



Education and Social Work Resources

Cambuslang and Rutherglen Pathfinder Initiative

Impact and implementation factors

June 2021

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Section 1 Executive summary

This is the second of two research reports (First Pathfinder Report, March 2020), investigating research questions identified by Children's Services:

1. What is the impact of the Youth, Family and Community Learning (YFCL) Pathfinder Initiative in Cathkin, Stonelaw and Trinity High Schools?
2. What are the key elements, critical qualities, attitudes, and behaviours to be considered in any further implementation?

Findings

1. Using qualitative and action research methods over a period of 18 months, analysis of the responses on impact from a wide range of research participants would indicate that:
 - the Pathfinder Initiative enhances individual capacities for learning and promotes engagement in learning
 - the Pathfinder officers establish supportive and nurturing relationships throughout school and at points of transition
 - the effective partnerships promoted by the Pathfinder officers facilitate social support networks, which mitigate the risk of negative outcomes

- the policies, practice, and culture of the Pathfinder Initiative, which have developed since 2019, support key local and national policies and agendas including Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC), the South Lanarkshire Council Attachment Strategy for Education Resources (2020), South Lanarkshire Council's Children's Services Plan (2021-2023) and the recommendations of the Independent Care Review, in particular The Promise (2020)
 - the core commitment of the Pathfinder officers to establish effective links with community and Children's Services partners supports the integration of services for young people
 - the Pathfinder officers actively work within the complex system of relationships in a young person's environment. They are well positioned to gain and to share insight with partners about the complexities of behavioural difficulties, and the dynamic interplay of socio-cultural, genetic, and contextual factors that may affect a young person's behaviour.
2. Key elements identified in successful implementation of the Pathfinder Initiative in other establishments would include:
- Pathfinder officers being based and integrated within schools, while retaining professional management and peer links with Community Learning and Development (CLD) colleagues in the YFCL Service
 - a Pathfinder recruitment process led jointly by school and YFCL
 - opportunities for school and CLD staff to gain an understanding of the role and core competencies of each profession. Although the underpinning theory of CLD is educational, and there is much in common with teachers, it would be beneficial for school staff to gain an overview of the philosophy, values, and skill base of the CLD profession
 - multi agency discussion which clarifies the range of appropriate and timely referrals to Pathfinder and the place of Pathfinder in the staged intervention process.

Section 2 Background

As a result of committed leadership, discussion and collaboration between Education, Social Work and Corporate Resources during 2018, the Pathfinder Initiative was established in three secondary schools in Cambuslang and Rutherglen in 2019. The aim of the initiative was to promote effective early intervention and to consider how best to promote resilience and support 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).

Factors which influenced the decision to pilot the initiative in the Cambuslang and Rutherglen area included the high number of young people under 20 from low-income families; the highest rate in the authority for alcohol and/or drug admissions to services; higher social work referrals for Child and Family services than the South Lanarkshire average; relatively more of the locality's economically inactive population were unemployed and significantly more were long term sick or disabled.

An integral part of the implementation of the pilot initiative was a commitment by Children's Services to undertake a rigorous and scientific research programme exploring impact and outcomes, in order to inform decision making and influence the quality of future implementation. A research programme was commissioned which had a temporal element to it, to allow a focus on impact and development over time but also to avoid the positive recency effect around new initiatives. It also provided time for the researcher to gain insight into the informal reality of organisations, which can only be fully perceived over time and from the inside of an organisation.

Section 3 Methodological approach undertaken, and methods chosen for data collection and analysis

3.1. Research methodology

Well defined research questions (see section 1) guided the data collection, and a qualitative research approach was chosen as the most appropriate way to explore the underlying social and psychological processes. It was acknowledged that quantitative data is equally important. However, this research study aimed to access some of the complex realities and deeper meanings of everyday life for young people, families and the agencies which support them. Unlike quantitative data analysis, which tends to discard 'outliers', qualitative research gives voice to exceptional and unusual views, in order to gain a more complete understanding of the situation being explored, while also looking for common threads of meaning.

The research approach was also influenced by action research methodology where the researcher aims to be immersed in the context and to work with participants as collaborators in the research activity. The views of the research participants to some extent influenced the research direction.

3.2. Research informed by context.

To ensure an understanding of the existing context i.e., structures, processes, and issues, the six Pathfinder officers met and liaised with the researcher throughout the research programme during school visits, and by emails and telephone conversations. It is noteworthy that the Pathfinder officers showed a clear readiness and openness to support the research programme and evidenced a strong commitment to quality improvement.

Regular liaison meetings and discussions took place from the start of the research programme, in particular with the Head of Education (Inclusion), the Head of Children and Justice Services and Chief Social Work Officer, and the two members of the Pathfinder management team. There were also ongoing discussions with the Head Teachers of the three secondary schools, members of the multi-agency Pathfinder steering group and the Youth, Family and Community Learning Manager.

In addition to these regular links, productive meetings took place throughout the programme both with key staff from South Lanarkshire Council Children's Services, including:

- Senior Manager Pupil Support (Cambuslang/Rutherglen)
- SWR Children and Justice Services Manager
- SWR Children and Justice Services Team Leader
- SWR Fieldwork Manager (Cambuslang/Rutherglen)
- SWR Service Manager Children's Services (Corporate Parenting)
- YFCL Junior Pathfinder officers
- MCR Pathways officers
- contact with a member of CAMHS

and with appropriate local and national groups including:

- Education Scotland CLD Inspection team
- the Director of the CLD Standards Council Scotland
- Youth Work and Schools Partnership Manager of YouthLink Scotland
- 'Edges of Care' hub of the Independent Care Review

- Centre for Excellence for looked after children in Scotland (CELCIS)
- Senior Lecturer in Community Development, University of Glasgow
- Chief Executive of COVEY Befriending and Mentoring, Lanarkshire
- Dartington Social Research Unit (regarding Junior Pathfinder).

3.3. Research methods

The main method chosen to collect data was audio-recorded individual semi-structured interviews, with an allocated time of up to 1 hour 15 minutes, in order to avoid participants feeling they had insufficient time to reflect. The semi-structured and flexible nature of the interview ensured categories for discussion were not all predetermined and allowed participants to discuss issues about Pathfinder that were important to them and which the researcher had not anticipated. All recorded interviews were transcribed solely by the researcher and only the researcher had access to the recordings.

'Reflexive Thematic Analysis' (RTA) was chosen as an appropriate method to code the transcribed interviews and identify themes from the data. RTA 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.

Document analysis was another method used to explore planning and recording documents which were being developed by the Pathfinder service.

In the many school visits and virtual meetings throughout the research programme, field notes were maintained by the researcher to provide a record of the research journey and inform observations in this report.

3.4. Research participants

In-depth interviews and case studies took place with a representative sample of young people and their parents and carers, ensuring young people with a range of age, gender, family situation and reason for referral to Pathfinder. Mental health challenges, including anxiety, and being at risk for self-harm and suicide, were included in the reasons for referral for some of the case studies. Behavioural reasons were also cited as well as experience of traumatic bereavement and loss, changes of care base and substance abuse. Many of the life histories of the young people were complex, multifaceted, and affected by early childhood trauma. Young people who received support from Pathfinder and who experienced barriers to learning through social and communication challenges including autism, as well as medical issues, and who had agreed to be research participants, were included in the case studies.

A representative sample of participants from partner agencies were also invited and agreed to participate in the research programme. They included one or more representatives of the following:

- SWR Fieldwork Manager
- Case Social worker
- SWR Family Support worker
- School nurse
- Campus police officer, Police Scotland
- Head Teacher
- Depute Head Teacher
- Principal Teacher Pupil Support
- Senior Manager Pupil Support
- Housing Officer

- Educational psychologist
- Pathfinder management
- Members of YFCL, who were not part of the Pathfinder initiative
- Housing officer.

All 6 Pathfinder officers were interviewed as part of the research programme.

A total of 42 semi-structured research interviews were carried out, recorded, and transcribed by the researcher. These interviews lasted on average 1 hour 5 minutes. Furthermore, follow-up meetings with young people and parents and the researcher took place some months after the initial interviews to capture any further reflections over time or any changes in views of Pathfinder. The follow-up meetings included one young person who had left school since the initial interview and was very willing to take part in the research again.

3.5. Ethical considerations

The research programme was characterised by:

- openness of purpose outlined in an information sheet provided for all research participants, to be read well in advance of a research interview
- ensuring research participants were not placed in any harm
- maintaining anonymity and confidentiality
- ensuring signed informed consent
- providing the opportunity at any point for research participants to withdraw their consent.

The majority of research interviews were face-to-face, and audio recorded. However, due to the pandemic restrictions some research participants were interviewed, and audio recorded on a virtual platform. All transcriptions, face-to-face or on a virtual platform, were transcribed solely by the researcher. The British Psychological Society (BPS) guidelines for ethical practice in psychological research were strictly adhered to, including specific BPS guidance for psychological research online.

Section 4 Findings and discussion

When research participants are quoted from the transcribed interviews, 'P' is used whenever the individual name of a Pathfinder officer was mentioned.

Research question 1 What is the impact of the Youth, Family and Community Learning Pathfinder initiative in Cathkin, Stonelaw and Trinity High Schools?

Part of the context of this research question are the CLD values, knowledge and skill base brought by the Pathfinders officers. This research question is also set with an acknowledgement that some of the most profound, formative impact on the life of a young person may only be fully realised in the long term.

Identified themes

- Providing a secure base and safe haven for young people through the power of positive relationships

There were common threads in the responses throughout every research interview about Pathfinder promoting positive relationships, leading to feelings of safety and security in young people. Trust was a word used frequently about Pathfinder in the research interviews

with young people. *"I know they keep me in mind even when I leave their room and go to classes. I can always trust P."* (S2 pupil). Another pupil from S4 commented *"Going into their room at breaks and then having time just with P, made me feel like I was part of a family"*.

In this way, Pathfinder would seem to support attachment or bonding to school. The research literature discusses how attachment to school affects the degree of commitment to and engagement with schooling felt by pupils and reflects a sense of value and purpose in school. Research evidence shows the healing power of relationships in young people who have experienced developmental trauma and /or neglect. It would seem that the relational approach taken by Pathfinder promotes the psychological safety of young people, which in turn can increase readiness to learn and reduce fear of failure. Bowlby (1988) talked of children and young people with an insecure attachment profile tending to form a view of themselves as undeserving of care, and viewing others, especially adults, as untrustworthy, unsafe, and undependable. Evidence presented in this research programme would seem to show that Pathfinder establish attuned and predictable relationships that are enriching and compensate to some extent. The voices of the young people involved in what were extensive interviews, gave a strong indication that they felt they could rely on the Pathfinder officer to respond to their needs in times of stress. Research highlights how this can help children and young people manage their emotions and engage in reciprocal relationships. Educational provision has the ability to provide a stability and care for young people experiencing multiple changes elsewhere in their lives, and it would seem that in partnership with school staff, there was evidence Pathfinder contributed in a significant way to this process.

Furthermore, Children's Services partners highlighted the positive impact of the relationships they observed between Pathfinder officers and their clients, as well as the positive working relationships they experienced themselves with Pathfinder. Participants provided detailed accounts of how Pathfinder had *"paved the way"* for them becoming involved with families who were very reluctant to engage and provided reassurance and practical support to help families attend crucial appointments. The words *"invaluable addition to the team around the child"* was the comment of one Children's Services practitioner.

Powerful, passionate, and moving statements were also made by parents and carers about the strength of the relationships they experienced with the Pathfinder officers. Caring, trust, and reliable were frequently mentioned and more than one parent described the relationship with their child and them as *"life-changing"*.

This underpinning CLD approach supports the South Lanarkshire Council Attachment Strategy for Education Resources (2020), and the recommendations of The Promise that young people experience *"loving, supportive and nurturing relationships as a basis on which to thrive"*. It is aligned with the importance and centrality placed in the Children's Services Plan (2021-2023) on *"promoting a culture that values relationships between the workforce, and children and young people and their families."*

The impact of these relationships was very evident in the responses by young people, parents and carers in follow-up research interviews, as they reflected on the support from Pathfinder during the restrictions caused by COVID-19. All young people, parents and carers commented on the reliable and caring contact maintained by the Pathfinder officers, and parents reported frequent telephone calls and text messages and garden visits. A young person said in her follow up interview *"P never forgot me and my mum when the virus was bad"* and all parents talked of the Pathfinder's attentiveness in quickly returning calls and texts during COVID-19. One member of school staff described the role of Pathfinder during the restrictions as *"absolutely invaluable in maintaining a strong link with the most vulnerable young people and their families and keeping me up to date and helping direct what part I could play in meeting the needs of families during the pandemic."*

It was evident that these positive, nurturing relationships, established by Pathfinder since the start of the initiative, had led to improved outcomes for the young people in the case studies. There were frequent responses from young people in the research interviews about improved attendance, more involvement in school and in community activity, awards achieved and overall, feelings of more hope about their future. The voice of an S1 pupil who was experiencing complex challenges in his life and who had been thought of as 'at risk' of failing within the mainstream setting due to behaviour difficulties, succinctly describes the change: *"I am only still in school because of all the help I got from Pathfinder. I now feel I have got a future."* The research design provided opportunities for triangulation for this evidence as the parents and carers, school and partner agencies reported the same outcomes, as did document analysis of relevant paperwork. To quote the parent of another S1 pupil, Pathfinder has *"changed school life for us."*

- Effective and skilled service delivery

Many Children's Services partners reported positive outcomes in the lives of young people and families. One participant talked of observing *"unstinting support for young people and their families."* Words such as *flexible, adaptive, responsive* and *timely* were used to describe the key attributes of the service which had made a difference. One participant reflected *"from a joint home visit with me to encourage the boy back to school at a time of crisis, to arranging financial support through a community group for the parent to be able to buy clothes for school, to contributing real insight at a Child Protection meeting, all that was for just one pupil, and everything done **just at the point it was needed**"* (emphasis from the participant). Other participants from Children's Services talked of creative and proactive responses, and one talked of *"sustained intervention over a considerable length of time"*. One Children's Services partner referred to *"sensitive responses, skilled assessments and management of risk in terms of mental health."*

Creativity was evident in the wide range of interventions and programmes implemented by the Pathfinder officers during COVID-19 restrictions and were referred to frequently in positive terms by school staff, head teachers, parents and young people during research interviews and follow up discussions.

In terms of the skill base of Pathfinder officers, referred to often by research participants, it is of relevance here that observations noted by the researcher over the period of the research programme showed evidence of the reflective and reflexive thinking of Pathfinder officers. They showed awareness of the need for all professionals to work within the limits of their professional competence and to access additional training where required and appropriate. The Low Intensity Anxiety Management (LIAM) training is an example, organised for the Pathfinder team by the Pathfinder management, in response to the high number of referrals related to anxiety. It was clear that the Pathfinder team were very open to the expertise of different agencies and were instrumental when the involvement of a specialist service was needed.

- Range of referrals

Document analysis of the reasons for referral would seem to highlight the predominant concerns about mental health and well-being and social isolation, especially relevant during lock-down.

Attendance concerns were often mentioned in the paperwork, but there was almost always a complex narrative about the young person's life which explained why attendance was poor. One research participant expressed appreciation of Pathfinder, *"mum disclosed to P some really tragic family history which explained so much...and helped us all make a more sensitive response."*

Children's Services partners, in school and external agencies, and Pathfinder officers themselves, reflected during the research interviews on the term 'edges of care'. The majority view was that 'at risk of being on the edges of care' was a more appropriate description of most of the young people referred to Pathfinder.

- Ecological approach

Many of the Children's Services partners referred to the varied levels of assessment and intervention Pathfinder operated within and noted this as a significant strength. This was further confirmed in the 'witness statements' of parents during research interviews. *"The difference P made to our whole family has been life-changing. P understands our whole life situation. There has been individual support for my daughter in school, getting me financial practical support and advice, involving a housing officer.... I could talk forever too about the help P gave me with my mental health difficulties"*.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory is a powerful way to explain the complex system of relationships in a young person's environment (families, home and care settings, school, community, culture) and is a useful way to explain why the impact of Pathfinder has been seen as significant by partner agencies and parents. When explaining the reason Pathfinder made a difference in his life, one young person, in S4 at the time of the interview, showed considerable insight when he said *"P just knows what my life is about – he knows why I don't live with my mum, he knows the people I can get into trouble with where I live, he knows about my weight problems, he knows what chances are out there for me to get a job...he just gets it all."*

- Empowering young people

Reflecting on young people in their case load who received support from Pathfinder, it was noted by some Children's Services partners that Pathfinder officers empower young people, *"to attain and achieve through learning in school"*. Another partner from Children's Services used the phrase *"safety and stretch"* to describe the Pathfinder approach.

This role would support post-modern perspectives of human agency in helping young people to navigate the social world, and echoes one of the recommendations in The Promise, "Children must be listened to and meaningfully and appropriately involved in decision-making" and supports the commitment within the Children's Services Plan that "children and young people are involved in decisions that affect them."

Comments from young people and parents further reflected this theme. *".....they gave me the support to work out what the best decisions were for me, like going to classes even when I didn't feel like it."* (S5 pupil). One parent reflected, *"P helped my daughter realise she had decisions that she could make. In a way, she woke my daughter up to let everyone in the community outside of the house see her real self."* A number of parents used the word *"champion"* to describe how Pathfinder constantly looked for opportunities in school and in the community for their son or daughter to achieve; to reassure their child, improve their confidence and access their inner strengths. One parent said *"P is really approachable and there for me but at the end of the day P always says, now let's see what we can do to help your boy – always comes back to my boy as the focus."*

Research question 2 What are the key elements/critical qualities/attitudes and behaviours to be considered in any effective roll out?

This research question is aimed at quality implementation of Pathfinder in a new setting. It is about resisting a focus on snapshots of disparate parts of the Pathfinder initiative and instead looking at the deepest level of the system and what makes it work.

Identified themes

- CLD methodologies

In any further implementation of the initiative, it would be helpful to give school partners the opportunity to extend their knowledge about the philosophy, values, and skill base of CLD. Details from the CLD Standards Council for Scotland provided by the researcher on the research information sheet for partner agencies led to a number of reflections from participants. One person commented that the CLD vision for “equality, empowerment and life-wide learning for all” was wider than they had realised. Another commented that reading the information made them reconsider what they called the *“commonly held assumptions and myths about youth work within my own profession.”* However, there were also recommendations made by participants for all agencies involved in providing support to pupils in one school or a local group of schools, to have an opportunity to hear about and reflect on the core roles of their partners in Children’s Services. Linked to this was the recommendation made by many of the research participants that such dialogue should include discussion of the criteria for referral to each service. One participant noted *“I know it is not an exact science, but we need the chance to talk openly about questions and frustrations around referrals.”* A number of participants raised the idea of an induction programme for new Pathfinder officers to support understanding of the school structure and key processes, and a similar induction for pupil support teachers to gain an understanding of the role of Pathfinder. Another participant noted it would be helpful *“to have it articulated where Pathfinder fits in the pathways of support for young people and families.”*

These ideas were often linked to suggestions of a leaflet on Pathfinder which could be used to help subject teachers understand the Pathfinder role and also useful to introduce with parents and young people the idea of involving Pathfinder. The view was expressed by many participants that it would be hard to capture such a multi-layered and multi-faceted role, but another commented that a written description would help to ensure consistency in the Pathfinder services across schools.

Another related theme raised by some participants was the term used to refer to Pathfinder officers. Some preferred the term youth and family workers and one person commented that it would be helpful to get a consensus on the most helpful term to use. All of these comments were more commonly expressed by adult research participants. Young people interviewed did not raise the need for written information or a particular way of referring to a Pathfinder officer.

- Management of Pathfinder

Some participants raised the issue of management responsibility and made strong recommendations that Pathfinder retained YFCL professional management in order to maintain professional links with YFCL colleagues in other areas of the service. Being based in the school was unanimously viewed by parents, young people and partner agencies as hugely beneficial and essential to the effectiveness of the service Pathfinder provide.

This theme was linked to comments that being well-integrated within the school organisation would promote a more coherent team approach from school staff and Pathfinder. A number of comments mentioned the importance of open communication, and for both school and Pathfinder staff to feel safe to raise delicate and nuanced issues with school management. As an example, one comment expressed was that that it would be *“beneficial to openly talk through how school and Pathfinder negotiated the informal nature of Pathfinder interactions with young people in the school setting.”*

A related theme was recruitment of Pathfinder officers. It was evident that the appointment of the six Pathfinder officers in post had been undertaken collaboratively with the head

teachers and YFCL management. The majority of participants who commented on this issue viewed this careful matching of the needs of the school, with the core competencies, capacities, attitudes and experience of candidates as essential in any future extension of the initiative.

Observations over the course of the research programme would indicate that just as psychological safety encouraged young people to achieve their potential, the schools involved in the pilot initiative had managed to achieve that for the staff involved. Valuing the contribution of the service was key, but other actions and decisions which contributed to that are often subtle and it would be useful for head teachers of schools implementing Pathfinder to discuss these issues with head teachers of the existing pilot schools.

Another associated theme was target setting for Pathfinder and establishing efficient methods for gathering the most effective and useful evaluation data. The importance of consulting with school and partner agencies in this process was raised by some participants.

Section 5 Concluding summary of applications and recommendations

The research programme revealed an extremely positive evidence base for the contribution of the Pathfinder team in the three schools in influencing improved life trajectories of vulnerable young people and also to strengthening effective partnership working.

The voice of research participants and their views and recommendations related to effective implementation are found throughout the report. The following include the key recommendations for future implementation:

- that Pathfinder Officers are based and are integrated within schools
- that Pathfinder Officers continue to be managed by YFCL
- that opportunity is provided for school and Pathfinder Officers to gain insight into each other's role and responsibilities e.g., through an induction programme
- that recruitment procedures are led jointly by school and YFCL management
- that consideration is given to a written description of the role of Pathfinder Officers, and a professional working job title agreed for use within and across schools
- that further exploration is undertaken to finalise methods of collecting coherent and meaningful evaluation data to inform improvement.

Elizabeth N King
HCPC Registered Practitioner Psychologist
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Wordle of predominant descriptive words about Pathfinder voiced by young people, parents and carers



Wordle of predominant descriptive words about Pathfinder voiced by multi-agency partners



Quantitative data provided by the Pathfinder Service

BENEFICIARIES			
Gender		School year	
Female	136	S1	61
Male	102	S2	51
		S3	61
		S4	44
		S5/ S6	21

ENGAGEMENT					
Referral reasons		Length of engagement		Support offered	
Attendance	161	Long term/ongoing	99	One-2-one	192
H&WB	146	Short term	101	Home visits	148
Peer influence	55			Connect with parents	141
A.S.D.	19			Group work	71
Financial	16				
Behaviour in school	20				
Anger management	11				
Drugs / alcohol	7				
Offending in community	5				
Other agencies (Both prior and during Pathfinder engagement)					
CAMHS	30	Educational Psychology		15	
Social work	38 (13 orders)	Children's Hearing		11	
Police	18	Arch		4	
Aspire	18	Reach		3	
MCR	18	Housing		4	

LOCKDOWN SUPPORT

Young people 171

Type of support	
Connect with parents	133
Connect with young person	94
Curriculum support	74
Home visits	56
Deliver resources	31
Engage other agencies	17