

# North Lanarkshire Council Report

## Education, Children and Families Committee

Does this report require to be approved?

☒ Yes ☐ No

Ref BS/AG/AGi/AMcG

Date

19/11/24

## Resilient People: Improving Health and Wellbeing, Family Support and School Attendance

**From** Barry Smedley, Chief Officer (Education South)  
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**Telephone**

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### Executive Summary

This report sets out for committee progress in the delivery of a range of services to support families as part of the Resilient People Programme of Work. As with the report provided to committee in May of this year, it is wide in scope as it seeks to illustrate how strategic decisions to integrate and align approaches within the context of the council's Programme of Work and the wider Children's Services Plan 2023-2026 are improving service delivery and, in turn, outcomes for children.

A key strand of the Resilient People Programme of Work is to improve the outcomes for children and their families through a long-term shift in resources to preventative support that gets the right support to families at the right time. This report provides an update to committee on actions to achieve these aims, including how we are using investments through the Whole Family Being Fund (WFWBF), Scottish Equity Fund (SEF) and the Community Mental Health and Wellbeing Support and Services Framework grant (CMHWBF) to innovate and realise the ambitions of Resilient People. The report will set out these approaches at the levels of universal, additional and intensive supports in line with our staged intervention model.

We reported to committee in May 2024 the improvement in our school attendance figures and this report provides a further update to the end of last school session (23/24). At that meeting Committee endorsed our approach to sustaining improvement through a focus on whole family support, in recognition of the importance of the need for bespoke and trauma-informed interventions to address the complex issues affecting attendance. This report provides some specific examples of these approaches.

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### Recommendations

It is recommended that the Education, Children and Families Committee:

- (1) Endorse the approach to supporting children and young people and families as outlined in the report.
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## The Plan for North Lanarkshire

Priority	Support all children and young people to realise their full potential
Ambition statement	(7) Enhance collaborative working to maximise support and ensure all our children and young people are included, supported, and safe
Programme of Work	Resilient People

### 1. Background

- 1.1 Our strategic approach to ensuring we have the right supports in place at the right time is to put in place a range of services at universal, additional and intensive levels. The range of these supports reflects the GIRFEC staged intervention model allowing for levels of support to be stepped up or stepped down as families' needs change. As first reported to committee in September 2023, these supports are being developed in collaboration with families and staff. It is therefore a dynamic and evolving picture and Figure 1 below updates committee on the current developments:

### Mapping family support & funding so far...

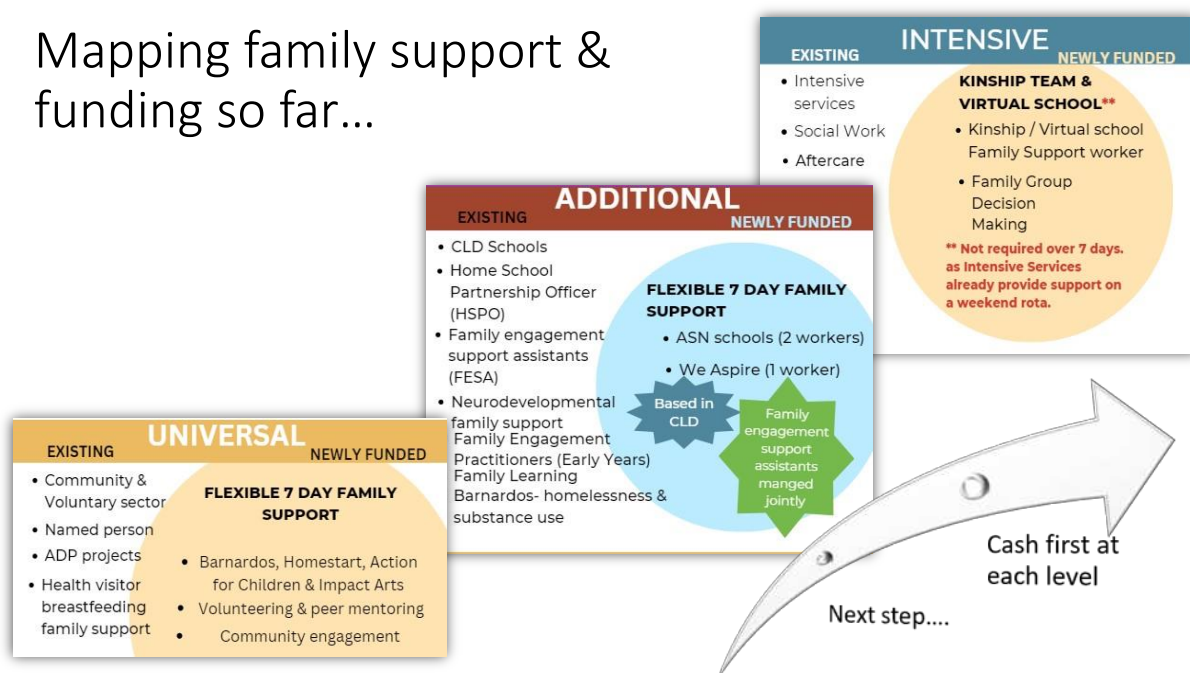


Figure 1.

- 1.2 Given the range and diversity of these services, responsibility for the delivery of whole family supports sits across a range of partners. The Children's Services Planning Partnership, with strategic alignment to the Resilient People Programme of Work, provides coherence and governance around this complex landscape to ensure that family support is experienced by families as integrated and responsive to need. The key areas of change are mapped out below:

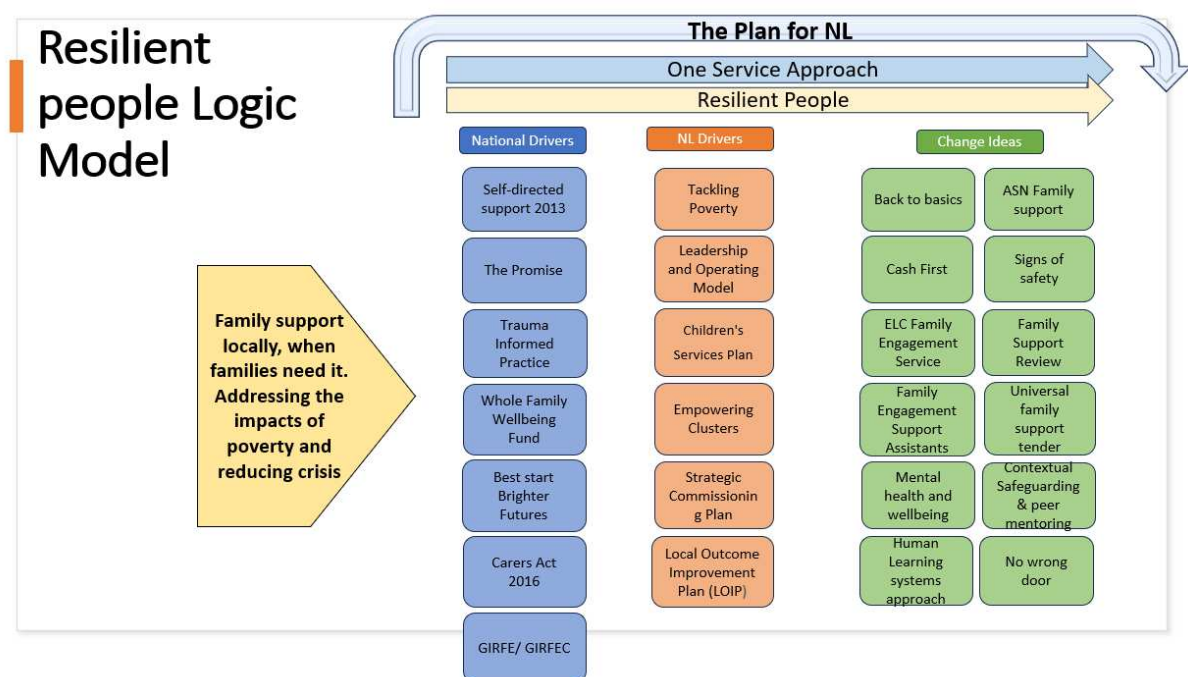


Figure 2.

- 1.3 To this end, the Resilient People Programme is taking forward the commitment the council made in August 2020 to keep The Promise and in particular the ambition of The Promise to upscale accessible family support and move away from patterns of crisis intervention.
- 1.4 To support local partnerships deliver on these ambitions and innovate around need, the Scottish Government announced the WFWB in 2022 (see section 5.2 for details of the allocation to North Lanarkshire). A significant proportion of the WFWB has been used to commission an early help and support service which can be accessed directly by families across North Lanarkshire as well as by referral from agencies.
- 1.5 Members will recall the significant amount of temporary money supporting service provision in this area and this is a potential risk for long term service delivery. Different funds such as the health and wellbeing elements of the Scottish Equity Fund, the CMHWBF, Best Start Bright Futures and ADP funded projects share the objectives of the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund (WFWF) and are being used to support the Resilient People Programme of Work (PoW) to test changes and align this activity as part of system change and to maximise impact for families. The Resilient People Programme Board has also now commenced a review all our family support activity in North Lanarkshire with a view to recommending a sustainable and affordable model of support by end of the PoW period aligned to the council's financial strategy. The Board is also working with the national Promise Team to apply Human and Economic Cost Modelling to evaluate and cost family support to help us implement the strategic ambition of Resilient People to move funding towards prevention.
- 1.6 Attendance at school is a national and local priority following a national decrease in attendance post Covid, most notably by 1.8% from 20/21 to 22/23 across Scotland. In North Lanarkshire, the need for whole family support to address attendance through the integrated approaches to planning support is well established, using core and temporary funds to promote and sustain improved engagement with school.

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## **2. Report**

### **Whole Family Support – Universal Level**

- 2.1 As agreed by committee in February of this year, a partnership of providers, led by Barnardo's Scotland, was successfully commissioned to deliver early help to families across North Lanarkshire and reach into the local community through engagement to identify needs and ensure the development of the service is responsive to local circumstances. The partners comprise Barnardo's, Action for Children, Impact Arts and Home-Start to give a breadth of complimentary support bespoke to families' needs. The service was launched in April from the Newmains and St Brigid's community hub to align with developments to integrate services around the new operating model. The service has now been named the Families Here and Now Service (FHANS) by some of the first families to use the service. To date they have provided direct 1:1 support, practical help, group support, a drop in Newmains and St Brigid's hub, family days out and activities during school holidays. Appendix 1 gives an example of how a family has experienced support and a leaflet designed with families to publicise the service.
- 2.2 Between April and July 2024, the service worked with 24 families (note recruitment of staff only commenced following award of contract), successfully diverting 9 families from social work intervention. Two early themes have emerged. First, for 12 of the families using the service school attendance and relationships with school was a difficulty and second, the impact of poverty. The service is therefore working closely with schools and the Family Support Engagement Workers to get the right help to families. We are also introducing the capacity for Barnardo's to make direct payments to families as part of the 'cash first approach' within the tackling poverty strand of the Resilient People Programme of Work. A summary of the first quarter's activity is illustrated below:

# Families Here & Now Service

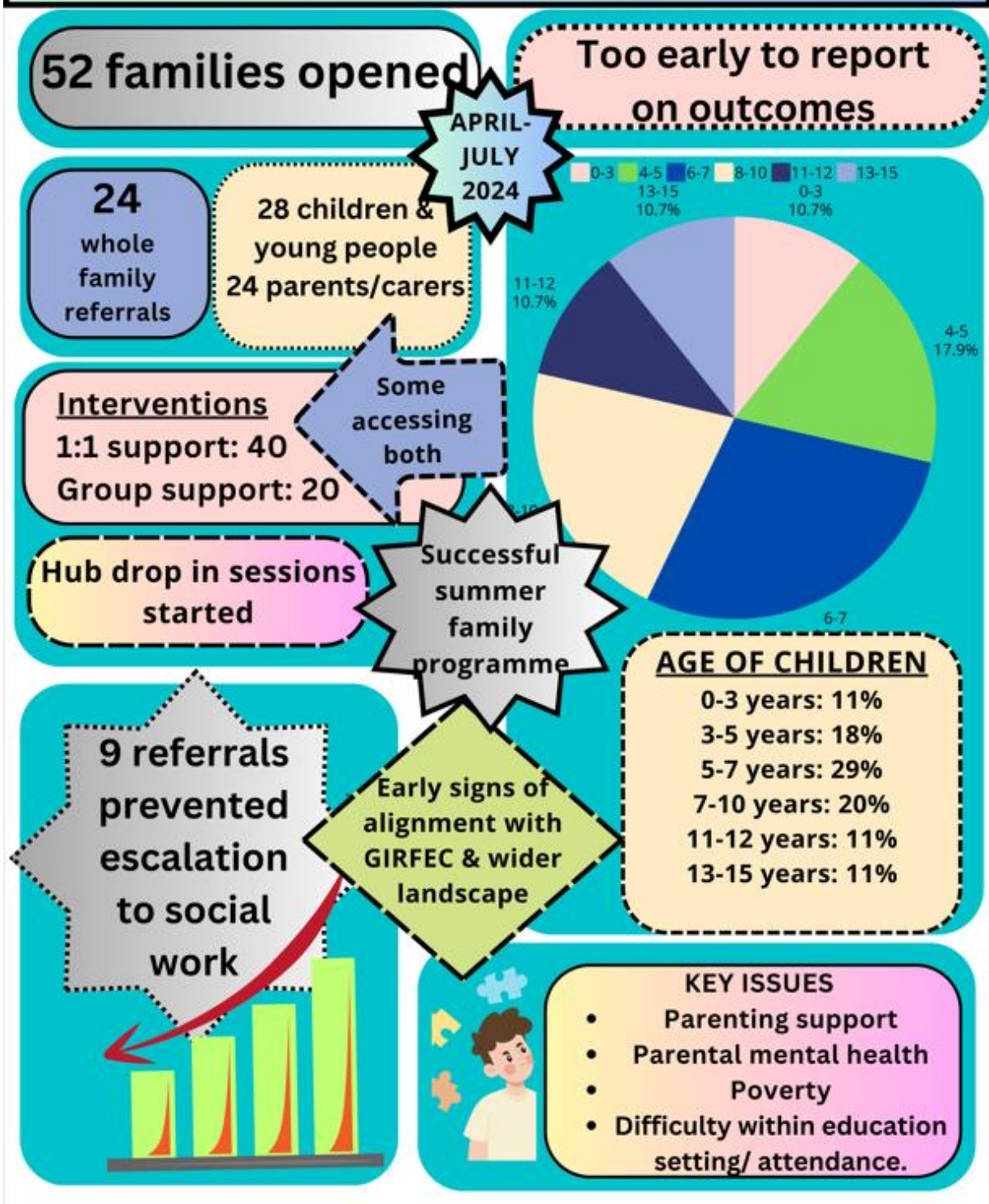


Figure 3.



## Next Steps

- 2.3 The partnership with Impact Arts is being used to facilitate community engagement and co-production activity. The partnership with Home-Start will create peer mentoring opportunities for families and reduce stigma. Over the autumn, The Families Here and Now Service will expand across Coatbridge and the Northern Corridor working around the Riverbank and Chryston Hubs. Subject to successful recruitment, the service will be operational across the whole of North Lanarkshire at the beginning of 2025. The service will be evaluated to measure the extent to which this early help prevents difficulties for families increasing and the need for more intensive supports.

## Supporting School Engagement and Attendance – Additional Level Support

- 2.4 Attendance rates increased across all sectors in academic session 2023/24. The largest increases were in ASN provision (2.5%) and Early Years (2.41%). Overall, across all sectors there was a 1.35% increase in attendance.
- 2.5 There was no real difference in gender in session 2023/24. Attendance for care experienced young people remained higher all session with overall improvement of 1.65%. The gap between care experienced young people and those not care experienced was 6.09%. This is a decrease in last session's gap.
- 2.6 There continues to be an attendance gap between the Quintile 1 and the Quintile 5. The table below shows, however that in three sectors this reduced within academic session 2023/24:

Gap Q5 - Q1				
	2021	2022	26-Jun	Gap diff 23-22
ASN	7.24	7.04	5.29	-1.75
Early Years	8.61	8.84	7.50	-1.34
Primary	6.12	6.16	5.54	-0.61
Secondary	9.03	9.62	10.02	0.40

Figure 4.

- 2.7 Establishments have taken significant steps to ensure robust attendance tracking is in place and are making good use of this data to examine attendance levels at each school and stage to determine the root causes of absence and build an evidence base of effective and better practice which can be shared across clusters. Alongside the work and initiatives within schools paragraphs 2.8-2.17 below illustrate some of the family support approaches that are being taken to support children and young people engage with school and address the underlying barriers.

## Family Support Engagement Workers

- 2.8 As previously reported to Committee, the service is using Scottish Equity Funding to invest in Family Engagement Support Assistants (FESAs) to take a family support approach where there is a concern about attendance, with a focus on those families

living in SIMD 1 and 2. The FESAs offer practical family support such as routines, linking with the Tackling Poverty Team and facilitating communication with schools.

- 2.9 Over 2023/24, the FESAs completed work with 192 children and their families. As illustrated in figure 5 below, attendance improved for 56% of these children.

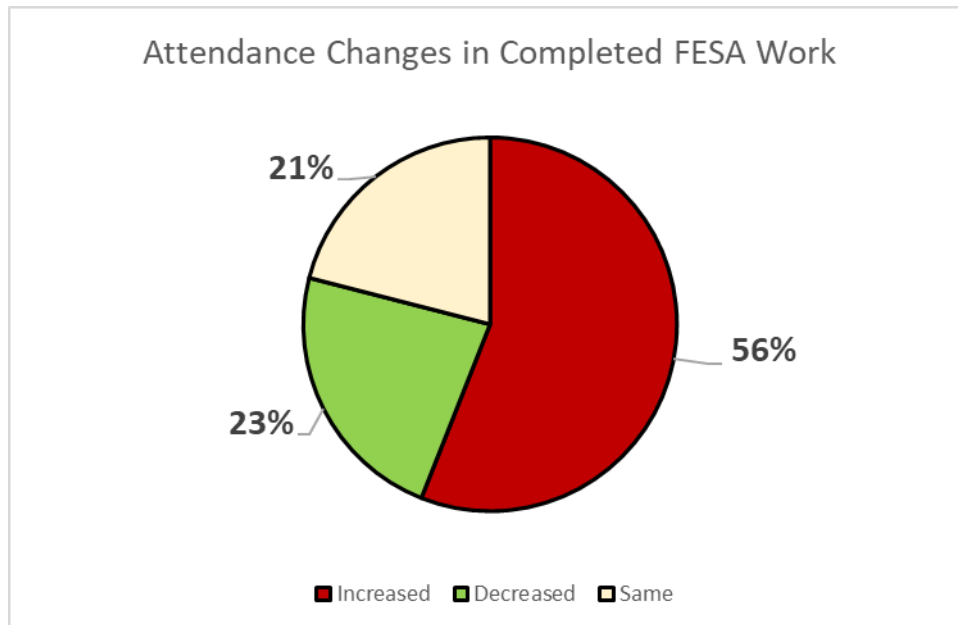


Figure 5.

- 2.10 What we have found is that the approach of the FESAs has most impact where children's attendance sits between 30-60% on referral and for children of primary school age. For example, 2 children's attendance improved from 37.5% to 100%. As with the Families Here and Now Service, the most common themes impacting on attendance are poverty (cost of school day); parental mental health and communication/engagement with schools.
- 2.11 As the data illustrates, earlier intervention both in terms of age and attendance level is crucial. Further work to understand the issues impacting on children with very low attendance has been carried out starting with an audit of the 21% of children whose attendance reduced. This audit shows that for the 40 that showed a reduction in attendance:
- 13 (32%) ended their contact with the service
  - 11 (28%) moved home and ended contact
  - 9 (22%) reached school leaving age
  - 7 (18%) moved to receiving a higher level of intervention, either through social work services, and/or referral to the children's reporter
- 2.12 The next step is to undertake case evaluations of the children whose attendance decreased, as part of the wider work in analysing attendance issues, to understand the issues in more depth and ensure we develop the right kind of support at the right time. We expect, however, that the preventative work of the FESAs and other supports (see below) will reduce the number of children whose non-school attendance becomes entrenched.

- 2.13 As part of this strategy we have enhanced and aligned resources from across Education and Families to create a flexible family support offer across 7 days that can respond to the needs of families whose children attend our Additional Support Needs schools, including We Aspire, with a particular focus on issues of mental health, neurodiversity and engagement with education and the community. Project Officers have now been recruited to offer community based whole family support for children as part of a 'one service' approach working with the FESAs, managed within the CLD Family Learning Service, and working closely with other health and community-based resources. We will report on the impacts of this in 2025.

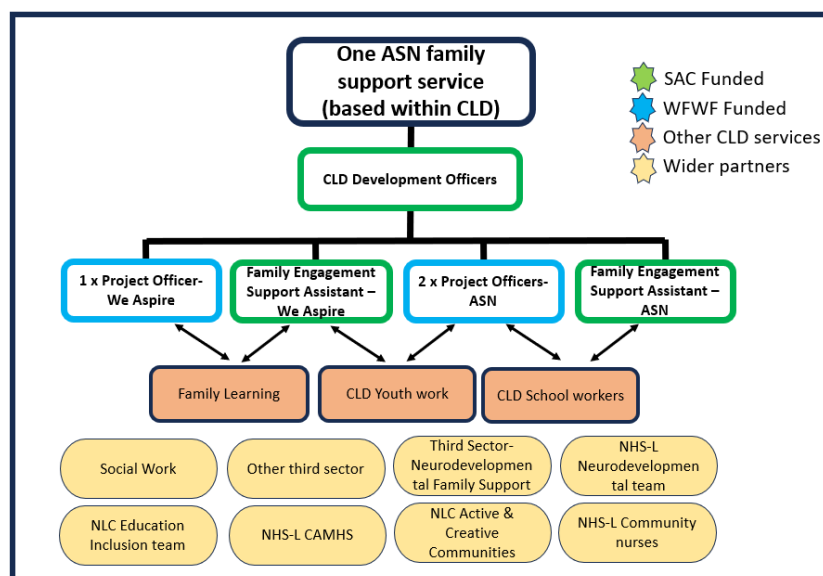


Figure 6.

### Neurodevelopmental Family Support Workers

- 2.14 We know that children and young people who are neuro divergent may experience difficulties engaging with school. This is compounded by the stress experienced by families waiting for formal assessment. Through a combination of the CMHWBF and WFWBF we have funded neurodevelopmental family support workers based in North Lanarkshire Carers Together, who offer a range of 1:1 and family-based supports at home, in the community or in school. The full range of activity for 2023/24 is outlined in Figure 7 below.



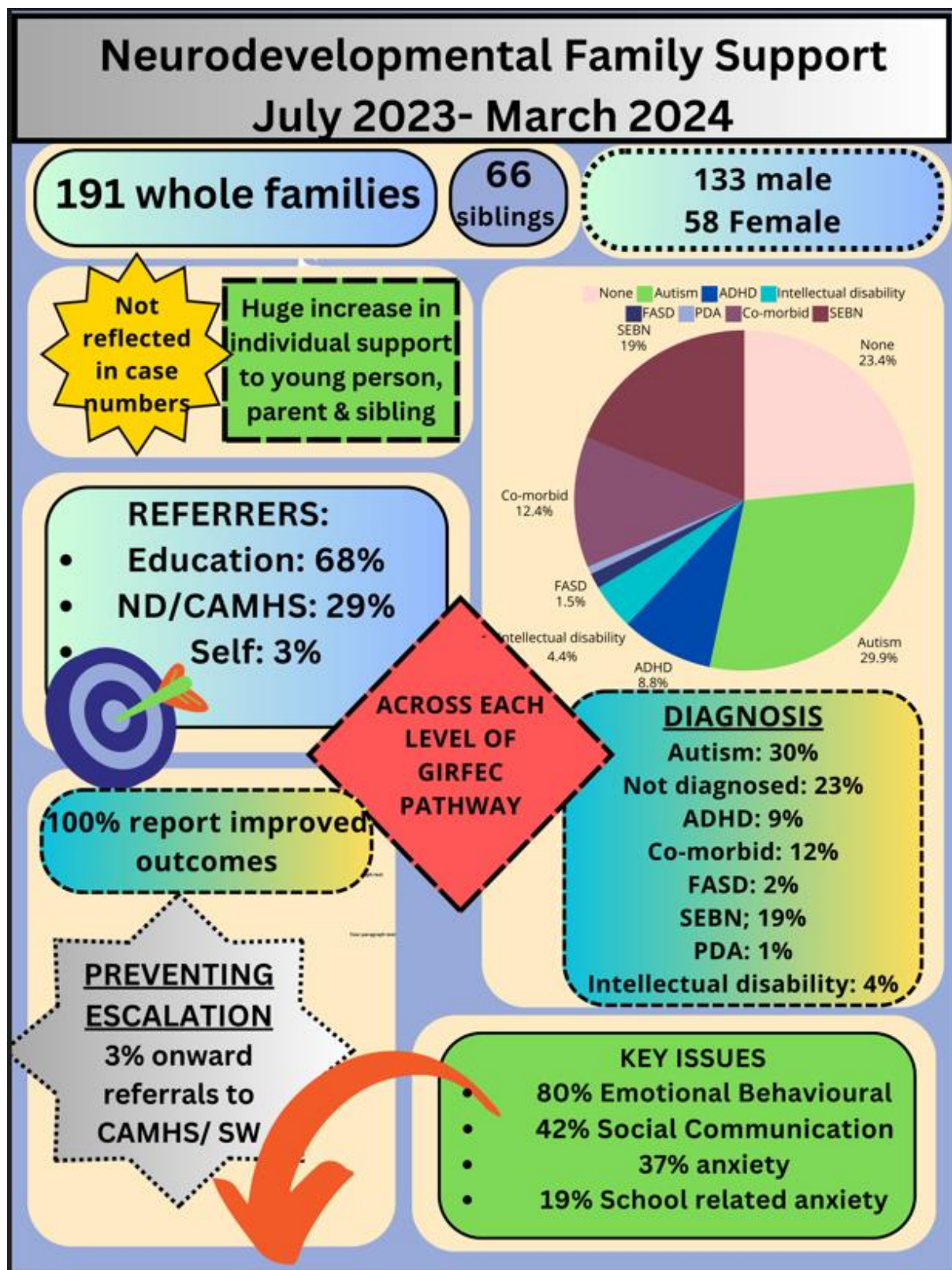


Figure 7.

- 2.15 The success of this preventative approach is indicated by the low level of need for onward referral to social work or CAMHS and evaluation from families and referrers is positive (see Appendix 2)

- 2.16 An increasing number of requests for assistance are for children who are either school refusers (35) or have anxiety about going into school. A key focus is therefore bridging home and school support. As part of this work, NHSL Neurodevelopmental Service, Educational Psychology and Carers Together have begun a project in 2 clusters to support children over from P7-S2 in recognition of the support needs of children with neurodevelopmental needs through transition from primary to secondary school and help prevent an emerging trend of some of these young people disengaging with school over this period. Participating children in the clusters are assessed by the NHSL team and supported by Carers Together and nearly all the children have made a successful transition from primary to secondary school.

### Wellbeing, Resilience and school engagement

- 2.17 19 Empowering Clusters identified emotionally based school avoidance and through the Community Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund worked with local community and voluntary sector organisations to create specific supports to address this issue. These supports have included art therapy, outdoor experiences, equine therapy and promoting emotional wellbeing through sport. Last year just over 1,000 children and young people accessed these supports with just 61% experienced improved outcomes, including improved engagement with education. As a basis for ensuring maximum impact, the next step is to align this outcome data with attendance within the cluster dashboard.
- 2.18 Building on the positive impact of the Living Life to the Full Programme delivered by CLD (funded by the CMHWP), the programme has focused on young people where attendance has been a concern. The programme builds relationships with young people by engaging them in the community and build confidence (see Appendix 3 as for case examples). As the table below illustrates, this programme has had a positive impact, particularly for young people with very low poor attendance.

Young Person	Month One %	Month One % & change from last month		Month Two % & change from last month		Month Three % & change from last month		Month Four % & change from last month		Overall Change from Month One
A	13	67	+54	80	+13	68	-12	89	+21	+76
B	58	74	+16	74	-	95	+21	97	+2	+39
C	42	47	+5	56	+8	62	+6	72	+10	+30
D	77	70	-7	90	+20	86	-4	92	+6	+15
E	90	88	-2	100	+12	92	-8	92	-	+2

## Whole Family Support – Intensive Level

### Kinship Care

- 2.19 Kinship carers care for children who have often suffered trauma and have additional needs. Kinship carers often have their own needs, are older, and are supporting other family members. In recognition of these specific challenges, we have used the WFWBF to increase family support to kinship carers within the kinship care team and within the Virtual School. Additional capacity has enabled the Virtual School to support 38 learners in 23/24. This has improved school engagement and educational outcomes. Only 1 young person in kinship care was excluded from school in session 23/24 (see figure 7) and the 5 S4 learners achieved 12 National 3 and 4 awards.
- 2.19.1 Additional capacity for family support in the kinship team has afforded specific support to 26 families. The worker has provided intensive work with kinship carers and young people around areas of need through emotional, practical and therapeutic approaches, on a consistent and regular basis. Based on feedback from those kinship carers, we know excellent relationships have been established and in two situations have prevented placements ending.

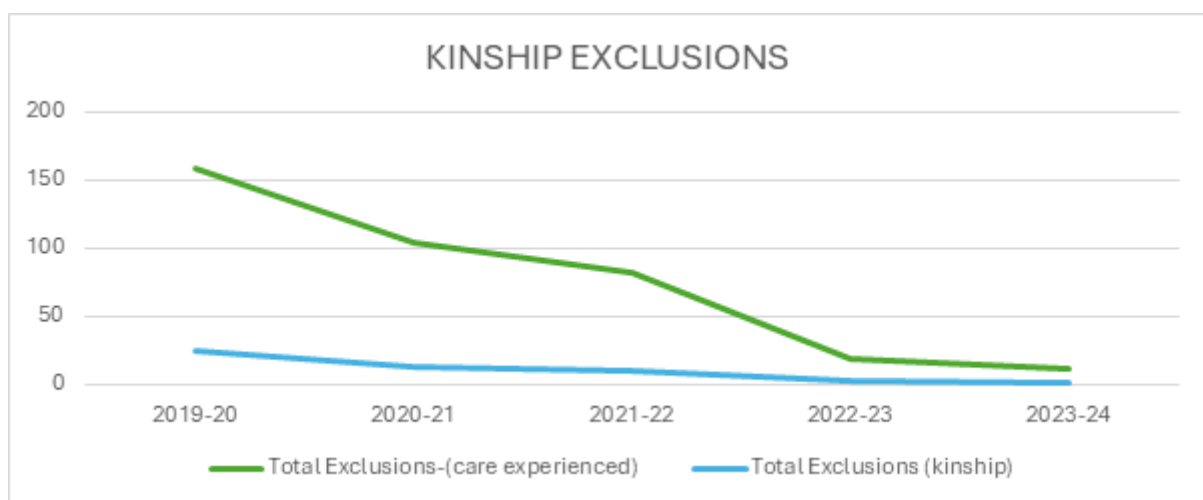


Figure 8.

### Social Work Intensive Services

- 2.20 Our intensive services have provided intensive family support where children may be at risk of experiencing care or have left care to 450 children and young people and their families and carers over the year. In line with the principles of family support outlined in The Promise, they offer family support 7 days a week in way that is flexible, relational and focuses on families' assets. The service also supports some young people in care to help sustain care situations and prevent breakdown. From a sample 89 pieces of work which concluded April 2024-September 2024, the desired outcomes were achieved or partially achieved in 77 cases. This included enabling 45 children to remain at home, or return home, with parents and 19 children remain safe in their care placement. The following table shows an overview of the work.

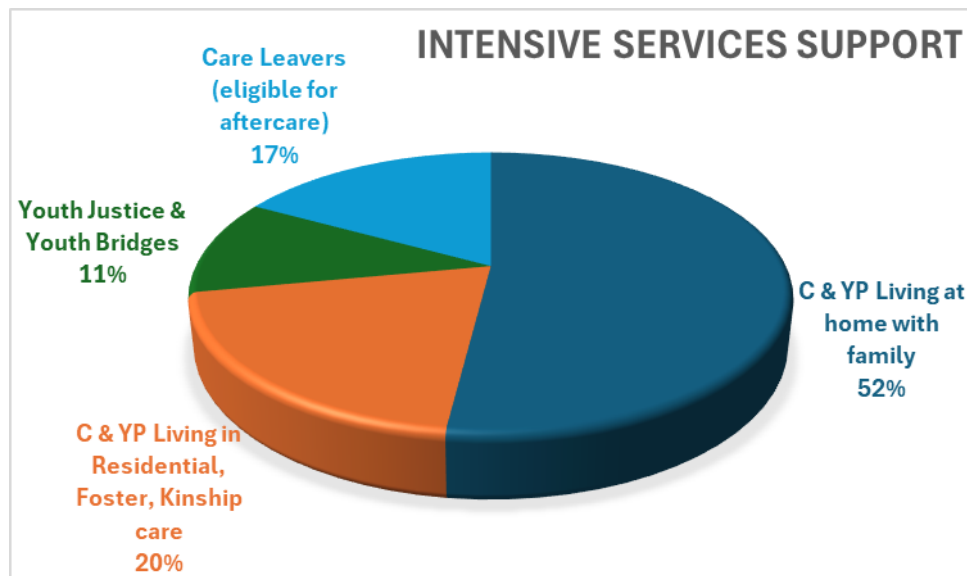


Figure 9.

## Family Group Decision Making and Lifelong Links

- 2.21 As reported to committee in September 2023, we are using the WFWBF to strengthen our Family Group Decision Making Service, which is an integral part of our intensive services to support children at risk of harm or in significant need remain within their families. A Family Group Meeting builds on family assets and strengths by helping key family members come together to create a plan which protects and supports the child and or young person. Over 2023/24, 70 referral progressed to a family meeting where a family plan was devised. Of these, 22 meetings were held to prevent a child coming into care resulting in 21 children remaining in their families. In addition, 9 children were supported through the FGDM process to return to their parents from care. While prevention of care is a priority, family group meetings were also held to discuss family support, contact arrangement and transitions. Details about the impact and outcomes of this approach are contained with the 2023/24 annual report (Appendix 2) and the outcome of referrals detailed in (Appendix 4).
- 2.22 As well as achieving positive outcomes for children, the approach represents best value in financial terms. Work with finance colleagues estimates that over 2023/24, the approach avoided costs of approximately £1.65 million.
- 2.23 Many care experienced young adults have told the Independent Care Review that they felt abandoned and ill prepared as they moved from childhood into adulthood. To help address this, we have used WFWBF to invest in Life Long Links work (developed by The Family Rights Group) which uses principles of the family group decision making approach to build positive, lasting relationships with and for children and young people in care and care leavers. Starting from a full understanding of the young person's life story, the young person decides who and how they wish to reconnect with. Over 2023/24, 16 young people were referred, and 14 lifelong connections were established with important people such as brothers, sisters, grandparents or workers. The outcomes are long term but the feedback from young people has been very powerful:

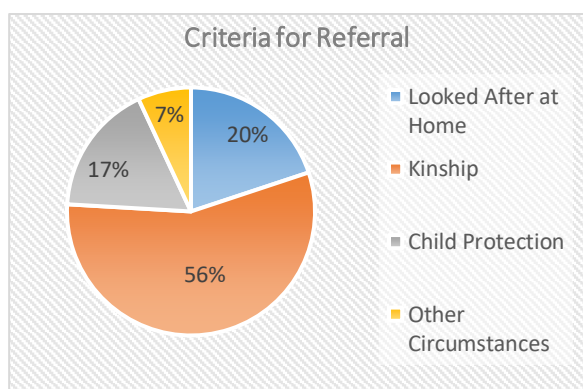
*"The best think about lifelong links was meeting my grandad and seeing that he was happy about seeing me too. I now know what happened in my life." young person.*

2.24 Our approach to Family Group Decision Making and Life Long Links has been independently assessed by the Family Rights Group against key standards and North Lanarkshire is now an accredited family group decision making service. The Family Rights Group stated, 'there is a particularly strong commitment to utilise the experience and learning from Lifelong Links to improve practice across children's services based upon the core commitments contained within the Promise'.

### Support to Families Over the Summer

2.25 The service delivered a range of activities over the summer targeted to support children and their families during the holidays. There were three main strands:

- Strengthening Families Summer Programme delivered by the Virtual School
- Intensive Services Summer Programme
- Family Learning (CLD) Summer Programme



2.25.1 The **Strengthening Families Programme** was targeted at those children and young people in most need and risk living at home or with kinship carers, supporting families address the cost of the school holidays. As such a variety of activities were offered to keep children entertained and to enhance relationships through having fun together whilst minimising the financial impact on families. The breadth of programme is illustrated below.

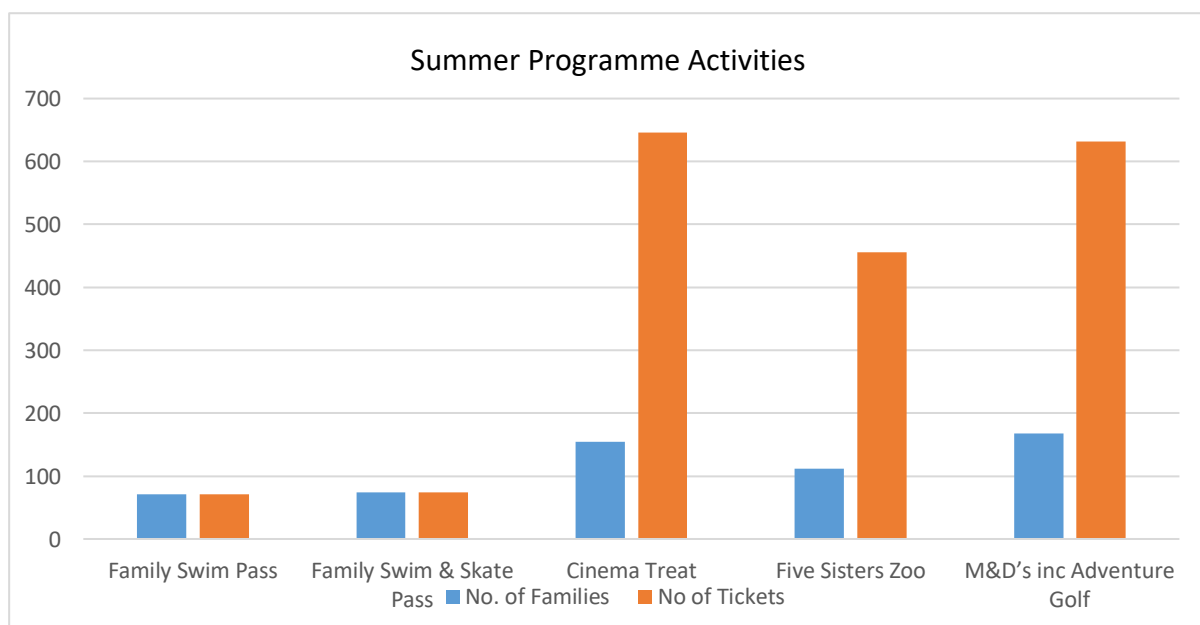


Figure 10.

2.25.2 The **Intensive Services summer programme** targeted 47 families of children under 12 (Families First) and 30 young people (12-18) where there was a risk of children coming into care. The range of activities is illustrated below. The Families First (FF)

summer activities focused on whole family activities to encourage play and learning as well as building resilience in the children and confidence in the parents. This included Messy play, Tye-Dye day, Making Music day and Canvas painting and finished off with a 'Grande finale' fun day and Strathclyde Park. Appendix 3 gives feedback from parents and young people.

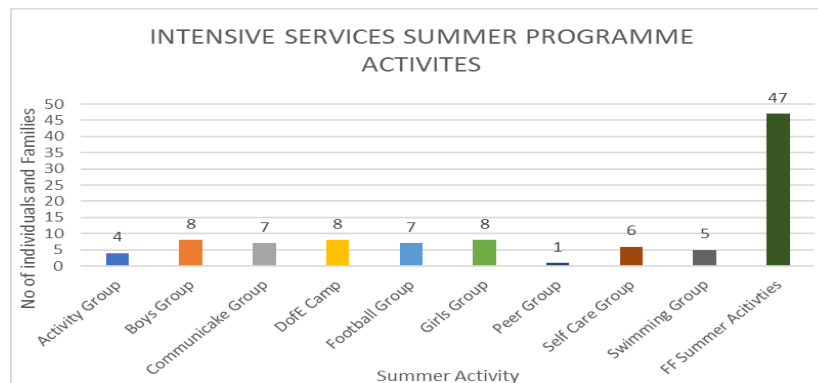


Figure 11.

2.25.3 Over the summer, 798 families participated in **CLD Family Learning** summer programme which completed the more targeted programmes delivered social work intensive services. The offer included outdoor learning, baby massage, book bug sessions and visits to parks, outdoor spaces and places of interest both within and out with North Lanarkshire and 97 parents took part in parenting programmes. A number of positive outcomes were reported by parents: 100% of participants said the programme program led to significant improvements in family relationships; 55% of parents experienced notable improvements in their personal well-being and 45% of parents felt the programme reduced isolation.

### 3. Measures of success

- 3.1 Improved health and wellbeing of children and their families
- 3.2 Reduction in need for crisis services and requests of assistance to social work
- 3.3 Progress in improving attendance is maintained.
- 3.4 Outcomes for children, young people and there are improved through positive relationships with staff and with trauma-informed approaches.
- 3.5 Supports will become easier to access and responsive to need – the 'no wrong door approach' – through integrated working within the new operating model, supported by the GIRFEC pathway.
- 3.6 Reduction in number of children being cared for outside of their family.



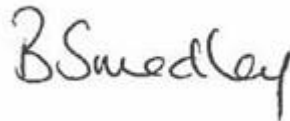
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**4. Supporting documentation**

- 4.1 Appendix 1: Families Here and Now Service (FHANS) Case Study and Leaflet
- 4.2 Appendix 2: Parental Feedback & child case study on Neurodevelopmental Family Support Workers
- 4.3 Appendix 3: Living Life to The Full Case Study
- 4.4 Appendix 4: Family Group Decision Making and Life Long Links Annual Report
- 4.5 Appendix 5: Parental and young people feedback on the intensive services summer programme



**Alison Gordon**  
**Chief Social Work Officer**



**Barry Smedley**  
**Chief Officer (Education South)**

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## 5. Impacts

<b>5.1 Public Sector Equality Duty and Fairer Scotland Duty</b> Does the report contain information that has an impact as a result of the Public Sector Equality Duty and/or Fairer Scotland Duty? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> If Yes, please provide a brief summary of the impact?  If Yes, has an assessment been carried out and published on the council's website? <a href="https://www.northlanarkshire.gov.uk/your-community/equalities/equality-and-fairer-scotland-duty-impact-assessments">https://www.northlanarkshire.gov.uk/your-community/equalities/equality-and-fairer-scotland-duty-impact-assessments</a> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>5.2 Financial impact</b> Does the report contain any financial impacts? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> If Yes, have all relevant financial impacts been discussed and agreed with Finance? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> If Yes, please provide a brief summary of the impact?  As noted within the body of the report the operational delivery of these activities is supported through core Council funding, directed Scottish Government funding and grants.
<b>5.3 HR policy impact</b> Does the report contain any HR policy or procedure impacts? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> If Yes, have all relevant HR impacts been discussed and agreed with People Resources? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> If Yes, please provide a brief summary of the impact?
<b>5.4 Legal impact</b> Does the report contain any legal impacts (such as general legal matters, statutory considerations (including employment law considerations), or new legislation)? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> If Yes, have all relevant legal impacts been discussed and agreed with Legal and Democratic? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> If Yes, please provide a brief summary of the impact?
<b>5.5 Data protection impact</b> Does the report / project / practice contain or involve the processing of personal data? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> If Yes, is the processing of this personal data likely to result in a high risk to the data subject? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> If Yes, has a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) been carried out and e-mailed to <a href="mailto:dataprotection@northlan.gov.uk">dataprotection@northlan.gov.uk</a> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

5.6	<p><b>Technology / Digital impact</b></p> <p>Does the report contain information that has an impact on either technology, digital transformation, service redesign / business change processes, data management, or connectivity / broadband / Wi-Fi?</p> <p>Yes    <input type="checkbox"/>                      No                      <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>If Yes, please provide a brief summary of the impact?</p> <p>Where the impact identifies a requirement for significant technology change, has an assessment been carried out (or is scheduled to be carried out) by the Enterprise Architecture Governance Group (EAGG)?</p> <p>Yes    <input type="checkbox"/>                      No                      <input type="checkbox"/></p>
5.7	<p><b>Environmental / Carbon impact</b></p> <p>Does the report / project / practice contain information that has an impact on any environmental or carbon matters?</p> <p>Yes    <input type="checkbox"/>                      No                      <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>If Yes, please provide a brief summary of the impact?</p>
5.8	<p><b>Communications impact</b></p> <p>Does the report contain any information that has an impact on the council's communications activities?</p> <p>Yes    <input type="checkbox"/>                      No                      <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>If Yes, please provide a brief summary of the impact?</p>
5.9	<p><b>Risk impact</b></p> <p>Is there a risk impact?</p> <p>Yes    <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>                      No                      <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>If Yes, please provide a brief summary of the key risks and potential impacts, highlighting where the risk(s) are assessed and recorded (e.g. Corporate or Service or Project Risk Registers), and how they are managed?</p> <p>There is a risk in maintaining some of the services and approaches discussed in the report. Some of the work being carried out is funded through temporary funding which raises a risk about long term sustainability.</p>
5.10	<p><b>Armed Forces Covenant Duty</b></p> <p>Does the report require to take due regard of the Armed Forces Covenant Duty (i.e. does it relate to healthcare, housing, or education services for in-Service or ex-Service personnel, or their families, or widow(er)s)?</p> <p>Yes    <input type="checkbox"/>                      No                      <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>If Yes, please provide a brief summary of the provision which has been made to ensure there has been appropriate consideration of the particular needs of the Armed Forces community to make sure that they do not face disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public services.</p>
5.11	<p><b>Children's rights and wellbeing impact</b></p> <p>Does the report contain any information regarding any council activity, service delivery, policy, or plan that has an impact on children and young people up to the age of 18, or on a specific group of these?</p> <p>Yes    <input type="checkbox"/>                      No                      <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>If Yes, please provide a brief summary of the impact and the provision that has been made to ensure there has been appropriate consideration of the relevant Articles from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).</p>

A CRWIA has been undertaken in respect of Children's Services Planning Partnership and the focus on family support within the CSP upholds the interlinked rights of children.

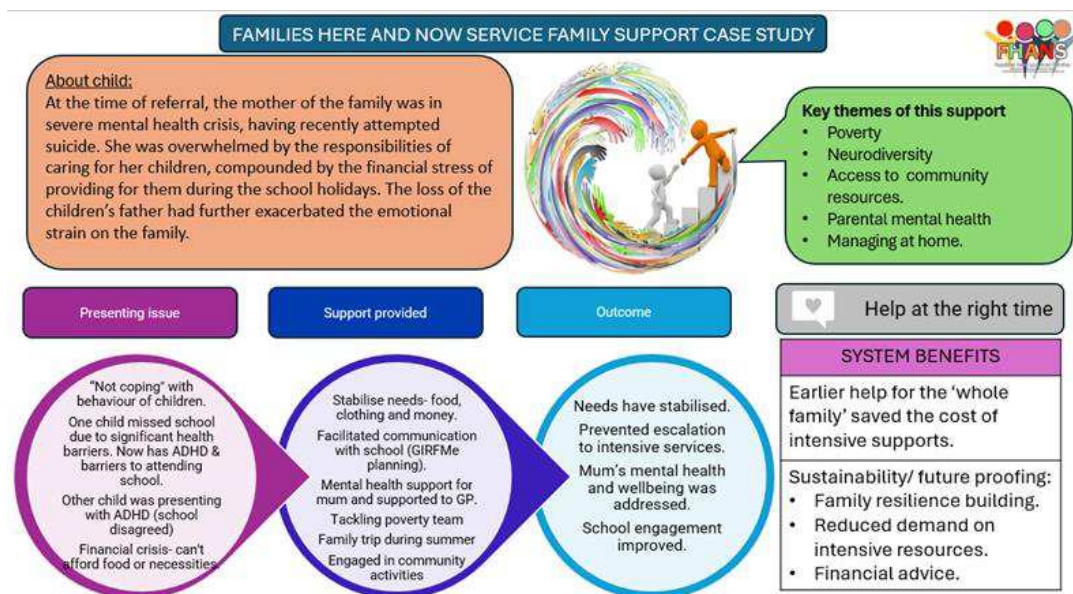
If Yes, has a Children's Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment (CRWIA) been carried out?


A CRWIA has been carried out for the commissioned family support service.

Yes ☐

No ☐

## Appendix 1: Families Here and Now Service (FHANS) Case Study and Leaflet





**FHANS**  
Families Here and Now Service  
A partnership with Barnardos, Action for Children, Home-Start Glasgow North and North Lanarkshire and Impact Arts


**The Families Here and Now Service (FHANS) is a Partnership with Barnardos, Action For Children, Home-Start and Impact Arts**

**FHANS work with families who feel they need some support and currently have no other services involved**

**Working across and with local communities, we provide individual and whole family support as well as offering both fun and issue-based group work**


**The service is driven by the voices of communities and works in partnership with local residents to ensure the needs of each community is met**


**We accept referrals from anyone.**  
For further information please call  
**01698 262443 (option 4) or**  
**email [nlwholefamily@barnardos.org.uk](mailto:nlwholefamily@barnardos.org.uk)**



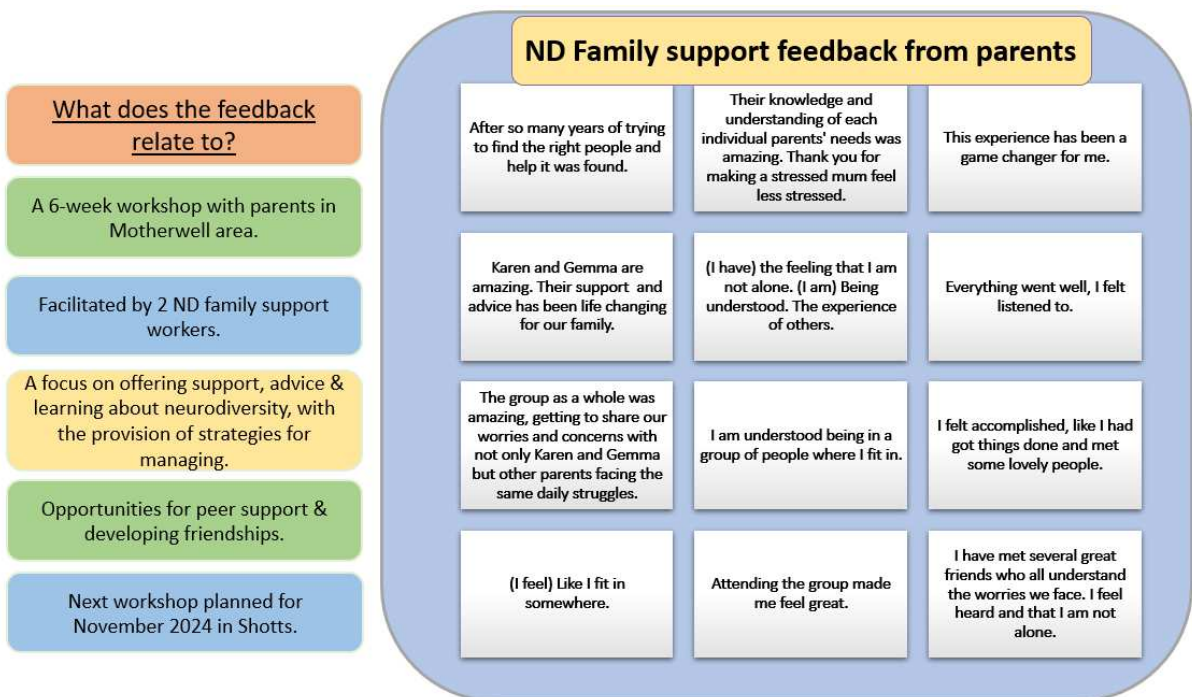








## Appendix 2- Parental Feedback & child case study on Neurodevelopmental Family Support Workers





## NEURODEVELOPMENTAL FAMILY SUPPORT CASE STUDY

Child B- Primary 6

### About child:

B is in primary 6 of a mainstream school and lives at home with mum, dad and younger sister C. B was referred for family support after her mum was talking to another parent on an online forum and heard about the support. Both B & C have a diagnosis of autism from the paediatrician at the CAS service. The worker met mum in a café and discussed concerns. She said B would benefit from 1:1 support to take place after school times. B didn't like to be singled out as different so time and venue was important. Mum also needed support & this too was provided.



"(Worker) Is just like me, has Autism and she works, and has a job and children"

"We just know more about ourselves now! "

### Presenting issue

B was doing well at school academically but struggled to be away from mum. She suffered health anxiety around people who were unwell. This affected learning and school attendance.

### Support provided

1:1 sessions with a variety of interventions. LIAM worked best. The relationship with the worker was a key facilitator. Support to mum helped take a holistic approach

### Outcome

B's confidence is now much higher & she speaks to people confidently. Autism is no longer seen as a negative, but a positive. Her attendance has improved.

### Potential benefits

CHILD	PARENT
Less isolated	Reduced stress
Improved understanding	Coping strategies
Coping strategies	Reduced crisis
Improved attendance at school	Improved relationship.

## Appendix 3

## CLD LIVING LIFE TO THE FULL

### About child:

Young person (A) was first invited to join the Community LLTTF Wellbeing group in May of 2024 due to low and sporadic school attendance. This attendance was linked to feeling tired, sleeping a lot and feelings of anxiety.



### Key themes of this support

- School attendance
- Mental health
- Access to community resources.
- Relationship-based practice

### Presenting issue

(A) showed low motivation to attend school and often advised that she was tired and liked to sleep a lot. The first time (A) was introduced to the group she was reserved and quiet.

### Support provided

(A) attended almost every session and became more relaxed with staff and peers. She took part in all activities and helped with an event at her school. Throughout the summer (A) participated in the 'learning to use transport' group to build confidence in travelling independently using public transport. Attended outings to Millport and Ayr as well as other summer sessions.

### Outcome

A) gained confidence and achieved youth work outcomes  
Built resilience  
Made new friends  
Showed courage returning to school, even though she was anxious

### What did this achieve?

Earlier & targeted help to address need, supported A to return to school.

**Sustainability/ future proofing:**

- Resilience and skill building.
- Reduced likelihood of crisis.
- New relationships with workers and peers.

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Made new friends  
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### What did this achieve?

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### Sustainability/ future proofing:

- Resilience and skill building.
- Reduced likelihood of crisis.
- New relationships with workers and peers.

## Appendix 4: Family Group Decision Making and Life Long Links Annual Report



Annual Report

Family Group Decision Making and Lifelong Links

April 2023 to March 2024

Contents

Introduction

What is family group decision making (FGDM)?

What is lifelong links (LLL)?

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FGDM progress and The Promise

Feedback from family

## Lifelong Links in North Lanarkshire

Lifelong Links Aims and Objectives

Our Lifelong Links journey through The Promise

Children and young people referred

## Next Year and Beyond

## Appendices

- All examples have been anonymised for confidentiality

## Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) and Lifelong Links (LLL)

### **Introduction**

Our Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) and Lifelong Links service have strengthened their approach to listen and support children, young people and families in North Lanarkshire. The service has become an integral part of Education and Families, Intensive Social Work Services, supporting children, young people and families build on their family's assets to maintain family care.

FGDM and Lifelong Links service recognise that children are not always able to remain within their family. A core component is our commitment to improve culture and practice, to support rehabilitation back to family, where possible, and to promote and maintain important relationships when children and young people become care experienced.



## What is family group decision making?

Since the mid 1990's Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) has been used as an effective way of working with children, young people, unborn babies and their families in Scotland. FGDM can be used on a continuum from early support to situations where there is significant risk and/or complex needs.

FGDM is a family led decision making process where a child and/or young person's and their family and friends are supported and prepared to come together in a family meeting. The key aim of the meeting is for the family to develop a plan which protects and supports the child and/or young person. Families find this process to be an inclusive, enabling, and empowering process, which places the child and/or young person and family at the centre of decision making in relation to plans for their children.

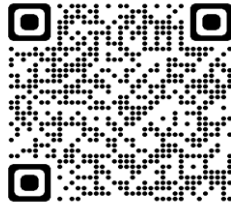
## FGDM National Standards

FGDM in North Lanarkshire is committed to the FGDM National Standards for Scotland, its key principles:

- *FGDM is strength based, future focused and blame free.*
- *The focus is on the voice and safety of children and young people.*
- *FGDM recognises that families are the experts in their own lives.*
- *The FGDM Coordinator should always be independent of any other professional involvement with the family.*
- *FGDM recognises the child's and families right to be involved in their future planning.*
- *Private family time is an essential element of Family Group Meeting.*

## FGDM Animation

Over the past year we have used our FGDM animation to illustrate the strength of the FGDM approach. The animation has received positive recognition at a European and National level, as an inclusive, honest and inspiring local story, with a young boy and his papa sharing their views on how FGDM brought them back together. It is now used as part of the Family Rights Group (FRG) National Family Group Conferencing training programme. Please scan the QR



code to watch our animation.



## What is lifelong links?

Lifelong Links is a service that was developed by Family Rights Group (FRG). Its key aim is to support care experienced children and young people to maintain a natural network of support. A trained Lifelong Links coordinator engages with the young person to identify people that are important to them and seeks ways to maintain connections which are often lost in the process of their care journey. These can be anything from direct lifelong commitments or to indirect answers to questions a child or young person may have.

Over 2000 young people throughout Britain have benefitted from Lifelong Links. Key findings from the Family Right Group (FRG) Lifelong Links research shows that 78% of the young



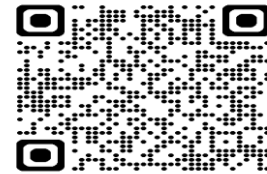
people felt an improved sense of identity and placement stability after taking part in lifelong links. (FRG, 2023).

Lifelong Links is now recognised nationally, as a vital service for young people who have care experience. There is a recommendation in England's Independent Review of Children's social care that *"all local authorities should have skilled family finding support equivalent to or exceeding, the work of Lifelong Links in place by 2024 at the very latest."* (McCallister, 2022).

## Lifelong Links in North Lanarkshire



Please scan to see our  
Lifelong Links Animation



In North Lanarkshire the implementation of our Lifelong Links service has been supported by the Family Right Group (FRG) and our service has adopted the aims and objectives of their original Lifelong Links model. However, as our service has developed, we have extended our support to meet the needs of our young people. All the young people who received support from Lifelong Links have sought answers to their care journey. There have been key things they have wanted to know, such as information on their birth family and their experiences, an understanding of why they became care experienced, and clarification on specific events in their life. They have requested time to reflect and understand their care journey, in addition to considering who they want to connect or re-connect with and who they want to have as part of their ongoing support network.

## FGDM/LLL Legislative Framework

There are clear legislative and policy drivers for the development and expansion of FGDM and Lifelong Links. The duties placed on local authorities within *Children and Young Persons (Scotland) Act 2014* to support to children where they may be at risk of coming into care underpins Family Group Decision Making.

The Children (Scotland) Act 2020 emphasises the importance of family involvement in decision making for children and young people and legislative changes have added the importance of siblings.

The FGDM approach aligns with to the principles of GIRFEC (Getting it Right for Every Child, 2006) and is rights-based in accordance with ***The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)*** which has been implemented into Scottish Law. It puts the views of children and families at the centre and supports multiagency working by providing professional support to the family.

In August 2020, North Lanarkshire Council made a commitment to keeping The Promise, Scottish Independent Care Review for children and young people in care, ensuring family support services were reviewed and developed. This included FGDM and Lifelong Links. **The Promise Plan 21 - 24** made a commitment to children and young people who are care experienced in Scotland will grow up loved, safe and respected by 2030. The Promise acknowledges that too often the care system has failed to work effectively with families when children enter care, or when they leave care as young adults. The Promise (The Scottish Government, 2020)

**The promise plan for 24 – 30** confirms that the promise plan must be kept in full. It must build on the progress with a clear breakdown on changes that need to be made in the care system. The plan achieves this through the 5 foundations of voice, family, care, people and scaffolding. **Which links with the key principles of FGDM and Lifelong Links.**



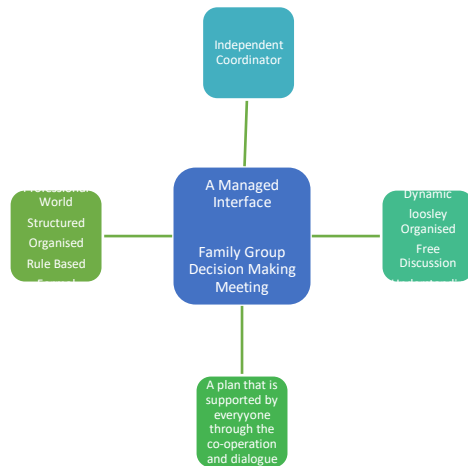
## Family Group Decision Making in North Lanarkshire

### FGDM Aims and Objectives

Our Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) service is a strength-based approach which seeks to work in partnership, ensuring children, young people and their families remain central to the decision-making process. FGDM supported the interface between the relationships between professionals and family and creates an opportunity to improve

*Bridging the gap between  
organisation and families  
(Re-imagining child welfare:  
Learning from Family Group  
Conferencing, Mary Mitchell, 2019)*

outcomes for children and make supportive family plans to keep children safe.



## Our long term FGDM aims

- To recognise families as the experts in their own life and to empower children, young people and their families to be at the centre of decision making for their children or young people.
- To improve the longer term emotional and mental well-being and stability for children and young people.
- Identifying and maximising the network of support around children and young people, so they will be able to successfully maintain and / or reconnect with the important people and family in their life.

## Key Objectives

- Children and young people's networks are strengthened with important people in their life.
- Children and young people are reconnected, have sustainability with and/or understand of the significant people in their life.
- Where children are looked after by the local authority and not able to live with their family, family time (contact) arrangements are place for those relationships important to the child.
- Children and young people will have an increased sense of identity, are supported to build their own narratives, safe connections, and restore damaged relationships.

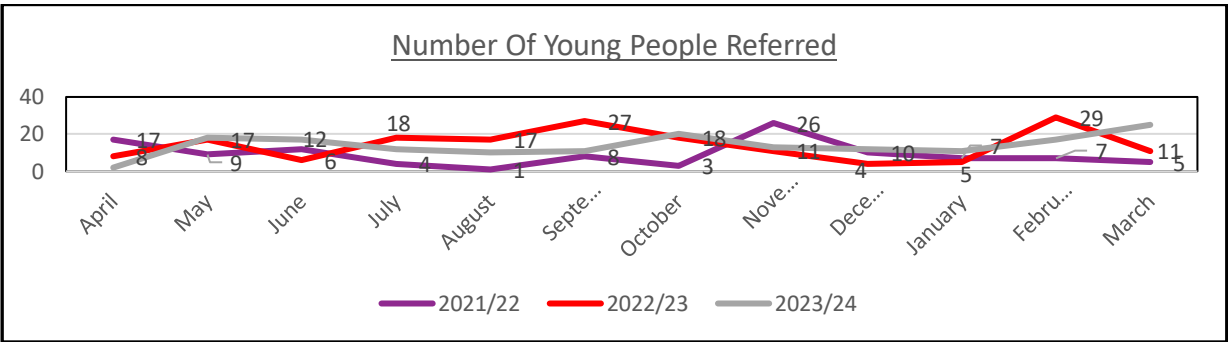
## FGDM progress

Between April 2023 and March 2024, we have been working to achieve our key objectives to strengthen children's and young people's support networks. The pillars of the promise,

voice, family, care, people and scaffolding are integral to service provision and will be illustrated throughout our annual report.

We have increased the number of children, young people and families referred to our FGDM service. The chart below shows a steady pace of referrals over the past 3 years and demonstrates the FGDM teams continued commitment at promoting the FGDM service across North Lanarkshire. The referrals to the FGDM service have come from all the 6 social work locality teams, Airdrie, Bellshill, Coatbridge, Cumbernauld, Motherwell and Wishaw.

The chart demonstrates the peak referral times are after the school holidays.



The 2023-24 projected annual cost of avoidance of circa. **£1.65M**. This figure represents a ‘minimum’ cost avoidance based on the cheapest form of alternative care provision (provided foster care provision). It does not include on costs associated with transport and worker’s time. The costs only relate to accommodation costs for these children, which clearly is only part of the financial cost involved in supporting vulnerable or children in care and their families. It is thus a ‘minimum’ cost avoidance, but also one that is verifiable and not an estimated cost. Nonetheless, the projections demonstrate best value through the FGDM approach. It is important to note that as FGDM is a voluntary process not all referrals will progress to a family meeting. FGDM in North Lanarkshire are like the UK average of referral progress to a meeting which is at 55%.

Cost Avoidance - Where a Meeting Took Place 23/24	
Potential total costs (annual)	£1,849,356.60
Current total costs (annual)	£ 206,456.12
Saving (annual)	£1,642,900.48

### Prioritisation of Referrals

Over the past year we have prioritised referrals to the FGDM service to ensure we can target the service to children who most need it, in line with the priorities of Keeping the Promise, Close To Home and The Children’s Services Plan

Prioritised Groups where a FGDM must be offered and explored with the family:

### Un Born Babies

All unborn baby referrals, where there are concerns raised and a decision has been made for a social work assessment to be undertaken.

### Child Protection

Opportunities to create of a family plan to inform a Child Protection Plan.

And, following a Child Protection Conference to include wider family in the plan.

### Edges of care

When a child or young person's care placement is at risk.

### Rehabilitation/leaving Care

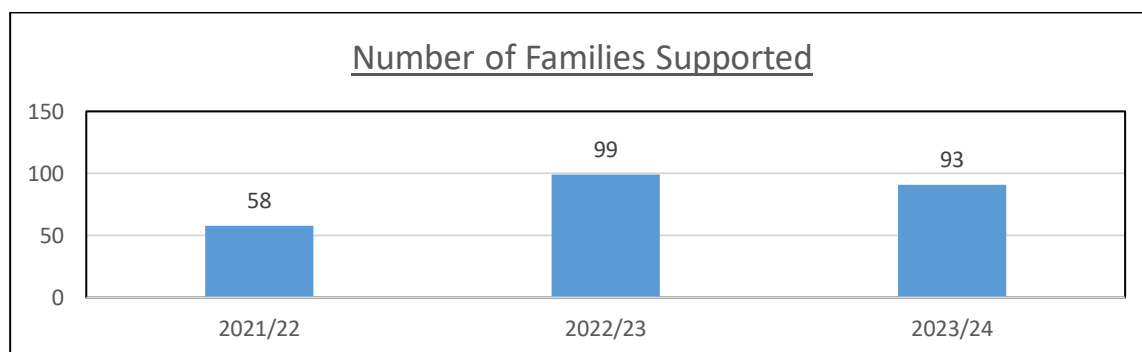
Where there is consideration for rehabilitation or where young people are leaving care.

Our collated statistics have confirmed that we have prioritised the right identified groups as these prioritised referrals have evidenced as having the greater success. 56% of our referrals have come from our prioritised groups and of these referrals, 74% went to a family meeting or a significant piece of work. Family Support continues to be our biggest referral request at 44 % and has been evidenced as more difficult to progress to a family meeting. A key improvement required is increasing our unborn babies' referrals, numbers continue to remain low at around 5 %. However, of the 9 referrals, 7 referrals progressed to a family meeting, one referral the family made their own plan and only one declined service. Work over the next year will continue to promote FGDM to all our prioritised groups and throughout all 6 social work locality teams.

### Voice



The FGDM process has confirmed that the voice of the children and young people and families have been heard and family members have been active in decision making. Over the past year **67** children had a full family meeting and **26** significant pieces of work where children, young people and families engaged in planning before the meeting and developed a family plan. Following a family meeting families can choose to have a review of their family plan, to ensure the plan is working. From the families who participated in the FGDM evaluations, **77%** chose to have a review meeting.



The following example demonstrates how the benefits of including children's voices and the extended family networks in the decision making can ensure safe planning.

### Feedback from a family that attended a family meeting....

**Aunt** "Keep doing this to help the kids stay in their own environment"

**Gran** "Bringing together family can benefit the group and the young person. Concerns, solutions and compromises can be addresses. Allows everyone to be involved and heard."



Our approach has a strong focus on family care to progress and improve a child and young person's wellbeing. Over the past year we have supported families build on their strengths, improve natural support networks and work towards addressing the risks held by social work

**A referral was made to FGDM when parents had separated and were experiencing challenges with addiction. The children were living in kinship and the placement had broken down. The children views were central, and they expressed that they were happy to live with their dad and that they wanted to spend more time with their mum. The extended family were able to come together and thinks creatively on how they could support and ensure this could happen. The family developed a comprehensive family plan to keep the children safe and how they could support the family. In addition, the family supported contact with mum until social work felt this could progress to unsupervised. The social worker presented the family plan at the Children's Hearing and the children were returned to dad's fulltime care, where they continue to reside. Dad confirmed he was delighted to be caring for his children.**

or other professionals. A family meeting ensures that all options to keep families together have been explored before any decisions are made for children to be removed from family care.

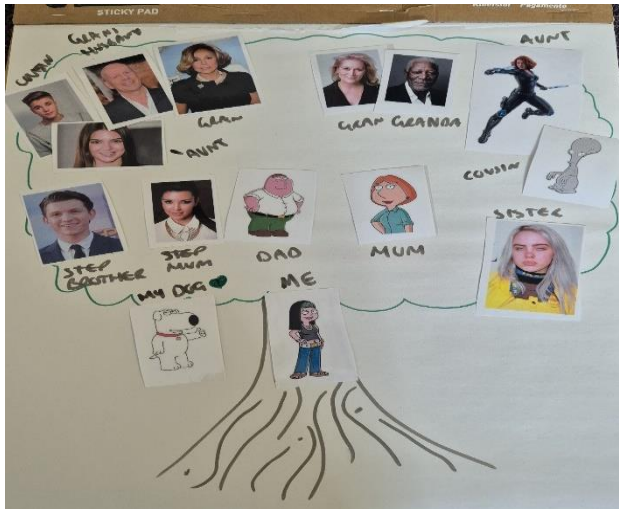
In all families who progressed to a family meeting, a family plan was developed which held the children's views at heart of the plan. The outcome for most of these plans was for the child to remain at home safely with parents or family and friends. The family plans further confirmed that change in stability of placements and an increase in family support or family links can be to support children.

A FGDM meeting establishes routines and practicalities on how to make this work. An example was an uncle continuing to take a young person to their weekly football game or a support worker providing transport for a young person to continue to attend a family dinner



once a week. As this plan is made by the family there is a shared understanding of the important factors that keep a child or young person involved in family life.

- Central to our family meetings are children's and young people's family members and important relationships. Below is an example of a young person's and a young child's drawing of her family and who should attend her family meeting.



- Parents and carers can confirm who they believe are important to attend the family meeting. The co-ordinators ensure they have spoken to all family members and all voices have been heard, even if there have been barriers to attend.

FGDM is sometimes the only way extended family members become aware of issues. The FGDM expands the support network as more people can contribute to the family plan. This further strengthens a child or young person's support network and ability to remain either within the family, or at a minimum, involved in family life.



The example demonstrated the importance of family for a new baby to stay in Mum's care and rehabilitation plan for older sibling.


A referral was received around seeking FGDM support around pre-birth concerns. Mum was pregnant and Mum's older child (7) had been living in Kinship placement for several years. A family plan was created around the unborn baby going home to Mum's care with support of the extended family. The baby was born and went home with a FGDM family plan in place. There were no concerns around Mum's ability to manage baby safely. A further FGDM meeting was held, and the family created a plan around Mum's older child returning to her care. Both children are now in Mum's full-time care and are closed to Social Work.

All our family meetings have followed the FGDM National Standards and have adhered to the key principles of a family meeting. Key to FGDM is that meetings ***recognises that families are the experts in their own lives and there has been an opportunity to have private family time during the meeting.*** Over the last year we have ensured that all meetings have had private family time and that all family plans created by family's have been child centred and demonstrated extended family involvement in decision making for children. There was an opportunity to increase family networks in most referrals we progressed with an average of 7 family members attending meetings.

FGDM works on a consent basis, not only from the parent but from the child or young person where appropriate. This ensures that the child is involved in decision making and it is the right time for the service to be provided.



The Example demonstrates FGDM supporting an extended family network as natural supports: Guardianship Order: Self Directed Support / Transition Plan when a young person has addition support needs,



A referral was received for a 17-year-old man to support the family to explore and consider Guardianship Order in respect of 17-year-old young person who has a diagnosis of Autism: Learning Disability and has non-verbal communication. He required a high level of support and had been assessed as having no capacity to make decisions about his future. He lived with his maternal grandmother. However, plans needed to be made for his future. The family developed a plan to meet his future health and wellbeing needs. The family agreed to apply for a Joint Guardianship Order with an appropriate contingency plan made if this was to fail. Through FGDM, additional service needs were also explored, and the family agreed that service provider should be identified for the young person and that family would educate them on Young Person Cultural Beliefs and needs. This was agreed by social work who recognised the positive progress for the young person's future. FGDM family plan was then presented at young person's Education Transition Meeting. (For more details please see [Appendix 2](#))

#### Feedback from family

Parents and Family provided verbal feedback following the FGDM meeting where they felt they now had a 'better' understanding of the legal process for Guardianship Order and young person's future. They identified that sitting together as a family in 'family time' was one of the most positive aspects of the process and would recommend FGDM to other families.



Care

Our FGDM team continues to promote the service to all children who are care experienced, including those in Kinship placements, to promote positive, future focused decision making and maintaining family relationships which can sometimes become strained through the kinship process.

“Kinship family decision making must be supported by – and characterised by – **family group decision making** to explore the breadth and consequences of decisions about where children should live.” The Promise, Plan 24-30, 2024

The below is an example of a family networks coming together to supports young person from a Children’s House to a move to family in a Kinship placement.

### People

A referral was received around looking at possible rehabilitation plan for 14-year-old young person who had been accommodated and was living in a Children’s House. The parent did not want to engage to look at plan for young person to return home however consented to looking at family options. Through FGDM a Kinship Placement was identified with the maternal Grandmother and the Family Plan (see appendix 5) incorporated agreed boundaries, routines for the young person and support from the extended family. The young person successfully moved to her Grandmother’s home and has been settled since move.(For more details, please see [Appendix 1](#))



We are a small experienced, trained and skilled team comprising a senior social worker and 5 full time coordinators. Over the past year one of our long standing and dedicated FGDM co-ordinators has reduced their hours through flexible retirement, and this has given an opportunity to employ a new member of staff. Her first task was to shadow our experienced workers and complete the Robert Gordon University Family Group Decision Making Training. We have prioritised training to make sure all our coordinators are trained in Community Mediation, life story work and safe & together approach around domestic abuse, to offer these skills as a precursor to attending a family meeting, where there is tension and conflict preventing a family from creating a positive and effective plan for the future.

In 2023-24 we had the opportunity to successfully complete the Family Rights Group (FRG) Accreditation Framework and are awaiting the outcome. The accreditation is self-evaluation framework, to ensure that our FGDM service meets a standard of practice and that our co-ordinators are trained to meet the requirements of facilitating an effective family meeting. The process has given us the opportunity to gather evidence, reflect on our practice, highlight examples of good practice but also an awareness of our developmental needs. The FRG accreditation is a pledge by NLC and our FGDM coordinators are working to the 7 FRG key standards. During this process we created a Practice Guidance for FGDM in North Lanarkshire to ensure our standards are kept.

#### **FRG Key Standards**

- |                   |  |
|-------------------|--|
| <b>Standard 1</b> | The FGC coordinator is independent.  |
| <b>Standard 2</b> | The family's decision to participate in the FGC is voluntary.  |
| <b>Standard 3</b> | The FGC should be family-led and include 'private family time' for the family to make a plan in response to concerns.  |
| <b>Standard 4</b> | The referred child or adult should be the central focus of the FGC and they should be offered support, including advocate.   |
| <b>Standard 5</b> | The FGC service should ensure that the family has all necessary resources, including adequate preparation, relevant information, and a safe and appropriate environment, to make their plan. |
| <b>Standard 6</b> | The FGC should respect the family's privacy and right to confidentiality.  |
| <b>Standard 7</b> | The FGC service should work to the principles of equality and  |

#### **Family Members Evaluation Statistics and Quotes**

Hearing the voices of family members is important to us and receiving feedback from families is part of our evaluation process. Our original method was for independent member of the FGDM team to complete a telephone evaluation, however due to the low response rate and to promote independence, we adopted a new approach in July 2023 of using online evaluations.

After a FGDM family meeting has been completed, we seek consent to send a text to involved family members with a link to our anonymised questionnaires to gather feedback on families' experiences of the FGDM process. The feedback from family members is essential to help us to continue to reflect on and improve the service we provide. This is a voluntary survey that families complete in their own time without input from a coordinator. If support is required, the referring social worker can support the completion of the form.

Below we have highlighted some of the statistics and quotes from the evaluations.

Please scan our online evaluation:




32 people have provided feedback through this online survey at the time of writing.

On average, family report feeling very positive about their family plan, with a score of 8.13 out of 10.

93% of responders would recommend FGDM to other families.

17. Would you recommend Family Group Meetings to other families?

[More Details](#)

 Insights



### What families said....

**Mother** “it is very good thing to do because it made me, and my partner realise that this is no longer something we can put off all the time”

**Maternal Grandparent** “Excellent support service facilitating a way to move forward, make changes and accept what cannot be changed.”

**Great Aunt** “The family meeting let all of the family speak openly without feeling stressed with authority figures in the room”

### What a social worker said....

**Social Worker** “Great way to bring families together to make decisions about their own lives.”



## Lifelong Links in North Lanarkshire

Our priority over the past two year has been supporting young people who have care experienced and, in the transition, out of care and into adulthood, ensuring they could reconnect with important people in their network, including brother and sisters.

The Promise documented:

“Many care experienced young adults have told the Care Review that they felt abandoned and ill prepared as they moved from childhood into adulthood” (The Promise, 2020, pg.92).

### Aim of FGDM Lifelong Links

- To improve the longer term emotional and mental well-being and stability for children and young people in care and after care.
- To Identify and maximise the network of support around children and young people, so they will be able to successfully maintain and / or reconnect with the important people in their life, including family.

### Objectives

- There will be clarity over the existing relationships and important people in children and young people’s lives to ensure these relationships are supported and sustained in care and into adulthood.
- Children and young people with care experience will be supported to identify or reconnect with important people and family, to expand their network in a supportive and sustainable way.
- Children and young people will have better understanding of their family life, an increased sense of identity, and be supported to build their own narratives and address their needs to build safe connections, restore damaged relationships or to achieve closure.
- A Lifelong Links service will be established to promote systems, practice and culture change around the importance and sustainability of relationships for care experienced children and young people.

#### Relationships around the child

Loving relationships with the child at the centre

Family of origin

Family Carer  
(people in a parental role)

Decision Makers

Awareness Roles  
(such as education and health)

Wider Community



### Our Lifelong Links journey.

Lifelong Links service has developed and grown in importance and has proven to be an essential support that should be available to all young people with care experience in North Lanarkshire. The support offered by Lifelong Links connects with the wider work in North Lanarkshire to improve the engagement and participation of young people with care experience.

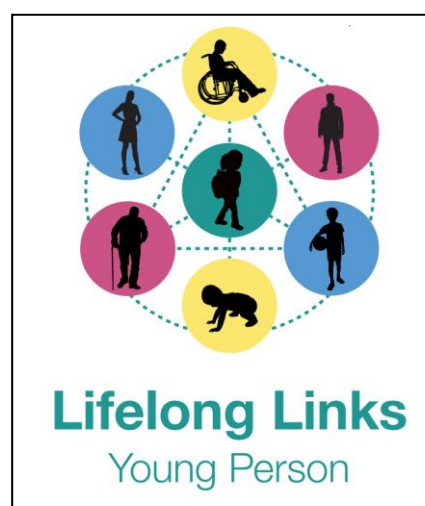
We continue to primarily focus on young people over the age of 16, however we will consider all referrals if appropriate for the young person. There have been 30 referrals to Lifelong Links service, consisting of 14 males and 15 females.

### Children and young people referred.

The majority of the young people requesting support have been over the age 16. We are currently supporting 18 young people through the LLL process. LLL service works with each individual young person and works around their needs.

Age and gender of children and young people referred

Age	Male	Female
<b>16 and Under</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>17</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>18</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>20</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>21</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>22</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>23</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>24</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Over 25</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>16</b>



Of the young people referred, 11 were living independently, 8 were living with family, 4 were in supported care, 1 was in a children's house, 3 were in foster care, 1 was in secure care and 1 was in prison.



## Lifelong Links and The Promise

### Foundation: Voice

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Young people are at the core of every decision in Lifelong Links. The service is offered to all young people who are care experienced, but when they feel that it is right for them. This may be when they are asking questions about their past to their allocated worker, or when they request access to their social work files to learn about the decisions that were made about them.

The LLL coordinator have spent time getting to know the young person and what they are looking for from the service. Some young people have a clear objective regarding who and what they want to achieve through Lifelong Links, for some this requires to be established.

All young people have had significant care experience and gaps in their knowledge about their family, identity and care experience. Many are experiencing the impact of adversity from their childhood, with presenting issues relating to their emotional wellbeing and mental health. The work is long term and provides a safe and structured space for young people to explore their network and plan in a safe way.

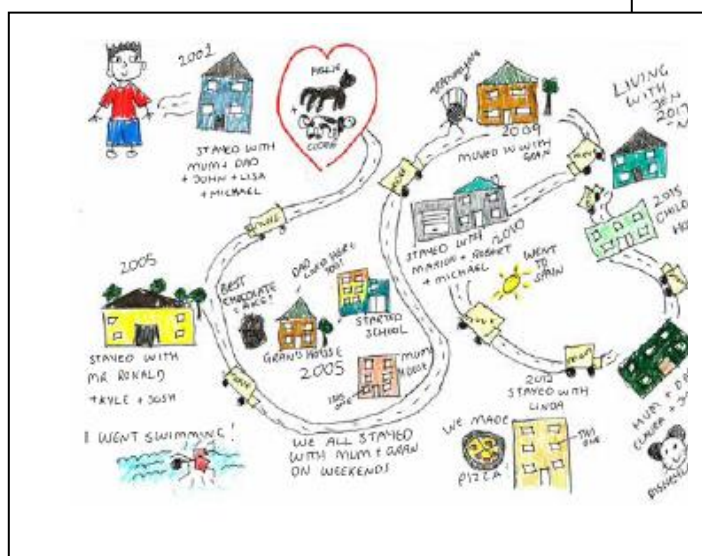
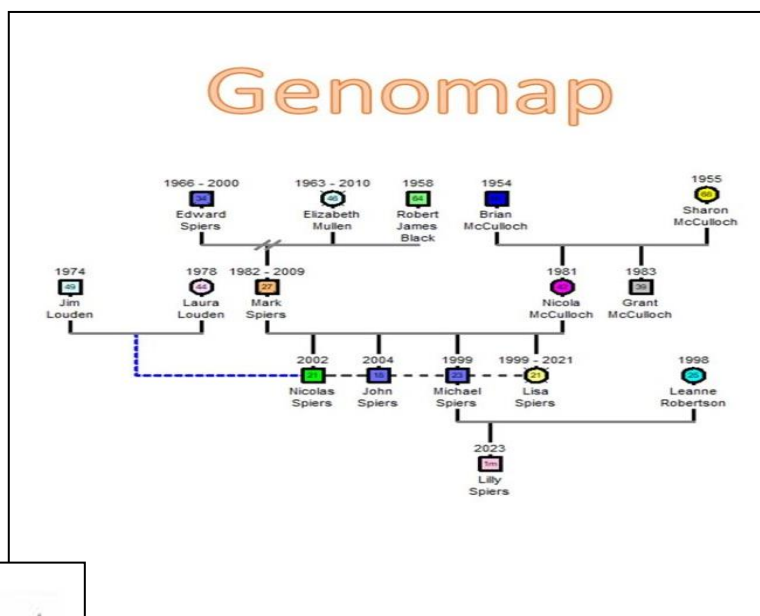
When completing lifestory work with a child or young person, it is done at a level and at a pace which suits them. Prior to starting the young person and coordinator agree the best way of communicating, so the young person can fully engage and understand the information that's being shared. The work is bespoke to each person to support and identifying their needs and exploring new ways of meeting these.

#### Young people's views of Lifelong Links:

*"Lifelong Links works. The workers are nice and explain what the service can do for you. I have had a positive experience and would recommend that other young people do it if they want."* Anonymous young person.

*"The best think about lifelong links was meeting my grandad and seeing that he was happy about seeing me too. I now know what happened in my life."* Anonymous young person.

*Example of a Genomap:*



Further exploration is developed through a tool known as “mobility mapping.” The young person draws and reflects on their journey to think about people, places and memories. By doing this it can help a young person remember and consider connections. The process can support maintain connections or reconnect any that have been broken.

*Example of Mobility Mapping:*

Research into Lifelong Links highlights that familial relationships are often lost when a family is unable to offer a kinship placement and the child is placed out with the family network. Lifelong Links can support a long-term plan to reconnect lost connections.

## An example reconnecting with birth family: Anna

Anna was referred by her counsellor as she was seeking information about her life prior to being adopted at age 6. Anna was supported to complete Genomap, mobility mapping and life story work, exploring her birth family and reflecting on what she could remember. She has been supported through the process by her LLL coordinator and her adoptive mother to reflect and understand her care journey and consider possible connections. Initially this was a difficult process to hear about the death of her birth parents. Anna has since made connections with both of her paternal and maternal grandfathers, a grandmother, brother, half-sisters and aunt who she likely wouldn't have known without Lifelong Links. Anna continues to explore her future connections at her pace with the supportive of her family. ([Appendix 3](#): case study)

### Anna and her family's Feedback on Lifelong Links:

Anna has advised she feels engaging with Lifelong Links has allowed her to make peace with the past and feel more secure in the present. Prior to engaging with Lifelong Links, Anna had felt a sense of 'what if' and sadness around special occasions wondering how her birth family may be feeling. Anna is aware she was never forgotten by her birth family, and she has always been loved.

Anna's Paternal Grandfather is delighted to be back in contact with Anna. He advised that he has prayed for Anna and her adoptive parents on a weekly basis and that he is eternally grateful to her adoptive parents. After meeting Anna for the first time with her adoptive Mother he advised that he is able to sleep easy at night now that he knows Anna is well and happy.

Anna's adoptive Mother advised she feels Lifelong Links has been extremely successful for Anna. Anna's adoptive Mother feels there is a sense of the weight of the world being removed from Anna's shoulders now she no longer lives with the 'what if' questions. Anna's adoptive Mother recognises that Anna could have had contact with her Paternal Grandfather throughout the adoption and that he poses no risk to her. Anna's adoptive Mother has agreed to participate in adoption preparation groups for future prospective adopters.

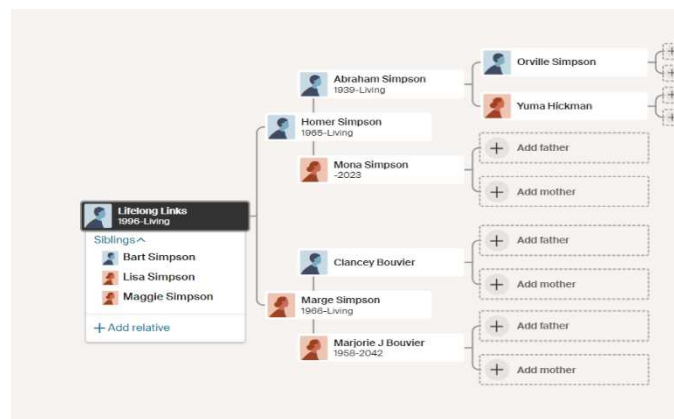
**Feedback from Anna's Aunt** "Thanks for coming back to me and going out to see my mum and dad. I spoke with my mum and dad this morning we are all delighted to know that Anna has had a great life she has never been far from our thoughts. We've all waited so long for this day to know she is okay, and I just want to say thanks for everything. Thanks"

## Foundation: Care

With the young person's consent, the coordinator undertakes a "deep dive file search" which involves reading through the individual's social work records to identify any important people or places that could support making a connection. This can include everyone from birth families, previous foster carers or social workers to neighbours, teachers or anyone else that the young person feels were significant to them. Often the young people have forgotten the carers or other significant people from their early years, yet these people can provide a rich history and understanding of this period of the young person's life. This stage could take months to complete, particularly if the young person had several moves or lived out with North Lanarkshire, as files need to be sourced from other local authorities.

Other options and resources are available, such as National Birth, Death and Marriage Records, Ancestry, Census submissions and social media, which can all be used where appropriate to identify and contact people.

### *Example of Ancestry Tree:*

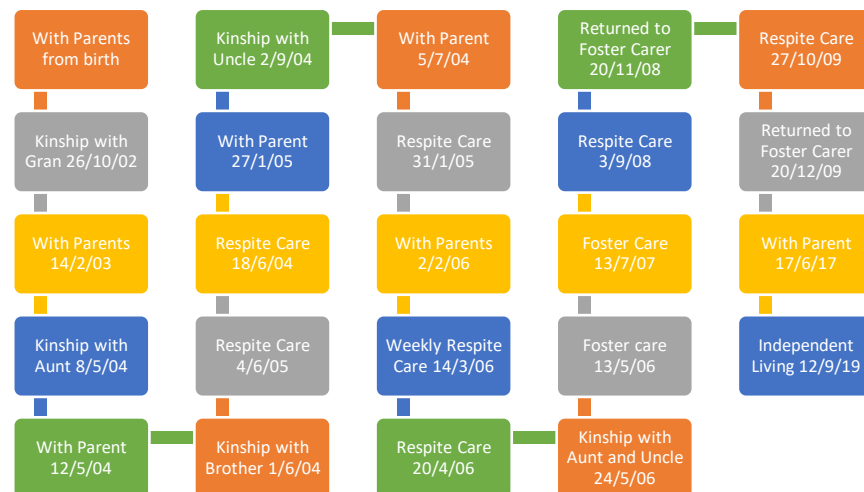


A placement timeline is compiled.

This is used to map the moves that a young person has had throughout their care journey. Young people have said that the placement timeline has helped them clarify the sequencing of events in their life as they have been unclear due to being a young child and changes in placements. For some young people, a placement timeline is where the journey ends for Lifelong Links, but for many it is just the beginning of the process. Many of the young people we work with have questions about why important decisions were made in their life and what steps were taken to support them to stay in their families and communities prior to or just after becoming accommodated. There is an option to explore a young person's social work involvement through a Subject Access Request (SAR) of social work case files. However, Lifelong Links offers a structured and supportive approach that encompasses a trauma informed model of life story work with young people.



### Example Placement timeline



While all important relationships are recognised in Lifelong Links, there is a particular emphasis on brothers and sisters and how these relationships have been supported. Many separated sibling groups do not know why they did not grow up together, or in some cases, that they had siblings at all. Siblings may be in a very different place and not be able to manage this new relationship. A coordinator supports the young person to manage the expectations and emotions and to explore a positive way forward.

### An example of the impact on sibling separation: Daniel

Daniel requested a referral to LLL as he wanted to know the reason why he was cared for separately from his sisters, although at that time he did not want contact with his siblings. He had a concern that it was his actions that had led him from being separated and that he was assessed as a risk to his siblings. When Daniel was younger, he experienced further trauma and disclosed physical and emotional abuse whilst in foster care. Daniel wanted to know how his disclosure of abuse was managed by social work. His coordinator spent time with Daniel, linking with his support from counselling and aftercare services. The LLL coordinator completed a deep dive search into his social work case files and compiled a comprehensive chronology to try and answer the questions he had about his care journey. The LLL co-ordinator supported Daniel understanding the information from social work records. Feedback from Daniel informed that this gave him an understanding of his care journey, that he wasn't responsible for his siblings being separated and made him open to contacting his siblings. Daniel now has contact with two of his sisters and has met a previous foster carer who he sees as his only positive experience in foster care. The work undertaken with Daniel highlighted to Daniel that he had many more care placements in his life (24 moves) and that even the event he thought happened in a particular home actually happened elsewhere. (See full case study: [Appendix 4](#))

### Daniel's Feedback:

Daniel has found the process to be really positive. He feels that now he understands his story, he is able to connect with his family without feeling angry about the different directions their lives took. Daniel is now looking to use his experience to support other young people who are experiencing similar circumstances. Daniel believes that all young people who have questions about their past should do lifelong links. Daniel is happy that he now knows his story and how his childhood experiences have shaped his future.

After life story work some young people work with the coordinator to identify anyone they would like to contact. The co-ordinator carefully plans and contacts each identified person. This process can take time and can start and end in written form. The aim is to bring everyone together to create a plan on how to maintain the support network for the young person in the future with their "lifelong links". The facilitator ensures that people are supported to only commit to what they are comfortable with and manages the individual's expectations through open and honest discussions.

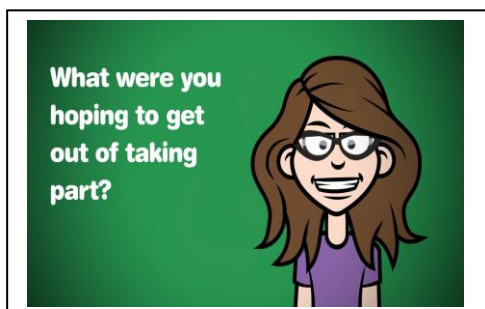
### Foundation: People

Lifelong Links is often the only way that other relationships are often identified and supported. Such as important teachers, neighbours or other significant people who are willing to be a part of the young person's support network. Lifelong Links supports this through rebuilding these links that may have been lost. Reconnecting carers has shown to be very successful in our service, with young people being reclaimed and welcomed back into relationships that have been lost.



**Family  
workers,  
teachers,  
neighbours,  
foster families,  
people important  
to you.**

An example of the importance of young people knowing their narrative and reconnecting with a foster carer.



Stephanie:

Stephanie had requested access to her social work case files but had agreed to try Lifelong Links instead as a more supportive input, having been through the care system and experiencing trauma in her life.

Through mobility mapping, Stephanie was supported to reflect on her time in care and identified people she would like to reconnect with, including a previous

worker and foster carers. Stephanie was supported by her coordinator and has made a Lifelong link connection with a previous Foster Carer, they have been able to share memories and photographs when they cared for her and slowly developed a long term commitment to each other. This has given Stephanie a support network to people she feels care about her that she was never aware of.

Stephanie's feedback:

Stephanie has found the experience positive with Lifelong Links and feels this should always have been made available to her. Stephanie feels that links should be allowed to continue with workers and previous carers and is happy that this is being embedded into policy with the promise (See full case study: [Appendix 5](#))

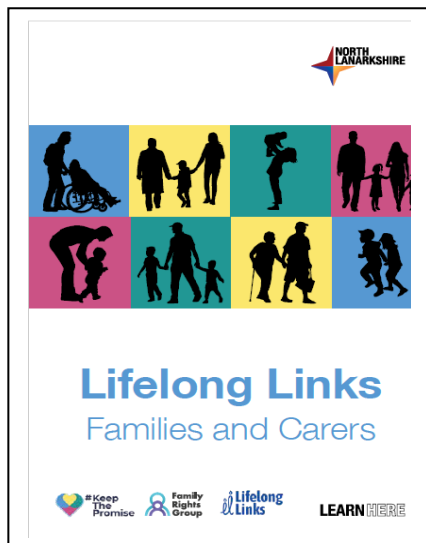
Foundation: Scaffolding

Lifelong Links has achieved its key aims and objectives over the past 2 years. There continues to be a clear focus on supporting young people and improving our understanding of young people's care journeys.

We have had the opportunity to promote systems, practice and culture change around the importance and sustainability of important relationships for care experienced children and young people. We continue to look at creative ways to meet individual requests, including navigating other countries' legal systems and the complexities of navigating General Data Protection Regulation. At times we have worked closely with the legal department to ensure we are adhering to local and national guidance regarding information sharing while meeting the needs of the people we support. However, more importantly, our learning from what young people tell us about their care experienced journey and how the service can be improved in the future.

The examples below demonstrate some of the ways we have promoted our learning from Lifelong Links:

- Training to workers around lifestory work and language awareness sessions on what and how information should be recorded as an important event in a young person's life.
- Awareness raising sessions to Foster Carers and preadoption support groups on our experiences of LLL and what young people feel is important to remember on their care journey.
- Providing key learning from LLL to social work locality teams, local and national events and inputs to university and newly qualified workers training.



- Supporting the development of the North Lanarkshire Aftercare Website, including stories from the young people we have worked with from LLL.
- Informing Social Work recording system, giving space to record important relationships, which should be maintained throughout a young person's care journey and into adulthood.
- Promoting the use of the counselling service within Intensive Services to ensure that young people are able to explore and process their care journey.
- Contribute to the National Lifelong Links support network, exploring learning and reflection on practice experience.

There are regular meetings with the Family Rights Group to discuss and explore issues and support embedding the Lifelong Links service into practice. This has provided the team with ongoing advice, support and guidance as issues have arisen through service delivery. This includes legal complications, cross boundary access to records and general practice issues.

Statement from FRG: "Family Rights Group has been impressed with the appropriately paced and thorough approach North Lanarkshire has taken to developing a new Lifelong Links service within the authority over the last year. The implementation and development of the new service has been strongly supported by senior leaders with impressive efforts made to include colleagues from across the full range of children and family services in North Lanarkshire. There is a particularly strong commitment to utilise the experience and learning from Lifelong Links to improve practice across children's services based upon the core commitments contained within the Promise".

## Next year and beyond ....

The report has evidenced the positive service development of the FGDM and Lifelong Links service. The model has been strengthened over the past year and has had the opportunity to provide the service across the 6 North Lanarkshire children and families locality teams. Over the next year we will continue to reinforce our key objectives and work towards our long-term goals.

FGDM has helped support social workers recognising families are the experts in their own life. The FGDM and LLL service will continue to work hard to ensure children and young people's voices are heard and work towards empowering children, young people and their families to be at the centre of decision making. Through our Lifelong Links service, we will continue to work towards improving the longer term emotional and mental well-being and stability for young people. Using the FGDM service and Lifelong Links service, we will continue to identify and maximising the network of support around children and young people, so they will be able to successfully maintain and / or reconnect with the important people and family in their life. By completing the Family Rights Group accreditation process and our yearly evaluation report, we have identified key areas for service development. We have reflected on the work we are doing and the positive impact it has had on families.

Over the next year we will building on this year's success, identifying key areas for development.

1. We will confirm our Practice Guidance for FGDM in North Lanarkshire to ensure our standards are kept and comply with FRG and the Scottish national FGDM standards.
2. We will continue to use the same referral criteria for FGDM, prioritising unborn babies, child protection, edges of care and rehabilitation/leaving care.
3. We will continue promoting our service delivery and ensuring the 6 social work localities prioritise our key referrals, providing ongoing information raising sessions.
4. We will continue to raise the FGDM and lifelong links profile to our local community to ensure a rights-based approach to FGDM and lifelong links is delivered throughout North Lanarkshire.
5. We will continue to work creatively with children and young people to ensure that their views can be gathered in whatever way they feel most comfortable, ensuring their views are included in decisions which affect them.
6. We will continue to promote parents/carers and extended families' voices in decision to ensure that we can keep children within their families wherever possible.
7. We are working on developing new ways of recording children, parents and family's views, particularly when the individuals are unable to attend the family meetings to ensure their views are accurately shared within the family plan.
8. We plan to review our recording processes, including how we record significant pieces of work and FGDM review meetings.

We will continue to expand and learn from the children, young people and families receiving support from the FGDM and Lifelong Link service. We hope our learning will continue to help improve social work practice and make it an easier journey for children and young people within the social work service.



**Appendix 5: Parental and young people feedback on the intensive services summer programme**

*"My daughter learned a life skill. I can't swim so I'm glad she had the chance to learn"*

*"Thanks for taking him as it has given him something to do with other children his age"*

*"Can't believe how relaxed he was, he's talked about it non-stop"*

*"The time let me sort some stuff out, without having to worry about him"*

*"Could not afford to take her away on something like that, so I'm pleased she got to go"*

*"Helped bring my family together in a way I had not seen in a while as I'm always on high alert thinking that the police are going to chap the door anytime and this causes anxiety and friction in the house".*

*"I'm going to take them back there because she had so much fun"*

*"All he does is sit in his room. I'm surprised he went but, he seems to have enjoyed it"*

*"Who knew I could swim"*

*"The staff are alright too"*

*"Amazing, favourite group of 2024"*

*"Banging"*

*"I've got a bestie"*

*"I want to come again next year, or I am going to cry"*

*"Loved the paddleboarding and kayaking cause I never thought I could it"*

*"I liked being out for the full day, it kept me distracted"*