

cyrenians

TACKLING THE CAUSES AND
CONSEQUENCES OF HOMELESSNESS



'KEEPING FAMILIES TOGETHER' EVALUATION

2023

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all of the young people and families who participated; Cyrenians, secure care and social work staff who supported the research over the past three years; and Cyrenians for commissioning the research. I would especially like to thank Kerry Watson for all her support and guidance throughout.

'Keeping Families Together' Evaluation December 2023

Dr Briège Nugent

Executive summary

Introduction and overview

This three-year evaluation of Cyrenians' Keeping Families Together (KFT) project reports on a test of change funded by CashBack for Communities. The project set out to support young people in secure care and their families to rebuild relationships and return to the family home where possible after leaving care. It targeted those at risk of being involved in the criminal justice system. KFT staff work with each individual within the family on a one-to-one basis first, to understand needs as well as strengths, before bringing the family together to provide mediation and promote positive time together, such as enabling family days out. They also hold conflict resolution workshops with young people in secure care to help them to reflect before acting and learn different ways of dealing with issues.

The project set out to achieve the following CashBack for Communities six mandatory outcomes:

- Outcome 1: Young people build their confidence and resilience, benefit from strengthened support networks and reduce risk taking behaviour.
- Outcome 2: Young people develop their physical and personal skills.
- Outcome 3: Young people's health and well-being improves.
- Outcome 4: Young people participate in activity which improves their learning, employability and employment options.
- Outcome 5: Young people contribute positively to their communities.
- Outcome 6: Young people are diverted from criminal behaviour or involvement with the criminal justice system.

Approach and methodology

The project was significantly impacted by the pandemic and all agencies were subject to legal restrictions which resulted in a markedly reduced sample size. The number of people who participated in this evaluation was small and the findings cannot be generalised.

This study reports on quantitative data collated by the project on outcomes for 74 young people supported over the past three years. The main qualitative study reports on:

- a longitudinal study from three different families who were supported by the project from 2020-23 and a consultation event with two of these families
- a retrospective interview with a parent/carer
- a focus group with young people who participated in a conflict resolution workshop
- focus group sessions with eight Cyrenians staff over three years
- interviews with two staff members from one secure care centre and one social worker.

A thematic analysis was carried out for each of the elements.

Key findings: Quantitative data

Findings and qualitative feedback suggest that the whole family benefitted from KFT interventions and the outcomes set by CashBack for Communities were met for those young people and families that participated in the project. However, the initial target of working with 380 young people over the course of the funding was not achieved. As a new project launching, KFT, secure centre partners, and those young people and their families who may have been involved with the project, were significantly impacted by the pandemic and legal constraints during an extensive period of time and also during the period of recovery. For the 74 young people that did participate in the project, almost half of the 74 young people stated their participation in anti-social or criminal behaviour had reduced over the past three years and more than three quarters were less inclined to participate in this behaviour. Findings reported 7% were now in employment and 75% in further education.

Interviews with families

- Families reported having complex lives at the point at which they met with Cyrenians, dealing with intergenerational trauma and poverty.
- Working with Cyrenians was crucially a choice, and families were supported holistically, provided with practical as well as emotional support.
- Cyrenians staff were viewed as frank and personable in a way that struck a chord, and established trust, building relationships by being consistent, responsive, going at the pace the individuals wanted, following through on what they said they were going to do, and not being judgemental.
- Feedback from families suggests the impact on families was significant. They reported being able to communicate better as a family, having strengthened relationships, and improved physical and mental health.
- Two parents/carers were now back working and felt this was because of Cyrenians' support. One young person was at college and working full-time. Another young person was linked in with another third sector organisation as they waited to go back to full-time education.

Interviews with Cyrenians, secure care and social work staff

- Qualitative and quantitative data, along with feedback from families, indicates that this model of whole family support, and using mediation, has been shown to work. Support for young people and their families upon leaving care is much needed.
- Drawing on the learning, it is important that Cyrenians takes account of the time-intensive nature of this project.
- All staff interviewed, that is from Cyrenians, the secure care centre and the social worker, wanted to see the project continue with more young people engaging with the workshops and families able to work with KFT, in part highlighting successful collaboration and the added value of working in partnership.

Conclusion and recommendations

Overall, as a test of change, this has shown that the families need and want the support, and this takes time and a lot of effort and persistence to build trusting relationships. It is recommended that:

- The KFT project is promoted to the Children's Hearings System so that it is accessible to families where any form of care is being considered, to promote earlier intervention, recognising this would require additional funding.

- Cyrenians staff continue to be afforded opportunities in training in trauma-informed responses and neurodiversity, and to support families to also access this information.
- With a budget of this size, keep the target number of families low and ensure staff are supported to manage boundaries and potential burn out.
- Cyrenians further explores a hybrid approach of in-person and online support for families living outside the Central Belt. This is due to constraints in the project budget. In the Central Belt, or more specifically the Lothians, Cyrenians can tailor their offer of support in those areas where they have most community connections, thus offering the most meaningful engagement.
- Collate data every six months from the young people based on the six outcomes outlined.
- Partnership working, between Cyrenians, secure care centres and referral agencies, continues with the shared aim of improving the lives of young people and their families.

Introduction and overview

Cyrenians' *Keeping Families Together* (KFT) project was funded by CashBack for Communities and this final report is based on a three-year evaluation of the project.

*"CashBack for Communities is a unique Scottish Government programme which reinvests criminal assets recovered through the Proceeds of Crime Act (POCA) and invests in projects delivering positive futures for our young people."*¹

Phase 5 of CashBack for Communities ran from 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2023 and supported projects that provided a range of activities for children and young people between the ages of 10-24 which:

- Support people, families and communities most affected by crime.
- Support those most at risk of being involved in anti-social behaviour, offending or reoffending into positive destinations.
- Support young people most at risk of entering the justice system.
- Provides intergenerational support for parents, families and children impacted by Adverse Childhood Experiences.²

Relationship breakdown and Mediation and Support

Strong, positive relationships are essential to every person's health and wellbeing, and that could not be truer for young people. Relationship breakdown is the primary cause of youth homelessness in Scotland – in 2022/23, 63% of people under 25 presenting as homeless cited 'family relationship breakdown' as the reason for their application.³

Since 2006 Cyrenians has been delivering an award-winning Mediation and Support service for young people at high risk of homelessness.⁴ Their early intervention approach reduces and tackles relationship breakdown and conflict between young people and their families, and nurtures positive relationships. This holistic approach provides young people and families with the opportunity to develop skills in areas such as active listening, relationship-building, parenting, communication, conflict management and conflict resolution.

KFT project

The Scottish Government describes secure care as:

*"... a form of residential care that restricts the freedom of children under the age of 18. It is for the small number of children who may be a significant risk to themselves, or others in the community. ... Secure care aims to provide intensive support and safe boundaries to help these highly vulnerable children re-engage and move forward positively in their communities."*⁵

¹ <https://cashbackforcommunities.org/about/>. The CashBack for Communities programme has strong links to the Scottish Government's [Vision for Justice in Scotland](#).

² To find out more information please go to: <https://cashbackforcommunities.org>.

³ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/homelessness-in-scotland-full-statistical-time-series/>.

⁴ In 2012 Cyrenians' mediation service won the Family Support Award at Children & Young People Now – <https://www.cypnow.co.uk/>. In 2016 two Cyrenians mediators won national Civil Mediation Council awards (<https://civilmediation.org/national-mediation-awards/>) as Community Mediator of the Year and Family Mediator of the Year.

⁵ <https://www.gov.scot/policies/youth-justice/secure-care/>.

Recognising that young people in secure care may be at particular risk of relationship breakdown with their families, in April 2020 Cyrenians began the KFT project. KFT is specifically targeted at children and young people aged 12+ who are living in one of Scotland's four secure care centres and offers whole family support, with a particular focus on building positive relationships.⁶

The KFT project is a test of change, to support young people aged over 12 years old to rebuild relationships with their families and return to the family home where possible after leaving secure care.⁷ The project was funded to specifically target those who are at greatest risk of spiralling further into the criminal justice system. The project does this by engaging with young people and their families, before the young person leaves care, and ideally as early as possible, on a one-to-one basis first. It then supports the family to come together, to communicate with each other, providing mediation, family days out, highlighting their strengths as well as addressing needs. It offers practical and emotional support, and in keeping with the values set out by *The Promise*, offers a whole family approach.⁸ The project also provides *conflict resolution workshops* to young people, to help them to reflect and understand ways in which they can communicate better, reducing conflict. The project offers three separate yet interconnected interventions:

- **Mediation** between young people and their care-givers, siblings and other relevant family members.
- **Outreach** support breaking down barriers such as education, well-being, employment or training.
- Group **workshops** to build resilience, conflict resolution skills, and emotional regulation.

Mediation – a skilled and trained mediator supports families to have meaningful conversations in a productive way. Families are supported to:

- Negotiate rules and guidelines for young people's return home from secure.
- Set boundaries and communicate needs to each other, both when visiting in secure and the transition to other environments (e.g. their family home or new accommodation).
- Discuss and receive a sense of closure on historical issues; mediation can help families draw a line under and move on from specific issues.
- Improve general communication skills so needs can be expressed positively to professionals (e.g. social work, police, keyworkers, secure care staff) in their lives.

Family Outreach – working closely with mediators, the Family Outreach Workers (FOWs) offer whole family support, working with parents/carers and young people on issues that are important to them e.g. practical support around education, work, parenting, developing skills to manage emotions, understanding how relationships work and increasing confidence to communicate their needs. The initial assessment is trauma-informed, rights respecting and strengths based, asking only two questions (*What's good about your family?* and *What would you like to change?*). If needed, there is also a small KFT fund available to assist with travel costs, child care

⁶ At the start of the project, KFT worked with five secure care centres. The fifth secure care centre closed during the project lifespan.

⁷ For context, previous research has shown that half of young people (54%) leaving care return to their biological parents and around a half (43%) do not receive aftercare support. Scottish Government (2023) Children Social Work Statistics 2021-2022. Edinburgh: Scottish Government. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/childrens-social-work-statistics-scotland-2021-22/pages/secure-care-accommodation/>.

⁸ <https://thepromise.scot/>.

and other expenses to enable parents/carers to visit their children and, on occasion, FOWs can also help families access small grants for fun family activities in local areas.

Conflict Resolution Workshops – interactive workshops for young people who have been identified by secure care staff as struggling with conflict; promoting improved communication and reducing the potential for future conflict. Workshops can follow a set 6-week *Fight or Flight* programme or be more bespoke depending on individual needs. Delivered in conjunction with secure care staff, workshops are aligned to the Curriculum for Excellence and skill up young people to better manage anger, build stronger relationships and limit the negative consequences of conflict. Workshops can also be adapted, for example if there is limited literacy, and utilise a range of interactive activities and visual resources.

In addition, for a short period in 2022, KFT was able to trial **art therapy** sessions with 22 young people – a further support to enable young people to develop confidence to communicate their needs to others within the family, with a view to them participating in mediation.

The various KFT interventions – all aim to support families to create positive memories and build stronger relationships. Project staff offer emotional and practical support, such as around housing, finance, understanding about neurodivergence, and where appropriate, discuss underlying family issues, signposting families to agencies and specialised support.

In the first year of the project, the pandemic hit and the project could not operate as planned, but instead used the time to upskill staff in areas such as trauma-informed practice and neurodiversity, and to build connections with secure care staff and other organisations. As well as the aftermath of the pandemic, the cost-of-living crisis meant the project had to slightly shift their focus, away from mediation towards crisis practical support. KFT is not a crisis support project but by being responsive and removing potential barriers to engagement, staff were able to create trusted relationships with families. This practical support was wide ranging, such as getting families food parcels, electricity, weight blankets to help with anxiety, money for family days out and providing toys at Christmas. The project also provided resources and access to training for family members supporting neurodiverse young people. In order to further build trust Cyrenians also occasionally played the role of advocate for parents/carers and young people; promoting their rights and acting in a multi-agency way, to arrive at solutions, sometimes creatively, to help families and young people get the help they required from the wider system.

Evaluation approach and methodology

This evaluation was approached with an ethic of care and participants supported where possible, by for example, linking them back in with Cyrenians if the case had been closed but they revealed in the interview that they wanted to regain support. Participants were made aware that their names would never be disclosed to the public and their testimonies treated with strict confidence. Due to lockdown restrictions and literacy difficulties, the consent form was read out to interviewees with different options given for opting-in, such as being willing to be recorded, to check their understanding about how the information would be used and to be contacted again to organise another interview. The evaluation adopted an action research model with findings communicated back to project staff quickly and on an informal basis to help develop practice.

Data management for this study was in line with The University of Glasgow's Code of Good Practice in Research.⁹

A thematic analysis was carried out for each of the elements. This involved six phases, namely becoming familiar with the data; generating initial codes; searching for themes; reviewing themes; defining and naming themes, and finally writing up.¹⁰

The start of the project was hindered by the pandemic and lockdown restrictions, despite repeated requests this did have an impact on sample size. The number of people who participated in this study was small and the findings cannot be generalised.

This evaluation reports on these families' specific experiences of engaging with KFT interventions. All of the young people who participated had been in multiple residential and secure settings over several years. To protect the young people's anonymity no placement has been named. The main aim with qualitative data is to achieve depth of understanding, and this was dependent on those taking part being able to 'tell it like it is' and being comfortable to open up. The research required significant support from project staff to gain access to the young people and their families. Cyrenians collated the quantitative data on outcomes for the full group.

The findings in this report draw on:

- demographic data available for 74 young people
- quantitative findings based on 74 young people who have self-reported on impact
- a longitudinal study from three different families who have been supported by the project from 2020-2023
- one interview with a parent/carer
- a focus group session with two of the young people who had participated in a conflict resolution workshop
- focus group sessions with eight Cyrenians staff
- a consultation event involving two families near the end of the evaluation
- interviews with two staff members from one secure care centre and one social worker.

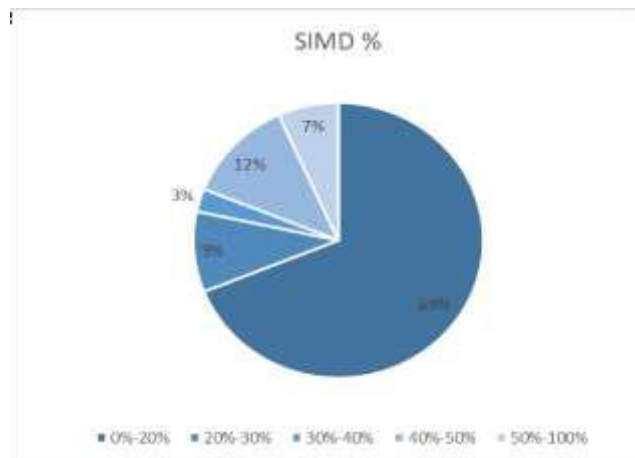
Key findings

Demographics (quantitative data):

- Of the 74 children and young people supported over the duration of the project, 55 were aged between 10-15 years old and 19 were 16-18 years old.
- 45 were male and 29 were female.
- The following graph presents the breakdown of the area of deprivation young people came from, with 0-20% SIMD 1 (69%), the most deprived area in Scotland, and SIMD 2 (9%) the second most deprived.

⁹ The University of Glasgow (2020) Code of Good Practice in Research. Available at: https://www.gla.ac.uk/media/Media_490311_smxx.pdf.

¹⁰ Nowell, S. Norris, J. White, D. and Moules, N. (2017) Thematic Analysis: Striving to Meet the Trustworthiness Criteria. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*. 16: 1-13.



Breakdown of project costs

As part of the evaluation, CashBack for Communities required a breakdown of the project costs per participant and the total figure for the three years. The figures and breakdown in the table below are calculated based on total project spend for each financial year, divided by the number of young people from each local authority who participated in the project.

Local authority area	Spend over three years	No. of young people
Angus	£ 31,556	7
Argyll and Bute	£ 10,906	2
East Dunbartonshire	£ 25,713	3
East Lothian	£ 19,922	4
Edinburgh	£ 104,911	19
Falkirk	£ 15,528	3
Glasgow	£ 23,819	4
Highland	£ 21,927	4
Renfrewshire	£ 83,023	17
South Ayrshire	£ 4,507	1
South Lanarkshire	£ 13,027	2
West Lothian	£ 9,014	2
Cross Border*		6
Total	£363,855	74

* Six young people from England who were being accommodated in secure care in Scotland attended workshops

Over the three years, the KFT project worked with children and young people from 12 of Scotland's 32 local authority areas.

Outcomes (quantitative data):

CashBack for Communities stipulated that the external evaluation of projects funded during Phase 5, such as KFT, should include measurement of achievement against six mandatory outcomes: five short term (Outcomes 1–5) and one longer term (Outcome 6).

Taking account of all 74 young people who have been supported over three years, data suggests that the following outcomes have been achieved based on the self-reporting of young people. However, the initial target of working with 380 young people over the course of the funding was not achieved.

Outcome 1: Young people build their confidence and resilience, benefit from strengthened support networks and reduce risk-taking behaviour

Indicators	Across the three years
1.1 Young person reports increased confidence	70 (95%)
1.2 Young person reports they are able to do new things	55 (75%)
1.3 Young person feels more resilient	63 (86%)
1.4 Other stakeholders report young person's increased confidence	74 (100%)
1.5 Young person reports positive supportive networks	55 (75%)
1.6 Young person reports positive change in behaviour	69 (93%)
1.7 Other stakeholders report positive change in behaviour	74 (100%)

Outcome 2: Young people develop their physical and personal skills

Indicators	Across the three years
2.1 Young person has increased skills, achieved accredited learning	03 (4%)
2.2 Young person reports an increase in their skills	72 (98%)
2.3 Other stakeholders report positive changes in behaviour of young person	74 (100%)

Outcome 3: Young people's health and well-being improves

Indicators	Across the three years
3.1 Young person improves SHANARRI indicators ¹¹	64 (87%)
3.2 Other stakeholders perceive increase in SHANARRI indicators ¹²	74 (100%)

Outcome 4: Young people participate in activity which improves their learning, employability and employment options (positive destinations)

Indicators	Across the three years
4.1 Young person feels they will achieve a positive destination	61 (82%)
4.2 Young person's school attendance improves	52 (70%)
4.3 Positive destination into employment achieved	05 (7%)
4.4 Positive destination to further education/returning or remaining in school	55 (75%)

¹¹ <https://www.gov.scot/policies/girfec/wellbeing-indicators-shanarri/>.

¹² *Ibid.*

Outcome 5: Young people contribute positively to their communities

Indicators	Across the three years
5.1 Young person feels their contribution, links with communities and social interaction are improving	60 (81%)
5.2 Other stakeholders perceive the young person to have improved contribution, links and social interaction	74 (100%)
5.3 Participants have a heightened sense of belonging to a community	26 (35%)

Outcome 6: Young people are diverted from criminal behaviour or involvement with the criminal justice system

Indicators	Across the three years
6.1 Young person feels their own participation in anti-social and/or criminal behaviour has reduced	33 (44%)
6.2 Young person feels less inclined to participate in anti-social or criminal behaviour	61 (82%)

The journey described by families and impact of the work with Cyrenians (qualitative data)

This section provides findings from the interviews, based on how families described the challenges and their lives before engaging with the KFT project, their views of the support they received and the impact felt.

Whole family support

As a result of getting support in their own right, parents and carers stated that they felt their own health and wellbeing had improved; this demonstrates the need for support to be extended to the whole family.

Intergenerational trauma

Through engaging with support, parents and carers felt they had a space to explore the impact of the intergenerational trauma they had experienced and how they felt about themselves, which again evidences the need for whole family support in helping young people resettle back to family life.

"I am not ready for counselling. I don't think I am strong enough for it. Sometimes I feel I do need that counselling. But I am not ready to do it all. I think I need to do that separate... I put everyone else first. I think I do need to fix me. Maybe if I had done this earlier. I am judging myself here. Guilt comes in and then I become a recluse. I was self-taught with everything as I had shit parents." (Parent/Carer, Second Interview)

Poverty

People's complex lives were made even more complicated because of the backdrop and foreground of poverty that had pervaded every aspect of their lives. None of the interviewees spoke about the impact of poverty openly, but the kind of support requested, family circumstances and comments from parent/carers and young people to KFT staff, indicate that

the shame and stigma around this is real.¹³ Families all spoke about support they had from Cyrenians by way of food parcels, heating, support with travel, and their day to day struggles to manage. One example given was when the KFT Family Outreach worker had called a multi-agency meeting with housing and social work to advocate on behalf of a parent/carer, as they were overwhelmed by the situation and required the extra support from Cyrenians to move forward with the situation. As a result of combining efforts with other services, the family has now moved into more suitable housing.

Love

Despite all of the issues they experienced, they saw themselves as a family and although not always able to communicate well, the care and love is something they all spoke about as being there. In the consultation event, one young person revealed that all this time they had thought their parent/carer hadn't wanted them and had asked social work to put them in care. The young person said they did not realise that the decision had not been 'made' by their parent/carer. The young person added that recognising and understanding this was a major breakthrough for them and said it made them see themselves, and their relationship with their parent/carer, differently. Through engaging with meditation, both the parent/carer and young person now had the confidence to communicate this to each other, saying they had never had the space to say this to each other in the past.

Working with Cyrenians: Facilitators to engagement

The following section sets out firstly the facilitators and barriers to engagement with Cyrenians, before moving on to the impact reported.

Above all else, working with Cyrenians was a choice for the families and in their view, this was different to the other 'support' they had in their lives.

"I have been working with Cyrenians now for a year and seeing them twice a week. I like that this is my choice." (Young Person)

"It is different, it is more flexible. I am not pressured into doing this. I am doing it of my own free will. I can always say I don't want to do it. I don't but I could. We have a wee cup of tea and blether. Social work often just work with the kids... It is on my terms." (Parent/Carer)

The project aims to meet people where they are at, which means staff have the flexibility to meet families in places and at times that suit them. The families I interviewed reported that they felt that the style of the communication with KFT workers was different, less formal, on their terms and at times that suited them. During interviews and at the consultation event, the KFT workers were described as speaking to the family as a family, asking them what they felt their strengths were in the beginning and what support they wanted to develop these, as well as addressing the challenges.

Part of the Family Outreach Worker role is to inquire about practical issues families might be struggling with, and help them directly, such as getting help with food parcels or heating. In doing so, the outreach workers were able to build trust and regarded as offering holistic support that benefitted the whole family. The importance of practical support is further discussed below.

¹³ Walker, R. (2014) *The Shame of Poverty*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Importance of direct consistent support, good communication and being non-judgemental, and time to build trusting relationships

Despite the best efforts of social work teams, and other support services, parent/carers said they felt they had sometimes been left without appropriate support in the past. They noted that often the support offered was for their child and that, for them as parent/carers, this had felt like the 'first time' they had been given support in their own right too. All said they could be open and honest with the KFT workers and that they had often struggled to do so in the past. Cyrenians staff were viewed as frank and personable in a way that struck a chord and established trust, building relationships by being consistent, responsive, going at the pace the individuals wanted, and following through on what they said they were going to do. Families said they did not feel 'judged' and this was important to them.

"It helps me to have someone to speak to and get advice. Even if I just text she gets back to me as soon as she can. I think that they are not social work and they are not family. She is brilliant, I am not just saying it... It is different, it is more flexible...I feel like she can help me to take the burden away. I am the same person with her. I don't pull any punches. She gets me and she helps me to try other things. She listens to me and that is what really helps. She has been brilliant and has kept pushing as well with X. It means so much, she brought those flowers when they were no well. They were over the moon, it shows she cares." (Parent/Carer)

"I feel like I have known them all my life. I feel I can be me. I feel I can be totally honest... It is like a relationship I have never had before. It is really weird. I feel like I can be honest and they are not going to judge... Their approach is different. How they message you in WhatsApp. And when you are on the Zoom chats and you don't need to be professional... I think Cyrenians go above and beyond. They always get back to you." (Parent/Carer)

Practical support

All parents/carers appreciated the practical help given; for example, to discreetly get food parcels, heating, transport, gym passes and help at Christmas time, and this helped to build relationships of trust. One parent/carer was also supported to navigate the benefits system and to deal with sanctions.

"I was stressed about if there was enough presents at Christmas. She [KFT worker] could see that in me. She said 'You are a good parent' – she told me that." (Parent/Carer)

Another parent/carer reflected,

"Without them, X wouldn't have a bed. It was the Cyrenians that got it... I had a 6-8 week wait for my benefits to get up and running and they came here with £100 so I could get in groceries and pay for the electric heaters the council gave me, as I didn't have any heating... She [KFT worker] reassures me that I am doing enough and this [their benefits situation] is not my fault." (Parent/Carer)

Enabling the family to have fun together and to be a family

Families living in poverty who cannot afford to take part in activities that cost money said they feel like they are living in permanent lockdown. Jardine (2019) compellingly argues that families are

best understood by what they do together.¹⁴ Part of the CashBack funding included a small fund to enable families to spend time together and have family days out. KFT workers helped the families to plan the day and gave them the money directly to do it. These days out were a way for families to have fun together, make memories and affirmed their identity as a family.

Barriers to engagement

The main barriers families had to engagement with the project was the daily challenges they faced in life, such as struggling financially, and also outside of the support they had from Cyrenians, the parents said they felt that they had little other help in their lives. One of the concerns raised by the KFT workers was that families could become dependent on the support they had received and closing cases had to be carefully managed, ensuring connections to follow on support with other agencies had been established.

Impact

Making sense of and dealing with complex emotions

The young people felt they were now addressing the anger they carried with them and they were now able to communicate better with their families, strengthening the relationships.

“I was so full of anger before and didn’t know how to deal with it...I trust her [KFT worker] and am able to talk to her. I think if I had been able to talk to someone sooner, things wouldn’t have turned out as they did.” (Young Person)

“I think the difference it has made to me is that I know better how to control my emotions. It has made my relationship with my mum and I better. They worked with mum and taught her also how to handle things better... This has got me and my mum chatting more. I used to get angry more, but I am gradually getting better.” (Young Person)

A couple of years on from first working with the project, one parent/carer felt they wanted to try counselling. They felt the mediation and whole family support given by Cyrenians had made it feel safe to talk, not to keep things to themselves, as they have done all their life, and instead to confront how they were feeling and feel confident in reaching out for other supports.

All of the parents/carers said they had carried a lot of guilt about their children being in care and that the KFT project was helping them to let go of this and recognise they were asking for this help, for the benefit of the children and the family as a whole. All of the parents/carers were helped to access training to understand neurodiversity and respond more appropriately to their children. All parents/carers whose children were identified as neurodivergent felt that it could have been diagnosed sooner and they also felt guilty that this had not been the case. They observed and felt that once the diagnosis had been given only limited support had been available.

Communicating better as a family and with professionals

Cyrenians has supported families to manage situations better. For example, to not shout at the young people, and in meetings with professionals/practitioners, to not get angry or frustrated but try instead to communicate their needs and views calmly.

¹⁴ Jardine, C. (2019) *Families, Imprisonment and Legitimacy: The Cost of Custodial Penalties*. Oxford: Routledge.

“I do deal with X differently now, because of the diagnosis and I have taken on board that they don’t like me shouting. I have had to change my ways... She [KFT worker] used to pick me up for the meetings and she would help me to keep calm. I think the meetings are stressful but I think my temper is better. She managed to calm me better.” (Parent/Carer)

“Within myself I see a big change, just being able to talk, it has been half my problem. I wasn’t allowed to talk as a child. Before, I would have kept things to myself and I used to worry about the kids being taken away. We weren’t encouraged to talk when we were kids.” (Parent/Carer)

Positive family relationships

All participants interviewed felt that as a family their relationships had improved greatly. They felt that by not reacting as they normally would, not shouting at each other, family relationships had improved, and the parents/carers had begun to regain their role as the main carer. All felt there was a lot more work to do to help them to come together as a family, and they appreciated that the support was not time limited. One parent/carers reported that the family had not spent very much time together as a whole and the project was supporting siblings to rebuild trust. In the interview with one of the young people, they said they felt the family had become closer because of the support.

“They have saved my family. She [KFT worker] is part of my family. We hit it off straight away, and without her support I don’t think I could have coped. I wouldn’t have been able to get through the year.” (Parent/Carer)

“My X and I are getting on a lot better. The fact that we have been away from each other and I want to make up for that time we have not been together.” (Young Person)

“It has helped. I just feel there is someone there, and they are supporting the whole family, so X and me too.” (Young Person)

Creating positive identities

The parents felt they were regaining their role as parents.

“How I am thinking and feeling, these are the big changes. X says they seen the differences so that I am the parent now.” (Parent/Carer)

Improved physical and mental health

All of the parents/carers said they had improved their physical and mental health since working with the project. During the pandemic they met with the KFT worker outside and went for walks, noting that otherwise they would have felt isolated. They had improved their confidence and felt more positive about life. One parent/carers had been supported to engage with the council in relation to their housing situation. Two young people also said they had improved their self-confidence and were more aware of their rights and entitlements. For example, families had been provided with the secure care pathway and standards, highlighting what they should expect after a period of time living in secure care.

“I would say my stress levels are halved, and I am not reacting how I would normally react. I don’t scream anymore... I am taking a wee bit of time for myself. So even if it is just taking the moment, that is my chill time.” (Parent/Carer)

“Strengths – I am stronger than I had thought I was and I am not a bad parent. Those two things, they are the things I question myself.” (Parent/Carer)

Positive destinations

Two parents/carers were now in employment, something they did not think would have been possible without support from Cyrenians to help them to build their confidence. One young person was in college and also working part-time. Their case study, which shows the importance of the mediation provided, is outlined in the Appendix. Another young person was eager to get back to school and wanted to be working. They indicated that drug dealing was an option for many young people in their area but they did not want to do that and now wanted to do well in education. They were engaging with another third sector organisation in an outdoor pursuits programme and had full attendance. Their main concern was that the perceived ‘label’ they had in their local area would act as a barrier to others accepting them and said they had faced threats from other young people since returning to their local area.

“I was at college before but I didn’t stick at that because of the drugs and now I am back studying... I have even been looking to get back into playing football.” (Young Person)

Young people who attended the ‘Fight or Flight’ conflict resolution and anger management workshops (qualitative data)

The ‘Fight or Flight’ conflict resolution and anger management workshops were designed in line with the Curriculum for Excellence¹⁵ and feedback suggests they are an effective tool for building trusted relationships with staff and young people at secure centres. Young people reported that the workshops are a safe and enjoyable way to challenge entrenched and normalised behaviours, reduce anger and aggression in young people, and are a means of increasing referrals to KFT’s more intensive mediation and support services.

The group workshops focused on short interactive sessions of around 30-40 minutes, working closely with small groups of young people at a time (generally 3-5 young people). A challenge identified by KFT staff early in the process was having inconsistent attendance by the young people; however, Cyrenians changed the structure of the workshops so that young people could benefit from attending one workshop, or the full programme of six workshops, should they return home or transition between visits.

Over the three years, a total of 74 young people engaged with the KFT project; 34 of whom participated in the workshops. Feedback from the young people notes the positive impact made. One young person remarked *“I really enjoyed it, it made a lot of sense and I am going to try to be less angry.”* Another young person said *“I thought this was going to be rubbish...but it’s actually minted!”*

Feedback from staff at one of the secure care centres reflected that they had never had young people engage so well with an external facilitator. It was hoped by Cyrenians staff that these workshops would be a way for young people to request further mediation, and this happened in

¹⁵ <https://education.gov.scot/curriculum-for-excellence/curriculum-areas/health-and-wellbeing/>.

two cases. A young person attended workshops for several weeks where they participated well and engaged with the activities; mediation was discussed with them. Mediation and support took place over several months and the young person was very clear about what they wanted and needed, including choosing to stay longer within residential care than had been planned. This view was not initially supported by their parent but the parent then reported being 'blown away' by the young person's maturity and improved communication skills, and ultimately ensured the young person was empowered to share these views for themselves. The young person was thankful for the opportunity to have support in communicating with their parent and felt that mediation had improved their relationship.

Part of the research involved observations as part of a conflict resolution workshop with two young people. The workshop session focused on the different ways people can deal with challenging situations. The KFT worker enthusiastically provided clarity on the differences between being assertive and being aggressive, discussed how people use power, as well as the different strengths and weaknesses of divergent approaches to problems. Both young people had already had a few sessions with the same worker and were very comfortable to speak openly about how they tended to react in situations and how they could deal with these 'better', applying what they had learned. The young people reported at the focus group session that they felt listened to and heard, and that it was a chance to learn and have fun. They liked that the worker did not 'dumb down' the material, and they felt treated 'like adults', improving their confidence, helping them to feel calmer, understanding more about themselves and how others approached problems too.

'When we come down here and we are doing things like this that we enjoy, it is like you can breathe.' (Young Person)

The conflict resolution workshops contribute to the fulfilment of all of the outcomes as set out by the project from the outset.

Interviews with Cyrenians, secure care and social work staff (qualitative data)

These findings are based on multiple focus groups with eight staff from Cyrenians, and interviews with two representatives from a secure care centre and one social worker. The willingness of everyone to engage with the KFT project was appreciated and recognised, especially during the early stages during lockdown.

What worked well

The model of support: The time taken to build trust took longer than anticipated and required project staff to be resilient. Project staff were trained in trauma responsiveness and neurodiversity, which they felt was really helpful in them doing their job confidently.

The workshops: The secure centre staff valued the workshops taking place and felt the KFT staff delivering them were very confident and competent in the work.

The benefits of using the arts: In one secure centre they observed how well the young people had responded to working with the art therapist. The arts can be a very powerful way for young people who struggle to communicate to make themselves heard, and to help others understand more about what they really think and want.¹⁶

¹⁶ Nugent, B. and Deacon, K. (2022) 'Seen and Heard: The Long-Term Impact of Arts Projects on Young People Living in Poverty', *YOUNG*. doi: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/11033088221089183>.

Follow on support and linking families locally: All staff interviewed, that is from Cyrenians, the secure care centre and the social worker, felt that the KFT project was needed by young people and their families when they transition out of care and into the community, in all cases where support was been provided.

Building connections with social work services and providing early intervention: In one case, in response to a social work referral, the project had been successfully supporting a young person and their family to plan a family holiday. The young person was in residential care and the support provided by the project was helping to sustain them outwith secure care. Cyrenians workers and the social worker reflected that the sooner they can engage with families in the process, the better it can be for all.

Staff expertise and resources: Cyrenians works with The University of Edinburgh who provide 300 hours of student counselling per year to the young people and their families that Cyrenians support in Edinburgh. Essentially, the KFT project has benefitted from being in a position to offer this additional form of support.

Staff reflexivity and ongoing training and development: Due to the legal restrictions during the pandemic, the project team were unable to work with families in the way they had planned, and were unable to visit and work with young people in the secure care centres. The team used this time to complete training in working with young people with harmful sexual behaviour and neurodiversity. Staff from the secure care centres were also invited to take part in this training during year one if it was felt to be appropriate. KFT staff reported that throughout the past few years they have been supportive of one another as a team, and taken time to learn and adapt the way they work as challenges and learning have taken place.

Challenges

The pandemic: The early stages of the project were affected by the pandemic and the restrictions that took place. In the initial stages of the project, meetings with young people took place using digital platforms, which presented challenges with many young people not wanting to be on camera, and not having face-to-face contact made building rapport difficult.

The time needed: Cyrenians staff are now more aware of the time-intensive nature of the project and the need to be realistic about the numbers of people who can be supported effectively, considering the length of time needed to build trust and the extent of support needed after young people leave care.

The future

All staff interviewed, that is from Cyrenians, the secure care centre and the social worker, wanted to see the project continue, with more young people engaging with the workshops and families able to work with KFT. The importance of working in partnership, across teams and organisations, was also noted. Cyrenians staff and the social worker interviewed felt that ideally the KFT project should be offered at as early a stage as possible, even potentially when any form of care is being considered within the Children's Hearing System.

Assessment of Outcomes

The table below represents the extent to which outcomes have been achieved based on the evidence provided and outcome indicators of the 74 young people that participated in the KFT project. However, the initial target of working with 380 young people over the course of the funding was not achieved. As a new project launching, KFT, secure centre partners, and those young people and their families who may have been involved with the project, were significantly impacted by the pandemic and legal constraints during an extensive period of time and also during the period of recovery.

Outcome	Evidence	Extent to which outcome has been achieved
Outcome 1: Young people build their confidence and resilience, benefit from strengthened support networks and reduce risk taking behaviour	<p>Quantitative data as above.</p> <p>Qualitative data that both young people and their families built their confidence, positive strong networks and thinking consequentially, reducing risk taking behaviour.</p>	Fully achieved.
Outcome 2: Young people develop their physical and personal skills	<p>Quantitative data as above.</p> <p>Qualitative data that young people interviewed reported having improved physical health. One young person was at college and had been supported to develop life skills to maintain tenancy. Another young person was engaging with another third sector organisation. Their main barrier to change was their continued associations with an older anti-social group.</p> <p>34 young people engaged with the conflict resolution workshops.</p> <p>One young person has been linked in with an education psychologist.</p> <p>Young people are supported to engage in hobbies.</p>	Fully achieved.
Outcome 3: Young people's health and well-being improves	<p>Quantitative data as above.</p> <p>Qualitative data that both young people interviewed described now being confident and knowing what they want to do in life, and being hopeful about the future. All felt their families now had more positive relationships.</p> <p>Mediation is helping families to improve their relationships. Support has been provided to families to access training on neurodiversity, so</p>	Fully achieved.

	<p>they are better able to understand and deal with issues relating to this, particularly to communicate more effectively.</p> <p>One young person has been supported to speak to their GP and deal with their medical condition.</p>	
<p>Outcome 4: Young people participate in activity which improves their learning, employability and employment options</p>	<p>Quantitative data as above.</p> <p>Qualitative data that one young person was now attending college and in part-time work. Another young person consulted with an education lawyer, as to their rights.</p> <p>One young person was supported to access a 'Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS)'.</p> <p>Young people who participated in the conflict resolution workshops reported being able to communicate their needs better.</p>	<p>Achieved.</p> <p>Transitional support from social work to access education by one young person in the qualitative study had not been set within the year of them returning home.</p>
<p>Outcome 5: Young people contribute positively to their communities</p>	<p>Quantitative data as above.</p> <p>Qualitative data that one young person was working part-time in the local community. The other young person was engaging with a third sector organisation and had a gym pass. They had struggled however because of past negative associations and connections.</p> <p>Supported to have successful family days out.</p> <p>Families supported in their attendance at social work meetings and hearings.</p>	<p>Achieved.</p> <p>Qualitative data shows the challenges one young person faced to building a positive identity.</p>
<p>Outcome 6 (long-term goal): Young people are diverted from criminal behaviour or involvement with the criminal justice system</p>	<p>Quantitative data as above.</p> <p>Qualitative data that one young person had not had any further criminal charges since leaving secure care.</p> <p>Another young person had no criminal convictions prior to going into care but now has potential charges. They felt targeted by local young people and the police, and labelled.</p>	<p>Achieved.</p> <p>Qualitative data shows the challenges one young person faced to building a positive identity.</p>

Conclusion

The number of people who participated in the qualitative study was small and this evaluation reports on these families' specific experiences. There is no doubt that keeping young people out of the criminal justice system is better for them and better for society. This report highlights the benefits of partnership working, as well as the value of early intervention and support for families who are beginning to experience difficulties.

Getting families who said they distrusted services to engage with KFT support took time, patience and persistence on the part of Cyrenians workers. Relationship building is not easy but families do want and need help.

The evaluation findings indicate all of the intended outcomes for this project for the young people were met, and it is the whole family who benefitted. Families gave feedback that the whole family approach 'worked'. The parents/carers that young people are returning home to reported that they also need and want support in their own right.

Findings suggest that the project has had a significant impact on the lives of those they worked with, improving confidence, physical health, and well-being, and supporting people into positive outcomes, such as going to college, back to work or getting access to legal representation to help access school.

Almost half (44%) of the 74 young people reported that their participation in anti-social or criminal activity had reduced over the past three years, and more than three quarters (82%) were less inclined to participate in this behaviour. Findings reported 7% were now in employment and 75% in further education, either returning or remaining in school. The qualitative data highlights the challenges young people face to build a positive identity, and one of the biggest challenges is convincing others that their behaviour has changed.

Over the past three years it is clear that Cyrenians and secure care centres have worked hard to collaborate and develop effective partnership working, especially during lockdown restrictions and the challenges that entailed for everyone (young people, families, referrers, secure care centres and Cyrenians). For the two secure care staff interviewed, they felt the partnership had worked well, with Cyrenians workers being understanding, flexible and confident in their abilities to engage well with the young people. Feedback from families suggests mediation had been transformational for those who had taken part.

Overall, as a test of change, this has shown that the families need and want the support, and this takes time, effort and persistence to build trusting relationships.

Recommendations for Cyrenians

- Promote the KFT project to the Children's Hearings System so that it is accessible to families where any form of care is being considered, to promote earlier intervention, recognising this would require additional funding.
- Staff continue to be afforded opportunities in training in trauma-informed responses and neurodiversity, and to support families to also access this information.
- With a budget of this size, keep the target numbers of families with low and ensure staff are supported to manage boundaries and potential burn out.
- Cyrenians further explore a hybrid approach of in-person and online support for families living outside the Central Belt. This is due to constraints in the project budget. In the Central

Belt, or more specifically the Lothians, Cyrenians can tailor their offer of support in those areas where they have most community connections, thus offering the most meaningful engagement.

- Collate data every six months from the young people based on the six outcomes outlined.
- Partnership working, between Cyrenians, secure care centres and referral agencies, continues with the shared aim of improving the lives of young people and their families.

Appendix: Mediation & Support Case Study

The young person was referred by social work to the KFT project in 2021, as part of the young person's support plan after being in secure care placements since 2018. The purpose of the referral to Cyrenians was to focus on the young person and their relationship with their parent and also to reconnect them with their two younger siblings. Following leaving care, they were moving into supported accommodation and not returning to the family home; however, their family would be an important part of their support network. The young person felt they had a close relationship with their parent but they did not always find it easy to communicate calmly. The parent was anxious about what might happen to their child because of the issues that were present prior to them going into care and how the improvements that had been made would be maintained whilst living independently. There had been arguments and the young person was feeling anxious.

The family engaged and participated in mediation and support to re-establish and strengthen their relationships. Mediation helped each person discuss and agree ways in which to improve their relationship, identify their individual needs, and share concerns.

At first, the young person's parent said they would want '*nothing to do with* [the young person]' if they continued with the risk-taking behaviour they had been involved in, they wanted to protect their two younger children. Taking a gradual and staged approach, pre-mediation began to support the young person and their parent to explore what they might do or say differently, how to have a conversation about their concerns in a calm way, and to reflect on what they needed by way of support to rebuild their relationship.

The family outreach worker provided support to the parent to cope with anxiety, manage emotions and to find time to relax. A 'self-care and wellbeing pack' was provided and they were linked into Home Start as they expressed worries about not being able to afford things for their children. A younger sibling's needs were also considered and they began working with Cyrenians art therapist.

As work progressed, the young person and their parent agreed to come together in a joint mediation meeting. The parent was now better able to support their child and had worked on regulating their own emotions and anxieties about some of the young person's behaviours and choices. The parent shared with their child in the meeting that they wanted to be there for them, "*I want you to know I'm trying hard not to judge, but to be supportive and be there for you whatever you decide*". The young person considered how they would like to reach out to their family when they wanted to spend time with them, when they needed support or simply letting them know they were '*doing okay*'. The young person and their parent spoke about wanting to spend quality time together but found it difficult to arrange this and afford it. During the meeting, they agreed on a date and a plan. They were provided with some financial support to have a family day out where they all went to the amusements, bowling and shared lunch together. They sent in a note to the project, "*Thank you so much – we really appreciate all the help and support for our family. We loved every minute of it*".

Because of past experiences, the young person explained they had found it difficult to work with services. They kept appointments with the Cyrenians Family Outreach Worker. They were supported to attend review and planning meetings with their social worker and other agencies, ensuring, with their permission, that their views on how things were progressing were shared. They were also supported to attend meetings with their solicitor and attend court hearings, to attend appointments with their GP and other health professionals, and they are now

considering counselling. They were supported to apply for a leisure card and are now taking part in free sports and activities in their community; this has replaced going out for drinks. They moved on to attending college, holding down a job and continue to make positive life choices.

On the young person's birthday, the project ordered a personalised birthday cake from 'Free Cakes for Kids' and put together a package of materials for college, as they wanted to get involved with art activities again. The young person and their parent are now in touch more regularly than before, and the family have visited the young person's flat to help them out with shopping and cleaning. Their relationship is continuing to grow as they move forward into a new of their lives together.



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