

Report

Report to:	Education Resources Committee
Date of Meeting:	5 December 2023
Report by:	Executive Director (Education Resources)

Subject:	Pathfinders Initiative - Care Experienced Children and Children on the Edges of Care
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1. Purpose of Report

1.1. The purpose of the report is to:-

- ◆ advise on the ongoing work of the Pathfinder initiative to support care experienced young people and children on the 'edges of care'.

2. Recommendation(s)

2.1. The Committee is asked to approve the following recommendation(s):-

- (1) that the content of the Longitudinal Research report at Appendix 2 be noted;
- (2) that the research findings showing the impact and benefit of the Pathfinder Initiative at Appendix 2 be noted; and
- (3) that the ongoing development of the initiative be noted.

3. Background

- 3.1. As part of the Learning Recovery report noted at the Education Resources Committee on 1 June 2021, a range of other programmes and activities were identified in order to support learners in their recovery, including the extension of the Pathfinders Initiative in secondary schools.
- 3.2. From its inception, Pathfinders was established by Education and Social Work as a new way of supporting an early intervention approach to support young people and their families who may be at risk of poorer outcomes or subject to statutory measures. The aim of the project was to deliver support as in a non-statutory way. The initiative was delivered across 52 weeks to target critical periods such as points of transition and summer and spring break holiday periods where disengagement from school may become a significant issue for particular children and their families. Support was provided holistically across the settings of school, community and the home.
- 3.3. Pathfinders has adopted the attachment theory principles to develop positive and consistent relationships with vulnerable young people and their families. This enables the identification of support required to address the causes of instability in both the educational and personal environment of the young person. The aim is to prevent an escalation of statutory interventions.
- 3.4. Pathfinders is an alternative intervention initiative with an overarching aim of embedding a Community Learning and Development (CLD) approach within the core of mainstream education to improve outcomes for young people identified as being

'on the edge of care'. The initiative was developed through multi-agency planning to offer appropriate and meaningful support to identified young people and their families.

- 3.5. The extension of Pathfinders beyond the three pilot schools has been supported by the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund (WFWF) since March 2022. Currently, Pathfinders are deployed in seven schools: Cathkin High; Trinity High; Stonelaw High; Lanark Grammar; Calderside Academy; St Andrew's and St Bride's; and Carluke High. This is funded through the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund (WFWF), Pupil Equity Funding and Learning Recovery monies.

4. Current Position

- 4.1. The Pathfinder Initiative has engaged with 658 young people and their families. The referrals that are made through Joint Assessment Team (JAT) meetings (known as House meetings in Cathkin High School) are made for a variety of reasons that include: attendance; peer influence; poverty/financial concerns; offending in the community; anger management; use/impact of drugs and alcohol; and general health and wellbeing concerns. Flexibility is maintained to ensure that young people can self-refer.
- 4.2. Support is bespoke and provided through individual and group support. Home visits and parental engagement are key elements of the role. Pathfinder staff are well connected to key partners in the wider community to ensure appropriate referrals into and out of the provision (See Appendix 1).
- 4.3. Impact is recorded through agreed fixed CLD impact measures that are reported directly through the South Lanarkshire CLD Plan. In addition, a range of Pathfinder specific progressive indicators have been developed to record participation levels and impact.
- 4.4 Young people are at the centre of the Pathfinders evaluation process. It is designed to allow them to control the pace and nature of recordings.

Total number of referrals	658
Total number linked to social work	120
Total number of individual support sessions	3779
Total number of group work sessions	1066
Total number of engagements with home	1858
Total number of engagements with other agencies	430
Formal qualifications achieved	157

Priority outcome data

Outcome 1- increase participation in school	81% have maintained or increased their participation
Outcome 2- increase confidence/ self esteem	60% have recognised positive improvement
Outcome 3- improvement of social skills	62% have developed their social skills
Outcome 4- Adapt behaviour in school	60% have consciously adapted their behaviour
Outcome 5- manage negative peer influence	44% have reduced the influence of their peers
Outcome 6- improve health & wellbeing	54% have recognised an improvement
Outcome 7- Improve mental health	37% have acknowledged improvement

- 4.5. This data captures immediate impact but the impact is longer term. Evidencing impact on preventing negative outcomes for young people, through reduced referrals to statutory measures is problematic, particularly when the lifespan of the project has included a global pandemic, making mapping progress against baseline data difficult. In the absence of hard data to support intended impact, qualitative research has been gathered where young people and parent/carers self report wider impact.

5. Longitudinal Study on Impact of Provision

- 5.1. A four-year research report was commissioned by SLC Education and Social Work resources (see Appendix 2). The focus of the research was Youth, Family and Community Learning (YFCL) Pathfinder initiative and the work with young people, families, schools and partners.
- 5.2. This research programme, commissioned by Education and Social Work Resources is evidence of further shared agendas across services and agencies. This is particularly pronounced in supporting the implementation of The Promise (Independent Care Review, 2020; Scottish Government, 2023). Scotland's promise to care experienced children and young people is that "they will grow up loved, safe and respected". This ambition to improve the lives and opportunities of care experienced children, young people and their families extends to the lives of **all** children and young people in Scotland. The Independent Care Review findings highlighted that to achieve this vision, collaboration across organisations was essential to effect transformational change and redesign of systems. The review also stressed the importance of listening to the voices of children, young people and families and including them in planning for the redesign of services e.g. the youth justice system in Scotland. Given the long history within CLD of listening, advocating and collaborating for change with members of communities, the Pathfinder Initiative has demonstrated the potential for a significant contribution to this agenda.
- 5.3. Key findings of the research are:-
- ◆ The caring, compassionate and empowering relationships which Pathfinders establishes with young people, creates a safe, secure and growth promoting environment which can have a transformative impact on the lives of young people.
 - ◆ Pathfinders contribute to building resilience in local communities by working collaboratively with parents and carers, providing unstinting emotional and practical support, ensuring their voice is listened to and heard, empowering them and building confidence.
 - ◆ Pathfinders adopt a holistic approach and through that they gain a very broad understanding of a young person's life and the complex systems of relationships and layers within a young person's environment.
 - ◆ In the schools where they are based, Pathfinders have quickly become highly valued and embedded as part of the school community, and they are increasingly becoming integral to how schools achieve their improvement aspirations.
 - ◆ Mutual respect and esteem between school and Pathfinder staff is rooted in the establishment of shared vision and values, and the combined effort creates a power and momentum which can lead to creative and transformative thinking.
 - ◆ Pathfinders are playing a pivotal role in widening the curricular opportunities for young people and extending the range of formally accredited qualifications.
 - ◆ Pathfinders are contributing to improvement and change in the systems of assessment and planning for vulnerable young people.

- ◆ The work of Pathfinders is strengthened by working in collaboration with the wider YFCL service.
- ◆ An appreciation of the CLD foundational principles, values and practices, is of great importance when understanding the 'how' and 'why' Pathfinders is making such a significant positive difference at the individual, family, school and wider systems level.

5.4. Direct feedback from Education and Social Work staff on the impact of Pathfinders has been overwhelmingly supportive of the initiative in contributing to positive outcomes for young people.

5.4.1 A member of the senior management team from one of the schools where Pathfinders had been involved since its inception, voiced the view that "Pathfinders has become increasingly integral to achieving our school improvement aspirations".

The link DHT in a school where Pathfinders has more recently become involved, reflected on why she and her head teacher wanted Pathfinders:-

It was because of their holistic approach, which included youthwork, family work, and strong links with the local community, and the resources available in the community, especially in the wider YFCL service. We knew that the holistic way of working can make the biggest difference to the outcomes of our most vulnerable pupils.

5.4.2 The impact of the Pathfinders holistic approach in Joint Assessment Team (JAT) meetings was specifically referred to by the DHT of another school :

I can see more and more the difference Pathfinders make to our JAT assessment and planning ... they take a wider scope of the needs of young people...it is a holistic view...and that has greatly improved our understanding of the wider life experiences of the pupils we are discussing ... it makes our planning processes more child centred and more effective.

A Senior Manager Pupil Support (SMPS) also reflected on the Pathfinder contribution to JAT assessment and planning:

During JAT discussions, the Pathfinders bring a wider and deeper insight into the young person's life...their challenges and barriers... but also their strengths... and that helps us work out what is the next manageable step for the young person and helps us better identify the right supports.

5.4.3 The effective links with, and knowledge of, the local community was highly valued by a DHT who mentioned the head teacher was in complete agreement that "Pathfinders help the school to further understand the strengths and challenges in the local community". She cited the "invaluable contribution" of Pathfinders when incidences of serious gang violence were causing considerable concern in the school and community.

5.4.4 A member of the Social Work Resources Family Support Hub talked very positively about the impact of Pathfinders within a local secondary school and reported that effective communication between the Family Support Hub and the school was much improved by having Pathfinders as the main link.

- 5.4.5 There were examples given to the researcher of effective joint work between family support workers and Pathfinders, including support for a young person who had experienced significant childhood trauma. There was a noted lack of trust in adults and very low confidence in the young person. The DHT reflected that because there were no behaviour problems in school, the pupil could have “gone under the radar”. The family support worker further reflected that:

In my view, without Pathfinders, the young person would have continued with very poor attendance and left with no qualifications; she is now leaving with 3 national qualifications and has a place in college after leaving school. The strong, trusting relationship built up between the young person and Pathfinders was pivotal to this outcome.

- 5.4.6 In terms of the impact on the systems involved, the family support worker commented that the time taken to discuss

...whose responsibility it was to do what, had led to clear understanding of role responsibilities between the Family Support Hub and Pathfinder...it meant there was no duplication of work, and we both fully understood the other's role ... I can see increasing examples in the future of effective collaborative work between both our services.

6. Additional Developments

- 6.1. In November 2021, the Pathfinder team was one of 8 initiatives across the West Partnership network asked to participate in a collaborative enquiry in relation to youth work's contribution to reducing the attainment gap. A copy of the reports are available here:

Report overview [Work with Regional Improvement Collaboratives | YouthLink Scotland](#)

Case studies (including the South Lanarkshire one) are here [Attainment Good Practice | YouthLink Scotland](#)

Animation with young people's perspectives is here [Understanding Impact | YouthLink Scotland](#)

- 6.2. As a follow up to the collaborative enquiry, Pathfinders hosted a visit from representatives of Northern Ireland Youth Services and Education team in February 2023.

The delegates visited Stonelaw High School to observe good practice and conduct a consultation session with senior staff from Stonelaw High School and YFCL.

- 6.3. Pathfinders contributed positively to the Stonelaw High School HMle inspection in May 2023, with an excerpt from the summarised findings stating:

Young people engaged with the Pathfinder and MCR projects develop strong and trusting relationships with staff. There is mutual respect and understanding that extends to members of the wider family who all benefit from support. Young people and their families feel listened to and the provision of an advocacy role between the family and school or other services is described as invaluable. As part of an external longitudinal research project, the Pathfinder project is demonstrating strong impacts for young people and their families. A few young people involved with the Pathfinder project described their experience as being lifesaving. These projects are underpinned

by a successful youth work approach that would be worthy of sharing with the wider school and externally.

- 6.4. Pathfinders distributed £40,500 of Whole Family Wellbeing funding, directly to families who were experiencing hardship.
- 6.5. The Pathfinders team have successfully secured £92,300 from the UNCRC Innovation fund to develop a youth led consultation process that will allow young people to be the catalyst for change in relation to areas that effect their lives. This funding will support the further development of youth voice in relation to developing appropriate interventions and support.

The project will have three distinct phases:-

- 1 Skills development – this will allow the participants the opportunity to develop the key skills and knowledge in relation to the process.
- 2 Consultation- the participants will develop and deliver a series of consultation events with their peer groups.
- 3 Conference – young people involved will host a conference for key partners, sharing life experiences, barriers to participation and evidence of need to shape future policies.

7. Employee Implications

- 7.1 None

8. Financial Implications

- 8.1. The current programme is funded from Whole Family Wellbeing Funds, PEF/SAC monies from participating schools and augmented by Learning Recovery funds (due to cease in March 2024). Funding for the period April 2024 – March 2025 has been secured through Whole Family Wellbeing Fund for 8 posts with participating schools required to commit 50% of staff costs through PEF funds. Opportunities to sustain the initiative beyond March 2025 are being explored.

9. Climate Change, Sustainability and Environmental Implications

- 9.1. There are no significant implications for climate change, sustainability and the environment arising from the recommendations in this report.

10. Other Implications

- 10.1. There are no implications for risk in terms of the information contained in this report.

11. Equality Impact Assessment and Consultation Arrangements

- 11.1. This report does not introduce a new policy, function or strategy or recommend a change to an existing policy, function or strategy and, therefore, no impact assessment is required.
- 11.2. Engagement with children, young people and families is a fundamental component of the Pathfinder initiative as is regular dialogue with school staff and partner agencies, including funding providers.

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Executive Director (Education Resources)

14 November 2023

Link(s) to Council Values/Priorities/Outcomes

- ◆ Education and learning: inspiring learners, transforming learning, strengthening partnerships.

Previous References

None

List of Background Papers

None

Contact for Further Information

If you would like to inspect the background papers or want further information, please contact:-

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