voices

“The decisions Council officials or politicians make need to reflect the people those decisions directly affect right down to the poor families. So yes, if you want equality & equal rights for all. Yes, we need to be part of the process”

“It is imperative that grass roots people are continually involved going forward as they are the end service user of anything provided by the council. Furthermore, people have encouraged us to take part, feel valued and appreciated and that our voices matter.”

Joint Statement from Jim Savege, Chief Executive Aberdeenshire Council and Caroline Hiscox, Chief Executive NHS Grampian

The publication of our third joint Local Child Poverty Action Report reflects our continued commitment to reducing poverty across all our communities whilst understanding that the impact of Covid-19 compels us to place an even greater urgency on the actions that we need to take to support our communities.

Tackling poverty and addressing inequalities requires partnership and collaboration and we are proud of the strong relationships and shared values across our Community Planning Partnerships that enable this. We know the complex origins of poverty require us to be creative in our response and this presents us with opportunities to work in innovative ways with our third sector colleagues and communities. We saw many fantastic examples of partnership work over the past year that ensured services and support continued to be delivered to families and we saw communities pulling together to support each other in new ways.

We continue to explore opportunities within our organisations to support our own staff, many of whom may be experiencing the impacts of poverty in their own lives, perhaps for the first time.

We want them to feel supported and secure, and to know where to turn to for help. We also want them to be well equipped to identify and respond appropriately to those in their care who are experiencing poverty.

Our most important stakeholders in helping us to understand the impacts of poverty and informing our actions to address it are, of course, those who experience it. We know many children and families have been less visible during the pandemic and that some of those families, who were already vulnerable or marginalised in our communities, have been further impacted by their experiences over the last year.

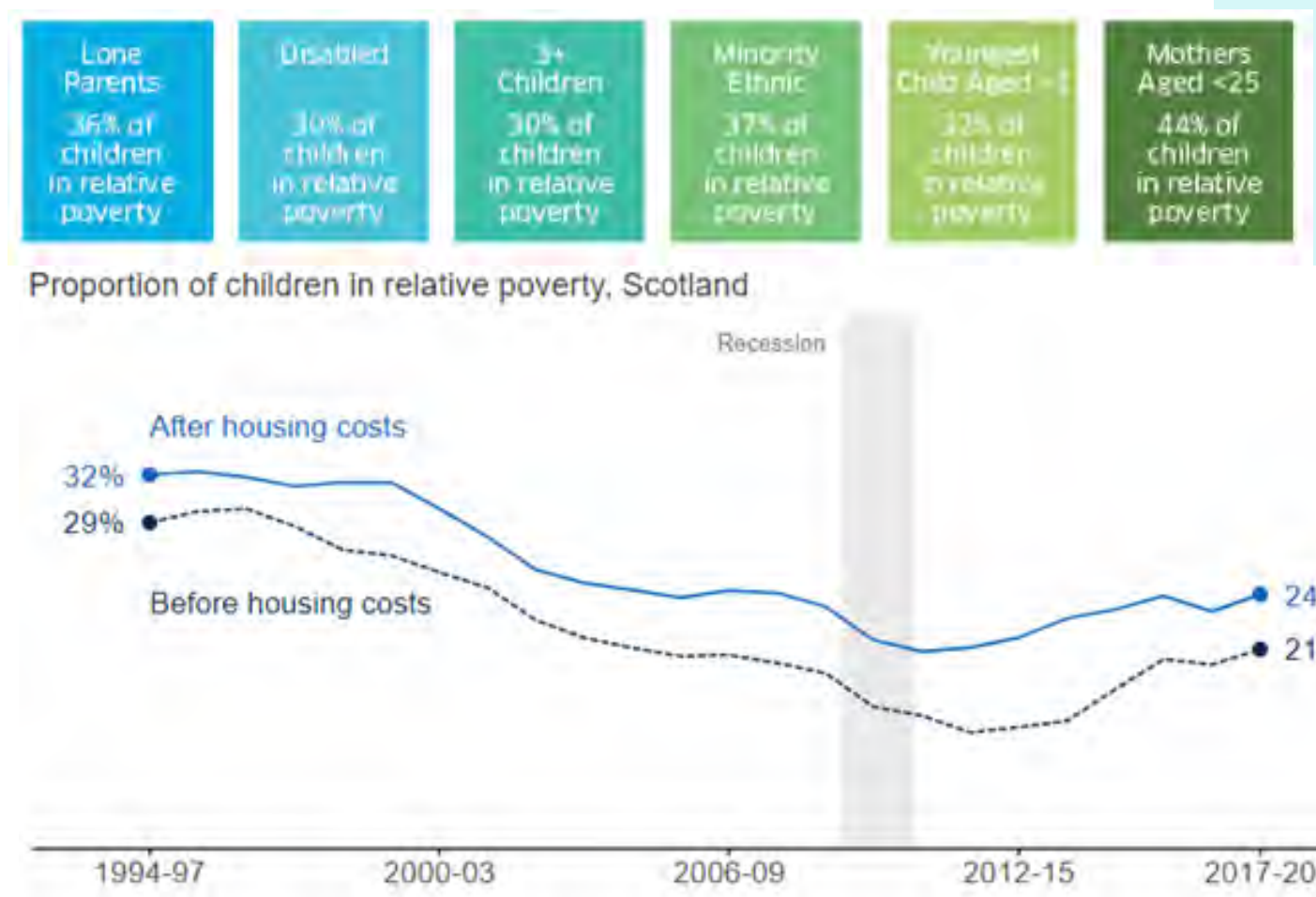
For that reason, we know that there is a lot for us still to understand and we are committed to listening to the voices of children, young people, and families to help us shape our rights-based response to tackling child poverty in Aberdeenshire and you will read about our plans and the actions we are taking within this report.

We believe that by working together we can support every child to have every chance and help achieve the Scottish Government's ambition to eradicate child poverty by 2030.

National Context

In Scotland it is estimated the 24% of children were living in relative poverty after housing costs 2017-20. Before housing costs, it is estimated that 21% of children were in relative poverty

There are groups, noted below, where there is strong evidence that the risk of poverty is higher. The majority of these households have at least one adult in work. However, there are barriers that throw up additional challenges for these parents in the workplace, meaning that many are at higher risk of poverty because they are unable to work enough hours and/or earn a high enough wage. Economic impacts will be felt disproportionately by women, those from minority ethnic communities and disabled people. (Source: Protecting Scotland, Renewing Scotland Report Sept 2020)



(Source: Scot Gov)

The Child Poverty (Scotland) Act, passed unanimously by the last parliament, requires the new Scottish government to ensure fewer than 18% of children are living in poverty by 2023/24, on course to less than 10% by 2030. Councils and local health boards are also required to publish annual Local Child Poverty Action Reports setting out action being taken at local level to tackle child poverty.

Local Context - What do we know?

Child Poverty - After Housing Costs

Aberdeenshire 2018/19 - 15.7%

Aberdeenshire 2019/20 - 16.7%

Aberdeenshire

Parliamentary Constituencies

Banff and Buchan 2018/19 - 20.4%

Banff and Buchan 2019/20 - 21.3%

Gordon 2018/19 - 13.0%

Gordon 2019/20 - 14.3%

West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine
2018/19 - 11.3%

West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine
2019/20 - 12.4%

The strong partnership approach which has developed around this agenda has secured a range of local data sources that are used to inform our priorities and inform our action plan. The data sets which are used reflect local and national trends.

Drivers

Income from social security and benefits in kind

Data Source: Information & advice quarterly returns, Social Security Scotland, DWP, Aberdeenshire Support & Advice Team, Financial Inclusion partners

Income from employment

Data Source: Aberdeenshire Employability Partnership, Skills Development Scotland, Economic Development, Procurement team.

Costs of living, including housing, food and fuel costs

Data Source: Aberdeenshire Financial Inclusion Partners including Foodbanks, SCARF, Social Housing partners and Aberdeenshire Council Housing service.

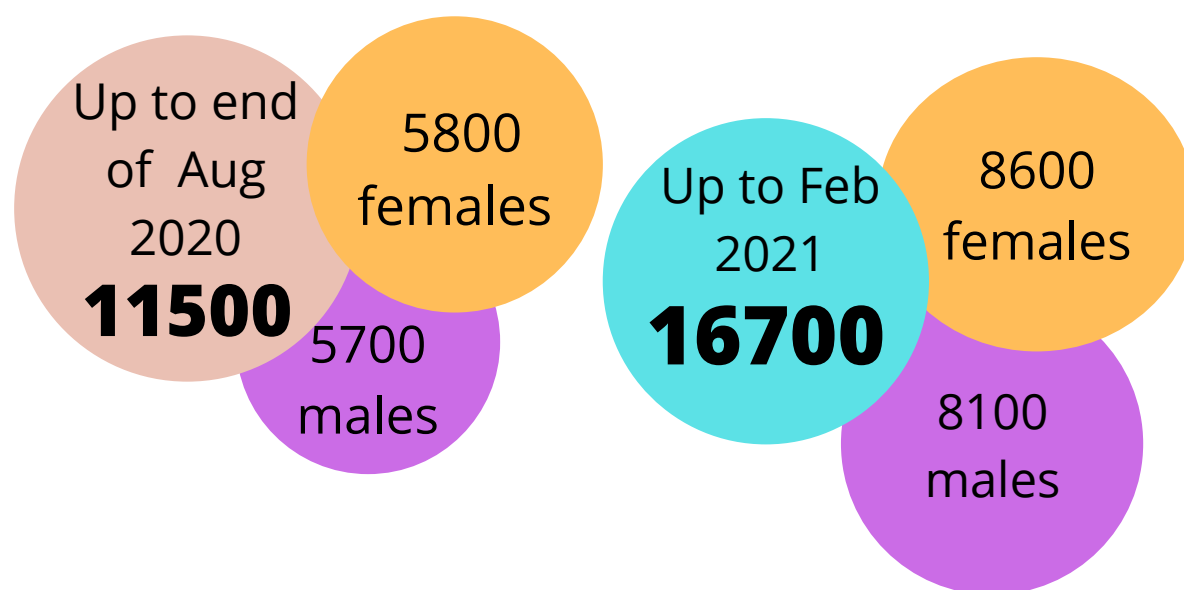
The data is only one aspect that is used to identify gaps and trends. Additional information gathered from those with lived experience highlights the complex nature of poverty and its effects on children, young people and families, therefore those voices continue to inform services, policies and practice.

Impact of Covid-19

Employability

Aberdeenshire was highlighted as the 4th most vulnerable local authority in the Oxford Economics Vulnerability Index. Business environment and digital connectivity contribute most to the locality's vulnerability, suggesting poor broadband speeds and low rates of working from home.

Emerging unemployment rates revealed the following number of jobs furloughed in Aberdeenshire:



An increase of 30% over a six-month period

Further concerns raised by the community, through the Aberdeenshire Covid Community Impact Assessment (Aug 2020), related to the end of furlough, increased unemployment, reduction of available jobs, pay cuts, communities that already have high levels of poverty and the readiness of the Universal Credit to cope with the increased applications. Increased unemployment and altered jobs market are likely to have a disproportionate impact on women (and therefore children).

Reduction in household income

The benefits linked data tells us that we have seen an increase in the need of Universal Credit across every Ward area in Aberdeenshire, comparing 2019 to 2020.

Aberdeenshire Areas – Benefit Statistics (2019/20)

There is an increase in the numbers of children entitled to free school meals from 2748 to 4027 (68%). Partners also reported an 80% increase food parcels provided to feed children during 2020 compared to 2019 data.



In 2020/21 we spent £943,691.36 in Crisis Grants and Community Care Grants compared to £786,557.70 in 2019/20

Jan - Mar 2020

4363

All four of the Citizen Advice Bureaux who operate across Aberdeenshire reported an increase in people accessing welfare services

Jan - Mar 2021

5226



A 'zero eviction' approach has ensured that families have been able to sustain their tenancies throughout. The impact of Covid-19 on household income has also been central to the proactive approach adopted with rent strategy for 2021/22 which was reviewed during 2020/21 in order to reflect pressures on rent affordability.

An early intervention approach has been adopted by Aberdeenshire Housing Service ensuring vulnerable groups including families experiencing difficulties in paying their rent where they were linked directly to Welfare Rights and Money Advice services. This approach was developed to address concerns of the impact the pandemic was having on household income. The reduction of employment with the added costs of home learning, home working and a cold winter resulted in families struggling financially.



Partnership Structure



How are we tackling child poverty in Aberdeenshire?

In 2019/20 we identified 5 areas for further development

1. Develop targeted training and employment programmes for young people that are leaving education not only in 2020 but for the next few years.

2. COVID-19 has further increased inequalities that low-income families have around access to good quality food at an affordable price.

3. COVID-19 and the requirement for learning at home has highlighted the many issues that low-income families have around digital access.

4. COVID-19 highlighted the increased inequalities that those with a disability or medical condition have faced.

5. There has been an increase in those requiring support due to furlough, redundancies and internships and apprenticeships that ended prematurely due to the strain on businesses.

We are targeting support to priority groups. Where a project is supporting a specific group it is highlighted by the relevant gold badge

**Minority
Ethnic**

**Lone
Parents**

**Mothers
Aged <25**

**3+
Children**

**Disabled
Adult or
Child**

**Youngest
Child Aged
<1**

1. Develop targeted training and employment programmes for young people that are leaving education not only in 2020 but for the next few years.

What are we doing?

The impact of Covid has affected people's ability to engage and their mental health which has resulted in the Employability Partnership adding a pre-engagement stage to the employability pipeline. There has been a focus on increased engagement of young people in that stage through 1-1 wellbeing and mental health support. The inclusion of youth councilors will increase engagement and reduce the risk of young people becoming long term unemployed. Of our 26 employment programmes set up through our Employability Partnership portal Employment Connect 19 of these are specifically focused to support young people.



2. COVID-19 has further increased inequalities that low-income families have around access to good quality food at an affordable price.

What are we doing?

Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. States –“ Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, **including food**, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.”

During the recent pandemic there has been a focus on the accessibility and availability of food as a result of that focus a strategic approach is being developed. Work started on this in autumn 2020 and our initial approach was shared during Challenge Poverty Week in October 2020 and work on this complex strategy continues. Follow the links to view the current draft strategy and action plan.

The vision for Aberdeenshire is to -

- Ensure equity of access to good quality low-cost healthy food across Aberdeenshire.
- Ensure the rural economy support and value a local food sector which creates skilled sustainable employment.
- Ensure people have the opportunity to develop and share skills around growing, cooking and the impact food has on Health & Wellbeing.
- This work builds on the work which has been developing in response to the pandemic where an additional 24 Community Based Food projects were funded to increase availability of good quality low-cost food.



3. COVID-19 and the requirement for learning at home has highlighted the many issues that low-income families have around digital access.

What are we doing?

We recognised that issues around digital inclusion highlighted by home learning needed a partnership approach. We set up a short-term working sub-group from our Tackling Poverty and Inequalities Strategic Group. The group carried out a mapping exercise to find out what existing digital projects were being delivered across Aberdeenshire and what the purpose of the projects were. A statement of intent has now been prepared and will be presented to the Community Planning Partnership Board in June 2021.

It is proposed that the recommendations for action are used by the Tackling Poverty and Inequalities Group and the wider Community Planning Partnership to deliver a step-change in access to digital connectivity, kit and learning in Aberdeenshire. The recommendations for action from the statement are grouped into three workstreams:

- Digital access – infrastructure and kit
- Digital access – affordability
- Digital confidence – developing skills and opportunities

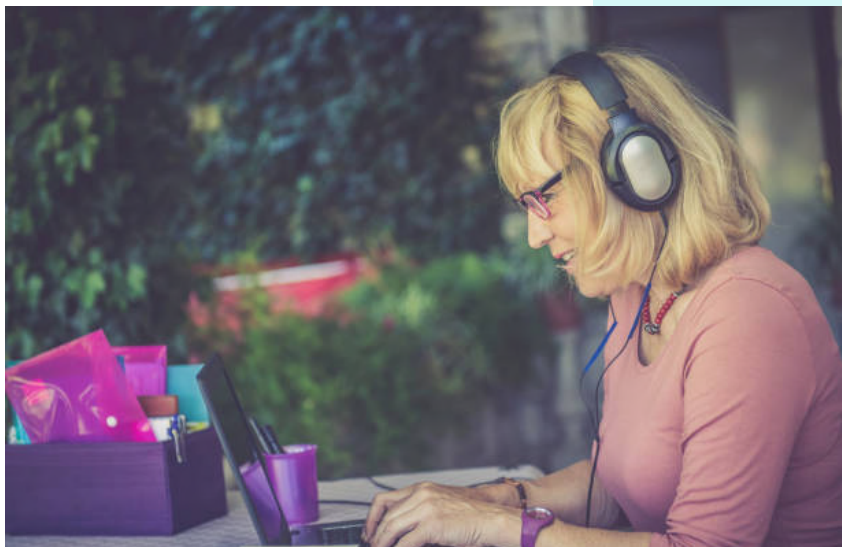
Actions will be developed with a view to making sure that all our residents and communities can engage effectively online and access services and support that help drive down the incidence of poverty in all its forms, tackle poor health and wellbeing outcomes and the lack of access to opportunities.

We have already increased digital access through developing a range of projects and using Connecting Scotland to support targeted groups.

Over phase 1 & 2 there has been over 6,462 digital kits secured and £1.4 million has been invested in ensuring families are digitally connected.

Combating digital exclusion has also been central to Housing's pandemic response with successful bids to all three phases of Connecting Scotland funding, allowing distribution of equipment to families with children'. We have also provided free internet access at our two Gypsy/Traveller sites at Aikey Brae and Banff.

Minority
Ethnic



4. COVID-19 highlighted the increased inequalities that those with a disability or medical condition have faced.

What are we doing?

Through Employment Connect we are delivering a programme to support parents with disabilities, and parents of children with disabilities, who are already in employment, to deliver an enhanced in-work support service through enhanced keyworker support.

A programme delivered by Aberdeen Foyer started in February 2021 online. 'Foyer Families' is a person centered sixteen-week employability and personal development programme delivered part time within school hours. Aimed at parents with children aged under 12 who are unemployed and those in employment and experiencing in-work poverty. These include lone parent; parent living with a disability/caring for a child with a disability; parent who has experienced trauma and/or mental health issues; parent in recovery from substance misuse; parent from a minority background. Childcare and travel costs are provided to maximise engagement opportunities. The programme is currently planned for online delivery but eventually the project will be delivered in the community using shared spaces including community centres and community hubs.

Programme Content -

The programme has four main objectives:

- Delivering accredited learning and employability skills training.
- Improving financial literacy and financial self-management skills
- Improving health and wellbeing for families
- Empowering parents to support their child's development.

10 parents started

9 have gained customer service cert

9 have gained manual handling cert



Disabled
Adult or
Child

Lone
Parents

Minority
Ethnic

To understand more about the project, you can read the [Foyer Families Year Book](#)



5. There has been an increase in those requiring support due to furlough, redundancies and internships and apprenticeships that ended prematurely due to the strain on businesses.

What are we doing?

Partnership Action for Continuing Employment (PACE) funding has been secured (£108,820) to cover additional advice and key worker support for people who are faced with redundancy situations. Through the development of a coordinated approach in place through Aberdeenshire Contact Center two modern apprenticeships have been developed to support this area of work. A skills retraining fund has been established and has been used to target Gypsy Travellers where evidence showed us that this community has been most affected through the pandemic. Many of their self-employed businesses were not always able to access the financial support. A sector specific training fund was developed to meet the needs of that community.

COVID-19 response grant funding supported Aberdeenshire businesses (£60,386,791)

Business Resilience and Sustainability Scheme (BRASS) supported 47 businesses across Aberdeenshire. (£288,361)

Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City have employed a joint workforce development officer to engage with small or medium business and public bodies such as NHS and the two Councils to help upskill working parents to earn more and have the ability to apply for better positions. Skills Development Scotland have employed an Employer Engagement officer which will work with this post to create a range of opportunities. This post is just one of the initiatives which is funded through the Parental Employment Support Fund.

Minority Ethnic

Aberdeenshire Reducing Poverty Action Plan

The action plan provides a focus for partners to ensure we are delivering to meet our priorities. The action plan is a live document, and a monitoring group meets quarterly to share data and review contents.

Reducing Poverty Action Plan 2018 – 2028 (April 2021 Update)

Impact under the Child Poverty Drivers

Maximising Income from Employment

One of the impacts of Covid was an increased number of referrals of clients who are experiencing Mental Health and Wellbeing barriers to employment, especially young people. There was a recognition that referral pathways and a range of provision required to be developed, resulting in Employment CONNECT (Aberdeenshire Employability Partnership) develop a safety net for people completing the Fair Start Scotland programme which supports the most vulnerable clients, additional support for young people through developing pre employment opportunities including wellbeing and counselling services.

Good Practice – Barnardos TRIBE

TRIBE has offered anxiety management, wellbeing coaching and support to all of our 24 starts on programme and so far, this is having a positive impact with one young person already progressing into employment as outlined in the case study below. Young People supported by TRIBE would not have sustained existing employability training and without a focus on wellbeing first and intensive 1-2-1 support, they would be unable to access the skills pipeline and progress.



Case Study for TRIBE:

“R” started working with TRIBE in April 2021 after a very negative experience with an employer in 2020 which had a huge impact on R’s self-belief, confidence, and levels of anxiety. R was also faced with the challenges of the pandemic and the impact that has had on the job market. All of this combined, took a massive toll on R and he found himself stuck in a negative thinking cycle. His confidence was very low, and he was finding it hard to see the future in a positive way.

R needed one-to-one support to help identify and break down these barriers and begin to build confidence back up about himself. R’s confidence began growing each week and the more R and his TRIBE worker built a relationship, the more he was able to open up about how he was feeling. This allowed key worker and R to work together to create an Action Plan to overcome the barriers he was facing.

TRIBE Worker and R had sessions based around exploring and developing coping strategies for R’s anxiety and building his confidence. Over a 6-week period, with support, R was able to overcome several barriers he had identified, and his anxiety levels started to reduce while his confidence started to increase. From this point R was able to start setting new goals such as learning to drive and finding suitable employment, so sessions were created to include employability training and practicing for his theory test. During R’s sessions, the TRIBE worker supported job searching via zoom while also providing employability training on topics such as Transferable Skills and Application and Interview Techniques.

After applying for several roles, R was offered an interview with a local employer. R was then supported to prepare and received intensive support in the days leading to his interview. R was successful at interview and was offered a part time role. R was ecstatic and really excited to start working. The TRIBE worker supported R to his first day and has been supporting him regularly since to ensure he settles in well. R has completed his first two weeks in work and has done so well, his employer has now increased his hours to full time. R hopes this will continue and allow him to develop his skills which can help him move towards his long-term career goals.”

Case Study – Self Employed Gypsy/ Traveller

“D” is a self-employed, applied for funding to Progress in Dialogue, Flexible Wellbeing Fund for support with employability. As a self-employed landscaper Covid-19 lockdown had meant that D wasn’t able to go out and look for work and, in their words, “everything stopped altogether” The work dried up so much that they felt they had no choice but to sell off much of their equipment so they could feed their family.



Unable to get a Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS) Covid-19 grant due to being self employed for just a year. D explained “Covid destroyed my work and meant we were barely above water as a family ... with kids to feed we have been unable to keep any money to keep my self-employed business going” D highlighted to the Community Champion that they had found a piece of essential equipment to replace what he had sold during lock down and if they could purchase this equipment, they could stay off welfare and get back into viable employment. D explained “I want to work and earn my own money. I don’t want to go on benefits”

The funding helped D to buy the equipment and get back to work. This resulted in reducing the risk of unemployment, keeping their small business viable and empowering D to earn their own money which was especially important to D and their self-worth.

Maximising Income from Benefits

Good Practice - Food and finance working in partnership

Development of an Income Maximisation service available to all who had received a food parcel through a new partnership between Aberdeenshire North Foodbank and Aberdeen Foyer. Recipients of food parcels are advised of the service at various stages of the referral and receipt process and if agreed would receive a follow up call from Financial Inclusion staff members.

Outcomes

- The top frequently raised queries were benefit checks, budgeting skills and support to apply for grants to address arrears.
- There were onward referrals to employability training, Citizens' Advice, substance misuse support services and access to free IT kits and IT skills training
- People that have engaged with this service have fed back that they are feeling more confident in asking for help in the future



**Oct 2020 to Feb 2021
345 Referrals**

**Resulting in
69
appointments**

**14 people who were
referred for support to
improve their skills for
work said that they would
not have known about the
help available if they had
not met the team**

**4 people with
improved money
management skills**

Epilepsy Fieldworker Case Study

The Epilepsy Specialist Nurses initially referred client to the service for benefit support. They have been known to the service for many years however, only requests support when in crisis.

The 31-year-old client, who is a single parent of an eight-year-old girl, has a diagnosis of Primary generalised epilepsy and can have 2-3 weeks' seizure free and then have a cluster of seizures over a couple of weeks.

The seizures are frequently prolonged, and the recovery period can be 2-3 hours. They were prescribed Midazolam. However, the client now lives alone with their daughter and there is no one to administer the medication. The client has recognised that seizure triggers are stress and lack of sleep.



May 2020

The client contacted the service to request a home visit and shared with me that she was pregnant and was anxious about her and her daughter's safety. Her partner was unsure, at that time, whether he wanted to support the client and the unborn baby, and their relationship was unstable. The client reported that there had been an increase in her seizure activity. We discussed the need for support from the GP and a referral to the Neurology Pregnancy clinic. I agreed to contact the Epilepsy Specialist Nurses for additional support. I was in fortnightly contact with the client as she experienced a lot of morning sickness and back pain.

June 2020

The client contacted me after she had a prolonged seizure and had a small bleed. This increased her anxiety levels as she was worried about her unborn child. She was admitted to hospital for a scan and observations. All was well, however, as a single parent she continually worried about the care of her eight-year-old child. The client's mother was able to provide essential support at this time.

August 2020

The client's Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) was due for renewal and I agreed to support her with her application and face-to-face interview. During the Covid-19 pandemic the client called in a distressed state, she was concerned about the restrictions and the fact her mother continues to have to shield. The client's daughter had to be home schooled for a while and she was finding it extremely difficult to educate and provide for her. They lived on the third floor and the stairs were becoming increasingly more difficult for her due to fear of having a seizure and falling and her pregnancy. I signposted to colleagues in the voluntary sector who could provide her with food parcels and medication drops. The client continued to be in financial crisis when she was notified that her ESA assessment was to take place via a telephone call. This was an increasingly anxious time for her. I supported her through her interview by way of conference call. During her interview, I was worried that she might be in labour as she was struggling to answer questions and was in a lot of lower back pain. At her request, I answered many of the questions asked of her. I followed up the assessment by contacting the client and encouraged her to arrange for a family member to stay with her. Her baby girl was born 10 days later. Mother and baby were well, and the pandemic started to lift to allow family members to support her. Her application for ESA was successful.

Outcomes

- Support through pregnancy, reducing anxiety and the triggers for her seizures.
- Support to have medication delivered and support from the local food bank.
- Financial support was successful in lieu of her ESA claim, and she and her daughters are able to pay bills and eat better.
- We applied to Cash4kids in order to support AC and her daughters through the festive period.
- Ongoing work with local housing office in order to try and get AC housed in more appropriate and safe housing. This is very challenging during the pandemic restrictions.
- Ongoing support continues.

Lone
Parents

Youngest
Child Aged
<1

Good Practice – Improving pathways for marginalised communities

Progress in Dialogue, a local organisation [[weblink](#)] who support grassroots voices, providing peer support, knowledge exchange and training opportunities; empowering them to become active citizens and tell their story, participated in Aberdeenshire's Challenge Poverty week in October 2020. The session they delivered was presented by those with lived experience from the Gypsy/Traveller community who outlined the impact of the pandemic and how decisions had increased inequalities for families within their community.

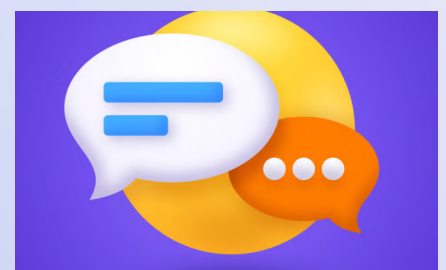
The presentation resulted in funding being allocated to Progress in Dialogue to support families from marginalized communities such as Gypsy/Traveller, LGBTQI+ and Disabled communities who were disproportionately affected by the pandemic. The funding was used to support Community Champions to increase access to relevant services and opportunities which would benefit these communities. The project delivered 155 hours of welfare rights support and 213 people benefited from the initiative. One of the aims of the project was to have a better understanding of the barriers which these communities faced when accessing services. Many families did not access support as they found the process difficult, they didn't know about the support or it was open to them and they did not trust organisations to not judge them or treated them with respect.

The full report on the short-term project can be read in the '[Flexible Wellbeing Fund Impact Report](#)' (May 2021).

The recommendations are now being considered at a strategic level within Aberdeenshire and additional funding has been secured to fund a specialist welfare rights post which Progress in dialogue will host to improve service pathways.

Mothers
Aged <25

Minority
Ethnic



Reducing Household Costs



Good Practice - Addressing Fuel Poverty

Households continued to be locked down over 2020 / 2021 resulting in larger energy bills which low-income families found challenging. A partnership project was developed lead by SCARF and Sureserve to distribute fuel vouchers for vulnerable households with pre-payment meters in Aberdeenshire. The scheme paid out 4100 fuel , each family vouchers were worth £49. This project also ensured that households were given a range of support and advice on how to reduce their future energy bills.

Fuel Poverty Details collected **225**, of which **137** households were in fuel poverty.

Behaviour Advice was provided to 810 customers, following enquiries, generated

Fuel Bill Savings – presumptive and actual fuel bill savings from supplier switching.

45 customers assisted resulted in £5,959.86 in savings

Annual savings of £87,545

Carbon Savings of 264.18

Debt Savings

Total debt reported by 39 customers £24,734.31

Total debt written off for total of 4 customers £1,792.29

Fuel Bill Discounts

Warmer Homes Discount assisted 77 customers with a total saving of £10,780

Redress Fund assisted 319 customers with a total savings of £15,631



Learning from the pandemic

Over the last year practice and services have had to develop to change to meet the evolving effects of the pandemic. A reflection on the last 12 months can be structured under a number of themes:

Flexible and responsive approach

Partners reported that all the families, households and communities they had been affected by the pandemic. The lock-downs and restrictions resulted in seeing household costs increased, a reduction of household income, an increase use of foodbanks and community-based food outlets and an increase in those seeking financial support. Partners reported that a high-level client have never accessed these services before therefore it was important to streamline support pathways and ensure people could access a range of support from their first contact.

The links between delivery partners around financial inclusion, employability and wellbeing had to be strengthened to ensure people could access services and support when they required, especially for those on furlough who found the range of support and processes to access services confusing and intimidating.

A flexible fund was developed to support those who didn't meet the criteria for other financial support to reduce the risk of high levels of debt, homelessness and food insecurity.

Employability partners refocused their support to those most effected by the pandemic including those on furlough who were supported to look at upskilling and retraining.

Challenging practice

Local Voices have continued to share their experience of the effects of the pandemic which has been used to not only inform practice but develop new structures / services. One of these areas of change is the provision of free school meals. There is a duty place of Aberdeenshire Council to provide a free school meal, however there are circumstances where a providing a meal to pupils is difficult. There has always been a duty to provide families in receipt of free school meals, including when children are not attending school for any particular reason. During 2020 and 2021, the pandemic resulted in direct payments into bank accounts for families who would otherwise receive free school meals. This cash first response was agreed due to the rural nature of Aberdeenshire, the decision was taken to give direct payment. Once schools reopened it became apparent that a formal system was required to be developed to support equitable access to free school meal provision.

A new process has been developed to ensure those that require free school meals and may have challenges in accessing these within a school setting can access a range of support including a direct payment option. This process is responsive and ensures families who have a change in circumstance can access a range of support within 48hours of the referral being made to the cross-sector panel.



Opportunities to review practice

Over the last year partners have delivered their support, opportunities and services using mainly virtual platforms. This report has highlighted the challenges for partners and families around digital inclusion. One lesson which is being explored is the effect the virtual services have had on referral pathways especially the Financial Health Check pathway which was being established prior to the pandemic. These pathways had been developed using trusted venues, including GP Surgeries to increase access to information & advice services especially for those who were expecting a child or had a baby under 12 months. These pathways were monitored and reviewed over the last 12 months and where they had been established prior to the pandemic the up take continued to be high. As restrictions were imposed and GP Surgery reduced their footfall all of these services were then delivered online or over the phone. In some areas the referrals through the pathways were limited and, in some cases, none were coming forward. Those areas where staff had not been able to develop a face-to-face relationship with health visitors, maternity staff or the clients themselves seemed to have resulted in low or no referrals. This finding highlighted that using a trusted venue was not the only element required. However, what seemed more important was the opportunity to build trusted relationships between partners. Partners agreed to develop a pilot project which will be developed within a new maternity unit as a test of change.

The pandemic has given partners the opportunity to develop creative and responsive models of working to ensure those who require support will continue to access it. The past 12 months has seen improved partnership working and the opportunity to reflect and improve services to ensure inequalities are reduce going forward.

A range of case studies and good practice has been collated and can be found via this [link](#).

GOOD PRACTICE



Priorities for 2021/22

Partners will continue to deliver positive outcomes for children, young people and their families through the delivery of the Child Poverty Action Plan.



Several areas of improvement have been identified and these form our priorities for the next 12 months:

Work to establish affordable credit in Aberdeenshire

To continue to explore options for Aberdeenshire, using the research carried out by Carnegie Trust as a starting point for development.

To increase financial skills & income maximisation programmes to increase people's knowledge around affordable credit.

Further development of the lived experience forum and framework to ensure participation

To increase the voice of Young People & Children within the decision-making process at all levels through a range of opportunities including co production of programmes, strategies and informing practice.

To increase the range of voices heard through developing a lived experience network which will result in a higher number of services and programmes that are co produced.

Development of effective and integrated service pathways

To continue to strengthen links between partners through the delivery of a range of training opportunities, joint referral pathways and co delivery of services.

Embed a Right's Based approach to programmes and services

The partners recognise that taking a right's-based approach is key to embedding our practice of working with those with lived experience as partners. Our GIRFEC Strategic Group has set up a Children's Rights and Participation group chaired by the Child Health Commissioner for NHS Grampian. Young people are currently being trained up to be assessors for an award scheme they would like to roll out that will give services and organisations an award if they are upholding Children & Young People's rights.