

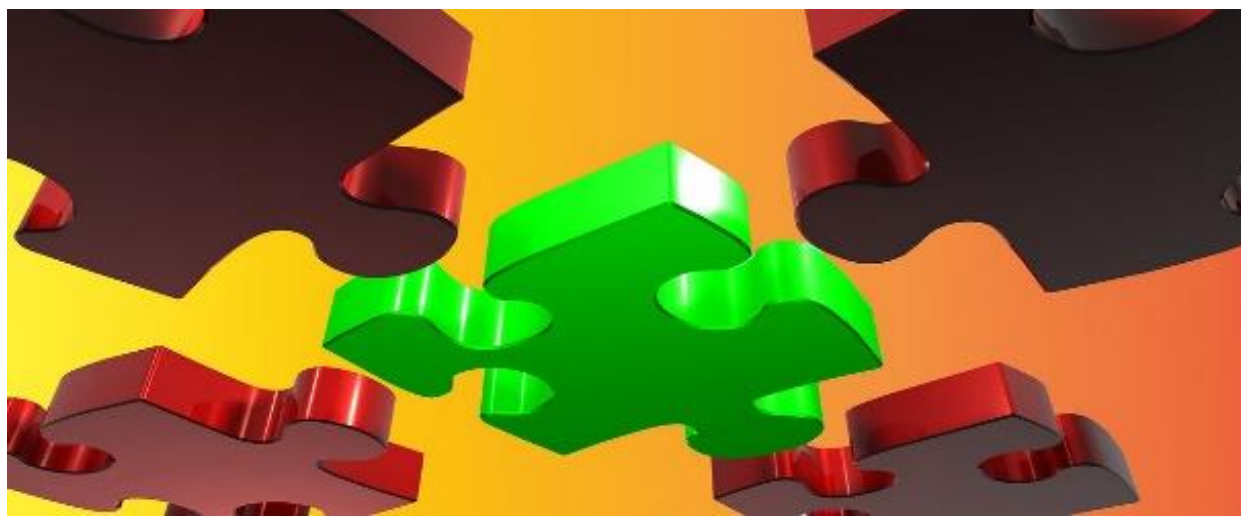
# Aberdeenshire Child Poverty Local Action Report

April 2021 – March 2022



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## **Families Forewords**



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

**- Expert Forum Member, 2021**

## **Partnership Promise**

In Aberdeenshire there is a strong commitment from partners at all levels not only to reduce Child Poverty across Aberdeenshire but to ensure children, young people and their families have the best outcomes possible, now and in the future.

Together we are challenging stigma and ensuring local voices are heard when decisions are being made and services are being developed. This engagement has made a difference for families as they have seen an improvement in service delivery, but more importantly the process has empowered them to become more active in their community, reducing the stigma which they have previously experienced.

Together we have improved financial inclusion and employability pathways for low-income families by delivering Integrated services to ensure people can access the help and support when they need them most.

Together we are working to develop interventions to support families to improve health & wellbeing, ensure they have a voice in developing opportunities which reduces fuel poverty, increases youth opportunities especially within the rural and remote communities across Aberdeenshire.

This is a shared agenda and must be a priority for us all. This report highlights some of the excellent and positive work being delivered in very challenging times. It is increasingly important that the partnership between local voices and the community planning partners is strengthened as it will need all of us working closely together to ensure that what we are delivering will support those most affected by the current economic circumstances.

**- Cllr Anne Stirling, Chair of the Aberdeenshire Community Planning Board**

## Aberdeenshire Data



**Aberdeenshire** is one of Scotland's 14 rural authorities and is defined as 'mainly rural'. We are the fourth largest geographical local authority in Scotland

- Our population is 260,780 with 19% aged under 16.
- Around 8,000 children in Aberdeenshire live in poverty

The economy of rural Scotland is both similar to, and tightly integrated with the economy of urban Scotland. However distinct differences, often related to distance and scarcity, remain between urban and rural economies. These differences may contribute to an even greater level of inequality particularly for low-income families.

The data below is the most up to date that is available, however, we know through the increased need for foodbanks, welfare rights advice and increased numbers of those on free school meals that the levels of child poverty have increased.

The data does not reflect the impact of Covid, withdrawal from the European Union and the current cost of living crisis, all of which are yet to be fully understood.

### *Percentage of Children (Aged Under 16) living in Relative Poverty*

Area	Number of Children 18/19	Number of Children 19/20	Percentage of Children 18/19	Percentage of Children 19/20
Banff & Buchan	2458	2535	15%	16%
Gordon	1672	1804	9%	10%
West Aberdeenshire & Kincardine	1407	1497	8%	8%

Area	0-5	5-10	11- 15	Lone parent	In Work	Not in work
Banff & Buchan	28%	<b>38.8%</b>	33.2%	<b>47.3%</b>	<b>67.2%</b>	32.8%
Gordon	25.6%	<b>40.9%</b>	33.5%	<b>49.1%</b>	<b>70.5%</b>	29.5%
West Aberdeenshire & Kincardine	23.6%	<b>38.5%</b>	37.9%	<b>50.3%</b>	<b>73.4%</b>	26.6%

The data highlights that more working lone parent families with primary school age children have a greater chance of living in poverty. This trend fits with the national priorities set out within **Best Start, Bright Futures**.

## Aberdeenshire's Approach

In Aberdeenshire, our approach to tackling poverty focusses on early intervention and prevention.

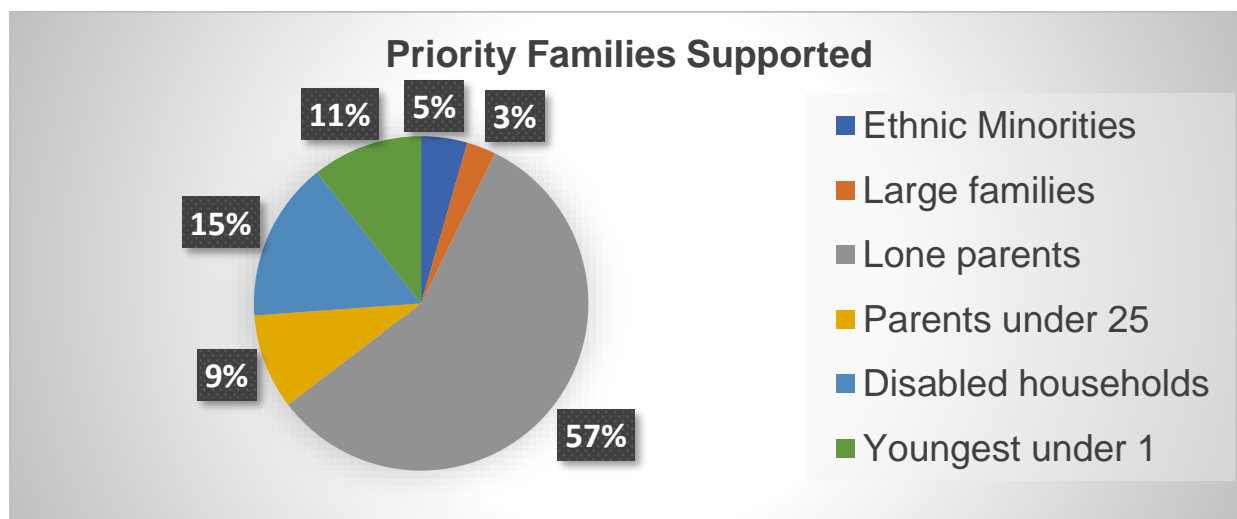
Tackling the root causes of poverty and building people's capabilities through income maximisation, employability and promoting positive life chances.

A partnership approach is vital in ensuring opportunities and services are accessible and relevant. The most important partner is those with lived experience who are central to all the work.

This agenda is complex however there are streams which have been developed in reducing inequalities and tackling poverty.



The impact of Covid and withdrawal from Europe has resulted in an increase in living costs when in cash terms incomes have decreased. Families and partners have raised concerns around the high prices of fuel, food and essential items with families seeking financial support for the first time. The partners have worked with 904 priority families to increase income, reduce costs, improve employability, and ensure they can access a range of opportunities.



## Making Employment work for families

*“I have met so many amazing people, staff, and others on the course, I have loved every minute. I can’t wait for my new job to start, thanks for the support to get here, it’s been great having you to help me when I have needed it”*

**– Participant of “Foyer Families”, an employability programme supporting parents**

### What are we doing in Aberdeenshire?

The parental support fund of £275,999 has enabled the development of a range of projects to support parents not only into work but to progress and identify careers which can ensure sustained employment. This resulted in 194 parents from the priority families that have been supported to participate in employability programmes.

Delivering Foyer Families targeting young parents under 25 years.

Ensuring everyone has digital kit and skills required to participate in training, further education, and employment opportunities.

Continue to engage with parents to identify areas of improvements, barriers to employment and identify solutions to ensure the programmes and employment supports meet their needs.

### What are the challenges?

A high number of low-income families are employed in the care, processing, agriculture, or retail sector where wages are low and hours can be limited, therefore access to affordable flexible childcare is important to allow parents to continue to work. The investment in additional childcare hours for early years has been welcomed however not all working families living in a rural area can access these hours as they have school age children who also require flexible childcare. Families have identified flexible affordable childcare places that would support them to secure good paid employment.

Accessible and affordable transport has been identified as a barrier to securing sustained employment, especially those living in rural and remote areas. Home working has supported those that have limited or no transport however the digital connections in those areas can be fragile.

Several families have raised the issue of the low number of family friendly employers who can offer sustainable employment in the rural areas. Several lone parents or parents with a disabled child have found it increasingly difficult to find local employment with hours that can be flexible around transport and childcare. These parents have taken up several part-time posts to ensure that flexibility.

### What are we going to do?

- Develop flexible childcare pathways especially targeting families living in the rural areas.
- Target disabled households who are struggling to access employment opportunities
- Ensure flexible funds are in place to support parents to reduce the barriers ensuring sustained employment.
- Supporting employers, partners, and local business to pay the living wage and develop good working practice.



## **Case Study - HomeStart North East**

A single teenage parent with one young child living in private rented accommodation. They recently relocated back to Aberdeenshire to be closer to family.

Mum described living with challenging mental health disorders. Mum does not drive so felt very isolated at the time with very little support network around the family unit resulting in challenges around coping with the behaviour and development of her young child.

As a low-income family they could pay the rent however they found it difficult to purchase some basic essentials i.e., clothes, kid's shoes, food, and other baby essentials.

Home-Start assessed that Mum was struggling with her own confidence and parenting abilities. Mum had concerns around child development and their challenging behaviour which exasperated her mental health and anxiety. The lack of affordable transport and childcare made accessing crucial mental health services impossible as they were in Aberdeen. The journey was not just expensive but would take 120 mins one way. The lack of peer support for both herself and her child and the impact of being a low-income family that could not cover costs of the basic living essentials increased her hopelessness.

### **Impact**

Through weekly support from both volunteer and staff, Mum built confidence in her abilities as a parent, provided her with emotional support when required, offered further practical support including application for eligible 'two's' nursery place for her child, support to access further appointments, outdoor weekly meets progressing to indoor groups as restrictions eased. Mum was able to budget and secure financial help to cover driving lessons and pass her driving test.

Mum successfully attended a 16-week course run by a local service which was beneficial, then progressed into the Prince's Trust which further built confidence in her own abilities. As a result of all the support she has received, she has been able to secure full time employment and is looking forward to being able to have more consistency in her family's life as well as being able to provide the essentials and lift the family out of poverty.

The family are still being supported by Home-Start to ensure Mum's transition into full time employment is successful and to allow some support should the family require it.

### **Client's voice**

**“Home-Start has been so crucial to learning about building trust with other people and knowing there was someone there if I needed to talk about what was going on.**

**I am so proud of myself because I have achieved so much, and I know I can support my family in the future.**

**Home-Start has been absolutely fantastic for myself and my little one, they have been a real lifeline. They go above and beyond for us physically and emotionally.**

**I am so thankful for Home-Start, they have been nothing short of angels for myself and my family.”**

## **Making Every Opportunity Count for families**

**“All children deserve the same opportunity in life regardless of where they live or what their family bring in financially. After Covid a lot of kids from all backgrounds may need extra support mentally and educationally.”**

**- Lived Experience forum member**

### What are we doing in Aberdeenshire?

Aberdeenshire Council and its partners operate a cash first approach and several wellbeing funds have been created to support those families in financial crisis.

We have developed the Fair Food Aberdeenshire partnership which addresses food insecurity, supports the rural economy, highlights environmental issues and links in with the Community Planning Local Outcomes Improvement Plan Priority Healthy Eating, Active Living (HEAL) ensuring active lifestyles are open to all.

Streamlining information and referral pathways through the development of the Worried About Money Leaflet in response to the issues highlighted by those with lived experience. Integrating welfare rights/ money advice with employability programmes, foodbanks, medical practices and within community organisations ensuring parents only need to tell their story once.

Providing activity opportunities through delivery of the ‘Summer of Fun’ programme which supported 49,071 children /young people and their families. As a result of its success further programmes were delivered through the October and Easter holidays, resulting in 60,918 children and young people participating in a range of free activities.

We delivered mobile food outlet pilot project which targeted those rural communities with no transport to access good quality fresh produce at an affordable price.

### What are the challenges?

Transport is an issue for low-income families as it reduces choice when shopping for food, clothes and basic items, childcare, accessing sustained employment, and other services. Home Energy Scotland and advice services have seen an increase in households with children seeking advice on how to reduce their fuel bills however a high number of these households are already on the best deal.

There are many families experiencing fuel poverty who are in social housing or private rent who are unable to take up support schemes which can insulate their homes, reduce their energy bills through heating up grades.

Those experts of experience still highlight the stigma they feel when accessing services especially for the first time. The perception of those who are living in poverty can be very negative therefore people from smaller communities are hesitant to come forward.

Navigating through the information to access the most appropriate service for families in crisis can be difficult which adds to the stress and anxiety that family feels.



## What are we going to do?

- Develop a cash first partnership across Aberdeenshire which will look at how we can reduce the need for foodbanks
- Expand the training and support for partners to support integration of services, resulting in better inclusion.
- Deliver an integrated skills and support hub within a rural area as a test of change on how future services could be delivered using a dignified and inclusive approach.
- Build capacity of partners to deliver a range of services which supports those families most effected by the cost-of-living crisis.

## **Case study - Heat & Eat – SCARF**

The Heat & Eat Scheme supports households struggling with fuel poverty and in particular families on prepaid meters or off the grid heating with school and younger age children.

The scheme supported these families through issuing food and fuel vouchers, which provided an immediate response to the crisis. The greater benefits of this scheme were the support around energy saving advice, supplier switching, understanding fuel bills and effective use of heating controls. This wrap around, ongoing service ensures longer term behaviour change for the families.

### **Client 1**

Client originally called in to see if SCARF could help her with her fuel costs as she has two prepayment meters, one for gas and the other for electric. The household is made up of 2 adults and three children and as a big family they struggle to make ends meet even in term time. They were spending around £30 per week on fuel however typically this would have been £40-£50 in the colder months. The client received a change of supplier assessment, a fuel voucher and £150 of Aldi vouchers.

The client was delighted that she had received everything that had been discussed. The fuel voucher was used solely on the gas pre-paid meter for hot water for showers etc and the Aldi vouchers are enough for her to get two full weeks of proper family shopping which was a big relief.

### **Client 2**

This client originally called in because she had heard that we were helping people who were struggling to afford their food shopping. The client and her partner are homeowners whose circumstances have changed due to COVID, and their income now comprises of Universal Credit and Child Benefit. They live in an all-electric property with a prepayment meter, more than 27% of their joint income goes on fuel.

The client received a supplier switching check, £49 fuel voucher and £100 of Aldi shopping vouchers.

The client was convinced that she would not qualify for anything, but a friend had encouraged her to call. She has a dog and the fact that she will be able to buy pet food as well as do a proper family food shop was a huge relief. She could hardly believe that she will receive £100 of food vouchers.

## **Making the future possible for all**

***“This is where we can make real changes. I am not doing this for myself but for the future generation. The change needs to start somewhere”***  
**– Expert panel member**

### What are we doing in Aberdeenshire?

Supporting young people to build the skills and confidence to secure sustained employment through the Young Person’s Guarantee scheme, which has invested £583,128 into supporting young people ensuring they have a positive future.

Supporting 14 groups of young people using a rights-based approach to develop and deliver youth services, widen the voice, and empower them to challenge poverty and inequalities at a local and national level.

Developing a lived experience network which represents 11 third sector partners and 8 Aberdeenshire Council Services.

Increase skills and knowledge around poverty and inequalities to reduce stigma and ensure interventions are inclusive. Sessions have been delivered to schools, front line staff and volunteers. 38 people have participated in these sessions (Dec 2021-Mar 2022).

### What are the challenges?

Aberdeenshire is a large rural area resulting in not only low-income families paying a poverty premium for services and goods, but rural areas also have higher costs in relation to food, fuel, transport, and childcare.

Accessing services and opportunities is not equitable across the areas as some remote and rural communities have been disadvantaged by centralising services such as health care.

### What are we going to do?

- Pilot digital inclusion within temporary accommodation that is used by families.
- Support young people to deliver a Youth Summit which will focus on Poverty and Inequalities and use a solution focused approach.
- Continue to ensure those with lived experience are developing and improving practices, services, and opportunities. A lived experience conference will be delivered in October 2022 which will encourage coproduction and development of future interventions and services.
- Continue to ensure stigma is reduce through integration of services and clear pathways are developed.

### **Case Study - Barnardo's Works**

One young person that was referred to the project at first would not talk at all and all communication was done through mum. He had no email address and has never used a phone or video call. His mum explained he never has and refuses to do so.

After two sessions, the young person began to communicate and mentioned that before lockdown he liked to get the bus to Aberdeen by himself, but since his bus pass expired, he hadn't really gone anywhere.

This young person was suspected to have ADHD and autism however with no official diagnosis they were not able to get a disability bus pass. He had no way to pursue a diagnosis due to his communication aversions. The project supported the young person to get another bus pass, fill in a GP referral form and was linked into the Autism Team. It was agreed with the right support in place the young person could focus on achieving his goals.

This young person spent a lot of time working on his electronics projects, however, living in a 3-bedroom house with his parents and three brothers and sharing a room with his sibling it is very difficult for him to work on his projects or store them, all of which exacerbates his attention issues. The young person informed the key worker that he does all his coding on the computer he has in his bedroom, which is not a portable laptop or tablet computer but a tower PC. This means he spent most of his days in there and seldom even visited the rest of the house.

The project supported him to get a laptop from Connecting Scotland. The young person has combined his amazing knowledge of electronics and programming to create a machine that tells the time, date, air pressure, GPS position, UNIX time and file names. Each week he adds another element such as a joystick or keyboard and mouse. Having the laptop meant he is now going out more, taking it with him and spending more time out of his room.

Enquiries are being made to Aberdeen University and electronics/programming companies to see if they could provide this young person with some resources to create his own project. This young person is a hugely skilled individual with a lot to offer.

### **Family Fun & Food Summer Programme -Community learning and Development (CLD)**

New Pitsligo is a rural area with limited local employment opportunities, transport links and access to facilities and services. This puts extra pressure on families especially during school holiday. The families have highlighted this is a stressful time especially around food, nutrition, and family wellbeing. Parents can find it challenging to provide meals and activities that stimulate and engage their children due to financial restrictions and their own mental health.

Family Fun and Food is organised by CLD in partnership with the Community Hub Support Worker and delivers family learning events during school holiday times. The activities include a packed lunch, drinks and snacks and relevant learning opportunities around outdoors, STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths), as well as loads of activities encompassing everyday literacy and numeracy.

*"Running Food and Fun for families within the New Pitsligo School Community is vitally important and beneficial as it will allow us to support our families with an experience within the holidays which allows for parents and their children to have an activity together where they as a family can have a memorable day. The individual benefits for families are vast. For some it is an activity and food which would not be a financial option for them. For some its interaction with other children and families as they are isolated within the community due to poverty, poor parental health or mental health, additional support needs or lack of knowledge of local affordable activities. The need for this is great within the community for the reasons mentioned and the feedback from individual families also supports it."* - Head Teacher Paula Donnelly

## Outcomes

- Increased income maximisation support has resulted in an additional £19,387,164 to 14,205 low-income households to increase their income and cover household costs.
- 127 low-income households were supported to reduce fuel poverty through the Eat & Heat scheme delivered by Scarf
- 2,697 food parcels/ boxes being delivered per month.
- Using the Information & Advice framework 7569 people have accessed information & advice services through a blended approach of online, phone & face to face.
- Client financial gain is over £5,819,939 resulting in, on average, an additional £679 per household.
- 2,757 parents and young people have accessed support and opportunities which have improved their skills and secured employment.
- Partners have secured an additional 287 digital kits to support low-income households to become digitally engaged

## Areas for Development for 2022/23

- Review and develop the Child Poverty Strategy and Action Plan for Aberdeenshire.
- Improve the usage of data and intelligence to identify priority areas for investment and development.
- Continue to develop the Lived Experience Network
- Implement the Aberdeenshire Food Strategy through Fairer Foods the partnership that are leading this area of work, Aberdeenshire Fairer Foods.
- Develop and deliver a training programme for 2022
- Deliver a digital pilot which will increase access to affordable wi-fi connections
- Develop and deliver rights-based approach projects focusing housing and young people's services.
- Develop flexible childcare pathways
- Explore affordable transport models

## Final Word

Poverty is not just a lack of money; it is not having the capacity to realise one's full potential as a human being. In Aberdeenshire we are all working together to ensure everyone can realise their potential – Local Parent.

