



**Education and Social Work Resources**

**South Lanarkshire Council**  
**Youth, Family and Community Learning**  
**Pathfinder Initiative**

**Implementation and Impact**

**Longitudinal Research Report**  
**2023**



## Acknowledgements

Until one is committed, there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back, always ineffectiveness. Concerning all acts of initiative, there is one elementary truth, the ignorance of which kills countless ideas and plans i.e., that the moment one definitely commits oneself, then providence moves too. All sorts of things occur to help that would never otherwise have occurred. A whole stream of events comes from the decision, raising in one's favour all manner of unforeseen incidents and meetings and material assistance which no man could have dreamed would have come his way.

Explorer W.H. Murray, from *The Scottish Himalayan Expedition*

A debt of gratitude is owed to many people without whom this longitudinal research programme would not have been possible.

From the inception of the research plan, many thanks are due to Anne Donaldson, Head of Education (Inclusion) and Liam Purdie, Head of Children and Justice Services and Chief Social Work Officer, for their vision to establish both implementation support of this new initiative, and establish a rigorous research programme into the impact of the South Lanarkshire Council Youth Family and Community Learning Pathfinder Initiative on the life outcomes for vulnerable and marginalised young people and families.

The rich conversations about the vision and values of Community Learning and Development (CLD) with the Pathfinder officers, their coordinator and area manager, and their YFCL colleagues, proved invaluable. The professional dedication of the whole Pathfinder team to be open to honest and robust reflection, enriched the research programme.

In the schools where the Pathfinder Initiative has been established, sincere thanks are due to the Head Teachers, senior management teams, pupil support teams and ASN departments, for the warmth of their welcome and their strong commitment to support research into practice which can improve the life trajectories of young people.

Many thanks to the South Lanarkshire Council Social Work Resources 'Inclusion as Prevention' team, Field Work Managers, Social Workers in the Child and Family Teams, and members of the Family Support Hubs who provided very valuable feedback on the impact of Pathfinder, both at the level of individual young people and families but also at the strategic and systems level.

It was a privilege throughout this longitudinal research programme to meet with and listen and gather the voices and views of the lived experience of young people and families directly involved with the South Lanarkshire Council Pathfinder Initiative. Ethical considerations were paramount in the planning of the research activity with young people and families. Some

young people and parents met with the researcher as research contributors at the beginning of their involvement and then again after a number of years when Pathfinder were still working alongside them. A few young people shared their views once again from the perspective of post school after they had moved into employment or training. It was the voices of young people and their parents and carers who made the research findings truly meaningful and powerful.

In addition to the teams and services mentioned above, thanks are extended to those who responded positively to an invitation to contribute to the research programme; there are too many to mention by name. However, the following list of job titles or services will provide an indication of the breadth and range of research participants. These participants generously gave of their time, and shared their reflections and insight into how they observed the impact of the practice of the Pathfinder officers with whom they collaborated, or in whose role and reach they had a keen professional interest in terms of the effect on systems and practice.

South Lanarkshire Council Spokesperson on Youth  
Education Senior Managers Pupil Support  
Inclusive Education Service  
Scottish Government Promise Team  
Education Scotland CLD Inspection Team  
CLD Standards Council  
YouthLink Scotland  
South Lanarkshire COVEY Befriending and Mentoring  
Police Scotland (Campus Police Officer)  
Youth Employability Service, and the Aspire programme  
Senior Lecturer in Community Development and Adult Education at Glasgow University  
Lecturer in Community Education at the University of the West of Scotland  
Community Mental Health Team  
West of Scotland Adolescent Inpatient Psychiatric Unit  
Psychological Service  
School nurse team  
CAMHS

Dr Elizabeth N King  
CPsychol; AFBPsS.  
25 September 2023

## **Contents**

Acknowledgments	2
Introduction	5
Section 1 Executive summary	5
Section 2 Background	6
Section 3 Overview of the Pathfinder research programme	7
Section 4 Findings	16
Section 5 Discussion and conclusions	29
References	33

## Introduction

This report forms part of the four-year implementation support and longitudinal research study, commissioned by South Lanarkshire Council (SLC) Education and Social Work Resources. The focus of this research is the SLC Youth, Family and Community Learning (YFCL) Pathfinder Initiative, which is currently based in 7 secondary schools. The research aims to explore the impact of the Pathfinder Initiative in their work with young people and families, schools and multi-agency partners.

It is helpful to note that this is the third of three research reports within the research programme. An exploration of the context and the emerging findings after the first year of the initiative are outlined in the 2020 report (Report of Initial Questionnaire on Pathfinder Initiative). The second report (Cambuslang and Rutherglen Pathfinder Initiative: Impact and implementation factors: Research Report 2021) includes case studies and explores the ongoing development journey of Pathfinder.

## Section 1 Executive summary

The Pathfinder Initiative is part of SLC's Youth Family and Community Learning Service (YFCL). The YFCL Service provide the main delivery of Community Learning and Development (CLD) in South Lanarkshire Council.

This implementation support and longitudinal research programme has been informed by qualitative research methodology and by methods including collaborative inquiry and action research. Analysis of the extensive data which has been gathered would indicate a number of key findings:

- The caring, compassionate and empowering relationships which Pathfinder establish with young people, create a safe, secure and growth promoting environment which can have a transformative impact on the lives of young people.
- Pathfinder 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.
- Pathfinder 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, Pathfinder 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.
- Pathfinder are playing a pivotal role in widening the curricular opportunities for young people and extending the range of formally accredited qualifications.
- Pathfinder are contributing to improvement and change in the systems of assessment and planning for vulnerable young people.
- The work of Pathfinder 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' Pathfinder is making such a significant positive difference at the individual, family, school and wider systems level.

## Section 2 Background

As a result of discussion, collaboration and creative thinking between Education, Social Work and Corporate Resources during 2018, the Pathfinder Initiative was established in the three secondary schools in the Cambuslang and Rutherglen area in 2019 (Cathkin High, Stonelaw High and Trinity High). Social and economic factors (Cambuslang and Rutherglen Pathfinder Initiative: Impact and implementation factors: Research Report 2021) influenced the decision to establish the initiative in the Cambuslang and Rutherglen Learning Community. The initiative was designed to extend existing developments aimed at supporting vulnerable and marginalised learners by promoting inclusion and equality and closing the poverty related attainment gap. The main aim was to consider how best to support and promote positive outcomes for young people on the 'edges of care', who experienced significant barriers to learning and whose health and wellbeing were at risk. This supported the agenda of the Scottish Government's Independent Care Review (2017-2020) which called for 'real change' in the delivery of services.

Influenced by the philosophy, values and skill base of the CLD profession (CLD Standards Council Scotland; YouthLink Scotland), who promote and support equality, empowerment and life-wide learning for all, a decision was made to recruit and appoint two CLD officers to be based in each of the three secondary schools. In South Lanarkshire Council, the main delivery of CLD comes from the Youth, Family and Community Learning Service (YFCL). The posts were advertised by the YFCL service and the head teachers of the three secondary schools were involved in the interview process. The successful candidates each had a range of work experience and skills to offer, and Pathfinder and school management successfully paired the candidates to work in the three schools in a way that offered each school a wide range of expertise. The pairings complimented each other, and each added to what their colleague brought to the post.

The plan was that the YFCL officers would work in collaboration with the schools, maintain close links with their local authority YFCL management and peers, and establish robust and effective partnerships with all partner agencies. The initiative was needs-led from the beginning and the detail of Pathfinder practice was developed over time in response to the identified needs.

The Pathfinder officers were initially managed by the YFCL coordinator for the Cambuslang and Rutherglen area, but in acknowledgement of the time necessary for management focused on the specific development needs of the initiative, a dedicated YFCL Pathfinder coordinator role was established.

To inform decision making and influence the quality of ongoing implementation of this initiative, a significant commitment was made by Education and Social Work Resources to appoint a researcher to support implementation and to undertake a rigorous and scientific research programme exploring impact and outcomes. To avoid the positive recency effect around new initiatives, a longitudinal research programme was commissioned to allow a focus on implementation, development and impact. This provided invaluable opportunities for the researcher to gain insight into the informal reality of the schools and other organisations, which often can only be fully perceived and understood over time and from within organisations.

Influenced by robust research findings published in 2021 (Cambuslang and Rutherglen Pathfinder Initiative: Impact and implementation factors), since 2021 the initiative has been extended to include secondary schools in all four learning communities. Seven schools in total are now involved, with two YFCL Pathfinder officers based in each school. This

includes the three Cambuslang and Rutherglen secondary schools, Lanark Grammar (from December 2021), St Andrew's and St Bride's (from December 2021) Calderside Academy (from August 2022), and Carluke High school (from January 2023).

### **Section 3 Overview of the Pathfinder research programme**

Discussion took place between the researcher and the Pathfinder management, the head and depute headteachers and the Pathfinder officers regarding the context and key considerations for the research. In this way, from the beginning of the research programme, there was consultation and collaboration with key stakeholders. The Pathfinder officers and Pathfinder management, and the Head Teachers and their Senior Management Team quickly became invaluable reference groups for the researcher. Consultation with these stakeholders, and with those who commissioned the research, took place on the 'why' and 'how' of the research and influenced the following decisions by the researcher:

- The relevant context
- The aims and rationale
- The particular focus of the research
- The main research questions

Figure 1 below provides an outline of the key elements in the research plan.



## Outline of key elements in the Pathfinder research plan

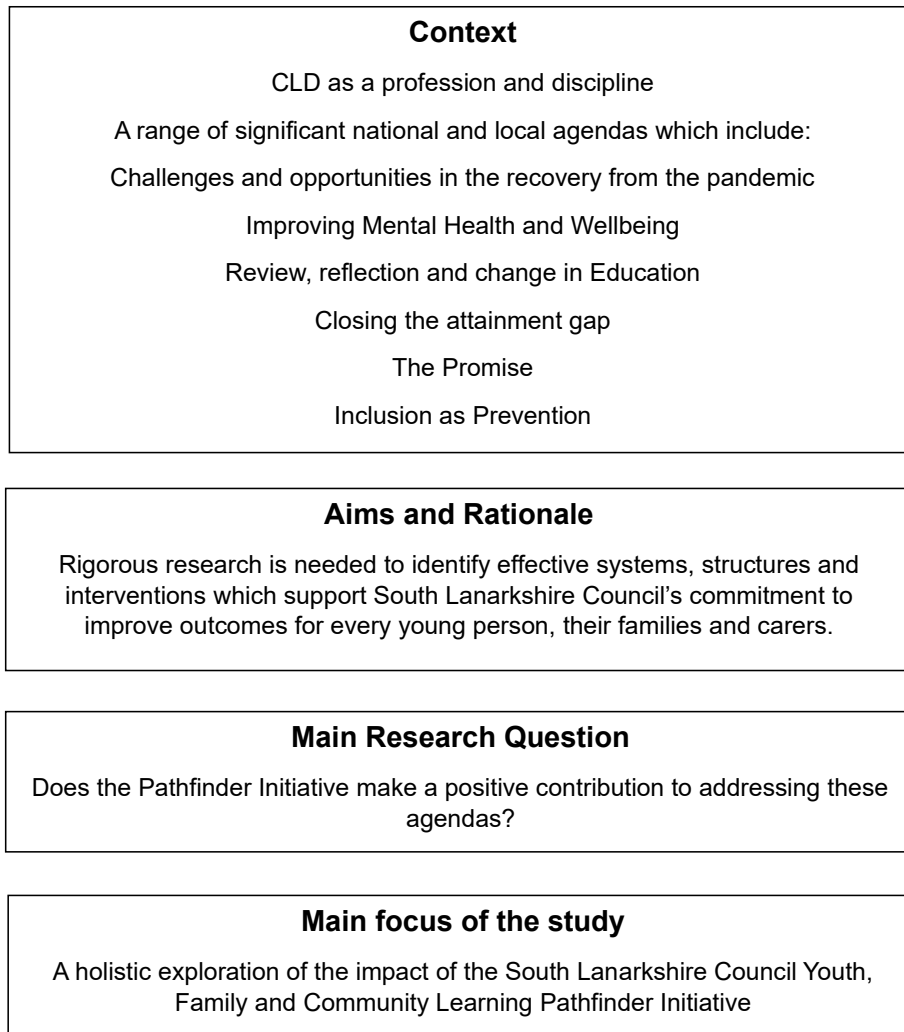


Figure 1: Outline of key elements in the Pathfinder research plan

### CLD as a profession and discipline

To understand the context of the research into the Pathfinder Initiative, an appreciation of the CLD profession is essential. In their publication, “Communities For Social Change”, Coburn and Gormally (2017, p. 15) talk of the “three core domains” of CLD as youth work, adult education and community development. The authors provide valuable insights into the theoretical underpinning of the profession. They call attention to the need for the profession to make their rationale and practices visible and explicit in order to emphasise that the work of CLD is “carefully developed over time, rather than being assumed as having no foundational principles, values and practices.” (p. 37). In the seminal work of Tett, “Community education, learning and development” (2010), the author highlights that all practice should operate within a framework of social justice. The role of CLD in promoting social justice and addressing structural disadvantage and socio-economic inequalities in society is found throughout the academic literature on CLD.

With echoes of Paulo Freire’s seminal work (1970) on emancipatory practice with the most marginalised, Ledwith (2016, p. 6) talks of the vision of youth and community work to “create a world in which everyone and everything is encouraged to flourish...based on participation

and collective wellbeing". The Code of Ethics and values of the profession are made clear in the CLD Standards Council for Scotland. The values are outlined as:

- self-determination
- inclusion
- empowerment
- working collaboratively
- promotion of learning as a lifelong activity.

The Standards Council website further highlights the Scottish Government's Strategic Guidance for CLD which is put within the National Performance Framework and identifies the purpose of CLD as:

1. Improved life chances for people of all ages, through learning, personal development and active citizenship
2. Stronger, more resilient, supportive, influential, and inclusive communities.

Of further help in gaining insight into the context of what YFCL Pathfinder can offer, YouthLink Scotland, the national agency for youth work, champion youth work as "holistic, person-centred" education. A study of the policy and practice documents, training offered, and research undertaken, all available on their website, makes it clear that the rights of young people are central to effective youth work practice.

Examples of youth work from across Scotland, shared by YouthLink Scotland, would bear witness to how fundamental positive relationships with young people are to youth work, as is effective collaboration with the families, communities, and the multi-agency teams around the child and young person. The mission of YouthLink Scotland includes the statement

We strongly believe that a healthy and vibrant youth work sector can bring transformation, not only to the lives of young people but also to their families, communities and society as a whole. Youth work can prevent many negative outcomes for young people and provide significant social return on investment.

An exploration of the literature and the practice examples of adult education and community development would also underline the commitment of CLD practitioners to establish collaborative and positive relationships with those they support.

For many professional colleagues, reflection is a key practice in CLD. McArdle and Briggs (2020) assert that "many of the social professions build their models of continuing professional development on reflective practice" (p. 58). There is also increasing mention in the academic and practice CLD literature of the need for reflection and reflexivity. Bolton (2014) describes reflexivity as "the process of looking back over what one has done, of gathering evidence to see how one's own values, beliefs, opinions and activities have affected what has been done."

Of relevance here is Shaw's study (2013) of the "transformative journey to reflexivity" of a sample group (n=16) from 190 community learning and development students in the final year of a three-year degree programme. Using semi-structured interviews and focus group meetings, the students were given the opportunity to deepen their levels of reflection to a more critical stance, where they became more aware of the assumptions which underpinned their reflections, as well as the assumptions of the rest of society. (p. 332)

Gathering evidence of the impact of CLD can be challenging. Although self-reflection is viewed as an essential attribute of an effective youth worker, there are voices in the academic literature that caution against the validity of certain measurements. An exploration of youth and community work leads Gallagher and Morgan (2013) to advise “We suggest and hold firmly to the belief that there are aspects of youth work practice that should not be measured, what we would refer to as the central core and that the process is indeed the product.” (p. 57). However, McKay and McArdle (2020) point out that in times of austerity, CLD services need “to present to decision makers and funders the effectiveness of what is funded and the impact of what is done.” (p. 69). They do acknowledge that “the complexities and challenges” (p. 69) of gathering evidence mean rigorous planning is needed.”

### Key agendas, policy and practice

In terms of recognising the policy landscape into which the Pathfinder Initiative has been introduced, a shared concern of all agencies is recovery for children, young people and communities from the negative impact of the pandemic. The Scottish Government publicly acknowledges the significant part the public and third sector CLD sector has played in supporting families and communities during the pandemic. It recognises their role in

...developing new and flexible ways to deliver key services with, by, and for vulnerable and marginalised learners in schools, colleges and communities.

The government also see the CLD approaches as “...key to planning for a full recovery and renewal to active civil society across Scotland” (<https://education.gov.uk/resources/a-summary-of-cld-covid-recovery-resources/>).

The need and the challenge for public services to work to improve the mental health and wellbeing of Scottish society has been heightened by the impact from the pandemic. This is a priority for services with a specific remit for mental health and wellbeing, but also for non-clinical services and organisations. The joint foreword written by the Scottish Government and COSLA in the 2023 Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy for Scotland, highlights

Our vision is of a Scotland, free from stigma and inequality, where everyone fulfils their right to achieve the best mental health and wellbeing possible.

Particular issues raised in the strategy include the need for a stronger focus on prevention and early intervention and the development of a culture of mental wellbeing and prevention within communities across Scotland. CLD approaches of attunement, collaboration, and empowerment, along with a vision that addresses social isolation and exclusion, would seem very relevant here.

It is a significant time for Scottish Education. Review, reflection and a vision for change is evident. Closing the attainment gap remains a fundamental aspiration within Scottish Education but it would seem that a radical shift in policy and practice is needed for the agenda to make a difference to life outcomes in the most disadvantaged communities. Overall, public consultations instigated by the Scottish Government, found positive support for the Curriculum for Excellence and the four capacities. However, two recently published reports commissioned by the Scottish Government and led by key government advisers, have recommended significant changes in Scottish Education. The reports of Professor Ken Muir ‘Putting Learners at the Centre: Towards a Future Vision for Scottish Education’ (Scottish Government, 2022) and Professor Fiona Hayward ‘It’s Our Future - Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment’ (Scottish Government, 2023) herald what could be a time of radical change ahead. Of relevance to these agendas, the Pathfinder Initiative brings with it the extensive CLD knowledge, experience, and commitment to extend learning opportunities to include all education settings, i.e., local communities as well as early years establishments, schools and further education establishments.

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 the potential for a significant contribution to this agenda.

Inclusion as Prevention (IAP) (<https://inclusionasprevention.org.uk/>) is an innovative example of exploring systems change that can positively affect life outcomes for young people at risk of offending. IAP is a partnership between South Lanarkshire Council, Action for Children, the Children and Young People's Centre for Justice, and the Dartington Service Design Lab. A commitment to equalities is evident throughout the journey of the project. The main aim is that less young people will become involved in the criminal justice system. To achieve this, because the design takes place in collaboration **with** children, young people and their families, more adaptive and responsive services are developed. IAP has a particular relevance to the Pathfinder Initiative in that IAP has been based in the Cambuslang and Rutherglen area where Pathfinder was first introduced. Furthermore, a part of the IAP project included a pilot of a Junior Pathfinder in two primary schools in Cambuslang and Rutherglen.

The philosophy of co-production and co-design with young people and families, and the value given to their voices by the IAP team, has much in common with CLD principles i.e., "priorities are identified *with* people rather than *for* them." (Tett, 2010). The final IAP report will provide learning for services throughout the council, including the Pathfinder team, in particular regarding the improvement science methodology applied by IAP.

### Holistic approach

Along with the key agendas highlighted in the figure above, there was also a strong consensus in the discussion with stakeholders on the research programme that research activity should explore the whole child in the context of their world. Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC) (<https://www.gov.scot/policies/girfec/>) and The Promise were cited, among other policies, as reinforcing the need to explore the impact of the Pathfinder Initiative from the perspective of the young person's entire social environment.

Various complex forces influence a young person's learning, behaviour and life trajectory. Figure 2 below (adapted from Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, 1979), highlights these complex systems of relationships and layers within a young person's environment. It presents a useful model to explore the impact of the Pathfinder Initiative.

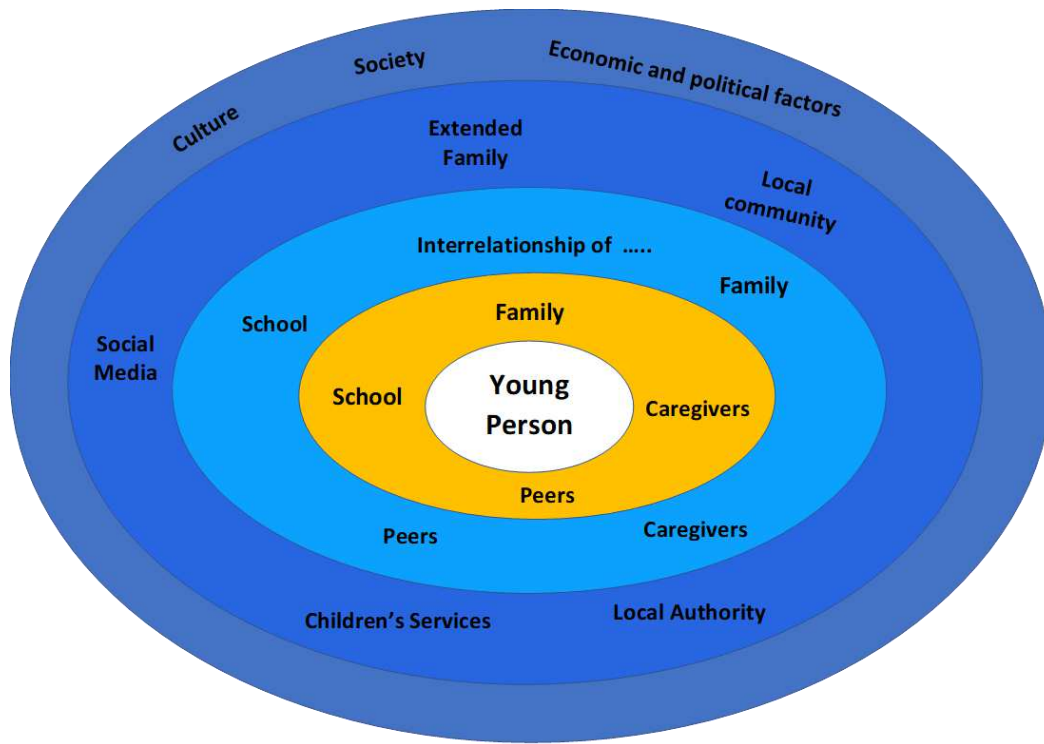


Figure 2: Useful ecological systems model to explore the impact of the Pathfinder Initiative

The lived experiences of children and young people do not exist in each system as a separate process, but their life experiences are impacted in the way these systems interact with each other. As Pathfinder has developed over the four years from its inception, it is useful to consider the reach of Pathfinder into each of these systems and into the interplay between each system. 'Development of the Pathfinder role and practice' (Section 4, p. 19) provides an opportunity to explore this complex issue.

In terms of the 'how' of the research, the researcher identified qualitative research methodology as the most effective way to explore the research questions, by seeking real-life contextual understandings from participants. The qualitative research approach by Braun & Clarke (2013, 2019) which was chosen allowed the researcher "to get under the skin of a group or organisation, to find out what really happens – the informal reality which can only be perceived from the inside" (Gillham, 2000, p. 11). Another reason for choosing qualitative methodology is that it encourages respect for each research participant, acknowledging their unique and valuable contribution.

Figure 3 below outlines the research design, the methodological approach undertaken, and methods chosen for data collection and analysis.

## Research Design

### Qualitative research methodology and methods

This provided an opportunity for the researcher to explore the views and understandings of research participants regarding the impact of the Pathfinder Initiative

### Research methods

- Semi-structured interview
- Thematic analysis
- Collaborative inquiry
- Case studies
- Document analysis

### Strengths

- Naturalistic settings
- Active involvement of research participants
- Account taken of the complex structure of schools and Children's Services
- Researcher's experience of the school setting and the multi-agency team around young people
- All semi-structured interviews undertaken and analysed by the researcher
- Research and development informed by implementation science research which explores the how, when and in what contexts interventions work or fail

### Challenges

- Ensure ethical practice in research activity with vulnerable young people and families
- Researcher bias

Figure 3: Research Design

### Semi-structured Interviews and Thematic Analysis

To gather data on the impact of Pathfinder, the semi-structured interview method was chosen. This provided access to the deeper, richer meanings and understandings of research participants, more so than a questionnaire may provide. The aim was to undertake these discussions in a way that provided the participants, especially young people and families

- an opportunity to be listened to without a crowd of other voices
- to be with an unhurried and undistracted listener
- to have their views respected
- to have no time pressure and be able to find just the right words to express their thoughts and feelings about the experience of working with the Pathfinder officers
- to reinforce their voice was crucial for the research outcomes.

With support from the Pathfinder officers, a safe environment was put in place for the audio recorded research discussions with young people and with their parents and carers. Their named school was mostly chosen by them as the venue. For a small number, the local Universal Connections premises were used, and a community centre was the most appropriate place for one of the parental research interviews. The average

The research interviews with school staff and Pathfinder officers were mostly conducted in the school setting, while the chosen venue for the wide range of professionals taking part in the research was mostly their place of work. These discussions lasted on average one hour fifteen minutes.

It was acknowledged that although the research literature would call the process a semi-structured interview, the word interview can have negative connotations and the phrase 'research discussion' was mostly used.

To inform coding of the transcribed interviews and identification of themes from the data, the researcher identified as beneficial Braun and Clarke's approach to thematic analysis (2021). This was due to its flexibility in managing a vast amount of data and its effectiveness in identifying patterns of meaning across a wide data set. Furthermore, this approach to thematic analysis has been shown in a wide range of national and international research papers to be particularly useful for producing analysis suited to informing policy, practice, and implementation.

### Case Studies

To further gather data on the impact of Pathfinder, a number of young people were identified to meet with the researcher and whose parent or carer either joined the discussion or met separately, depending on the decision of the young person. Permission was also sought from the young person and family for the researcher to invite those key professionals involved in the young person's life to be research participants. In one case study from the Cambuslang and Rutherglen area, this involved separate research interviews with the young person, the parent, the Pathfinder officer, a Mental Health Officer, a DHT, a Pupil Support Teacher and a member of staff from an Adolescent Inpatient Psychiatric Unit.

These case studies provided rich and valuable insights into the constellation of factors that affect the lives of many young people. It highlights the challenges young people and families experience when trying to navigate complex systems; it shines light on the systems where the Pathfinder Initiative hopes to effect change.

### Collaborative Inquiry

Research methods used included a collaborative inquiry approach (Donohoo, 2013) with the researcher working alongside the Pathfinder officers and Pathfinder management. Donohoo describes a collaborative inquiry as groups of professionals who "work together to ask questions, develop theories of action, determine action steps, and gather and analyse evidence to assess the impact of their actions" (p. 1). The researcher noted a learning culture within the Pathfinder team and a clear investment in new knowledge. The Pathfinder officers and their management were naturally reflective, and reflexive, which would seem to be a distinguishing feature of the YFCL Service as a whole. The Pathfinder team were committed, in the words of one Pathfinder officer, to "continual growth, ongoing problem solving and finding out how school staff and Pathfinder can work best together for young people and their families". Pathfinder was a new initiative aimed at responding to need and as such a period of time was needed to clarify where Pathfinder could make the biggest difference. Schools and Pathfinder were learning to navigate the new territory together.

Given all these features noted by the researcher, collaborative inquiry, a form of action research, was chosen in identifying the most effective practice from the evidence gathered.

### Document Analysis

Throughout the whole research programme, the Pathfinder officers and their management, their YFCL colleagues in the wider service, school senior management teams and relevant members of Education and Social Work Resources made significant effort to share documentation on policy, procedures, service plans and minutes of planning meetings, in order to support the researcher to gain a deep insight into the context within which Pathfinder operated. Furthermore, the Pathfinder coordinator and Pathfinder officers openly shared the various stages of the developing data gathering and evaluation procedures.

### Implementation Science

The influence of Implementation Science which “looks at how to move ideas and innovations into action” (<https://thecenterforimplementation.com>) was a strength of the research programme. The Implementation Science research literature (Rapport et al, 2022) focuses on implementation strategies, which are methods and techniques used to enhance, support and inspire change, and to promote sustainability of a practice or initiative.

Slavin (2012, p. xv) wrote of Implementation Science that “we are learning not only about ‘what works’ but also about why various programs do or do not work, for whom and under what conditions they work, what is needed to scale up proven programs, and what policy supports are needed to scale them up without losing their effectiveness”. Relevant to the ‘Context of the research’, outlined in Figure 2, page 12, the National Implementation Research Network (NIRN), (<https://nirn.fpg.unc.edu>), refer to ‘real world transformation’ and ‘real world contexts’. On their website, NIRN echo Slavin’s comments. They provide a clear explanation of their rationale for advocating Implementation Science method and techniques and describe the possible scenarios when implementation planning is inadequate:

Pilots and initiatives come and go. Islands of excellence rise and sink. The immediate results may be excellent, but the end results are unsustainable pockets of innovation.

Discussions on how to establish sustainable Pathfinder practice took place between the Pathfinder coordinator and school management. Furthermore, as part of the research, conversations about effective implementation strategies and sustainability took place frequently between the researcher and the Pathfinder team, the researcher and head teachers (HT) and deputy head teachers (DHT), and in particular between the Pathfinder coordinator and the researcher.

### Ethical research practice

The researcher had a particular commitment to listen to, record and, as an integral part of the research, share the voices of young people and families with whom Pathfinder worked. There were ethical considerations in relation to young people, parents and carers who willingly and enthusiastically gave of their time to be research participants. Maintaining anonymity and confidentiality was a major focus.

Falder and Nes (2021) take the view that, in principle, all children and young people, should be viewed as vulnerable participants in research; and in particular, children and young people who have previously been identified as ‘at risk’ and vulnerable. The authors argue that in research activity ethical practice is paramount. The Pathfinder officers were unstinting in their support to ensure all young people and parents were aware of the purpose of the research and, as stated in the research information, that their involvement was voluntary, and they could withdraw their consent at any point without having to give an explanation.



The contact details for the Head of Education (Inclusion) were provided should participants have any concerns about the research process. The Pathfinder officers made certain that the researcher's information sheet and the consent form to be signed were accessible to the young people and parents. The Pathfinder officers also made every effort to ensure accommodation for the semi-structured research interviews was comfortable, private and quiet and that it was booked well in advance. They always made every effort to put young people, parents and carers at ease and made themselves available to the young people and the researcher at the start and end of each research interview.

#### Potential researcher bias

It is hoped that the rigorous, systematic and scientific approach taken in this research mitigated any potential bias and prejudice in the researcher.

### **Section 4 Findings**

This research is based in a large Scottish Local Authority. Nevertheless, the following research findings, and the learning from the research, would seem applicable to other geographical areas.

#### Development of the Pathfinder role and practice

At the beginning of the initiative, a short-term steering group was established and chaired by the YFCL area coordinator, representing the three original Pathfinder schools and including the researcher, representatives from Social Work Resources, the Inclusive Education Service, Housing and local community partners.

As it is with the effective and successful implementation of many new initiatives, there were various stages worked through by the YFCL management and head teachers, and the steering group was pivotal in these early stages of implementation. Stages included the initial identification of the key stakeholders who had an ambition to implement change, and then the process of obtaining a specific 'buy in' from those stakeholders.

Another key stage was identified in the research literature by Topping (2012), who highlights that the needs assessment process is necessary and "creates an understanding of strengths and weaknesses" in the system (p. 240). Furthermore, Meyers et al (2012) argue the process can illuminate "how the innovation fits with the setting, and whether the organisation/community is ready to implement" (p. 477). A needs assessment was therefore undertaken.

Exploration of potential barriers to successful implementation, and the identification of solutions also took place in this phase of the initiative. Close collaboration between the three schools and Pathfinder characterised these stages of implementation and continue to be a feature of the dialogue with the further four schools now involved with Pathfinder.

To best capture the development journey over the 4 years, it was considered appropriate to gather the views of the key professionals involved in the initial three schools i.e., Pathfinder officers, HTs and the relevant DHTs, the Pathfinder coordinator and YFCL Area coordinator.

The research question developed to address and throw light on this journey was:

How has the role and practice of Pathfinder developed since it was established four years ago?

Figure 4 below highlights the themes identified by the researcher from responses to the research question:

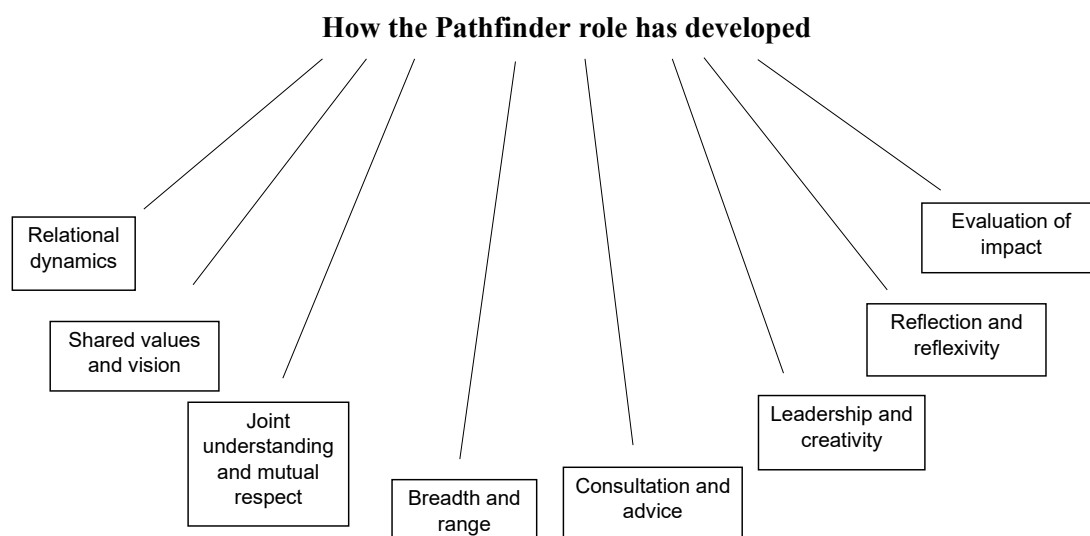


Figure 4: Themes on how the Pathfinder role and practice has developed

Relationship dynamics refer to the patterns of behaviour that exist between people and the ways we relate, interact and communicate with each other. Caring, compassionate and empowering relationships were identified as a prominent theme in the responses from Pathfinder officers and HTs and DHTs. In the first few months of the initiative, school staff noted how Pathfinder quickly established rapport with pupils and adopted a beneficial, non-judgemental view of young people; no pathologising of adolescent behaviour.

In responses to the research question, Pathfinder officers talked of their commitment, from the start of the initiative, to work in partnership with young people, participating voluntarily; to work on a first name basis, and to remain alert to issues relating to imbalance of power. Through negotiation they planned to develop shared goals and actions with young people, taking into account the strengths and challenges in the lives of the young people, and remaining sensitive to the impact of past and current trauma.

All the Pathfinder officers commented that the breadth and range of the referrals was much wider than anticipated when they initially started work in the post. The poor attendance of pupils was a common reason at the beginning but the challenges for some young people to attend school were often masking mental health concerns. The need for Pathfinder and school to explore the appropriate young people for referral to Pathfinder took time and the dialogue between the Pathfinder coordinator, Pathfinder officers and school management was essential in achieving joint understanding. At the beginning of the initiative, Pathfinder were not always involved in JATS, and in school and multi-agency planning meetings. However, this was relatively quickly addressed, and school senior management now greatly value the pivotal role Pathfinder has in these assessment and planning forums. Pathfinder officers now report they are integral in decisions about referrals to their service.

School partners and Pathfinders reflected on how the working relationships had developed and strengthened over the four years. There were many responses indicating that patience, effort and compromise were necessary at the beginning, and that honesty, trust and open communication developed as they began to understand and appreciate the vision and values which they shared. The majority of participants made reference of the need to gain a deeper understanding of each other's role and remit. One YFCL participant commented that there were myths in CLD about the attitudes in schools about their pupils, and myths in schools about the practice of CLD with young people. Gradually, over time, it would seem

that with school staff and Pathfinder making the time to talk, listen, and share views and purpose, that joint understanding and mutual respect developed. An ethos of mutuality and equality would seem to have been established, where positive challenge is welcomed.

As for all practitioners, and for managers themselves, 'psychological safety' within an organisation promotes a culture of creativity (Edmondson, 2018). When practitioners feel valued and trusted, they experience the safety and security that enables them to share innovative ideas, take calculated risks and drive improvement forward. Distributed leadership was fostered by the Pathfinder coordinator and area coordinator, and creativity was evident in many elements of Pathfinder practice e.g., how Pathfinder officers maximised their contacts and networks to provide opportunities for young people to gain achievement awards in practical areas where they had an interest.

Leadership from Pathfinder was evident e.g., in the response to serious gang activity, not only in terms of responding to the immediate challenges but also in terms of early intervention planned with younger pupils. There was also evidence of leadership in establishing innovative links with class teachers.

It should also be noted that, in particular during research interviews over the year preceding this report, senior management teams increasingly acknowledged the valuable consultation and advice role of Pathfinder e.g., one Pathfinder officer's membership on the school working group to implement the South Lanarkshire Council Education Resources policy "Promoting Positive Relationships and Understanding Distressed Behaviour".

Reflection is central to the profession of CLD and the research discussions with each Pathfinder officer provided clear evidence of reflection being embedded in everyday practice, especially in terms of the success and impact of their interventions with young people and families. There was also evidence of reflexivity in the Pathfinder officers and their management such as questioning their own attitudes to certain situations arising within school and community; noticing assumptions and prejudices; and analysing the complex interactions between their role and those of school and multi-agency partners.

This commitment to reflective practice and reflexivity was particularly evident in the way the Pathfinder team and their coordinator confronted the challenge of identifying the most meaningful data to gather in terms of evaluation of impact. One Pathfinder officer reflected some of the challenge:

In some ways it is hard to evaluate Pathfinder on its own as it is based on a close working relationship with the school and a lot of progress is down to school staff and Pathfinder closely collaborating and intervening for young people.

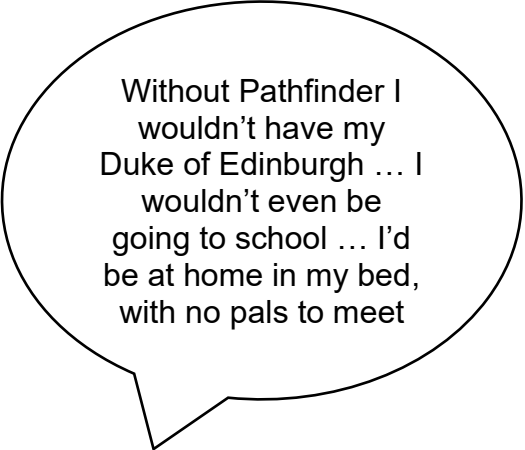
The researcher observed Pathfinder team meetings where there was clear professional commitment to develop best practice in data gathering, monitoring progress and improvement planning. Reflections from various DHTs who had been involved in some of these discussions on evaluation was further evidence of the ongoing exploration of meaningful data gathering.

## Impact


### *Voice of young people*

The young people who agreed to be research participants showed a real interest in the history of how and why the Pathfinder officers were in their school. A number asked if they were in all schools. When they realised Pathfinder were not a part of all South Lanarkshire Council secondary schools, without prompting, a majority reflected on what their school experience would have been like without Pathfinder; poor, or complete non-attendance at

school, leaving with no qualifications, getting into trouble from the police in their local community were common themes.




Without Pathfinder I  
wouldn't have my  
Duke of Edinburgh ... I  
wouldn't even be  
going to school ... I'd  
be at home in my bed,  
with no pals to meet




I'd have  
gone right off  
the rails  
without them

'Safety' was a major theme identified from the voices of young people when they described their experience of working with the Pathfinder officers. Many referred to feeling safe enough to 'be themselves' and to be open about their fears and anxieties. A number talked about sharing things they had previously kept hidden from everyone.

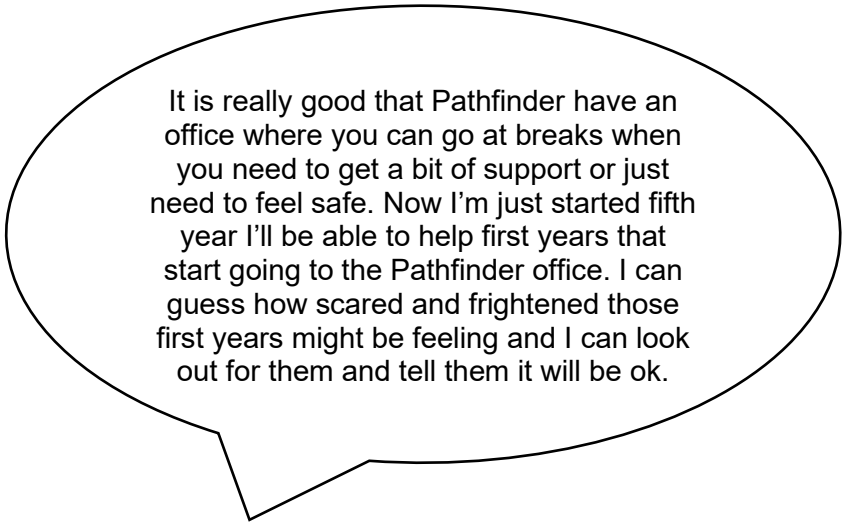


Makes me  
feel safe ... he  
has got my  
back



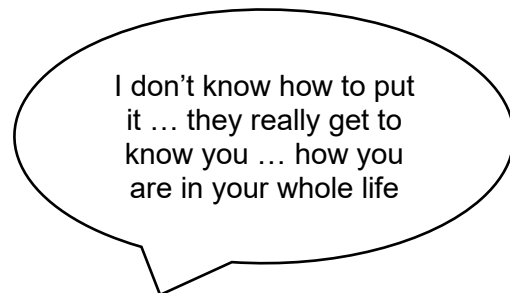
I felt safe enough  
to tell him  
something that I  
had kept secret for  
a long time

The feelings of safety and security were referred to by many young people in the context of the Pathfinder's room where young people would go to at breaks and lunchtimes. One young person compared the Pathfinder base to a "happy family home".



It is really good that Pathfinder have an  
office where you can go at breaks when  
you need to get a bit of support or just  
need to feel safe. Now I'm just started fifth  
year I'll be able to help first years that  
start going to the Pathfinder office. I can  
guess how scared and frightened those  
first years might be feeling and I can look  
out for them and tell them it will be ok.

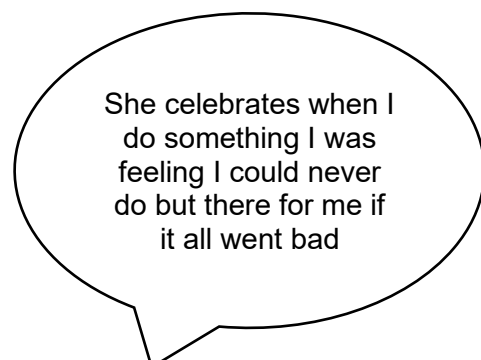
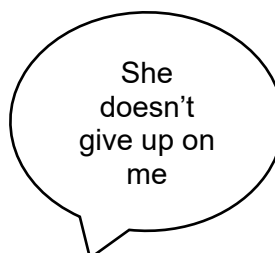
Feeling listened to and being understood was also a major theme when talking about Pathfinder.



In the research discussions with young people, a closely related theme to 'feeling understood' was that Pathfinder valued them.

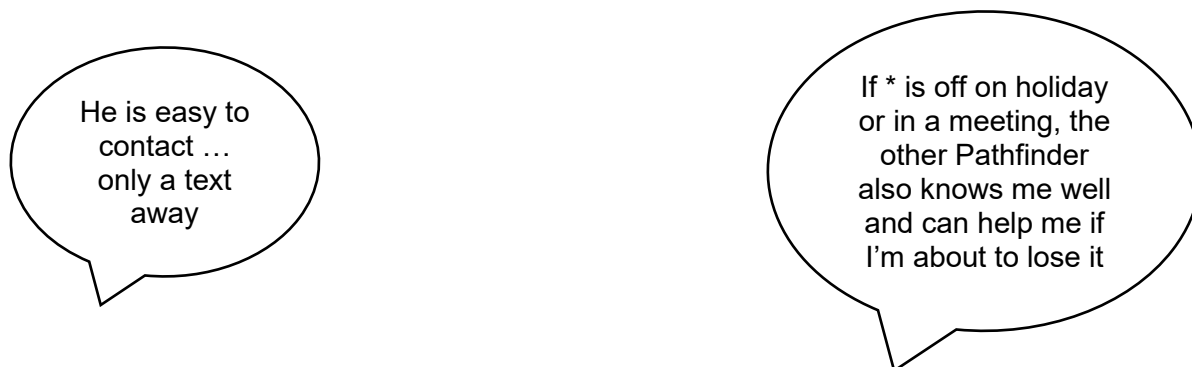


Many talked warmly of the trust they had in the Pathfinder officers. One young person also mentioned how he noticed Pathfinder was "doing for other pupils what they did for me".



The collaborative nature of the relationship between young people and their Pathfinder officer was evident. Phrases such as “we sat down and drew up a plan”, “we talked about what to work on first”, “we thought, what is it we need to solve here?” were used frequently.

All the young people reflected on how easy they found it to get in touch with Pathfinder and the majority noted and appreciated that although they had a main Pathfinder officer, the second Pathfinder was there for them also.



### *Voice of parents and carers*

The Pathfinder approach to work holistically in their involvement with young people would seem to explain the close working relationships with Pathfinder, which many families reported having experienced.

Research participants included the parents and carers of young people who were experiencing a range of challenges, some linked to mental health, some rooted in social issues and others neurodivergent. These challenges were often communicated by behavioural patterns which negatively affected attendance, attainment and engagement with school and community.

For many of the young people and families working with Pathfinder, there were a ‘constellation’ of factors behind the challenges. It was within this often-complicated socio-ecological interplay of forces and relationships described earlier in the report (p. 11), that Pathfinder provided support and navigated complex systems. This is the context in which the voices of parents and carers were heard as part of the research into the impact of Pathfinder.

There were a wide range of issues affecting the lives of parents and carers who took part in the research but note-worthy similarity in the identification of how the Pathfinder approach made a positive difference. Furthermore, the responses were consistent with the themes identified in the 2021 Pathfinder research update e.g. approachable, reliable, bringing hope. Words and phrases such as “life changing”, “invaluable” ,” always listened to me”, “really understood”, “ easy to contact”, “didn’t judge me” were frequently used. All parents and carers participated individually so there was no influence from the words used by another parent.

One parent whose son had a diagnosis of autism, talked passionately and powerfully about the invaluable engagement with Pathfinder during the pandemic, and went on to reflect :

There are not enough words in the dictionary to describe the impact Pathfinder made to my son and my family. It was life changing. Pathfinder have been on this journey with us since the end of my son's first year and he is now in S5. He would not be in school today without their support....and he is achieving so much. Pathfinder changed the direction of my son's life and that of our whole family.

Another parent reflected that Pathfinder "was an anchor for me when my son was in trouble with the school and the police". The same parent spoke of the "invaluable" role Pathfinder took in keeping the lines of communication open between the parents and school when at points "it seemed he was getting into serious trouble every day".

Linked to these reflections were other parents' comments about the role of Pathfinder as "champion" or "advocate":

Pathfinder advocated for my son on my behalf when I was undergoing significant intrusive medical treatment. I could trust they would be doing that.

A number of parents also spoke of Pathfinder as an advocate for them when they felt overwhelmed by the number of services involved with their child, especially during a crisis. One parent became emotional when she reflected on the support from Pathfinder when her daughter was sectioned under the mental health legislation. The parent reflected on the emotional support and encouragement from Pathfinder when she felt her voice was ignored by some professionals. The same parent referred to her gradually feeling "more confident and powerful" to express how unhappy she was with elements of the services she and her daughter received.

The theme of 'trust' was evident in every research discussion; trust in Pathfinder "being there" for them as parents, and for their child. The trust seemed to stem from Pathfinder taking time to understand the context of their lives and really getting to know the young person. One parent spoke earnestly about how:

Pathfinder fully understand what things in school and round where we live make my child frightened. \* totally knows the signs when he has shut down through his anxiety, and that it is because he is scared and not because he is being awkward and difficult, as some school staff thought about him at the beginning. \* also knows how to build him up again, especially when he goes that way in school.

Another parent provided the following description:

she is fine-tuned into how my son is feeling and how he is coping, in a way that someone without knowing him so well would completely miss.

Linked to this previous point, one parent reflected how children and young people

...wear a mask for the outside world and are often not fine at all...and I did not realise how bad she was feeling. It was Pathfinder who noticed how withdrawn and anxious she was...we got medical intervention far quicker because of Pathfinder realising she was self-harming.

The same parent reflected on how stressful it must have been for Pathfinder to discover how serious and life threatening were the behaviours of her daughter.

Many parents talked enthusiastically of how Pathfinder signposted resources for them as parents and also as individuals with their own needs for development and growth. The resources were often organised by Pathfinder colleagues in the wider YFCL service e.g., groups running in the local Universal Connections such as adult literacy groups. A number mentioned their own school experience had not gone well and they had now started to think about engaging in community-based courses or college as a result of what one parent described as:

Seeing the help my son got from Pathfinder and his pupil support teacher has made me view school and education in a better light...definitely a different world from my day with all the opportunities of support. They understand more about the pressures parents can be under.

Nearly all of the parents and carers made reference to significant practical help from Pathfinder during the pandemic, and on an ongoing basis, in terms of advice and support on how access food banks, how to apply for funds to buy for example clothing for their children, replace broken kitchen appliances such as washing machines, and purchase furniture for their children's bedroom.

#### *Voice of school and multi-agency partners*

A member of the senior management team from one of the schools where Pathfinder had been involved for the four years, voiced the view that "Pathfinder has become increasingly integral to achieving our school improvement aspirations".

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

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.

The impact of the Pathfinder 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.

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 "Pathfinder helps the school to further understand the strengths and challenges in the local community". She cited



the “invaluable contribution” of Pathfinder when incidences of serious gang violence were causing considerable concern in the school and community.

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

There were examples given to the researcher of effective joint work between family support workers and Pathfinder, 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 Pathfinder, 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 Pathfinder was pivotal to this outcome.

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.

It is relevant here to note that similar observations were made by a member of the Youth Employability Service, who was involved in delivering the ASPIRE programme (a targeted service for young people not quite ready to enter employment, training or further education) to a senior pupil in one of the Pathfinder schools. The ASPIRE worker commented on the impact of the relationship the Pathfinder officer built up with the young person. It had brought a sense of safety and security to an anxious pupil at the point of post school transition planning and “with the support from Pathfinder the young person agreed to meet me and went on to engage with the ASPIRE programme”.

The ability of Pathfinder to establish these trusting and supportive relationships was recognised and emphasised in many research interviews with e.g., DHTs, pupil support staff, school nurses, and campus police officers. One mental health officer reflected on how young people who have experienced abuse will push adult helpers away, but the Pathfinder officer persevered “sensitively and very skilfully” and over time built a very trusting relationship and became “very attuned to the young person's body language and in one meeting was able to highlight the young person was becoming distressed... someone else may not have noticed”.

It is worth noting here that “strong and trusting relationships”, established by Pathfinder with pupils, was noted in the 2023 HMIE inspection report for one of the schools where Pathfinder was based. Some young people receiving support from Pathfinder, who spoke to one of the inspection team, described their experience as being “lifesaving”.

School staff observed how these relationships sometimes were built where there had been no plan to refer to Pathfinder, but where young people gravitated to and felt safe to spend time in the Pathfinder's room. A number of DHTs and pupil support staff talked of young

people who could have “gone under the radar” had it not been for Pathfinder’s insight into the hidden distress experienced by some young people. One member of pupil support reported that Pathfinder often highlighted these young people and recommended a Pathfinder referral and that “what came out as they developed further trust in Pathfinder, was a background of serious trauma”.

Related to the earlier point made about the skilled professional practice observed by partner agencies, were the comments made by partners that they had noticed Pathfinder observed professional boundaries and showed insight when it was time to seek advice and recommend ‘requests for assistance’ are made to relevant professionals.

Insight into the impact of Pathfinder at the systemic level could be inferred from the reflections from members of the Inclusive Education Service. There would seem to be a link between reduced referrals for Partnership Planning Meetings from schools where Pathfinder are based. Additionally, as part of the systems and procedures in place for the care and monitoring of care experienced children, it has been noted that families are describing the positive impact that Pathfinder are having on their children’s abilities to manage school life, improve attendance and gain qualifications.

Some DHTs had noticed the value of Pathfinder continuing to work with young people over the summer school holiday period. One commented :

We have a planning meeting before school stops for summer and we identify our most vulnerable pupils who would benefit from ongoing support over the holiday period. The Pathfinders keep the connection with them and organise valuable fun and learning experiences e.g., outdoor activities.

An NHS practitioner, a mental health officer, a number of DHTs and an SMPS all highlighted their observations that the Pathfinder role was very stressful. One DHT described the role as “ very demanding and emotionally labour intense”. These research participants all raised the question of support for Pathfinder with one posing the question, “Who helps the helpers?” One multi-agency partner from NHS who had worked closely with a Pathfinder officer in a very complex situation, raised the importance of debriefing and support when Pathfinder are working with young people who are e.g., at risk of admission to adolescent inpatient treatment.

A number of school staff commented on the added stress they perceived may be experienced by Pathfinder officers who were on temporary contracts and who were becoming involved e.g., with first year pupils who clearly could need long-term support.

A major theme identified in the responses from school and partner agencies was the role of Pathfinder in widening the curriculum and improving opportunities for young people to attain and achieve qualifications. All DHTs linked to Pathfinder praised the creativity of Pathfinder in identifying routes for young people to achieve certificates e.g. The Royal Horticultural Society School Gardening Awards, to name one of many such opportunities referred to in research interviews.

The effective collaboration between Pathfinder and the YFCL Awards Team was noted by some DHTs and a number of pupil support staff. There were also positive comments about Pathfinder facilitating young people’s participation in wider curricular activities provided in the local Universal Connections.

Related to this recurring theme of Pathfinder’s role in extending the traditional school curriculum, was the equally strong theme of Pathfinder and class teachers working collaboratively to support young people to overcome difficulties in some of their school

subjects. Noone was indicating that Pathfinder was taking the role of a class teacher but instead playing an invaluable role in scaffolding the learning under the direction of the class teacher.

During their research interviews, a number of professionals from partner agencies compared their experience of working with schools with and without Pathfinder involvement. Pathfinder would seem to be viewed as filling existing gaps in the continuum of service provision, with one research participant reflecting that “ in schools with no Pathfinder provision, I am undertaking tasks that are not really part of my role and it means I have less time for the work that I am supposed to be doing.”

When considering the impact of Pathfinder, all research participants voiced hopes that the Pathfinder Initiative would be maintained in the existing schools, and also extended to other secondary schools. This theme of ‘hope for the future of Pathfinder’ is taken forward in the following section.

### Best hopes/preferred future of the Pathfinder Initiative

In order to further investigate the views and understandings of school and Pathfinder research participants, a future-directed research question, influenced by solution-focused approaches (Iveson et al, 2012), was developed to gather data:

What are your best hopes /preferred future for Pathfinder?

The research literature on solution focused approaches indicates that the ‘best hopes’ or ‘preferred future’ question helps to focus thinking onto realistic and achievable goals and to avoid unrealistic expectations.

All HTs, Pathfinder coordinator, YFCL manager, link DHTs and the 14 Pathfinder officers from the 7 schools which Pathfinder are based, were invited to respond to the research question.

The following themes were identified from the responses:

#### **Themes from Best Hopes / Preferred Future for Pathfinder**

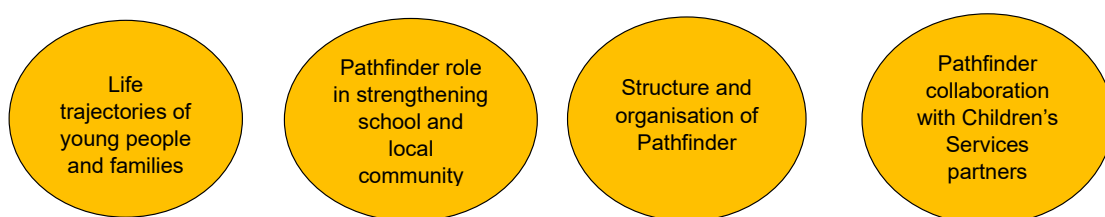


Figure 5: Themes from the best hopes/preferred future for Pathfinder

To follow are a number of illustrative quotes which represent the range of best hopes voiced by research participants.

For all members of the senior management in schools who responded, their best hopes included the continuation of Pathfinder in their school. The main reason given was the difference their Pathfinder officers were making to improve the life trajectories of young people and families. One head teacher expressed it powerfully:

In terms of my hopes for the future for Pathfinders it is easy. I hope they would become a permanent fixture in our staffing complement - not taken from our existing

numbers but bolted on as permanent additional staffing. They and their work has been invaluable, and I know for certain that there are some students we would have 'lost' completely without their interventions and engagement strategies. Personally, we see them as part of our school family, as do the students, and can't imagine a future without their partnership.

Supporting the work of the school and the school community led another head teacher to hope for the maintenance of Pathfinder:

Our young people come to us now with extremely complicated stories. Pathfinders support us to navigate those stories in an education setting.

The best hope expressed by one DHT was influenced by extensive experience witnessing the impact Pathfinder officers' work had on the life outcomes for pupils. The hope was that:

Pathfinder becomes an integral part of all South Lanarkshire secondary schools. The impact of their work can be transformational for young people and their families, and they form an invaluable part of the wellbeing interventions available to our Pupil Support Team... the Pathfinder project transcends school, community and home. It has successfully fostered school connectedness and has helped young people improve their attendance, their sense of self, and of course, their experience of learning.

Another DHT voiced a hope that:

the Pathfinder programme becomes nationally recognised and is embedded in every school in Scotland...if they were to have a permanent role in Scottish schools, their work could be linked to every School Improvement Plan; they could have their own short and long-term action plans that could be reciprocal and mutually beneficial, and this would only increase their effectiveness within the school and community.

One DHT expressed a best hope for decisions made at a strategic level, that:

Pathfinder is not a short-term initiative. The cycle of different initiatives...making a positive difference, but then removed, with the decision influenced by changing funding streams, can demoralise schools and communities.

A number of DHTs hoped for a continuation of Pathfinder's efforts into widening the curriculum and extending the range of formally accredited qualifications. This was a best hope also raised by many of the Pathfinder officers.

As is evident in all the responses from school senior management, all Pathfinder officers described a best hope and preferred future for Pathfinder, where the posts in all 7 schools were made permanent, and that the Pathfinder service was extended to other secondary schools in South Lanarkshire Council. A number of responses included a hope that Pathfinder's influence and involvement would continue to be established at the primary to secondary transition stage.

The Pathfinder team were unanimously passionate in their best hope of continuing to make a difference that improves life outcomes for young people and families. One specific example within this was the prevention of young people entering the Youth Justice System was given as one specific example.

Another specific example is linked to the CLD promotion of learning as a lifelong activity:

I would hope to ignite an interest in education in parents and carers as their children become more engaged in school.

Many of the Pathfinder team signalled a best hope that the service would remain aligned with CLD values and principles. This included a commitment to be flexible and responsive to the needs of individual young people

...and not develop into a service which offers pre-set interventions...where a young person has to fit the pre-established criteria for getting the help on offer. I would want the system of help to be developed around the young person, not the young person having to fit into what is on offer.

Related to this issue of CLD core values and principles, was a best hope from one of the Pathfinder officers regarding skilled interventions :

One of my best hopes is for the continuation of high-quality training to ensure Pathfinder remains a highly skilled workforce.

In terms of knowledge and skills, some Pathfinder officers expressed the hope for increased focus on attachment-informed practice within the Pathfinder team and hoped for opportunities to further develop their understanding of attachment theory and how to apply it.

The CLD commitment to establish positive and effective working relationships with partner services was evident in numerous responses from Pathfinder officers. The Family Support Hubs were frequently cited as being a key partner. All communicated a clear desire for ongoing strengthening of partnerships with Children's Services and voluntary sector practitioners " so that we really 'get it right' for our young people and families".

Another common theme in the Pathfinder responses was related to the structure and organisation of the Pathfinder initiative as it sits within the wider YFCL service. One Pathfinder officer commented:

I feel very privileged to be part of the school community and the YFCL community.

There were many examples shared with the researcher of creative, effective joint working between Pathfinder and the wider YFCL service. There was some excitement about the prospect of working together and exploring how to maximise the YFCL contribution to a number of important national agendas, such as supporting parents and building more resilient communities. One Pathfinder officer referred to:

The great work that is taking place in communities across the YFCL service but when Pathfinder and our YFCL colleagues work closely together the results will change lives and communities.

Another Pathfinder officer spoke enthusiastically about the drive to establish unified and coherent approaches across the YFCL service, including a coherent school engagement approach within YFCL, which

...would help clarify the way in which the Pathfinder role maps on to other 'school offers' within the wider service.

Additionally, Pathfinder officers articulated hopes in respect of the ongoing development of a robust and user-friendly system for recording impact.

At the time of the preparation of this report a successful bid had been made by Pathfinder to the Innovation Fund, a collaboration between the Scottish Government and the Hunter Foundation, to tackle child poverty. The bid acknowledged the recognition of the value and

worth of young people, and the funding will be used to support the establishment of a group, identified by the Pathfinder officers from the 7 Pathfinder schools. The group will be 'constituted' and supported by the Pathfinder officers to engage in consultation, with other young people, on their views of what help is available for those in need of support.

Best hopes for this project are that those who participate find the experience empowering; that they are enabled to have a genuine influence on the development of relevant policy and practice ( including that of Pathfinder); and that fundamentally, the project will nurture the voice of the young people.

## **Section 5 Discussion and conclusions**

Fosha (2003) has written that "whereas fear constricts, safety expands the range of exploration". The caring, compassionate, and empowering relationships, and rich bonds, which Pathfinder establish and make with young people, would seem to engender safety, security, and a sense of hope.

Young people involved in the research highlighted many attributes of their Pathfinder officer e.g., approachable, understanding, non-judgemental, and this is a reminder that when working with young people, who are often affected by past and present trauma, the issue is not "what to do" but "how to be" (Fursland et al, 2013, p. 69).

Young people reported that they felt valued, and that their strengths were recognised, and successes celebrated by their Pathfinder officer. This practice contributes to how Pathfinder are challenging some of the negative stereotypes of adolescence, through promotion of positive, rather than deficit, perspectives.

Parents, school staff, partner agencies and young people themselves report the positive effect of the trust, encouragement, and unswerving support from Pathfinder. This includes improved school attendance, increased school connectedness and engagement, progress and success in learning and development. The impact of Pathfinder on the lives of young people very often is transformative and there is a sense from the research data that the whole school community is being strengthened by Pathfinder.

The Attachment-Informed, Trauma Sensitive South Lanarkshire Good Practice Guide outlines the key elements of attachment-informed practice:

- act to make a difference
- see the whole person
- hear their voice
- recognise behaviour as communication
- respond with compassion
- believe in change

These elements are embedded in Pathfinder practice. The attachment theory research literature would clearly indicate that in the school setting, attuned practitioners who are able to relate positively to young people, and provide a secure base and safe haven, can act as a buffer against the impact of adversity and have the potential to divert maladaptive developmental trajectories. It would seem from the findings from this research programme, that Pathfinder practice is already attachment-informed.

There is evidence that the emotional and practical support from Pathfinder for parents and carers mitigated some of the challenges many families experienced during and after the pandemic. The evidence gathered from parents and carers would illustrate how Pathfinder value the voice of parents and carers, work alongside them, and connect them into local networks of support. This would seem to mitigate against past experiences of feeling

unheard and diminished, and thus self-confidence is built in members of the local community.

The holistic approach, and ecological model of practice, adopted by Pathfinder would seem highly significant in explaining their wide range of impact. There is much evidence of Pathfinder successfully navigating the complex systems and layers of relationships in a young person's life (see Figure 2, p.13). The word 'invaluable' used by HTs, DHTs and pupil support staff to describe the benefit of Pathfinder in their school, is understood when a Pathfinder's work activity is analysed. In any one week Pathfinder may be working with an individual young person, undertaking home visits to support parents, contributing to multi-agency assessment and planning processes, collaborating with class teachers, supporting and accompanying young people and parents at reviews or case conferences where they feel overwhelmed, liaising with community networks, and because of their CLD understanding of how to strengthen communities, contributing to a community based meeting to address a local concern about young people.

The findings of the Independent Care Review in Scotland, articulated in The Promise, includes the recommendation for all the Children's Services workforce, that "supervision and reflective practice is essential for all practitioners, regardless of professional discipline or role, who are working with children." The report continues to advocate that Scotland must recognise the secondary effects of working with children "who have and continue to experience trauma." The references made by school and partner agencies about the demanding nature of Pathfinder's work with young people who may be distressed, insecure and traumatised are relevant to the need for support and debriefing after incidents of crisis. Work which aligns with one's core purpose and values may be a buffer to 'burn out' and the passion to make a difference by using CLD approaches is very evident in Pathfinder officers. However, both the report outlined above and the current focus on work-place health and wellbeing, would seem particularly relevant to the Pathfinder team.

There are signs that the rich and productive collaborations between Pathfinder and their colleagues in the wider YFCL Service will continue to grow and develop. The examples cited during the research of Pathfinder highly valuing the YFCL Awards team and their colleagues in the local Universal Connections were echoed by a sample of YFCL team leaders and coordinators. As practice is shared and as YFCL aims and objectives continue to be aligned across the service, the potential for effective collaboration between Pathfinder and other teams such as English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) and Adult Literacy and Numeracy (ALAN) is expanded.

#### *Next steps for Pathfinder: points for consideration.*

- Considering the Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment (2023), led by Professor Hayward, if priority was given to further Pathfinder's creative and highly valued contribution to extending the traditional school curriculum and qualifications system, there would be benefit to schools and young people in South Lanarkshire Council.
- The research literature on attachment theory would assert that adults who understand the attachment process and the negative effect of unmet attachment needs and trauma, are better equipped to build resilience. Given the close alignment between, on the one hand the Education Resources Attachment Strategy, the Attachment-Informed, Trauma Sensitive South Lanarkshire Good Practice Guide and Accreditation Toolkit, and on the other hand, Pathfinder's passionate commitment to and practice of establishing safe, trusting and nurturing relationships, there would seem particular benefit in YFCL contributing to the steering group which oversees the strategy. Some Pathfinder officers expressed a hope that they would have opportunities to learn more about applying attachment theory in practice and

understanding the impact of trauma. Of relevance here are the quarterly newsletters from the Attachment Strategy development officers, training opportunities and locality network events. These locality network events focus on applying attachment informed and trauma sensitive practice and provide opportunities for Pathfinder to become better informed and equipped.

- Effective collaboration between schools and YFCL, and fidelity to the Pathfinder programme, would be strengthened if interviews for new Pathfinder officers were undertaken jointly by YFCL and the relevant HT.
- Schools, multi-agency partners, young people and families would benefit from Pathfinder further articulating their aspirations and practice in a written, accessible format, in order to aid understanding of what is on offer. This would seem particularly helpful where partner services support the same client group.
- It would be important to have a strong focus on the newly constituted Pathfinder group of young people. There is the potential, through co-production and co-design, for the group to influence the ongoing development of Pathfinder in the context of wider policy and practice. This project would seem to support the CLD vision of “working particularly with those excluded from participation in the decisions and processes that shape their lives.” (CLD Standards Council for Scotland, 2021).
- Education Resources and the YFCL Service should remain alert to the most effective management model if additional schools become involved in Pathfinder.

### *Conclusion*

The research findings would indicate that Pathfinder does not appear to be a ‘passing’ or ‘fleeting’ initiative, but represents fundamental change and an extension to the existing education experience in South Lanarkshire Council’s secondary schools. To quote one Pathfinder officer in his response to the ‘best hopes’ question:

I hope this is not the end of the learning journey of how Pathfinder can work with schools and partner agencies to make a real difference to South Lanarkshire Council systems for supporting vulnerable and at-risk young people and families... I hope it is only the beginning.

### *Closing reflection*

It would seem appropriate for this report to end with the voice of a young person. The following reflection is from a 4<sup>th</sup> year boy who attends one of the first three schools involved with Pathfinder. This young person took part in two research discussions, 12 months apart, and had experience of a number of years of ongoing support from Pathfinder. Looking back on the years of working with his Pathfinder officer, he shared this thoughtful and powerful reflection:

Having had the chance to work with \* makes me feel I have been given a real chance to get on the right path. I was on a path going nowhere – it is like the word Path and finder ... it is a good word to describe them. With help from my Pathfinder, I am finding a better path – better for the rest of my life. I’d tell everyone that if you have been thinking there is no hope for getting on in school and that you’ll be leaving with



nothing ... Pathfinder works with you and you begin to have hope ... you feel that hope inside you get a bit stronger and you start to put in some more effort...but it takes time ... sometimes I really went back the way ... but now I've definitely got the hope that I'll get the life I want.

## References

- Arnett, J. J. (2011). *Debating emerging adulthood: Stage or process?*. Oxford University Press.
- Bolton, G. (2014). *Reflective practice: Writing and professional development* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Boyle, J., & King, E. N. (2021). Resilience, reflection and reflexivity. In J. Monsen, L. M. Wolfson, & J. Boyle (Eds.), *Why do teachers need to know about psychology* (pp. 107). Bloomsbury Academic.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2013). *Successful Qualitative Research*. Sage Publications.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2019). Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 11(4), 589-597.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021). *Thematic Analysis: A Practical Guide*. Sage Publications.
- Cannon, M. D., & Edmondson, A. C. (2005). Failing to learn and learning to fail (intelligently): How great organizations put failure to work to innovate and improve. *Long range planning*, 38(3), 299-319.
- CLD Standards Council for Scotland. (2021). *CLD Standards Council for Scotland*. Retrieved 05 September 2023 from <https://cldstandardscouncil.org.uk/>
- Coburn, A., & Gormally, S. (2017). *Communities for social change: Practicing equality and social justice in youth and community contexts*. Peter Lang.
- Cohen, A. K., & Schuchter, J. W. (2013). Revitalizing communities together: The shared values, goals, and work of education, urban planning, and public health. *Journal of Urban Health*, 90, 187-196.
- Donohoo, J. (2013). *Collaborative inquiry for educators: A facilitator's guide to school improvement*. Corwin Press
- Edmondson, A. C. (2018). *The fearless organization: Creating psychological safety in the workplace for learning, innovation, and growth*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Faldet, A. C., & Nes, K. (2021). Valuing vulnerable children's voices in educational research. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 1-16.
- Fursland, E., Cairns, K., & Stanway, C. (2013). Ten Top Tips for Supporting Education. British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF).
- Fosha, D. (2003). Dyadic regulation and experiential work with emotion and relatedness in trauma and disorganized attachment. In D. J. Siegel & M. F. Solomon (Eds.), *Healing Trauma: Attachment, Mind, Body and Brain* (pp. 221-281). W W Norton and company.
- Freire, P. & Ramos, M.B. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*.
- Gallagher, S., & Morgan, T. (2013). The Process is the Product: Is There a Need for Measurement in Youth Work. *A Journal of Youth Work: Research and Positive Practices in Work with Young People*, 11, 41-46.
- Inclusion as Prevention (2021). <https://inclusionasprevention.org.uk/>
- Independent Care Review. (2020). *The Promise*. Retrieved 05 September 2023 from [The-Promise\\_v7.pdf \(carereview.scot\)](#)
- Independent Care Review. (2020). *The Pinky Promise*. Retrieved 05 September 2023 from [Pinky-Promise.pdf \(carereview.scot\)](#)
- Independent Care Review. (2020). *The Plan*. Retrieved 05 September 2023 from [The-Plan\\_pages.pdf \(carereview.scot\)](#)
- Independent Care Review. (2020). *The Money*. Retrieved 05 September 2023 from [The-Money.pdf \(carereview.scot\)](#)
- Independent Care Review. (2020). *Follow the Money*. Retrieved 05 September 2023 from [Follow-the-money.pdf \(carereview.scot\)](#)
- Independent Care Review. (2020). *The Rules*. Retrieved 05 September 2023 from [The-Rules\\_pages.pdf \(carereview.scot\)](#)
- Independent Care Review. (2020). *Thank You*. Retrieved 05 September 2023 from [Thank-You-spreads-new.pdf \(carereview.scot\)](#)
- Iveson, C., George, E., & Ratner, H. (2012). *Brief coaching: A solution focused approach*. Routledge.

- Ledwith, M. (2016). *Community development in action: Putting Freire into practice*. Policy Press.
- McGhee, K., & Deeley, S. (2022). Emerging Adulthood: Exploring the implications for care experienced young people and those who care for them. *Scottish Journal of Residential Child Care*, 21(1).
- McKay, C., & McArdle, K. (2020). Presenting findings to different audiences. In K McArdle, S. Briggs, K. Forrester, E. Garrett & C McKay (Eds.), *The Impact of Community Work: How to gather evidence* (pp. 69-84). Policy Press.
- Meyers, D. C., Durlak, J. A., Wandersman, & Abraham. (2012). The quality implementation framework: a synthesis of critical steps in the implementation process. *American journal of community psychology*, 50(3-4), 462-480.
- Powell, B. J., Waltz, T. J., Chinman, M. J., Damschroder, L. J., Smith, J. L., Matthieu, M. M., ... & Kirchner, J. E. (2015). A refined compilation of implementation strategies: results from the Expert Recommendations for Implementing Change (ERIC) project. *Implementation science*, 10(1), 1-14.
- Rapport, F., Clay-Williams, R., & Braithwaite, J. (Eds.). (2022). *Implementation science: The key concepts*. Taylor & Francis.
- Scottish Attachment in Action. (2023) <https://scottishattachmentinaction.org>
- Scottish Government. (2022). *Putting Learners at the Centre: Towards a Future Vision for Scottish Education*. Retrieved 05 September 2023 from [Putting Learners at the Centre: Towards a Future Vision for Scottish Education \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/putting-learners-at-the-centre-towards-a-future-vision-for-scottish-education)
- Scottish Government. (2023). *Getting it right for every child*. Retrieved 05 September 2023 from <https://www.gov.scot/policies/girfec/>
- Scottish Government. (2023). *It's Our Future – Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment: report*. Retrieved 05 September 2023 from [It's Our Future - Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment: report - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/its-our-future-independent-review-of-qualifications-and-assessment-report)
- Scottish Government. (2023). The Promise. Retrieved from <https://thepromise.scot/what-is-the-promise/>
- Sercombe, H. (2010). Youth work ethics. *Youth Work Ethics*, 1-192.
- Shaw, R. (2013). A model of the transformative journey into reflexivity: an exploration into students' experiences of critical reflection. *Reflective Practice*, 14(3), 319-335.
- Shelton, L. (2018). *The Bronfenbrenner primer: A guide to develeology*. Routledge.
- Slavin, R. (2012). Foreword. In B. Kelly & D. F. Perkins (Eds.), *Handbook of Implementation Science for Psychology in Education*. Cambridge Press.
- South Lanarkshire Council. (2020). *Report of Initial Questionnaire on Pathfinder Initiative*.
- South Lanarkshire Council. (2021). *Cambuslang and Rutherglen Pathfinder Initiative: Impact and implementation factors: Research Report 2021*.
- Tett, L. (2010). *Community education, learning and development*. Dunedin Academic Press Ltd.
- The Center for Implementation. (2023). The Center for Implementation.
- The Promise, Scotland. (2020). *Plan 2021-24*. Retrieved 05 September 2023 from [Plan 21-24 - The Promise](https://www.thepromise.scot/plan-2021-24)
- The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. (2023). National Implementation Research Network.
- Topping, K. (2012). Framework for Improving the Impact of School-Based Social Competence Programs. In B. Kelly & D. Perkins (Eds.), *Handbook of implementation science for psychology in education: How to promote evidence-based practice* (pp. 230-246). Cambridge Press.
- Uhl-Bien, M., & Arena, M. (2017). Complexity leadership: enabling people and organizations for adaptability. *Organizational dynamics*.