

#ResearchCDN



PATHWAYS FROM POVERTY

COLLEGES FOR COMMUNITIES

**A RESEARCH REPORT PREPARED BY
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THE CDN RESEARCH AND ENHANCEMENT CENTRE**

September 2022



CONTENTS

1	REPORT CONTEXT	1
2	EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	2
3	CREATING SAFE SPACES	3
4	WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP	8
5	DIRECT ACTION ON POVERTY	13
6	SUPPORTING TRANSITIONS	19
7	SUSTAINABILITY	23
8	CASE STUDY 1: AYRSHIRE COLLEGE, CONNECTING COMMUNITIES	27
9	CASE STUDY 2: BORDERS COLLEGE, BORDERS YOUNG TALENT	35
10	CASE STUDY 3: FORTH VALLEY COLLEGE, TIME4ME	45
11	CASE STUDY 4: GLASGOW KELVIN COLLEGE, STAY	54

1 REPORT CONTEXT

In March 2022, the CDN Research and Enhancement Centre published evidence from a two-year national sector inquiry into the role of colleges in addressing the poverty crisis in Scotland.¹ Highlighting current practice in colleges, the Pathways from Poverty report established the first strand of a wider project to understand and amplify the role of colleges in tackling the tangible barriers faced by Scotland's communities around food poverty, digital poverty, fuel poverty, and period poverty. The current report comprises in-depth case studies combined with an overview that further explores the work of colleges in addressing the experience of material deprivation in Scotland's communities.

The college sector is helping to shape the national development and local delivery of approaches to poverty in Scotland. With several initiatives and programmes aimed at mediating barriers to healthy and sustainable living – including the Building Better Futures project, implemented to develop the skills that individuals need to lead healthy, successful lives – colleges are responding to the Scottish Government's Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan, amongst other national policies. Colleges are not only places of learning: institutions that provide national qualifications, or a stepping-stone between school and university and/or employment. Based at the heart of the community, colleges bridge the gap between individuals, families and vital intervention services aimed at preventing and tackling complex societal issues. With strong community learning and development links, and close interaction with local schools, charities and trusts, colleges are best placed to confront the multiple barriers faced by the communities they serve.

With the advent of Covid-19, and the damaging consequences of isolation, exclusion, and poverty resulting from restrictive measures, colleges have provided a lifeline to learners and the wider community as an extension of the learner. As we emerge from the Covid-19 emergency, colleges are driving forward social and economic recovery, for the dedication demonstrated by the people powering the college sector is enabling the delivery of crucial resources, supporting the successful transition to a more sustainable future. Colleges motivate communities to be stronger, self-sufficient, and more robust as we continue towards a more digitalised, globalised, and climate-safe society.

CDN would like to thank all the college learners and staff who participated in this research. We are also indebted to Dr Paula Christie and Dr Erica O'Neill for their excellent work in carrying out the case studies and producing the report.

1 IPPR Scotland and CDN Research and Enhancement Centre, 'Pathways from Poverty: Current Challenges and the Role of Colleges' (March 2022). <https://www.cdn.ac.uk/pathways-poverty-current-challenges-role-colleges/>



2 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Detailing best practice currently operating across a selection of Scotland's colleges, this report aims to promote and encourage the work of colleges in tackling poverty. We hope that the case studies highlighted in this report will serve as a benchmark for best practice in the college sector as we work to provide effective learner pathways and to support the delivery of the Scottish Government's pledge to facilitate 'material improvements in the lives and wellbeing of families across Scotland.'²

This report also reflects that the support systems of our colleges reach beyond institutional walls. Through the implementation of partnership programmes and projects, colleges create far-reaching opportunities for the learner, but also have a positive impact for families and local communities.

The report highlights five key themes as potential areas for the development of future practice in colleges:

- **Creating safe spaces**
The creation of trusted and safe spaces works not only to bridge the gap between the college and learners but extends to build a bridge between the college and the local community which it aims to support and inspire.
- **Working in partnership**
Working with external agencies and fostering close links between colleges and communities has contributed to successful partnerships which can not only respond to challenges and create innovative solutions but can additionally open up space for colleges to advocate for vulnerable learners and groups within a wider context.

- **Direct action on poverty**
Colleges are leading the way in driving and facilitating direct actions and interventions which have positive impacts on aspects of socio-economic disadvantage affecting learners and their broader communities. Through innovative engagements with partners and funders targeted support can be made available at a grass-roots level, providing learners with resources to help stay the course of their studies and building capacity for future success.
- **Supporting transitions**
College initiatives and partnership working create an opportunity for future goals to be affirmed as valid and achievable. Through innovative and supportive programmes, learners can identify existing skills, develop new skills and enhance their transferable skills for positive and sustainable outcomes.
- **Sustainability**
From embedding newly established best practice across the wider college community to creating new spaces for both learner and community engagement, the innovations of college projects are creating positive, practical, and sustainable impacts. It is clear that as colleges and policy makers consider the 'college student of the future' it is from grass roots interventions and initiatives that a deeper understanding of the context and complexity of vulnerable learners can lead to strategies to develop a sustainable pathway from poverty.

In the following sections, we examine each of these key themes in more detail, and the report concludes with the four detailed case studies, which are also available separately and will be added to as the Pathways from Poverty action research programme continues.

² The Scottish Government, 'Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2022-2026' (March 2022). <https://www.gov.scot/publications/best-start-bright-futures-tackling-child-poverty-delivery-plan-2022-26/documents/>

3 CREATING SAFE SPACES

Creating a safe space for learners to develop in the college is an ethos shared by many colleges and has been a cornerstone of many initiatives and projects in sustaining learning. By creating an environment in which vulnerable learners can thrive, colleges are seen to be breaking down barriers to education and widening participation, often with the benefits extending to the families of learners and the wider community. The perception of 'coming into college' as an activity solely related to learning and training is being challenged and as such the role of the college for learners and for the wider community is being reframed.

The Marie Trust College Education Programme

The Marie Trust in Glasgow responds to the needs of people in the local community who experience homelessness, addiction, poverty, and social exclusion. In addition to providing crisis intervention, counselling, health and social care, The Marie Trust's College Education Programme aims to widen access to education and use learning as a pathway out of homelessness. Originally funded by the National Lottery Community Fund (now Glasgow City Council Fund our Tutor), The Marie Trust College Education Programme is delivered in partnership with City of Glasgow College and Glasgow Kelvin College. As part of The Marie Trust's initiatives to support employability, recovery and rehabilitation, the education programme supports learners with complex issues who have previously experienced barriers to education to gain accredited qualifications in college.

The Marie Trust's partnership with Glasgow Kelvin College since 2015 has delivered an Access to Social Subjects programme, a co-delivery model where college lecturers and a Marie Trust tutor deliver twelve-week courses in Psychology,

Sociology, Counselling, Community Development, First Steps into Education, Literacy, ICT, Core Skills and Criminology at SCQF level 5 and 6 (and non-accredited levels) on campus at Glasgow Kelvin College. The programme also includes a core skills module which enables learners to identify their level of literacy and numeracy. This allows for the learner to build a profile of strengths and abilities and highlights areas where they may require additional support. In addition since 2014 The Marie Trust has delivered a successful Expressive Arts Programme with City of Glasgow College where SCQF level 5 and 6 courses in Printing, Arts and Glasswork are provided on the College's City Campus. The aim of the programme is to widen access to creative arts, support the transition to further education and offer learners the opportunity to develop wider skills in arts. All programmes are designed with a clear pathway and progression route into further education. The Marie Trust's College Education Programme is the only Community Adult Education Curriculum in Glasgow specifically designed to widen access to mainstream education for homeless people and those at risk.

It is crucial for The Marie Trust that their learners are not separated from the college mainstream system and learners receive the same access to college facilities as other college students, including a student card, library access and student services. The Marie Trust College Education Programme is often the first college experience of learners who have been socially excluded due to homelessness and poverty. Like other demographics highlighted in this report, The Marie Trust learners can view college as a barrier. Enrolling in college programmes gives learners an opportunity to re-establish themselves in an environment where they are treated in the same way as any other student in college, without discrimination. The Marie Trust staff handle the recruitment and enrolment on site at their premises as this helps remove the barriers to learners enrolling through a college

website. Learners are then welcomed to college for college administrative and teaching work to begin, supported onsite by The Marie Trust staff throughout the programmes. The Marie Trust staff create a safe space and assist in overcoming barriers to institutional education experienced by the at risk group they serve.

A person-centred approach

Often, college entrants recognised as vulnerable have experienced previous interventions throughout their lives which have not always resulted in positive outcomes. Research conducted for this report identifies that it is not uncommon for young people to feel that they have little autonomy and a lack of voice, resulting in a cycle of ineffective engagements and interactions with institutions and external support. Mentoring programmes funded by The Robertson Trust such as Borders Young Talent and Forth Valley College's Time4Me have tackled this by providing a safe and pressure free environment, facilitating open conversations via a 'person-centred' approach. In doing so these programmes establish relationships of trust and enable capacity building through a consistent and sustained relationship between dedicated mentors and young people.

“ We are aware that the challenge for the young people who experience considerable loss in early life is often in making a meaningful connection with the institution, sustaining this, and making a success of their studies. To facilitate the young people being able to understand these challenges fully and to help them overcome them a small team is required who are well prepared for making a sustained connection with the young people.

Borders College (Bid For Support Document 2018)

The establishment of a space for confidential disclosure, whether that relates to complex issues or simply offloading thoughts and feelings, has

broken down barriers and successfully fostered a greater sense of ownership of and engagement with learning. Mentors have been able to identify hitherto unrecognised or undisclosed barriers and challenges and can initiate or suggest strategies to overcome any issues.

“ Fundamentally the biggest skill of mentoring is to listen. Not to go in with your own agenda. Don't have an idea about what a mentoring session is going to look like. You need to respond to what that mentee wants to talk about that day. Maybe you've been working on a goal, but maybe they've had a really bad week and it's been chaos. Understand. Read the room. Understand the situation and what they need. It's about listening and enabling. Building capacity so that that young person can do things. You're listening, you're observing, pulling out the strengths ... and finding that golden nugget to let them open up.

Sarah Tervit, Forth Valley College

Learners engaged in these programmes have responded with a positive and effective uptake of college 'in-house support' in addition to broader support services offered by external agencies at both local and national levels.

“ I think, well in my case, it's like the whole support stuff CAMHS and support things, I've tried it all and it's just never worked for me. But it's nice to just sit with someone and not to feel pressured. I don't have to tell my mentor anything and he's made that clear, but like I choose to, because he's nice and he says the right things. He listens to what I have to say. It isn't about what other people have to say. He asks me my opinion on it, and I think that's really important, because not many people do that. Usually, it's just like 'we know what's best for you' and 'you're just a teen'.

Learner A, Borders College

“ My mentor got me in contact with Talking Rooms ... she got in touch with the mental health side of the College first ... and they arranged a counsellor through them first and I tell you, I've been to a lot of counselling and a lot of therapy, and the Talking Rooms are by far the best. I've never met someone who ever just got what I was going through in my life.

Learner A, Forth Valley College

Mentoring sessions take place within the college building and can also be more flexible by taking conversations into spaces in the local area where learners feel comfortable, such as a café or park.

Launched in February 2020, STAY is a regional programme funded by the Glasgow Colleges Region Board. The programme is facilitated by Action for Children in partnership with Glasgow Kelvin College, City of Glasgow College, and West College Scotland. Its remit is to support care experienced learners aged 16-24. The programme applies front line preventative measures to ensure care experienced learners remain in college. Amongst other services provided by STAY, the programme at Glasgow Kelvin College creates safe spaces for vulnerable learners by facilitating mental health support through 'Walk and Talk.' Designed for learners who struggle with eye-to-eye contact, the activity involves taking learners out of the college building, into a green space, to discuss mental health issues.

Connecting communities

Safe spaces created by college initiatives also extend into the broader community. Working in partnership with Active Schools, East Ayrshire Council and Ayrshire College, Mental Health United is an initiative launched to promote positive mental health for children in the Kilmarnock community by encouraging participation in sport. East Ayrshire has experienced very high suicide rates, with numbers doubling between 2017 and 2019. The Kilmarnock campus community has witnessed the suicide of students and family members of students. The Mental Health United programme aims to use sport to counter the consequences of mental ill health. The initiative started with the Rose Reilly Football Centre for girls and has expanded to the development of the Kris Boyd Football Centre for boys. Both centres provide after school sports activities for children from the local community.

From these two centres, activities have grown to include rugby, para football and dance; a day-time sports programme for schools; and a holiday programme of activities that runs over 5 weeks of summer and in the easter break. Furthermore, dedicated to tackling food poverty experienced by young people and their families the summer school provides a daily healthy meal for all participants. The various activities facilitated by Kilmarnock campus are grouped under the title Connecting Communities. From the initial concept (to facilitate sport for children) the initiative has grown. Reaching beyond the College and into the community, Connecting Communities is encouraging a greater relationship between local families and the College at the heart of the community.



“ It grows organically, as opposed to us saying: ‘here’s what we’re going to do. We say to each other: ‘I’ve got this idea, let’s try this,’ but actually, it’s very much the opposite. We look about and think, we see them sitting about, how can we engage with them? How can we get them part of our project? They’re not happy. So, the barriers will present themselves to us and we’ll see how to overcome them.

Cherryl Fulton, East Ayrshire Council

Each year, the Ayrshire College Connecting Communities activities engage 50 school children for the after-school clubs, and 100 school children for the holiday programmes. The concept of creating a safe and healthy environment for young people to come and participate in activity and receive a healthy meal remains central to the ethos of the programme and is shared by the staff and student coaches.

“ Within the Rose Reilly football club, we do lots of fundamentals, like passing, dribbling, shooting. But it’s also a place for girls to feel safe. For girls to open up to just chat and have fun. Especially for me, when I coach Rose Reilly, I always ask the girls, ‘did you have dinner; what did you do at school’ just constantly asking them different questions. It’s not so related to the sport, that doesn’t feel right, in order to get on with them you have to have a connection.

Alex Erskine (HND Sport), Connecting Communities

In addition to providing a safe space for young people, Connecting Communities is providing respite for parents, and promoting healthy living for families. With parents coming into the College while their children participated in sports activities, the College staff realised that parents and their younger children could benefit from college resources, and so a creche was created for the very young children to be looked after, in addition to extending sports activities to the parents.

“ There was a mother who was bringing her 5-year-old son and 7-year-old daughter, and her 2-year-old is out there because she’s too young to do anything. The mum’s having hassle having to bring the kid down in the pram and has to wait out there because she’s doing that for the benefit of her son who’s in doing football and that’s great. So, we decided to put on a creche and playgroup for the two-year-olds. The parents are in the gym getting one to one personal training with the Health and Fitness students. It’s a one stop shop. It’s gone from parents thinking, I can’t bring the pram in here, I’m going to be harassed, they’re going to be running about in the foyer, but now there’s something for the kids. We worked with Vibrant Communities to provide people to run the creche in the dance studio, so if you’re a parent bring them down, and for that parent to get respite, even if it’s only for an hour, how good is that for that parent to reset and then go up the road and deal with her kids again.

John McTaggart, Ayrshire College



This use of college resources for the benefit of the wider community has had an overwhelmingly positive impact in reframing what college has to offer on multiple levels. Many of the neighbourhoods within reach of Ayrshire College's Kilmarnock Campus sit within the top 5% of deprived communities in the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD). Individuals living in areas of multiple deprivation can feel excluded from educational institutions, with staff working within the college sector noting this disconnect: *"That's often missed; we work in the College and don't see it as a scary place"* (Elaine Hutton, Ayrshire College). Through the College facilitating activities for this often hard to reach demographic and by engaging in the College via their children's sports activities, parents got to know the staff and realised the benefit of the College to their children and the wider community.

Currently plans are in place to extend the parent engagement to providing evening bite sized lessons, offering the opportunity for adults to gain recognised qualifications. Adults from hard-to-reach communities, who would not normally come into, are becoming familiar with the building and are being given the opportunity to the College potentially gain their first qualification. The children also feel more at home in the College, which does not feel like another intimidating institution.

“ Our vision is that this building will be a complete hive of activity over the summer with kids out there, kids in here, parents in the kitchens. For us, that's a win for the College because young people who think, 'I don't want to go into the College it's another change, it's another step', well these kids will be over familiar with the College, they're our students of the future, they will know where they're coming to, they'll be confident and hopefully all they'll have had up to this point is a positive experience in college.

Elaine Hutton, Ayrshire College

The creation of trusted and safe spaces works not only to bridge the gap between the College and learners but extends to build a bridge between the College and the local community which it aims to support and inspire.



4 WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

The success of the programmes and projects highlighted in this report is directly influenced by those at the centre of the initiatives within colleges and also through broader partnership working with external agencies and organisations. Understanding the context and availability of local and national support extends the ability of programmes to offer targeted support and also creates sustainable links. Partnership working between colleges, local community organisations and local charities has also been successful in providing an expedient and targeted response to challenges, notably in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Adaptable partnerships

At Glasgow Kelvin College, the STAY programme has been particularly crucial due to the high number of learners identified as care-experienced.

“ There was a much more demonstrable need for a project like this at Kelvin for a number of reasons: the volume of care experienced learners that we had – not just those who were identifiable as care experienced, but those students that we knew were care experienced, but wouldn’t recognise that within themselves. Particularly the ‘looked after at home’ cohort who don’t see themselves as in the care system but are probably the most vulnerable cohort of care experienced learners you can work with.

Maggie Murphy, Glasgow Kelvin College

The impact of the STAY programme at Glasgow Kelvin College extends from the college learner to the family and filters out to the community. The programme begins with the learner and has grown to provide community support to individuals and families living in areas of multiple deprivation.

“ When you go in to support the student, they’re at the forefront of your mind, the forefront of your intentions for providing some sort of support. We’re not going in with the intention of providing support for the family, but it offshoots from the primary support when you see the circumstances the student may be living in. You see the background that they grew up in [...] when I’ve been supporting students sometimes it’s financial ... then it’s about providing advice to the parents whether it be advocacy advice about benefits or referring them to foodbanks or pantries and stuff like this. It’s not expected support for families but because it does transcend from providing support to students, we do that.

Stephen O’Donnell, Glasgow Kelvin College

Based on an awareness of multiple external issues experienced by care experienced learners, STAY at Glasgow Kelvin College is working to prevent this group of vulnerable learners from dropping out of education due to non-college related issues. However, the support offered by STAY does not end with the specific remit of the programme and actively cuts across boundaries. The programme is no longer solely about retention of care experienced learners: it’s about safety, health, and wellness for any learner considered vulnerable.

“ The other thing about the Action for Children guys is that if we present them with a case, or a young person, or a student, that doesn't 100% fit the criteria, one of the beauties of this project which sets it apart, is that they will look at it. And even if they can't do something exclusively, they will do something indirectly. Where we can give something, we'll give something. And these guys [Action for Children], all the time, respond positively. So, it started initially as just care experienced, and just in three Glasgow colleges, and has significantly evolved.

Maggie Murphy, Glasgow Kelvin College

The adaptability of the initiatives highlighted here is the cornerstone of their success. Existing partnerships between colleges, local authorities and agencies and maintaining close connections with named contacts have all proved valuable in supporting projects and initiatives, particularly in response to the restrictions imposed in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Multi-agency working

Borders College works in close partnership within the local community and has strong links to the local authority and external agencies such as Skills Development Scotland (SDS). The College also works closely with smaller local agencies and organisations, encouraging networking and knowledge sharing. Driving and maintaining these links is the programme coordinator who regularly keeps in contact with agencies to understand the nature of the support on offer and to bring a multi-agency approach to supporting the young person.

“ During lockdown I invited support agencies within the Borders region to an online keep in touch session ... to see what was happening with their services during lockdown.

Jen MacKenzie, Borders College

The Borders Young Talent programme was developed as a partnership project with The Robertson Trust and was established to widen participation in further and higher education for young people irrespective of their background or economic circumstances. Rolled out in 2018 as a two-year project, the programme provided mentoring support for young people facing additional challenges in making a successful transition to college from school while in their last year of secondary education. The target group for support consists of young people who are care experienced, young carers, young people who are experiencing considerable disadvantage because of social/rural deprivation and young people who are at risk of disengagement from education due to poor attendance (under 75%) or exclusion due to their behaviours.

The programme was subsequently extended in response to a shift in the identified need as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and ensuing periods of lockdown. The extension of the project saw a re-focusing of support away from part time school link programmes towards directly supporting full time first year entrants to college. Those identified for referral come from a variety of sources with Borders College working with local authority teams, SDS and schools. As part of their recruitment strategy to find mentors, Borders College have been able to draw on partnership links to recruit experienced professional mentors with established connections within the local authority and local community. This has been a major strength in fostering and extending external avenues of support for their learners.

“ I work for the council and have those connections. I know all the teams: I know what is out there and I can go to them as an individual and have an informal chat.

Mentor B, Borders College

Colleges have also been able to draw from the expertise of their internal support and guidance teams to direct learners to external agencies offering local or national support. Time4Me mentors at Forth Valley College are internally recruited on a voluntary basis and have access to a wide range of expertise drawn from the connections forged between the College and local and national agencies:

“ That’s how I found out about the Scottish Drug and Alcohol Abuse people, and they had conveniently been in the week before doing a presentation to the support and guidance advisers about what they do and how they work in the area. I’ve done that for quite a lot of my students if it’s around issues quite specific to things ... e.g. particular advisers know a lot about domestic abuse and have a bank of people and they’ve built up relationships. We know that it’s safe and we can refer students onto this and it’s a good solid service.

Mentor A, Forth Valley College

The close partnership between colleges and community organisations is exemplified by The Marie Trust’s College Education Programme whose staff are provided with office space at Glasgow Kelvin College’s East End campus. This has enabled a smoother transition for The Marie Trust learners to progress to Glasgow Kelvin College programmes and has widened the reach of The Marie Trust to other learners. The embedded nature of relationship between The Marie Trust and Glasgow Kelvin College has enabled learners studying on mainstream college programmes who are at risk of homelessness, or who become homeless during their college studies, to access external support from the homeless charity.

Projects such as Ayrshire College’s Connecting Communities bring together community partners to create quality coaching and training opportunities for college students and staff whilst providing free

physical activity and other benefits to a variety of client groups, many of which are the hardest to reach due to social isolation, poor self-esteem, confidence, and lack of social skills. The special relationship between the key staff members at the centre of the initiative has enabled its development: Elaine Hutton (Assistant Principal, Ayrshire College) is committed to tackling food poverty; John McTaggart (Curriculum Manager, Sports and Fitness, Ayrshire College) aims to use sport to promote positive mental health; and Cheryl Fulton (Active Schools Coordinator, Vibrant Communities Section of East Ayrshire Council) bridges the gap between the College and the local community.

The partnership understands the needs of the local community they aim to support, and the personal commitment of the three key individuals working on Connecting Communities has ensured the success of mental ill health and poverty intervention in Kilmarnock. Students have had the opportunity to make connections with community partners leading to greater employability potential: some of the college learners involved in coaching and running the programmes are now working for Active Schools.

“ Part of the benefit is the experience that these sessions give to the future in both contexts of the young people that are benefitting but also the students that are participating on this course and what they can speak about when they go on to further education and job interviews, life experience that you can look back on and reflect on and give examples of in a positive context.

Steve Swan, Onthank Primary School

A whole system approach

Also committed to partnership, Glasgow Kelvin College works in collaboration with 42 learning and community centres and has embedded college learning development delivery. The College works in partnership as a default, meaning there was a strong foundation in place for the relationship with Action for Children to take hold during the implementation phase of the STAY programme. Now, Action for Children staff are situated in the Advice, Guidance and Learner Support office at Glasgow Kelvin College's East End campus. *"We've organically grown together; we've just embedded, and it's taken hold"* (Marlyn Davidson, Regional Coordinator, Stay Programme, Action for Children). The foundational relationship between Glasgow Kelvin College and Action for Children has enabled the STAY programme to flourish in Glasgow's East End, and the people at the heart of the programme make it work.

“ Their passion is community support. Our passion is community support. So, when we come in with an ambition to support college students, we know there's a wraparound required. It's not going to just stop at the College, and most of the barriers that students face is externally. And that's where the teamwork makes such a difference.

Maryln Davidson, Action for Children

Partnership working provides scope for a whole system approach and the opportunity to access a broader range of resources as new connections are forged. Action for Children now links in with the Urban Fox Programme, a voluntary managed project, providing young people in the East End of Glasgow with a wide range of educational and diversionary activities. *"When we know that they have stuff that we can use, additional vouchers, we tap into relationships that we've built with those guys already. We seek out those kinds of partnerships"* (Stephen O'Donnell, Glasgow Kelvin College).

“ I like to see STAY as we're filling in the gaps. We work with a lot of external organisations as well to support the young person. Sometimes the referrals I've had, they've had support from external organisations but they're also very limited in what they can do so it's like, we come in and we fill in the gaps. When other organisations, or the College can't do things because of the way their policies work, we come in. That's how I like to think of it.

Aqsa Baig, Action for Children

The idea of filling the gaps has seen direct action taken outwith formal partnerships and new networks created. The Action for Children staff have created a network of organisations to provide material resources and in doing so they are tackling multiple issues around poverty: food poverty; period poverty; fuel poverty; and digital poverty, with the resources provided enabling learning to continue.

Across the college sector, staff are always finding new avenues to get support and material, and this is often led by small, direct actions taken by individuals at a local level. Being open to new ideas led in one instance to the successful procurement of resources to supply students with a free hot lunch and arose from a direct approach to local retailers.

“ Individuals will take an idea and run with it. Some ideas work and some don't, but you can imagine that resources are tight ... so one mentor went round local shops and supermarkets, and from that we got some supermarkets to provide lunch packs for students, even if that's noodles and a packet of crisps and a juice. To them that's massive.

Jen MacKenzie, Borders College

This direct approach has also been an effective strategy elsewhere, with Marlyn Davidson at Action for Children emphasising that reaching out into the local community has brought about positive solutions.

“ We beg from everybody to get stuff! For example, there was the wellbeing fund for food parcels during lockdown. We went to Iceland and Semichem and they gave us a warehouse full of stuff. And that’s the method we use, we’re a charity, so we need to reach out. We engage with an organisation that’s a law firm and through that engagement I have just now written up principles of where they could provide us with support that can support students. It’s a wish list that we narrowed down to 10 principles that mention financial support, but there’s also bits in there that’s about work experience, that’s about connectivity, feasibility study ... I reach out to everybody that I can, that’s the stuff that goes on behind the scenes.

Marlyn Davidson, Action for Children

There is also an opportunity for colleges within partnerships to be proactively involved in raising awareness of key issues facing learners and communities, and this is encouraged by project funders such as The Robertson Trust.

“ There’s something about, that it’s not for us to fix, but it’s for us to talk to ‘anchor organisations’ and using our influence to feed that back

Anna Vogt, Forth Valley College

Working with external agencies and fostering close links between colleges and communities has contributed to successful partnerships which can not only respond to challenges and create innovative solutions but can additionally open up space for colleges to advocate for vulnerable learners and groups within a wider context.



5 DIRECT ACTION ON POVERTY

Although the college-based projects featured in this report were initially and primarily established to support learners and learning, the impact and reach of these initiatives has resonated far beyond the classroom. It was found that projects grew and evolved, resulting in initially unintended outcomes, many of which not only worked to support and sustain learning, but also led to direct actions in tackling issues of poverty experienced by learners and families within the most vulnerable communities.

Food poverty

In working to target social issues and offer directed support, the issue of food poverty has been increasingly identified as a barrier to learning, affecting the young person's ability to maintain wellbeing and sustain their studies.

A commonality between the projects and initiatives presented here is the direct intervention of colleges in addressing food poverty as part of a wider approach to wellbeing and the sustainability of studies. Ayrshire College's Soup and Porridge initiative provides breakfast and lunch to every Kilmarnock campus student to mitigate the impact of food poverty on educational attainment.

“ How do we expect a young person to sit down and be engaged in learning and teaching if they haven't eaten, they don't know when they're going to eat ... how often do you sit down and think 'I'll get up and have a cup of coffee and something to eat and give my legs a stretch and that will put me back in a better frame of mind to get on with the work that I'm doing' – that's the same for a young person. We can't expect them to learn if they haven't got the basic food, warmth, before they even start.

Elaine Hutton, Ayrshire College

Learners in rural locations often travel a significant distance to college, with staff noting that breakfast is one area in which an intervention can be made. Programmes have implemented approaches which include providing breakfast to all students to remove any stigma around food poverty.

“ The reality in the Borders is that if you're in somewhere like Eyemouth, you're talking a 7 a.m. start for the bus, so some of the students haven't managed to eat anything before starting college. So we have a wee pack with oats and things for breakfast. We have that readily available to all students across our campuses.

Jen MacKenzie, Borders College

Initiatives such as Soup and Porridge at Ayrshire College have been directly supported by the College in meeting objectives. Committed to helping students remain in a healthy physical and mental state while at college, Elaine Hutton applied to the Ayrshire College Foundation in 2018. The funding received allowed the Soup and Porridge initiative to run for two years. The project ran over the summer, so that learners still had access to breakfast and lunch out of term time. Providing basic food for college learners has extended into the community. Staff realised that if the student needs access to breakfast and to lunch at college, likely their whole family would be in need. In the first year of the Soup and Porridge initiative, the College also put on a Christmas dinner and each family who came to the College was given a hamper.

“ All the other support systems that happen for families, they close. The only time the College closes is at Christmas, which is why we put on the Christmas dinner. Because we wanted there to be something in that period that people could come to.

Elaine Hutton, Ayrshire College

The Christmas dinner event not only aided families experiencing food poverty but helped to tackle social exclusion at what can be a difficult time of the year. Through grass roots initiatives and interventions, colleges have gained a deeper understanding of the context of the learner and the challenges and issues being faced within their homes and communities. The close links established through partnership working within the local community are often able to provide both practical solutions and expedient support. Mentoring programmes implemented within colleges facilitate informal and confidential disclosures relating to issues of food poverty to be made within sessions as part of a wider strategy to support learning.

“ Thinking about my mentee, she had just gone on placement, and she started talking about her feelings, she had been feeling really faint, and she was faint on the bus, and off the bus ... and as you start to unpick that, there's clearly something going on ... even though it's just wee things. You're able to pick that up every week because you're seeing them regularly and these are things that could otherwise have just got lost. You have that contact, and if you notice they've been talking about feeling faint over a couple of weeks, you can ask what's going on with their eating ... are they eating enough and open it from there. Sometimes they've never had someone there pulling together those threads.

Mentor A, Forth Valley College

Care experienced learners often experience issues around food poverty and isolation when they move into independent accommodation. A wellbeing check by mentors can flag up where targeted support is needed.

“ Some examples ... those students who had to move quickly into their first tenancy. Things like ‘do they know how to cook a meal’, ‘how to run a house’ ‘what have they got in their cupboards’ ... you're stepping into that kind of territory.

Mentor A, Borders College

In one instance, this approach led to an intervention which not only dealt with the immediate issue of food poverty, but subsequently engaged the mentor with local volunteering as a means of offsetting initial reluctance to accept support from a foodbank.

“ I had this person at Christmas time who was really low, and I thought the way to buck them up was provide a gym membership, but also to look at what he was eating. When I was chatting to him about food, I asked him to shout out what he had in his cupboards. He really had nothing there ... and nothing fresh, which is a big part of wellbeing, but he really didn't want to take a foodbank donation. Within 2 hours we had sorted a big parcel of what he needed. He said he felt really bad taking food, and we chatted about how he could ease this by volunteering 2 hrs a week to help the foodbank. They're all good people ... the students we support ... and they actually don't think twice about giving back.

Mentor A, Borders College

As a direct result, the mentee is now actively engaged and visible within their local community. They have acquired work experience leading to the development of skills for future employment.

“ Getting him involved with food parcels, making up and delivering food parcels and he’s now a great wee worker. The work experience placement said they would employ him in a heartbeat in the workplace, so he’s building up skills and creating networks.

Mentor A, Borders College

The Connecting Communities project at Ayrshire College, Kilmarnock Campus, again exemplifies how close links between colleges and communities can lead to positive impacts through direct interventions. While working on the programme, Connecting Communities staff got to know the children and realised that some participants were coming to the activities hungry. *“Food poverty in this locale is severe. 51% of kids here will be on free school meals”* (Elaine Hutton). When the schools are closed, pupils do not have access to the school meal. It was vital for the Connecting Communities summer sports school staff that children had access to a day-time meal, and so packed lunches were introduced to the programme. The Dignified Food Project (East Ayrshire Council) provides the lunches, and this link with the council means that children from areas of multiple deprivation in the local area can access basic food provision during the holiday period.

“ I think the phrase ‘dignified food’ can be open to speculation, but I think there’s no other way for dignified food, at the heart of what that means, to be in a place where young people are active, happy, and engaged, and families are being upskilled. It’s opportunities for everyone to learn and upskill following a time where there’s been real hardship. And if we can together, thanks to the College and the opportunities here, educate families that come from the top 5% multiple deprivation region in Ayrshire to be able to know that they’re taking responsibility to empower themselves and that they’re being their own helping hand – it’s not about here’s a food voucher, go and buy something, go to the community larder – if there’s continual opportunities for partnership funding, that’s ensuring families can be in a safe environment and know that they’re being upskilled, they’re being able to take charge and transform their life for their family. I think that has a wider ripple effect of opportunities for how that then trickles down through our community.

Steve Swan, Onthank Primary School



The responsiveness of the staff involved in Connecting Communities at Ayrshire College allows for new resources to be added as required. In the early stages of the sports initiative, a young girl turned up in a wet school uniform. When the same pupil returned in the same clothes the following day, staff realised that this young person did not have the correct clothes to participate in the activities. This gave staff the idea of fundraising to have strips provided for everyone. It is not only the school children who wear the strips, but the student coaches and the staff involved. Everyone is equal.

“ When we put all of this together, it’s not that this person gets a strip because they haven’t got one, but someone else has got one, so we don’t give them one. Everybody gets the same. Everybody gets their packed lunch. It’s the same with our Soup and Porridge initiative, every student has access to that. We don’t put any barriers. We don’t discriminate against any individual. That’s something that’s really important for us.

Elaine Hutton, Ayrshire College

Direct intervention

The consequences of the Covid-19 lockdowns have also hugely influenced practices around direct intervention across colleges and initiatives with initial strategies implemented to tackle digital poverty providing not only practical support, but also insights into the broader contexts of learners’ experiences. Via the STAY initiative, Glasgow Kelvin College and Action for Children provided laptops and connectivity to vulnerable learners, and this intervention proved to have additional benefits. Being able to hand the device over to learners at home allowed staff to ensure that beneficiaries of the STAY programme were safe at a time when they couldn’t go to college. This direct intervention, provided to learners during the lockdown isolation periods, also supported the learners’ families, and the community. *“The whole balance starts with the family, or the care place the young person’s living in, or the street they’re living on”* (Marlyn Davidson). This extension to the support provided, and the structure of how the learners were being reached during the lockdowns, enabled the programme to continue to support learners and their families at those crucial times.



“ The engagement with us, even from a wellbeing perspective, that meant we could check in with them and see how they were doing and was the family OK for food and all these things as well, you know. Just to be able to maintain the communication was vital in those early stages [of Covid]. Allowing them to progress with their college work despite the restrictions and the lockdowns.

Fiona Templeton, Glasgow Kelvin College

Developing an understanding of the home and family situation in building a response to the needs of learners was also reflected in the approach taken within the Borders Young Talent project. Mentors routinely engage with learners and their family members and carers to provide scaffolded support. One mentor noted *“You can work with a person, but you’ll never get as much information as opposed to a 15-minute home visit. You get the gist of what is happening in the 15 minutes”*. The Borders Young Talent project employs professional mentors who have experience of safeguarding and working within this context, however it is important to note that other projects rely on mentors who, as college members of staff, are volunteers. Here, alternative strategies have been adopted to facilitate direct interventions within families within a professional context by centring on the project coordinator as the conduit between home and college. With the coordinator assuming the responsibility for direct intervention, policies and practices which fell short of supporting students with complex needs could be flagged up to management, and structured solutions provided for vulnerable learners.

“ The laptops through Covid ... the procedure was that you need to come in and get them ... but that doesn’t suit my mentee. I need to go there and take it to them. So that’s what I did for those who didn’t have money to come in. My mentee was looking after his mum and didn’t want to go out in case he brought Covid in to his mum. I was able to do that through my role. I could also feed that back and with us going onto hybrid learning, I was able to go back to IT and say ‘let’s look at this’. Let’s see how it works because people don’t always think about it.

Sarah Tervit, Forth Valley College

Common across many initiatives highlighted here, is that students being referred to programmes and projects are experiencing the impact of deprivation even if that is not the primary driver for the initial referral. Whilst every referral and mentee faced a unique set of individual circumstances, common points of risk were identified by colleges and saw initiatives evolve in response to tackling poverty. Projects such as Time4Me and Borders Young Talent, initially set up to offer mentoring sessions, have extended their support and now directly intervene at recognised key points of risk which predominantly centre around college closure times. Financially supported by The Robertson Trust, the Time4Me project responds by issuing care packages for the young people which provide practical support and are presented as gifts.

“ These times are highlighted as a point of risk. Christmas and Easter when people are alone, and college isn’t about. Sarah and June, over the last few years, have created Care Packages that are useful ... but are also gifts. They’ve got a bit of food in them, a voucher. At Easter ... an Easter egg, at Christmas ... maybe a book or something that can occasionally be tailored to the individual based on how much they work. Then they all get delivered and that’s all funded through the Time4Me funding.

Anna Vogt, Forth Valley College

As mentors develop close links with their mentees, it was found that mentors often wish to provide their mentees with a gift. To maintain appropriate boundaries, it was decided that the mentors would get to deliver the care packages to mentees. Where students haven't been in college and are perhaps disengaging, the coordinator steps in to deliver the care package on behalf of the mentor. In scenarios where it was known that a mentee may benefit from a staff member clearing out furniture for example, this is again discussed with the coordinator, and it is the project rather than the mentor who directly facilitates any such exchange. For the recipients, the care packages are highly valued and appreciated.

“ They go that step further. At Easter I got an Easter egg, and a wee pack ... and we got stuff at Christmas too. It was lovely. My wee boy was like ‘look what you’ve got mummy’ ... and it was nice.

Learner B, Forth Valley College

Practical resources to support learners with their studies have also been funded by The Robertson Trust. With financial support, college projects were able to adapt to fulfil additional needs experienced by learners during the lockdown periods by distributing resources directly.

“ Things, even like a stationery pack, can make such a difference. Students were all working remotely and we were thinking what could we do to prepare them for College ... as we couldn’t see them face to face due to lockdown ... we ordered in ... pens, pencils, folders, post-it notes, diaries ... just a basic stationery pack which was issued to all Borders Young Talent students at that time, and we also looked at for those in most need of basic equipment ... who needed a chair, a desk, a dongle, a laptop. What did they need to start their learning journey? We got items ordered and delivered directly to their houses mitigating any risk for them having to travel to come and collect these.

Jen MacKenzie, Borders College

The person-centred approach adopted by Borders Young Talent meant that building a sense of value for individuals was also supported by direct intervention through the distribution of additional items which supported the learners' wellbeing and mental health.

“ We were still in lockdown at Christmas, so we thought putting together wellbeing gifts, a wee pick me up really with some sweets, bubble bath ... as some of the students wouldn’t have something under the tree and we just wanted to make sure that they had something to open. It was just a wee thing, but for some of these students it meant quite a lot for them. Mentors take students for McDonalds, I like to take them to Costa for a hot chocolate ... no matter what it is it makes the world of difference because it’s about them and what they like ... and we’re not just sitting in an office.

Jen MacKenzie, Borders College

Colleges are clearly leading the way in both driving and facilitating direct actions and interventions which have positive impacts on aspects of socio-economic disadvantage which affect learners and their broader communities. Through innovative engagements with partners and funders, targeted support can be made available at a grass-roots level, which provides learners with resources to help stay the course of their studies and builds capacity for future success.

6 SUPPORTING TRANSITIONS

Embarking on a college course is part of a wider transition in personal development for learners. Existing understandings and conceptualisations of ‘transition’ are being reimagined to extend beyond more traditional narratives. When the learner can build capacity, they understand that they have value and a set of skills and strengths. Consequentially, this builds confidence in their ability to sustain their course and can also create space to re-evaluate their aspirations.

For the projects featured, enrolment on a college course is not seen as the end point in creating a successful transition and sustainable future for the learner. Key to the success of the college initiatives has been to place the learner at the centre of decision making, and to continually reflect upon where the learner sees themselves within their own transition. It was found that it was not uncommon for vulnerable learners to consider withdrawing as they felt disengaged with learning, and often saw themselves as being on a pathway or course which didn’t reflect their individual interests and ambition.

“ When I met my mentee, she was incredibly stressed, her anxiety was through the roof, and she was basically on the wrong course. She wasn’t enjoying it, was completely withdrawn, and would have dropped off the radar completely. She also had quite a lot of people involved around her, and she didn’t know who she should turn to with a particular question ... there was just this massive list of people. Now, both me and Sarah, we supported her in withdrawing from her course and applying for a new one, which was a January start, and she’s still here. Now she’s absolutely loving it, she thinks this is the best course ever and she’s made plans for next year. She’s applied for a different course completely to what she

had been doing before and her friendship group has improved dramatically. It’s been all about building confidence with her and giving her the skills to be able to tackle problems instead of being so overwhelmed.

Mentor B, Forth Valley College

Mentoring sessions support transition through the establishment of safe and trusted spaces in which learners can openly discuss their interests and concerns. With mentors adopting a person-centred approach, and sessions being driven by the learners, the active listening process enables the mentor to build a deeper understanding of the context of the learners and to tailor more relevant guidance for successful completion of studies.

“ It can go from someone who has maybe applied for the wrong course in the beginning. We had someone who wanted to do animal care ... but they worked on a farm at the weekend, and just by chatting it was actually agriculture that they wanted to be in and that’s a good way of setting them up for success. Listening and making sure they are on the right course. Knowing more about them helps.

Mentor A, Borders College

Furthermore, as learners begin to engage with new subjects and routines, there is space for them to re-evaluate their own position within the learning environment and to consider new opportunities for a more sustainable future within education or employment.

“ An example is of one learner who came to us from school with high levels of non-attendance and non-engagement. They’ve come here and their attendance and engagement has been fab. They initially started out on a college course in painting and decorating ... but once their routines were established, they saw themselves doing well and found space for their thought processes, they have actually gone on to realise that they don’t want to be a painter and are looking at psychology. Their aspirations are now different, and we can react to those situations, and we know what they are capable of and what will keep them motivated. We can then signpost and guide them.

Mentor A, Borders College

The whole system approach adopted by many of the initiatives featured recognises that transition is an ongoing process which does not necessarily equate to completion and progression within a given timescale. The STAY programme at Glasgow Kelvin College, for example, assists with progression when learners are ready to move on to more advanced courses, however there is also provision through college initiatives to provide support for those unable to complete their studies. The Action for Children staff don’t see people who leave the College as no longer under their care; they also help learners who fall outwith the college system.

“ If it turns out that college is not for that young person, if they drop out, we don’t say, because you’re not a student anymore we can’t work with you. We will find that young person another destination, another positive, whether that is a shorter-term training course just to build their confidence, whether it’s finding them a job, whatever it is that they want to do next, we will help them get on that path. And it could be that in 10 years’ time they come back to college and that’s the

right time for them. So, we do work with the young person and always encourage them to stick to college, but if it isn’t for them, we will support them to find their next positive destination.

Claire Lumsden, Action for Children

It is here that the vital role of partnership working between colleges and external agencies and organisations can support opportunities for learners to return to study when their circumstances permit. In acknowledging that the transition process for learners with complex needs may be less linear and may require more flexibility and support, colleges can benefit from links to external networks to support learners as they navigate another path forwards.

“ My team in the council can maybe take them onto something else. It may be that college isn’t for them now ... but that should never be final. It’s just not for the now. We should be able to come back to it.

Mentor B, Borders College

A number of the initiatives reported that learners themselves saw a change in their behaviours, attitudes and approaches when they engaged within the programmes. Taking time to engage with learners and to understand their needs has proved valuable and effective in supporting successful transitions. STAY supported a learner who was displaying disruptive behaviour at college, and thanks to the programme, the learner was able to find a more appropriate destination and continues to stay in education.

“ The STAY worker helped me fix out my situation as the course was not for me. They fixed my money out and helped me with my application to my next course. I was not settled but feel better now and to know that STAY are just a call away is so good.

Anonymous beneficiary, STAY

It was also found that applying an approach which looks to build scaffolded support beyond term time is also an aspect in where college initiatives have been able to successfully ensure that learners stay the course of their studies through capacity and resilience building. Within the Time4Me programme, mentors work with their students to create strategies for identified times of risk such as college holidays.

“ With my mentee we’re looking at a plan for her over the summer to help her manage her money, and to make sure that when she gets to August that she’s ok till her SAAS comes in then. We do a lot of discussion about all the jobs she has on the go ... she actually has 4 jobs, and we’ll have a look at her budgets and how she’s managing everything. She’ll tell me ‘I’m freaking out about how I’m going to get through the summer’ or freaking about how she can do something. I can then say, ‘well, here’s the skills and let’s look at this template and let’s try that’. That’s something that maybe isn’t always on a report. The student stays the course, but it’s how you get them to that point.

Mentor A, Forth Valley College

The Borders Young Talent targeted approach to developing resilience, capacity building and increased motivation has repositioned learners within a space where are able to see the value in the continuation of their studies and identify cross transferable skills. Linkage between the College and external local agencies, such as Cheviot Youth, who themselves aim to *‘facilitate the growth of young people from dependency to one of interdependence’* offers a foundation for learners to build from as they transition onto self-sufficiency and employment.

“ We’re also very good in terms of meta skills and tapping into other external agencies. We have a young man just now, who has moved into his own tenancy, supporting him with cookery skills,

money matters etc. ... and we’ve got him engaged with Cheviot Youth, and that’s another support for him. It additional scaffolding. We always encourage things like part time jobs to help with routines. There’s no set thing, but the main thing has been communication and being able to cope with change.

Mentor A, Borders College

Connecting Communities at Ayrshire College also facilitates successful transitions and sustainable futures. The added benefit to engaging with various activities facilitated by the Connecting Communities partnership is the personal and social skills that are developed consequentially. *“It’s the whole package; sport’s just the hook”* (John McTaggart). The students involved in coaching the programme are developing skills for higher education and employment; pupils are developing team building, communication, and collaboration skills through sport; and parents are offered the opportunity to improve their health and fitness through one-to-one coaching and evening classes.

“ I think there’s united learning on a wider scale that isn’t just centred around sport. I think that’s what makes it dignified because we sit around and speak about all these wider outcomes whereas to a young person, and a student in the context of the room in which you’re learning to pass, to dribble, to take the ball – teambuilding skills – for me that’s the most important thing that’s been facilitated here, it’s actually not the sport but that the young people have been able to be themselves, feel empowered to take risks and learn life skills and develop how to speak to each other and be with each other after sitting in front of a screen for two years and potentially not being able to positively engage.

Steve Swan, Onthank Primary School

The Marie Trust has successful transition at the heart of the College Education Programme. Using education as a pathway from poverty and homelessness, learners are encouraged to gain educational qualifications and improve their life prospects. The courses taught are benchmarked at SCQF level 5 and 6 and there are no entry qualifications. Six-twelve week accredited and non-accredited courses are offered each year on a rolling basis. While the intention is for learners to progress from The Marie Trust College Education Programme to more advanced programmes in the mainstream college system, the rolling programme of courses enables learners to stay in education, providing them with the motivation and ability to keep learning. The benefit of the programme is the subjects taught. Learners experiencing homelessness may have very low educational aspirations. Studying subjects like psychology and criminology (established and regarded academic subjects) positively impacts motivation, self-esteem and raises educational attainment aspirations.

For many learners, targeted college initiatives provide a fresh start in education, and the opportunity to advance their educational and employability potential. After completing their programmes, learners are better equipped to progress onto further and higher education or employment. Whether aspirations are related to achieving goals within education or employment, college initiatives are about showing someone they can actually do what they set out to achieve, or more. Taking part in the programme gave the learners real belief in their goals.

“ My mentor makes you realise that you really are worth it. That you have a dream, and you are worth it, so why not chase it.

Learner A, Forth Valley College

College initiatives and partnership working creates an opportunity for future goals to be affirmed as valid and achievable. Through innovative and supportive programmes, learners can identify existing skills, develop new skills and enhance their transferable skills for positive and sustainable outcomes.



7 SUSTAINABILITY

The implementation of initiatives can not only be positive and transformational for learners but can also have notable impact within colleges and professional practice. The opportunities to capture new ideas and approaches and embed sustainable new practice from project initiatives have been both unintended and positive outcomes of the programmes implemented. Sustainability can be defined as *“a dynamic equilibrium in the process of interaction between a population and the carrying capacity of its environment such that the population develops to express its full potential without producing irreversible, adverse effects on the carrying capacity of the environment upon which it depends”*³. This equilibrium, within the context of this report, can be achieved when initiatives and projects themselves have a foundation of strong ownership and can benefit from working in partnership for success.

Projects such as Time4Me and Borders Young Talent have been widely seen as highly successful initiatives and have been received positively by both mentors, mentees and within the wider college community. The success of these projects has been largely credited to the leadership and ownership of a central project coordinator. However, there are also challenges for projects which rely heavily on a key member of staff. Noted as an area of risk within formal evaluation of the Time4Me project, Forth Valley College have addressed this challenge by working to embed a more sustainable model which can be replicated should staffing changes occur.

“ It’s all about a recruitment process and recruitment choices. If Sarah’s post became available you wouldn’t look to recruit a Sarah Mark II, but you would look to recruit somebody that might use different skill sets but move through the College in the same way. Actually, what we do need is systemised processes that reduce the risk of somebody exiting and we can’t replicate the work she’s doing as it all hinged on her. We are doing a lot of work as a department to identify those areas of risk, as where you do become quite lean, and rely on an individual’s skills set rather than the service itself is a risk.

Anna Vogt, Forth Valley College

The project remains part-funded by The Robertson Trust with additional funding being supplied from the College’s arm’s length foundation. Whilst The Robertson Trust continues to contribute to funding projects such as Time4Me and Borders Young Talent, from the perspective of the funder, initiatives must continually strive to make programmes sustainable and viable for the future to avoid the scenario of ‘cliff edge funding’. Noting the significant and positive impacts achieved through the funding of college-based projects, it is the position of The Robertson Trust that projects shouldn’t *“just drop off if we stop funding”* (DonnaMarie Steel, The Robertson Trust).

3 Ben-Eli (2015) as cited by Justice Mensah (2019) Sustainable development: Meaning, history, principles, pillars, and implications for human action: Literature Review, Cogent Social Sciences, 5:1.

Alongside considerations of sourcing of new strands of funding, the next phase of the Time4Me project is to look at any groups the College considers to be under-served, perhaps resulting from a lack of an obvious dedicated service. The College also plans to look at a more systemised approach to early interventions and in identifying learners for whom intervention may be appropriate.

“ There’s a transition element at the next phase of the project, we need to get better at that. We also need to look at what resources we need to do that because everybody’s doing a wee bit here and there. No one really owns the transition, but can we systemise that so that it doesn’t require a person to facilitate it all?

Anna Vogt, Forth Valley College

A significant unintended outcome of the establishment of initiatives to support vulnerable learners has been a change in perceptions and practices within colleges, directly influenced by the lived experience of individual learners. Drawn out within case study interviews and noted within the formal evaluation of projects, mentors felt they had professionally benefited from their involvement in the programme, citing new skills and levels of awareness which they had been able to transfer into existing or new roles. Mentors valued the opportunity to develop a respecting and trusting personal relationship to make a meaningful difference to an individual student’s life.

“ I’ve got a greater understanding and appreciation of care experienced students and of students who are young carers. When I get my new course codes and I know what kinds of students I’m getting ... when I see care experienced, I now know lots of strategies to be able to communicate with that student and have an understanding of what they are actually going through as well.

Mentor B, Forth Valley College

Testimony of lived experience not only provided new perspectives for teaching staff, but also had an impact within the College support teams.

“ I got a lot of value out of that in terms of understanding where policies and procedures that I am implementing can impact. With barriers, you can be told about these things you can hear the stories but actually there’s something about hearing that completely personal point of view that adds another dimension to how you understand the impact work has.

Anna Vogt, Forth Valley College

Mentoring at both Borders College and Forth Valley College will continue and remains a strategic peak intervention. Although both colleges differ in the delivery of mentoring sessions, their ethos and aims are similar, as is the desire to take forward and embed the learning gained from projects to continue to better inform sustainable practices and create positive outcomes for the most vulnerable learners.

“ Time4Me has given us so much in terms of learning. We have taken note of all these things and have tried to influence, as Time4Me won’t be there forever and we’re not naïve about that. So, it’s about what can we take from that learning to go back and to change some of our practices which aren’t access friendly and actually further disadvantage people.

Sarah Tervit, Forth Valley College



At Borders College, the project coordinator is working to embed the learning gained from the programme to embed new practices which have worked well within the project and which could benefit the wider student cohort.

“ I have been encouraging the team to use the youth work approach we have in BYT in other areas of the College. Rather than just sitting in an office and expecting students to come to you ... go to the student. There is real value in asking them for a coffee or meeting them in a public place. There’s no more of ‘we can only meet you in the office’. The pandemic pushed us to think about how we could operate our support service in the College and realign our service to be even more inclusive and I find this approach works. It’s now embedded in the wellbeing service at the College. I’m meeting a student in a local café to do her SAAS application, who I probably wouldn’t have been able to see if I didn’t go to them. I think, where there’s poverty, or care experience or whatever, you try and strip as much of those barriers away as possible. If that means we need to go to them, then that’s what we do.

Jen MacKenzie, Borders College

A commonality across many of the initiatives was found to be simple yet innovative ways of engaging learners in spaces in which they felt comfortable, and which enhanced their wellbeing, both of which work to sustain the learning process. The Walk and Talk service provided by the STAY programme mentors is implemented to support learners who struggle with eye-to-eye contact by taking them out of the College building, into a green space, to discuss mental health issues. And this function of the STAY programme is filtering into different aspects of college provision.

“ I was delighted to hear that one of the College staff has taken up this approach for learners who require someone to talk to but don’t want eye-to-eye contact. So, what we’re doing seems to be working and we hope it will reach much wider going forward.

MaryIn Davidson, Action for Children

Drawing on the success of initiatives and the development of valuable partnership links, colleges have been inspired to expand provision where possible. Elaine Hutton is aiming to extend the Connecting Communities model at Kilmarnock to the other three Ayrshire campuses.



“ Using the same partnership, working with Active Schools, we’re hoping that we’ll be able to do the same on the other three campuses over the next couple of years. It’s people that make this happen. And it’s not the same people on all the three campuses. Sometimes it’s baby steps, but that’s our vision.

Elaine Hutton, Ayrshire College

Sustainability further extends into local communities as a direct consequence of college initiatives. Within Ayrshire College, where there are plans to create a cooking school to encourage health and nutrition within the community surrounding the College. With the demise of home economics provision in schools, and the multiple barriers to healthy eating resulting from poverty and lack of education in geographical areas identified as deprived, generations of people in Scotland have grown up with poor health, nutrition, and cooking skills. The Connecting Communities model aims to initiate home economics classes using the College facilities. The plan so far is that while young people are engaging with the sports summer camp, parents will learn how to prepare nutritious and healthy meals using cupboard stores. Children participating in the sports activities will join their parents at the end of the day and the family will share the meal together. In connection with Home Link workers, eligible families will receive fee-wavers.

From embedding newly established best practice across the wider college community and creating new spaces for both learner and community engagement, the innovations of college projects are creating positive, practical, and sustainable impacts. It is clear that as colleges and policy makers consider the ‘college student of the future’, it is from grass roots interventions and initiatives that a deeper understanding of the context and complexity of vulnerable learners can lead to strategies to develop a sustainable pathway from poverty.



CASE STUDY 1

Ayrshire College

Ayrshire
College 

 **cdn**
Research and
Enhancement
Centre

CONNECTING COMMUNITIES

Partners: Ayrshire College, Kilmarnock Campus; Active Schools; Vibrant Communities, East Ayrshire Council.

Focus: Mental Health United & Soup and Porridge Initiative

Description

Working in partnership with the Active Schools, East Ayrshire Council and Ayrshire College, Kilmarnock Campus, Mental Health United is an initiative launched to promote positive mental health for children in the Kilmarnock community by encouraging participation in sport. East Ayrshire has experienced very high suicide rates, with numbers doubling between 2017 and 2019. The Kilmarnock campus community has witnessed the suicide of students and family members of students. The Mental Health United programme aims to use sport to counter the consequences of mental ill health.

The initiative started with the Rose Reilly Football Centre for girls and has expanded to the development of the Kris Boyd Football Centre for boys: after school sports activities for children from the local community. From these two centres, activities have grown to include rugby, para football and dance; a day-time sports programme for schools; and a holiday programme of activities that runs over 5 weeks of summer and in the easter break. Furthermore, dedicated to tackling food poverty experienced by young people and their families, the summer school provides a daily healthy meal for all participants. The various activities facilitated by Kilmarnock campus are grouped under the Connecting Communities initiative, From the initial concept (to facilitate sport for children) the

initiative has grown. Reaching beyond the College and into the community, Connecting Communities is encouraging a greater relationship between local families and the College at the heart of the community.

Success factor: partnership

Connecting Communities brings together community partners to create quality coaching and training opportunities for college students and staff whilst providing free physical activity and other benefits to a variety of client groups, many of which are the hardest to reach due to social isolation, poor self-esteem, confidence, and lack of social skills. The special relationship between the key staff members at the centre of the initiative has enabled its development: Elaine Hutton (Assistant Principal, Ayrshire College) is committed to tackling food poverty; John McTaggart (Curriculum Manager—Sports and Fitness, Ayrshire College, Kilmarnock campus) aims to use sport to promote positive mental health; and Cheryl Fulton (Active Schools Coordinator for East Ayrshire Council) bridges the gap between the College and the local community. The partnership understands the needs of the local community they aim to support and inspire. Many of the neighbourhoods in reach of the College sit within top 5% of deprived communities in the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD). The personal commitment of the three key individuals working

on Connecting Communities has ensured the success of mental ill health and poverty intervention in Kilmarnock. And Elaine, John and Cheryl are constantly working together to expand the remit of the programme.

“ It grows organically, as opposed to us saying: ‘here’s what we’re going to do. We say to each other: ‘I’ve got this idea, let’s try this,’ but actually, it’s very much the opposite. We look about and think, we see them sitting about, how can we engage with them? How can we get them part of our project? They’re not happy. So the barriers will present themselves to us and we’ll see how to overcome them.

Cheryl Fulton, East Ayrshire Council

College students studying on HNC/D Sports programmes provide the coaching as part of their learning and work experience. As it is directly related to curriculum activity, the after-school classes facilitated by the students are funded by core college funding. *“Within the framework that they are working towards there will be coaching units, volunteering units, they’ve got their work placement unit. So, what we do with Active Schools is all mapped to that unit content”* (Elaine Hutton). Students benefit from coaching on the programme as they are gaining work experience, volunteering, and developing life skills. By encouraging the ethos of giving back to the community *“we start to build a better society”* (Elaine Hutton).

The commitment from the students and staff at Kilmarnock campus has allowed for direct intervention in the lives of the young people involved in the activities.

“ We have a young person who does not build relationships who built a really positive strong relationship with a student and the flexibility of the College lecturers here allowed that female student to stay on to work one to one in the final session with that person; that young person also left the building but that student and staff from the school were right with them and that college student was as equal a part with the school at providing de-escalation and relation strategies for the sake of that young person as we were.

Steve Swan, Onthank Primary School

The benefits of the programme reach both the school pupils and the College students facilitating the activities. Students have had the opportunity to make connections with community partners leading to developing employability potential: some of the College learners involved in coaching and running the programmes are now working for Active Schools.

“ Part of the benefit is the experience that these sessions give to the future in both contexts of the young people that are benefitting but also the students that are participating on this course and what they can speak about when they go on to further education and job interviews, life experience that you can look back on and reflect on and give examples of in a positive context.

Steve Swan, Onthank Primary School



Success factor: from sport to tackling food poverty

50 school children from the after-school clubs and 100 school children for the holiday programmes benefit from the College activities. Young people who participate in the summer programme have the opportunity of being coached by high profile sports celebrities, consequently raising the profile of the initiative. The concept of inclusivity for children involved in the Connecting Communities activities at Kilmarnock campus is central to the success of the initiative. The programme has grown from one idea about sport to providing basic clothes and food to children and families in the community.

While working in the programme, staff got to know the children and realised that children were coming to the activities hungry. *“Food poverty in this locale is severe. 51% of kids here will be on free school meals”* (Elaine Hutton). When the schools are closed, pupils do not have access to school meals. It was vital for the Connecting Communities summer sports school staff that children had access to a day-time meal, and so packed lunches were introduced to the programme. The Dignified Food Project (East Ayrshire Council) provides the lunches, and this link with the council means that children from areas of multiple deprivation in the locale can access basic food provision during the holiday period.

The concept of creating a safe and healthy environment for young people to come and participate in activity and be fed remains central to the ethos of the programme and is shared by the staff and student coaches and extends into the after-school activities as well as the holiday programmes.

“ Within the Rose Reilly football club we do lots of fundamentals, like passing, dribbling, shooting. But it’s also a place for girls to feel safe. For girls to open up to just chat and have fun. Especially for me, when I coach Rose Reilly, I always ask the girls, ‘did you have dinner; what did you do at school,’ just constantly asking them different questions. It’s not so related to the sport, that doesn’t feel right, in order to get on with them you have to have a connection.

**Alex (HND Coaching and Management),
Ayrshire College**

This concept grew to providing clothes for the participants. Early in the programme, a young girl turned up in a wet school uniform. When the same pupil returned in the same clothes the following day, staff realised that this young person did not have the correct clothes to participate in sports activities. This gave staff the idea of fundraising to have strips provided for everyone. It’s not only the school children who wear the strips, but the student coaches and the staff involved. Everyone is equal.

“ When we put all of this together, it’s not that this person gets a strip because they haven’t got one, but someone else’s has got one, so we don’t give them one. Everybody gets the same. Everybody gets their packed lunch. It’s the same with our Soup and Porridge Initiative, every student has access to that. We don’t put any barriers. We don’t discriminate against any individual. That’s something that’s really important for us.

Elaine Hutton, Ayrshire College

This commitment to inclusivity is identified in other projects aimed at tackling food inequality in Kilmarnock campus. The Soup and Porridge initiative provides breakfast and lunch to every Kilmarnock campus student regardless of background or status.

“ How do we expect a young person to sit down and be engaged in learning and teaching if they haven’t eaten, they don’t know when they’re going to eat... how often do you sit down and think ‘I’ll get up and have a cup of coffee and something to eat and give my legs a stretch and that will put me back in a better frame of mind to get on with the work that I’m doing’ – that’s the same for a young person. We can’t expect them to learn if they haven’t got the basic food, warmth, before they even start.

Elaine Hutton, Ayrshire College

Committed to helping students remain in a healthy physical and mental state while at college, Elaine Hutton applied to Ayrshire College Foundation in 2018. The funding received allowed the Soup and Porridge initiative to run for two years. The project ran over the summer, so that learners still had access to breakfast and lunch out of term time. When the College building reopened after the Covid-19 lockdowns, the College Student Association informed Elaine that students were asking if the soup and porridge would restart, and a subsequent application was made to the Scottish Funding Council Mental Health Fund:

“ We made an application to that and got approval from the Funding Council on the basis that if you’re not eating, you don’t have good mental health, if you don’t have good mental health, you can’t learn. I’ve received two years funding from that (2022 and 2023).

Elaine Hutton, Ayrshire College



Before the Soup and Porridge initiative was implemented, the College was providing food support on an informal basis. Staff working in the College canteen know the students, and they were giving students in need extra portions. Then they started to leave the food left over at the end of the College day for those in need to take it.

Providing basic food for college learners has extended into the community. Staff realised that if the student needs access to breakfast and to lunch at college, likely their whole family would be in need. In the first year of the Soup and Porridge initiative, the College put on a Christmas dinner and each family who came to the Christmas dinner, was given a hamper.

“ All the other support systems that happen for kids, they close. The only time the College closes is at Christmas, which is why we put on the Christmas dinner. Because we wanted there to be something in that period that people could come to.

Elaine Hutton, Ayrshire College

The Christmas dinner event not only aided families experiencing food poverty but helped to tackle social exclusion at what can be a difficult time of the year.



Impact factor: community intervention

The summer school of sports activities runs for 5 weeks. For the summer camp referrals, college staff liaise with Home Link workers in local schools who alert the College to families that will benefit from the initiatives run by the College. However, when the programme started, staff realised they were not reaching the desired demographic of young people in the immediate locale:

“ When we looked at the information from the kids signing up to the initiatives, we realised there weren’t actually many from this postcode. So, it looks great on paper, we’re getting really high numbers (50 for the after-school activities; 100 for the holiday programmes), but it’s about ‘are we really making a difference to the ones who really need it?’

Cherryl Fulton, East Ayrshire Council

Statistics from the enrolment registers suggested that there was a high uptake in families from postcode areas with SIMD ratings of 14, 15, and 16. But there was a lack of participation from postcodes in lower SIMD zones. The staff came up with a plan to encourage greater uptake from the immediate community.

“ So, we thought, how to overcome this barrier: we got college students to meet pupils at the school, so anyone that wanted to come to the activities would meet at the school and the students would provide a walking bus. Our numbers went up about 25%. We had kids for the local schools, the kids wanted to come – which is what we expected – but the parents weren’t engaging. So that’s the work around from there.

Cherryl Fulton, East Ayrshire Council

The walking bus concept was a great success. With the children getting to the College with the walking bus, they were able to access the activities. The walking bus also runs as part of daytime sports programme for local school.

“ The College and Active Sport are giving opportunities for our young people. In regard to coming to the College, our primary 6 and primary 7s came for two 8-week blocks on the walking bus, again supported by the students at the College, so straight away opportunities were given for relationships to be built and established with the students who were going to be delivering the sessions with our young people, which can be challenging whether that be social or emotional trauma informed. What the young people at our school are actually living with just now; Onthank is in the top 5% of multiple deprivation according to statistics, so that does come with a certain amount of stigma. But the young people are very intelligent in the school, and they know who they are, they know what can be thought of them, they know the barriers that are in place. Something that’s been really refreshing is to see how the students and how the College have facilitated everyone being equal and supporting everyone to engage and reach their full potential in the activity sessions.

Steve Swan, Onthank Primary School



Impact factor: widening access to education

Once the Connecting Communities initiative had managed to reach the intended demographic, parents from low SIMD zones were encouraged to come into the College: the walking bus would get the children there, but the parents collected them afterwards. This had an unexpected positive impact. Individuals living in areas of multiple deprivation – who may have had a negative experience in education – can view educational institutions as a barrier. *“That’s often missed; we work in the College and don’t see it as a scary place”* (Elaine Hutton). By engaging in the College via their children’s sports activities, parents got to know the staff and realised the benefit of the College to their children and the wider community. In response, the College further expanded the programme’s activities to further engage the parents.

Now the community know who the staff are and feel comfortable and the College continues to expand the provision of activities to include the parents and the wider family.

“ It’s grown arms and legs; we needed to engage the parents. Before Covid, we looked at, when your kids are in, what can we do for the parents. So the Health and Fitness [HN] students provide one on one in the gym, they did activities in the gym with the parents, so they were involved too.

Cherryl Fulton, East Ayrshire Council

The College realised that activities and spaces for the younger siblings of pupils participating in the holiday sports programmes could benefit from college resources, and so a creche was created for the very young children to be looked after while the parents had access to one-to-one coaching with college students.

“ There was a mother who was bringing her 5-year-old son and 7-year-old daughter, and her 2-year-old is out there because she’s too young to do anything. The mum’s having hassle having to bring the kid down in the pram and has to wait out there because she’s doing that for the benefit of her son who’s in doing football and that’s great. So, we decided to put on a creche and playgroup for the two-year-olds. The parents are in the gym getting one to one personal training with the Health and Fitness students. It’s a one stop shop. It’s gone from parents thinking, I can’t bring the pram in here, I’m going to be harassed, they’re going to be running about in the foyer, but now there’s something for the kids. We worked with Vibrant Communities to provide people to run the creche in the dance studio, so if you’re a parent bring them down, and for that parent to get respite, even if it’s only for an hour, how good is that for that parent to reset and then go up the road and deal with her kids again.

John McTaggart, Ayrshire College

Now that the families in the local area are becoming more comfortable with the College, there is greater engagement. A lesson learned from the summer school last year is that the places fill up quickly. But the families most in need may not have access to the internet or have tech equipment to sign up. This year, 20 spaces per day will be reserved for those families.

The added benefit to engaging with these activities is the personal and social skills that are developed consequentially. *“It’s the whole package: sport’s just the hook”* (John McTaggart). The students involved in coaching the programme are developing skills for higher education and employability; pupils are developing team building, communication, and collaboration skills through sport; and parents are offered the opportunity to improve their health and fitness through one-to-one coaching.

“ I think there’s united learning on a wider scale that isn’t just centred around sport. I think that’s what makes it dignified because we sit around and speak about all these wider outcomes whereas to a young person, and a student in the context of the room in which you’re learning to pass, to dribble, to take the ball – teambuilding skills – for me that’s the most important thing that been facilitated here, it’s actually not the sport but that the young people have been able to be themselves, feel empowered take risks and learn life skills and develop how to speak to each other and be with each other after sitting in front of a screen for two years and potentially not being able to positively engage.

Steve Swan, Onthank Primary School

Currently, plans are in place to extend the parent engagement to providing evening bite sized lessons, offering the opportunity for adults to gain recognised qualifications. Furthermore, there are plans to create a cooking school to encourage health and nutrition.

The benefits to the community continue to develop. Adults who would not normally come into the College are becoming familiar with the building and the staff and are being given the opportunity to potentially gain their first qualifications by participating in the evening classes. The children also feel more at home in the College, it’s not another intimidating institution.

“ Our vision is that this building will be a complete hive of activity over the summer with kids out there, kids in here, parents in the kitchens. For us, that’s a win, win for the College because young people who think, ‘I don’t want to go into the College’ it’s another change, it’s another step, whereas these kids will be over familiar with the College, they’re our students of the future, they will know where they’re coming to, they’ll be confident and hopefully all they’ll have had up to this point is a positive experience in college.

Elaine Hutton, Ayrshire College



Success factor: Covid-19 restrictions and sport

Covid-19 changed the remit of the project. During the return to school after lockdown traditional PE could not be delivered because local schools did not have resources to facilitate sport while maintaining physical distancing. This meant that Active School Coordinators weren’t able to carry out their usual physical activities in school and pupils could not receive their recommended two hours of physical exercise each week.



Connecting Communities strategized as creative approach to overcome these barriers. The College decided to extend the programme to include daytime sports activities. After discussions with school pupils, teachers, college staff and students, an 8-week block of sports coaching was designed and delivered by college students at the outdoor courts in Kilmarnock campus. The walking bus enabled the young people to get to the College safely and the activities allowed for them to maintain the recommended physical exercise classes using the College's outside facilities. This also allowed the College students to continue to fulfil necessary volunteer and coaching requirements for their college programmes, which were suspended for most students during physical distancing restrictions. These sessions not only enhanced active and effective engagement with local school pupils, but gave young people, college students and staff the chance to experience some normality during the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions.

Barriers/challenges

As stated, initially children from the local community were not getting involved as the parents were not engaged. However, barriers around reaching the desired demographic were overcome by implementing the walking bus, enabling Connecting Communities to reach the demographic most in need.

Next steps

Having learnt about the success of the Connecting Communities summer school, the Scottish Government initiative, Activity on the Go, is now getting involved in the summer programme allowing for activities and resources to extend further.

Furthermore, an evening class and summer school activity modelled on the 'Ready Steady Cook' concept is being developed.





“ Elaine was talking about her plans for going into the summer. We’d shared information about how – I’ve been at Onthank for 4 years – I took a dignified food provision at Onthank through our community nights, and lunchtime waste, we were supported by Education Scotland to do that, to reduce waste. Those conversations have led to a potential future partnership in families from Onthank being able to come and participate in activities at the College where parents go and do the ‘Ready Steady Cook’ – £5 in a blue bag, what do you have today – and the chefs and hospitality at the College will facilitate food education in a wider context to families at Onthank who I work with in my Home Link role, may not know with what’s left in the cupboard how can I feed myself, how can I feed my family.

Steve Swan, Onthank Primary School

With the demise of home economics provision in schools, and the multiple barriers to healthy eating resulting from poverty and lack of education in geographical areas identified as deprived, generations of people in Scotland have grown up with poor health, nutrition, and cooking skills. Connecting Communities aims to initiate home economics classes using the College facilities. The

plan so far is that while young people are engaging with the sports summer camp, parents will learn how to prepare nutritious and healthy meals using cupboard stores. Children participating in the sports activities will join their parents at the end of the day and the family will share the meal together. In connection with Home Link workers, eligible families will receive fee-wavers.

“ I think the phrase ‘dignified food’ can be open to speculation, but I think there’s no other way for dignified food, at the heart of what that means, to be in a place where young people are active, happy, and engaged, and families are being upskilled. It’s opportunities for everyone to learn and upskill following a time where there’s been real hardship. And if we can together, thanks to the College and the opportunities here, educate families that come from the top 5% multiple deprivation region in Ayrshire to be able to know that they’re taking responsibility to empower themselves and that they’re being their own helping hand – it’s not about here’s a food voucher, go and buy something, go to the community larder – if there’s continual opportunities for partnership funding, that’s ensuring families can be in a safe environment and know that they’re being upskilled, they’re being able to take charge and transform their life for their family. I think that has a wider ripple effect of opportunities for how that then trickles down through our community.

Steve Swan, Onthank Primary School

Finally, Elaine Hutton is aiming to extend the Connecting Communities model at Kilmarnock to the other three Ayrshire campuses. *“Using the same partnership, working with Active Schools, we’re hoping that we’ll be able to do the same on the other three campuses over the next couple of years. It’s people that make this happen. And it’s not the same people on all the three campuses. Sometimes it’s baby steps, but that’s our vision”* (Elaine Hutton).

CASE STUDY 2

Borders College



BORDERS YOUNG TALENT

Partners: Borders College, The Robertson Trust
Focus: Mentoring programme for students at risk of non-completion

Description

Borders Young Talent Programme was developed as a partnership project with The Robertson Trust and was established to widen participation in further and higher education for young people irrespective of their background or economic circumstances. Rolled out in 2018 as a two-year project, the programme provided mentoring support for young people facing additional challenges in making a successful transition to college from school while in their last year of secondary education. The target group for support consisted of young people who are care experienced, student carers who have caring responsibilities, young people who are experiencing considerable disadvantage because of social/rural deprivation and young people who are at risk of disengagement from education due to poor attendance (under 75%) or exclusion due to their behaviours.

The programme was subsequently extended in response to a shift in the identified need as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and resulting periods of lockdown. The extension of the project saw a re-focussing of support away from part time school link programmes towards directly supporting full time first year entrants to college. Those identified for referral come from a variety of sources with Borders College working with Local Authority teams, SDS and schools. The new model adopted by the Borders Young Talent allows for greater scope in

providing support to young people and in helping the learners achieve their desired outcome.

“ With the Schools Academy we were quite restricted in terms of what we could and couldn’t do ... as they were still the school’s responsibility and they had to initiate whatever support was required. It was restrictive in what you could do and offer. With full-time college students you can offer bespoke support liaise directly with SDS or other support agencies, and we can navigate the direction. I think we definitely made the right decision in changing the programme vision.

Jen MacKenzie, Borders College

As part of the Borders Young Talent programme, young people are provided with a mentor who befriends them and provides one-to-one support with the aim of making a successful transition to college. The mentor’s role is to help the young person identify barriers to their successful attendance and/or completion of their college programme and support them through the transition to college. Mentoring involves a range of activities which are specifically tailored to the needs of the young person with the central focus for the mentor being getting to know the person they are supporting and the challenges they face. Through working with the young person, the mentor can identify the barriers faced to successful participation in education then implement strategies to help with

getting up and ready in the morning, preparing for study, coping with others' behaviour, avoiding risky behaviour, interpersonal skills development, coping with intersectional issues, dealing with social or rural barriers to name but a few. Whilst there are individual circumstances for each mentee, a common feature of the programme is building confidence through the support given by the mentor and trying out new strategies which can help in achieving goals/milestones and promote positive outcomes by positively impacting on the learner's development by building confidence and resilience in self.

Mentees themselves noted positive changes in their behaviours and in their approach to learning in college as a result of their participation in BYT, which contrasted with previous learning experiences.

“ It helps people out. I don't think I'd have quietened down if it wasn't there. I was a pretty loud one. I was hyper and I had a lot of stuff going on ... so I wasn't really learning. Well, I was learning, but the tutors didn't see it that way ... just boys being boys. This sorted all that out.

Learner A, Borders College

“ I was quite confident, but I was not the best behaved at school and at the start of college. But it's helped a lot, with my behaviour and that. It's helped me calm down a lot.

Learner B, Borders College

Two part time professional mentors, both working 2.5 days a week and combining as an equivalent 1 full-time post have been recruited to support the young people. These mentors have extensive experience of working with and supporting young people within the local authority area. In 2020-21 the project supported 32 young people and the project is currently supporting 38 young people.

Success factor: partnership

An important element of the programme is working with others to support the young person, not only whilst in college, but also with forward planning and development. Borders College works in close partnership within the local community and has strong links to the local authority and external agencies such as SDS. The College has also fostered positive connections and works closely with smaller local agencies and organisations, encouraging networking and knowledge sharing. Driving and maintaining these links is the programme coordinator who regularly keeps in contact with agencies to understand the nature of the support on offer and to bringing a multi-agency approach to supporting the young person.

“ During lockdown I invited support agencies within the Borders region to an online keep in touch session ... to see what was happening with their services during lockdown.

Jen MacKenzie, Borders College

“ Jen is pretty keen and is very good at keeping people on our radar. We have team meetings and people are invited along to that and keeps these links going. TD-1 are very local they are excellent and they work closely with one guy I support.

Mentor A, Borders College

Understanding the context and availability of local support extends the ability of the programme to offer targeted support and also creates sustainable links for the longer-term development of mentees.

“ Where students present experiencing problems, we discuss to see if there is a support agency that could come in and do some awareness raising. We have had Andy’s Man Club coming in to run sessions, Quarriers running resilience workshops, One Step Borders ... we look for opportunities to collaborate ... and although we’re small team we pack a lot in.

Jen MacKenzie, Borders College

“ Groups like Cheviot Youth help find apprenticeships, manage a home, deal with well-being. And, of course, all these groups can also tap into their own resources which we all benefit from. We work with Gamblers Anonymous and people like that ... Jen throws her net wide and that lets us tap into local interventions.

Mentor A, Borders College

There is an awareness also of the limitations of in-house college support and, in creating a hub of external networks, BYT also addresses sustainability issues related to project funding and actively promotes partnership working as a means of exploring opportunities for additional funding streams.

“ We have quite a good network available to us, through me being the lead for corporate parenting and liaising with the schools at transition meetings. Having those links really helps, and our network stretches quite far. We also link in with the Scottish Mentoring Network as mentoring is being done in so many different ways being a member of the network allows us to access wider support. You can access the network if you need something, whether that’s a contact that may help or a way of doing something differently. We also liaise with the local authority to explore options for funding options that may be available.

We have many students who come here to study from far and wide, having these links allows us to make connections with Social Work teams across the country. We cast our net wide ... but maybe that’s just about me getting myself out there and leading the way on corporate parenting. Just making sure we always have a name on the table.

Jen MacKenzie, Borders College





Success factor: Positively reframing support for young people

The mentoring programme has also been successful in changing the ways in which the mentees perceived and engaged with external agencies. The recruitment of trusted and experienced professional mentors with established connections within the local community and local authority has been a major strength in fostering networks and opening up extended and external avenues of support. The project initially explored a range of recruitment options and spent time researching and engaging with existing mentoring programmes and networks to find a workable solution which met the particular needs of the College.

“ Following our initial year we reflected on our recruitment of mentors and felt that younger mentors didn’t necessarily have the experience required, and maybe instead we needed to broaden out ... looking for those working with young people with difficult backgrounds. We wanted to recruit those with experience and who also had lived experience. For the Borders we always knew it had to be a paid mentoring role rather than volunteers for it to be successful. Given our rural location, we knew getting a volunteer mentor for an hour a week would be challenging, you spend that just travelling. We needed someone who would manage a specific caseload. We did try ‘matching’ mentees with mentors but for the project this didn’t work as we only had a few mentors.

Jen MacKenzie, Borders College

Mentors come with their personal experiences and backgrounds and that brings in different ideas and opportunities to engage with lots of different types of support.

“ I work for the Council and have those connections, I know all the teams, I know what is out there and I can go to them as an individual and have an informal chat. You really need to know what is out there.

Mentor B, Borders College

Mentors work to foster positive relations through the establishment of trust and capacity building. This is achieved the consistent and sustained relationship between the dedicated mentor and young person. For many of those referred to the programme there has been a series of interventions throughout their lives which have not always resulted in positive outcomes.

“ We are aware that the challenge for the young people who experience considerable loss in early life is often in making a meaningful connection with the institution, sustaining this, and making a success of their studies. To facilitate the young people being able to understand these challenges fully and to help them overcome them a small team is required who are well prepared for making a sustained connection with the young people.

Borders College (Bid for Support Document 2018)

“ My first step is to establish a relationship and often I do that with parents, carers, grandparents just so that they know who I am. I had to phone one learner’s granny this morning just to see where one of them was.

Mentor B, Borders College





“ One learner got in trouble with the police, and she received a warning for her behaviour ... but there was a story behind that which was actually quite serious. So we got to know about that and worked with her and she’s stuck it out at college. I was there and she could phone or text me and I was there for her. I say to them that they can phone or text me, whether it’s about the course, their family, something that’s happened outside. We’re seen as non-statutory and to have someone speaking to them who’s not a statutory agency and actually speaking to them and hearing their thoughts and aspirations ... that makes a huge difference.

Mentor B, Borders College

It was expressed that it was not uncommon for the young people to feel that they have little autonomy and a lack of voice resulting in a cycle of ineffective previous engagements and interactions with institutions and external support. The mentoring programme has provided a safe space for the young people leading to more positive engagement with support and within the broader learning environment.

“ I think, well in my case, it’s like the whole support stuff CAMHS and support things, I’ve tried it all and it’s just never worked for me. But it’s nice to just sit with someone and not to feel pressured. I don’t have to tell [him] anything and he’s made that clear, but like I choose to, because he’s nice and he says the right things. He listens to what I have to say. It isn’t about what other people have to say. He asks me my opinion on it, and I think that’s really important, because not many people do that. Usually, it’s just like ‘we know what’s best for you’ and ‘you’re just a teen’.

Learner A, Borders College

The informal tone and open nature of the conversations which develop between mentor and mentee create a more approachable perception of support and have resulted in positive relations within the College, helping learners sustain their studies and develop soft skills.

“ He puts you in the mood. Puts you in the mood for the day. He does a lot of wee things, comes round, and meets you and just keeps you going. He comes for a coffee and a chat, and I even had him down at the farm and he was clipping sheep. He got his wellies and boiler suit. He just kinda chats away ... just about normal stuff.

Learner B, Borders College

“ When I was in school, I used to have section 31s with Social Work and that, so I was never talking ... but I think he’s broken that out of me. I speak a lot better now. I’ve got more pals and that. College, on the first day, I got on with everyone.

Learner B, Borders College



Success factor: tackling food poverty

In working to target social issues and offer targeted supported, the issue of food poverty has been identified as a barrier to learning, affecting the young person's ability to maintain wellbeing and sustain their studies. The professional mentors work to understand the context of the learner and gain a deeper understanding of challenges and issues. From here, practical solutions are discussed which can then be implemented to support the learner.

“ Some examples ... those students who had to move quickly into their first tenancy. Things like ‘do they know how to cook a meal’, ‘how to run a house’ ‘what have they got in their cupboards’ ... you’re stepping into that kind of territory.

Mentor A, Borders College

In one instance, this approach led to an intervention which not only dealt with the immediate issue of food poverty, but additionally engaged the mentor with local volunteering as a means of offsetting initial reluctance to accept support from a foodbank.

“ I had this person at Christmas time who was really low, and I thought the way to buck them up was provide a gym membership, but also to look at what he was eating. When I was chatting to him about food, I asked him to shout out what he had in his cupboards. He really had nothing there ... and nothing fresh, which is a big part of wellbeing, but he really didn’t want to take a foodbank donation. Within 2 hours we had sorted a big parcel of what he needed. He said he felt really bad taking food, and we chatted about how he could ease this by volunteering 2 hrs a week to help the foodbank. They’re all good people ... the students we support ... and they actually don’t think twice about giving back.

Mentor A, Borders College

As a direct result, the mentee is now actively engaged and visible within their local community, and has acquired work experience, leading to the development of skills for future employment.

“ Getting him involved with food parcels, making up and delivering food parcels and he’s now a great wee worker. The work experience placement said they would employ him in a heartbeat in the workplace, so he’s building up skills and creating networks.

Mentor A, Borders College

Food poverty remains a challenge and through the programme innovative approaches to tackling this issue have been implanted. These approaches include providing breakfast to all students to remove any stigma around food poverty.

“ The reality in the Borders is that if you’re in somewhere like Eyemouth, you’re talking a 7 a.m. start for the bus, so some of the students haven’t managed to eat anything before starting college. So we have a wee pack with oats and things for breakfast. We have that readily available to all students across our campuses.

Jen MacKenzie, Borders College

Mentors have also been instrumental in linking up with local agencies and in one instance with local retailers to provide practical and cost-effective solutions.

“ Susan is full of innovative ideas and will take come up with an idea and run with it. Some ideas work and some don’t, but you can imagine that resources are tight ... Susan went round local shops and supermarkets looking to see if they would donate some resources, and from that we were donated items to allow us to put together lunch packs for students, students really appreciated having access to these.

Jen MacKenzie, Borders College

Success factor: Providing practical resources and support

The project was keen not only to address food poverty but to provide workable solutions in response to the broader impact of financial barriers faced by learners. Practical resources to support learners with their studies were funded by the project and distributed directly to learners.

“ Things, even like a stationery pack, can make such a difference. Students were all working remotely and we were thinking what could we do to prepare them for College ... as we couldn't see them face to face due to lockdown ... we ordered in ... pens, pencils, folders, post-it notes, diaries ... just a basic stationery pack which was issued to all Borders Young Talent students at that time, and we also looked at for those in most need of basic equipment ... who needed a chair, a desk, a dongle, a laptop. What did they need to start their learning journey? We got items ordered and delivered directly to their houses mitigating any risk for them having to travel to come and collect these.

Jen MacKenzie, Borders College

The person-centred approach adopted by BYT meant that building a sense of value for individuals led to more innovative ways to support learners and foster positive interactions. The project delivered gifts to learners and through the mentoring process, tailored approaches to promote positive engagement could be implemented.

“ We were still in lockdown at Christmas, so we thought putting together wellbeing gifts, a wee pick me up really with some sweets, bubble bath ... as some of the students wouldn't have something under the tree and we just wanted to make sure that they had something to open. It was just a wee thing, but for some of these students it meant quite a lot for them. Mentors take students for McDonalds, I like to take them to Costa for a hot chocolate ... no matter what it is it makes the world of difference because it's about them and what they like ... and we're not just sitting in an office.

Jen MacKenzie, Borders College





Success Factor: Laying the groundwork for sustainable futures

The mentoring sessions open up space for reflection on future plans within a safe a supportive environment. Learners have trust in the process and have been encouraged to reflect on their own individual goals and aspirations. Where issues were identified with course choices or progress for example, the mentors could identify and support positive alternatives as a means of ensuring continuing engagement with learning.

“ I let them know I’m there to support them if there’s anything getting in the way of the learning that they’ve signed up to do. If something isn’t right with the course, I’ll work with the tutors to see if we can find something that is right, or maybe they’ll come back another year. They’re good with that ... happy with that ... and they know I’m quite easy going.

Mentor B, Borders College

“ It can go from someone who has maybe applied for the wrong course in the beginning. We had someone who wanted to animal care ... but they worked on a farm at the weekend, and just by chatting it was actually agriculture that they wanted to be in and that’s a good way of setting them up for success. Listening and making sure they are on the right course. Knowing more about them helps.

Mentor A, Borders College

Exploring alternatives was found to have not only helped young people to ‘stay the course’ but in some cases, was seen to have raised aspirations higher, with learners showing more self-confidence and autonomy in decision making around the routes into employment.

“ An example is of one learner who came to us from school with high levels of non-attendance and non-engagement. They’ve come here and their attendance and engagement has been fab. They initially started out on a college course in painting and decorating ... but once their routines were established, they saw themselves doing well and found space for their thought processes, they have actually gone on to realise that they don’t want to be a painter and are looking at psychology. Their aspirations are now different, and we can react to those situations, and we know what they are capable of and what will keep them motivated. We can then signpost and guide them.

Mentor A, Borders College

“ Moving the young people into education, is giving them the opportunity for them to earn. They’ll all tell you they want a job to earn money ... maybe be a plumber or that ... but they don’t necessarily think it in detail and that the apprenticeship might actually be 4 years. So, it’s about explaining that you don’t just start right away as a plumber and helping them understand the process. Understand how to split the practical with the bookwork.

Mentor B, Borders College



The BYT targeted approach to developing resilience, capacity building and increased motivation has repositioned learners within a space where they are able to see the value in the continuation of their studies and identify transferable skills. Linkage between the College and external local agencies, such as Cheviot Youth, who themselves aim to ‘facilitate the growth of young people from dependency to one of interdependence’ offers a foundation for learners to build from as they transition onto self-sufficiency and employment.

“ We’re also very good in terms of meta skills and tapping into other external agencies. We have a young man just now, who has moved into his own tenancy, supporting him with cookery skills, money matters etc. ... and we’ve got him engaged with Cheviot Youth, and that’s another support for him. It additional scaffolding. We always encourage things like part time jobs to help with routines. There’s no set thing, but the main thing has been communication and being able to cope with change.

Mentor A, Borders College

Barriers/challenges

The geographical location of the College means that that staff are working with a diverse and widely distributed student population. Travel distance between local towns and the College can be marked and internet service is often patchy with connectivity issues and has proved a challenge in creating workable solutions. The project has evolved to meet these challenges, with the approach to mentor recruitment being one example of tailoring the approach to meet the specific needs of the local area. It was also expressed that more could be done to engage within the wider college environment to support vulnerable learners. Knowledge exchange and link up with college staff and employers was offered as one solution which could be of benefit.

“ It’s important we get guidance staff and tutors to explain the units and what they will be learning or what they need, that would help. They don’t always understand. For example motor engineering ... students are expecting to come in and use hand tools but as technology changes they now need computer skills due to the diagnostics ... and we need to make sure they are equipped for future employment needs.

Mentor B, Borders College

Next steps

The Borders Young Talent project has been granted additional funding from The Robertson Trust and plans to continue the programme for a further 2 years. This continued funding will help in exploring how the project can be sustained through partnership working and external funding opportunities. A multi-agency approach to sustainability could not only benefit the future of the project via continued financial support, but also consolidates the project ethos of generating person centred wraparound support to ensure positive outcomes for learners.

“ It’s great The Robertson Trust have given us a further 2 years of funding to allow us the opportunity to establish a sustainable funding source which is the hardest thing for us. We hope that the outcomes we are experiencing allows the Scottish Funding Council and the government to see that there is a need for and a massive value in mentoring.

Jen MacKenzie, Borders College

The project coordinator is also working to embed the learning gained from the programme to embed new practices which have worked well within the project and could benefit the wider student cohort.

“ I have been encouraging the team to use the youth work approach we have in BYT in other areas of the College. Rather than just sitting in an office and expecting students to come to you ... go to the student. There is real value in asking them for a coffee or meeting them in a public place. There’s no more of ‘we can only meet you in the office’. The pandemic pushed us to think about how we could operate our support service in the College and realign our service to be even more inclusive and I find this approach works. It’s now embedded in the wellbeing service at the College. I’m meeting a student in a local café to do her SAAS application, who I probably wouldn’t have been able to see if I didn’t go to them. I think, where there’s poverty, or care experience or whatever, you try and strip as much of those barriers away as possible. If that means we need to go to them, then that’s what we do.

Jen MacKenzie, Borders College



CASE STUDY 3

Forth Valley College



TIME4ME

Partners: Forth Valley College, The Robertson Trust
Focus: Mentoring programme for care experienced students

Description

Time4Me is a mentoring initiative, funded by The Robertson Trust, which targets young people (aged 15-26) considered at highest risk of not achieving successful and sustained educational outcomes. Established in 2018, the programme works with specific target groups including care experienced young people, young carers/young adult carers and young people from regeneration areas (SIMD20). Time4Me mentees are Forth Valley College students enrolled on differing levels of study, the similarity being they are all in a period of transition into the further/higher education environment. Mentees are generally referred by an organisation/individual they are currently known to (e.g. young carers' organisation, local authority, social workers) who recognise the need for targeted support and who deem Time4Me to be an appropriate support intervention for that individual. Sometimes, referrals to Time4Me are made by Forth Valley College staff once the student has started term and has been identified suitable for support. It is up to the individual to decide whether they wish to take up the offer of mentoring which has been a strength in promoting self-worth. For those in the target group, having a voice and taking ownership of the decision to participate is liberating and helps build trust in the programme as well as developing levels of self-confidence.



“ They ask if you are care experienced on the form ... but you never need to tell them one thing about your past unless you're ready to. Everything is on your basis, and you'd be surprised how many folk just sit and ask you a list of questions. They really do. I wasn't just fired into Time4Me ... the option was there. It wasn't forced on you. You can decide if you go.

Learner A, Forth Valley College

Time4Me mentoring is a targeted one-to-one activity that takes place for a recommended one hour a week, during academic term times. Mentors and mentees commit to that mentoring relationship for one academic year as a minimum and work on a voluntary basis. It was felt that the voluntary aspect of mentoring attracted committed individuals, not only keen to improve outcomes for their respective mentees, but who are also keen to enhance their own skills. Having a broad range of mentors from across various college departments and roles also

provides an opportunity for raising awareness and visibility of the project and encourages a sense of cross organisational cooperation. Currently, the role of the Time4Me coordinator allows up to 40 mentees to be supported by dedicated mentors.

Success factor: partnership working

Forth Valley College works closely with contacts, partnerships with organisations across three local authority areas – Stirling, Falkirk, and Clackmannanshire. College staff have also forged links with the Scottish Mentoring Network and other members of that network. The College leadership team promote projects and initiatives and use learning gathered to provide feedback.

“ Our Principal is quite outward facing and he’s keen that people come and visit us to see what we do and to see that we give government value for money ... so that we can then feedback challenges ... and he’s been doing quite a lot of that work recently. We think about what regional influence we have.

Anna Vogt, Forth Valley College

Time4Me actively engages with partnerships and contacts within the local community in addition to ‘in house’ knowledge as part of the strategic aim of fostering capacity building for the young person. When issues are divulged within mentoring sessions, mentors are able to draw on a broad range of experience from within college and actively signpost to internal support services. College partnership working and networking increase the provision of support services available, with college staff able to tap into a broader range of external agencies and contacts, broadening out the scope of support available. One mentor was able to draw on this expertise to help encourage support for their mentee and their family on disclosure of substance abuse.



“ We will signpost to Learning Support and to other agencies, that’s just what we do work with Social Work and Education for Colleges, and we work with those quite a lot, but we have support advisers who are the bank of other stuff going on. If my mentee came to me with a problem about accommodation, I would be able to go to support and guidance advisers and ask, ‘who are we best here to go and speak to?’ That’s how I found out about the Scottish Drug and Alcohol Abuse people, and they had conveniently been in the week before doing a presentation to the support and guidance advisers about what they do and how they work in the area. I’ve done that for quite a lot of my students if it’s around issues quite specific to things advisers like Neil, who knows a lot about domestic abuse, and people like him have a bank of people and they’ve built up relationships. We know that it’s safe and we can refer students onto this and it’s a good solid service.

Mentor A, Forth Valley College

Both the learner and the wider family were able to benefit from the support of an organisation supporting families affected by alcohol and substance misuse. The mentor was also able to engage the learner with a counselling service which has had a marked impact on the learner’s ability to maintain their studies.

“ My mentor got me in contact with Talking Rooms ... she got in touch with the mental health side of the College first ... and they arranged a counsellor through them first and I tell you, I’ve been to a lot of counselling and a lot of therapy, and the Talking Rooms are by far the best. I’ve never met someone who ever just got what I was going through in my life. You’ve never met them ... just spoken to them on the phone and I still managed to build up a relationship in one day and after just an hour’s session. And that’s where I really need to give Time4Me credit. It’s not just about them ... they really do open up other doors, and help out and they can offer you this, and offer you that.

Learner A, Forth Valley College

Time4Me has enabled those at risk of non-completion to be positively supported in seeking help on their terms, with a service which works for them, leading to engagement with internal and external support networks, all of which develop soft skills and foster greater independence. For this learner, participation in the programme had been life changing and had equipped her for a future beyond college.

“ When I started it was my mentor who helped me get into student advice and things like that. When I was in year 2 of the programme, my mentor helped me apply for the Transition Fund, and that covered me for my driving licence, 35 lessons and a test along with it, so it was a lot of money, but I wouldn’t have got that without her help. Through SAAS they helped me with things on my laptop, like MindMap and that can help me if I go onto uni so that support is still there, even if I leave here. I wouldn’t have done any of this without Time4Me ... printers and scanners and those things too. The application forms are tough, and I couldn’t have done it myself.

Learner A, Forth Valley College

College can not only be seen as a space for providing support to vulnerable learners but can be seen to be part of a wider community support ‘eco-system’. Through extended support, solutions can be found to help sustain the learner beyond the confines of the College course and provide a valuable foundation for further study or employment.



Success factor: changing college perceptions and practice

A significant unintended outcome of the Time4Me project is a change in perceptions and practices within the College, influenced by the lived experience of individual learners. Highlighted within the formal evaluation of the project and drawn out within case study interviews, mentors felt they had professionally benefited from their involvement in the programme, citing new skills and levels of awareness which they had been able to transfer into existing or new roles.

“ Mentors valued the opportunity to develop a respecting and trusting personal relationship to make a meaningful difference to an individual student’s life.

Project evaluation executive summary

“ I’ve got a greater understanding and appreciation of care experienced students and of students who are young carers. When I get my new course codes and I know what kinds of students I’m getting ... when I see care experienced, I now know lots of strategies to be able to communicate with that student and have an understanding of what they are actually going through as well.

Mentor B, Forth Valley College

Testimony of lived experience not only provided new perspectives for teaching staff, but also had an impact within the College Support Teams.

“ I got a lot of value out of that in terms of understanding where policies and procedures that I am implementing can impact. With barriers, you can be told about these things you can hear the stories but actually there’s something about hearing that completely personal point of view that adds another dimension to you understand the impact work has.

Anna Vogt, Forth Valley College

Where practices were seen to create additional barriers and further disadvantage for vulnerable learners, the project funding provided an initial solution and informed longer term and more sustainable practices.

“ What Time4Me did was to open a discretionary support fund and be able to bridge some of those gaps where policies don’t always work in the best interests of the student. Some of the things that happened in the first year made us go ... ‘whoa’. I had a 15-year-old exceptional entrant who couldn’t get PPE. They couldn’t get any money to buy PPE, but they couldn’t go into the workshop without PPE. There’s no mechanism in the College to fix that. So, in the meantime, we thought, ‘we’re going to fix that’. So Time4Me paid for that as it was a barrier to education.

Sarah Tervit, Forth Valley College

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic flagged up where policies and practices fell short of supporting students with complex needs and the Time4Me project was able to adapt and quickly respond, providing more immediate and practical solutions for vulnerable learners.

“ The laptops through Covid ... the procedure was that you need to come in and get ... but that doesn’t suit my mentee. I need to go there and take it to them. So that’s what I did for those who didn’t have money to come in. My mentee was looking after his mum and didn’t want to go out in case he brought Covid in to his mum. I was able to do that through my role. I could also feed that back and with us going onto hybrid learning, I was able to go back to IT and say ‘let’s look at this’. Let’s see how it works because people don’t always think about it. That can be a huge barrier. In terms of lifting people out of poverty, that kind of barrier is the difference between succeeding and not.

Sarah Tervit, Forth Valley College



Many colleges will have encountered similar challenges in responding to Covid-19 and the impact upon students. The structure and nature of the Time4Me programme meant that internally recruited mentors were exposed to the day-to-day realities through direct lived experience disclosed within mentoring sessions. The demographic of staff within the College, across all departments, was seen not seen as particularly diverse. Staff became more attuned to the complex and nuanced challenges of at-risk learners and began to rethink practice and procedures.

“ Covid has exposed more staff to students, whereas before they were probably more in the background. I.T. are used to dealing with I.T. and professional people in professional jobs. It was unfamiliar to them to deal with people who don't know how a laptop worked never mind how the system works in the organisation. We're not a really diverse staff ... even our age demographic is not that diverse. It's only when you engage with students that you start to see it differently.

Anna Vogt, Forth Valley College

This awareness extended beyond the Covid-19 response and has impacted day-to-day college practice. Commonly experienced scenarios are often re-evaluated to take into account the context of the target group.

“ I am picking up a sense of more understanding, even when I'm picking up the phone to funding, we know you can't say to someone living on your own that there's no money, and similarly with some lecturers there's that awareness that there may be more behind a student simply not just being in that class. That is what, for me, we're aiming at.

Mentor A, Forth Valley College



Success factor: capacity building for learners

Of huge significance for the mentees, has been the recognition of their own aspirations and an appreciation for the mentor taking time to understand them, impartially and without prior judgement.

“ It's really hard when you gone through the school system, and the minute you say you are a care leaver, they judge you. But with Time4Me, they don't care. They just want to help. It doesn't matter who you are.

Learner B, Forth Valley College

This has helped learners feel more comfortable and confident in making the transition to college and in staying the course of their studies. Mentors are trained to let the mentee drive the conversation, without prior agenda and this relaxed and safe space for discussion was welcomed.

“ Even when they talk to you, it's not like they say to you 'what do you want to talk about today?' or 'what's your problems?' ... they just let you ramble on and it free flows.

Learner B, Forth Valley College

“ There's no pushing on their side. If you say fine, then they don't keep pushing. You do things on your timescale. We used to meet in the office but now we go for a walk of go for a coffee or something ... and I find it easier walking and talking. I find it's better.

Learner A, Forth Valley College

Through the establishment of trusted relationships forged within the mentoring sessions, students have seen an increase in their confidence with learners developing a more positive outlook towards education than had been previously experienced.

“ A lot of our young people haven’t had a good experience of education, school refusers etc. ... and it’s trying to break that.

Sarah Tervit, Forth Valley College

A more positive engagement within the learning environment has encouraged positive interactions with support systems, increasing space for capacity building to be developed. Although many of the mentors come into the programme with particular expertise, Time4Me has been designed to enable the learner and build their capacity for growth and developing resilience. Mentors are trained not to be ‘fixers’ and to build confidence for the young person in taking affirmative steps for future success beyond the programme and college course.

“ An example of that is that one of our mentees needed to go to a particular support service. But her mentor manages that support service, so she has all the answers in her head and could probably just go in and fix that. But the student didn’t have the confidence to come up to the Hub and communicate what she needed. So, to help with that, the mentor didn’t do it for her ... but she went with her and said I am here. It’s about the mentee knowing someone is there and it’ll be ok. If she gets stuck, the mentor can jump in and help ... but it’s about showing the mentee that they need to do this. That mentee now interacts with those people and can do that independently. It’s building that capacity as you’re not going to have a mentor forever. We talk about what is going to happen after that.

Sarah Tervit, Forth Valley College

The programme provided a safe space for mentees to talk through any anxieties around their course choice or around more general issues affecting their ability to engage with learning. The mentors could identify and raise concerns around the potential for withdrawal and via the coordinator, alternatives learning opportunities could be explored and implemented.

“ When I met my mentee, she was incredibly stressed, her anxiety was through the roof, and she was basically on the wrong course. She wasn’t enjoying it, was completely withdrawn, and would have dropped off the radar completely. She also had quite a lot of people involved around her, and she didn’t know who she should turn too with a particular question ... there was just this massive list of people. Now, both me and Sarah, we supported her in withdrawing from her course and applying for a new one, which was a January start, and she’s still here. Now she’s absolutely loving it, she thinks this is the best course ever and she’s made plans for next year. She’s applied for a different course completely to what she had been doing before and her friendship group has improved dramatically. It’s been all about building confidence with her and giving her the skills to be able to tackle problems instead of being so overwhelmed.

Mentor B, Forth Valley College



Success factor: providing practical resources and support

Noted by the project coordinator, all the students referred are experiencing the impact of deprivation even if that is not the primary driver within the initial referral. Whilst every referral and mentee faced a unique set of individual circumstances, common points of risk were identified and were of concern for the project and formed part of the response to tackling poverty. Time4Me directly intervenes at noted key points of risk which predominantly centre around college closure times. The project responds by issuing care packages for the young people which provide practical support and are presented as gifts.

“ These times are highlighted as a point of risk. Christmas and Easter when people are alone ... Sarah and June, over the last few years, have created Care Packages that are useful ... but are also gifts. They’ve got a bit of food in them, a voucher. At Easter ... an Easter egg, at Christmas ... maybe a book or something that can occasionally be tailored to the individual based on how much they work. Then they all get delivered and that’s all funded through the Time4Me funding.

Anna Vogt, Forth Valley College

Often mentors may wish to provide their mentees with a gift and to maintain appropriate boundaries, it was decided that the mentors would get to deliver the care packages to mentees. Where students haven’t been in college and perhaps disengaging, the coordinator steps in to deliver the care package on behalf of the mentor. In scenarios where it was known that a mentee may benefit from a staff clearing out furniture for example, this is again discussed with the coordinator, and it is the project rather than the mentor who directly facilitates any such exchange. For the recipients, the care packages are highly valued and appreciated.



“ They go that step further. At Easter I got an Easter egg, and a wee pack ... and we got stuff at Christmas too. It was lovely. My wee boy was like ‘look what you’ve got mummy’ ... and it was nice.

Learner B, Forth Valley College

Through the mentoring sessions, mentors are also able to pick up on any crisis points, around issues of food poverty for example and can look to create a positive intervention through opening up a conversation.

“ Thinking about my mentee, she had just gone on placement, and she started talking about her feelings, she had been feeling really faint, and she was faint on the bus, and off the bus ... and as you start to unpick that, there’s clearly something going on ... even though it’s just wee things. You’re able to pick that up every week because you’re seeing them regularly and these are things that could otherwise have just got lost. You have that contact, and if you notice they’ve been talking about feeling faint over a couple of weeks, you can ask what’s going on with their eating ... are they eating enough and open it from there. Sometimes they’ve never had someone there pulling together those threads.

Mentor A, Forth Valley College

The mentoring sessions, in addition to providing resources for successful learning, also support and promote longer term and sustainable strategies for future success. The project discretionary funding can target poverty via facilitating the purchase of desks, chairs, or other resources to support the mentee's learning, however, mentees are also gently encouraged to reflect on 'who can help you with that?' and to engage with support and guidance advisers to help make a discretionary financing application and promote sustainable practices.

“ I think it's very kind of basic steps really. For example, with my mentee we're looking at a plan for her over the summer to help her manage her money, and to make sure that when she gets to August that she's ok till her SAAS comes in then. We do a lot of discussion about all the jobs she has on the go ... she actually has 4 jobs, and we'll have a look at her budgets and how she's managing everything.

Mentor A, Forth Valley College

Success factor: raising aspirations

Time4Me has created an environment in which the young people participating see a value in themselves and in continuing their learning. For the project coordinator, it's about saying 'look at this opportunity and look what you can do' as no one has maybe told the learners that they are good enough before. Many of the learners emphasise goals and ambitions that they have for the future and Time4Me creates an opportunity for these goals to be affirmed as valid and achievable.

“ Sometimes the hard part to foster is already there and you just keep working on that. With her, she is putting money aside and she doesn't want to be living where she's currently living ... and it's just chatting and thinking about that and looking at where she wants to be.

Mentor A, Forth Valley College

“ I actually came back for my little boy. I've got a 3yr old and I wanted to give him a better future. I've got a plan. I want to be a residential care worker cos I used to live in residential care ... so I want to go back and give them the support that I never really got, if that makes sense? I want to make it better for other children and for my wee boy, I don't want him to see that mum is just sitting in the house doing nothing. She's actually out working and she's at college ... actually at college. I've got a wee part time job just now and it's good to give him a better life and I'll stick at it.

Learner B, Forth Valley College

When the learner is able to build capacity, they in turn see that they have skills and strengths which builds a confidence in their ability to sustain their course, opening space to upwardly re-evaluate their aspirations. Whether aspirations are related to achieving goals within education or employment, Time4Me is about showing someone they can actually do what they set out to achieve or more. Taking part in the programme gave the learners real belief in their goals

“ She makes you realise that you really are worth it. That you have a dream, and you are worth it, so why not chase it.

Learner A, Forth Valley College





Barriers/challenges

The Time4Me project has been widely seen as a highly successful initiative and has been positively received by both mentors, mentees and within the wider college community. The success of the project has been largely accredited to the project coordinator, and this has been noted as an area of risk within formal evaluation of the project. This has been taken on board and the aim is to embed a more sustainable model which can be replicated should staffing changes occur.

“ It’s all about a recruitment process and recruitment choices. If Sarah’s post became available you wouldn’t look to recruit a Sarah Mark II, but you would look to recruit somebody that might use different skill sets but move through the College in the same way. Actually, what we do need is systemised processes that reduces the risk of somebody exiting and we can’t replicate the work she’s doing as it all hinged on her. We are doing a lot of work as a department to identify those areas of risk, as where you do become quite lean, and rely on an individual’s skills set rather than the service itself is a risk.

Anna Vogt, Forth Valley College

The voluntary nature of mentor recruitment relies heavily on good will and recent concerns over increased workload, time constraints and college restructuring may impact on the sustainability and consistency of existing and future mentor-mentee relationships.

Resisting the desire to ‘fix’ can be a personal challenge to resist for mentors, particularly as Covid-19 lockdowns impacted upon mentees. The mentor training and supervision incorporated within the project was however seen as robust and helpful in ensuring boundaries were maintained to facilitate a supportive environment in which mentees could develop individually tailored strategies and build capacity for future success.

“ It’s been good for me as it’s challenged me and by nature, I’m a fixer. I’ve not always found that a particularly comfortable part of the journey.

Mentor A, Forth Valley College



Next steps

The project remains part funded by The Robertson Trust with additional funding being supplied from the College’s arm’s length foundation. The next phase of the project is to look at any groups the College considers to be under served, perhaps resulting from a lack of a dedicated service. The College also plans to look at a more systemised approach to early interventions and in identifying learners for whom intervention may be appropriate.

“ There’s a transition element at the next phase of the project we need to get better at that. We also need to look at what resources we need to do that because everybody’s doing a wee bit here and there. No one really owns the transition, but can we systemise that so that it doesn’t require a person to facilitate it all.

Anna Vogt, Forth Valley College

Mentoring will continue and remains a peak intervention. The College aims to take forward and embed the learning gained from the project to continue to better inform sustainable practices and create positive outcomes for the most vulnerable learners.

“ Time4Me has given us so much in terms of learning. We have taken note of all these things and have tried to influence, as the Time4Me won’t be there forever and we’re not naïve about that. So it’s about what can we take from that learning to go back and to change some of our practices which aren’t access friendly and actually further disadvantage people.

Sarah Tervit, Forth Valley College

CASE STUDY 4



Glasgow Kelvin College

STAY

Partners: Glasgow Colleges Regional Board; Glasgow Kelvin College; City of Glasgow College; West College Scotland; Action for Children

Focus: Wrap-around support for enrolled college students who are care experienced to maintain and sustain college success

Description

Launched in February 2019, STAY is a regional programme funded by the Glasgow Colleges Region Board. The programme is facilitated by the Action for Children (Action for Children) organisation in partnership with Glasgow Kelvin College, City of Glasgow College, and West College Scotland. Its remit is to support care experienced learners, aged 16-24. The programme applies front line preventative measures to ensure care experienced learners remain in college.

Glasgow Kelvin College's high number of learners identified as care experienced emphasises the criticality of the STAY programme.



“ There was a much more demonstrable need for a project like this at Kelvin for a number of reasons: the volume of care experienced learners that we had – not just those who were identifiable as care experienced, but those students that we knew were care experienced, but wouldn't recognise that within themselves. Particularly the 'looked after at home' cohort who don't see themselves as in the care system but are probably the most vulnerable cohort of care experienced learners you can work with.

Maggie Murphy, Glasgow Kelvin College

Based on an awareness of multiple external issues experienced by care experienced learners, STAY at Glasgow Kelvin College is working to prevent this group of vulnerable learners from dropping out of education due to non-college related issues.



Success factor: partnership

STAY is notably successful at Glasgow Kelvin College because of the close partnership between college staff and Action for Children staff. In summer 2019, Action for Children staff met with Glasgow Kelvin College staff at the College's East End campus, where a discussion around the feasibility of the programme at Kelvin took place.

“ We were asked, ‘do you think this will work in Kelvin’, which to me was rhetorical, because, yes, there’s need, there’s demand, there’s opportunity. I knew right away there would be massive gains and massive opportunities to refer young people and other people in the College.

Maggie Murphy, Glasgow Kelvin College

Working in collaboration with 42 learning and community centres, Glasgow Kelvin College is entrenched in college learning development delivery. By default, the College works in partnership, meaning there was a strong foundation in place for the relationship with Action for Children to take hold. Now, Action for Children staff are situated in the Advice, Guidance and Learner Support office at Glasgow Kelvin College's East End campus. *“We’ve organically grown together; we’ve just embedded, and it’s taken hold”* (Marlyn Davidson). The foundational relationship between Glasgow Kelvin College and Action for Children has enabled the STAY programme to flourish in Glasgow's East End, and the people at the heart of the programme make it work.

“ Their passion is community support. Our passion is community support. So, when we come in with an ambition to support college students, we know there’s a wraparound required. It’s not going to just stop at the College, and most of the barriers that students face is externally. And that’s where the teamwork makes such a difference.

Marlyn Davidson, Action for Children

The impact of poverty in the geographic areas of Glasgow Kelvin College's campuses, and the community profile of the College, means that college staff are often the first point of contact for learners. Due to the nature of Action for Children being present in the College, in conversation with Advice, Guidance and Learner Support staff, Action for Children staff are able to access learners who can benefit from the programme.

“ This project has evolved significantly. One of the things about our faculty is we were very, very quick to get Marlyn and her team into our senior management faculty meeting on a Friday morning so they could meet all the curriculum managers and they had the opportunity to hear a bit about the project, so they were immediately immersed in college life and college activity. They never sat as an add on, they’re not an add on, we are complementary in the work and the practice that we do. They give a significant added value and significant added resource which is brilliant.

Maggie Murphy, Glasgow Kelvin College

Action for Children staff receive referrals from the College Advice, Guidance and Learner Support team, in addition to college course tutors – the teaching staff who provide guidance to their students – who are best placed to refer learners; they know the learners best. Since the course tutors were made aware of the programme, referrals have increased.

“ When Claire and Stephen [Action for Children] had the opportunity to come and speak to our faculty members, the information was immediately cascaded to course tutors: the spike in referrals, the spike in questions, the awareness of the project, the understanding of the criteria and the needs of the project just spiked.

Maggie Murphy, Glasgow Kelvin College



It's not only the close partnership of the College and Action for Children that has assisted the success of the STAY programme, but also partnerships with local community organisations and local charities. For example, Action for Children links in with the Urban Fox Programme, a voluntary managed project, providing young people within the East End of Glasgow with a wide range of educational and diversionary activities. *"When we know that they have stuff that we can use, additional vouchers, we tap into relationships that we've built with those guys already. We seek out those kinds of partnerships"* (Stephen O'Donnell, Glasgow Kelvin College). There is whole systems approach that enables STAY to thrive.

“ I like to see STAY as we're filling in the gaps. We work with a lot of external organisations as well to support the young person. Sometimes the referrals I've had, they've had support from external organisations but they're also very limited in what they can do so it's like, we come in and we fill in the gaps. When other organisations, or the College can't do things because of the way their policies work, we come in. That's how I like to think of it.

Aqsa Baig, Action for Children

The Action for Children staff have created a network of organisations to provide material resources, and in doing so, they are tackling multiple issues around poverty: food poverty; period poverty; fuel poverty; and digital poverty. Resources provided enable learning to continue, and the staff are always finding new avenues to get support and material.

“ We beg from everybody to get stuff! For example, there was the wellbeing fund for food parcels during lockdown. We went to Iceland and Semichem and they gave us a warehouse full of stuff. And that's the method we use, we're a charity, so we need to reach out. We engage with an organisation that's a law firm and through that engagement, I have just now written up principles of where they could provide us with support that can support students. It's a wish list that we narrowed down to 10 principles that mention financial support, but there's also bits in there that's about work experience, that's about connectivity, feasibility study ... I reach out to everybody that I can, that's the stuff that goes on behind the scenes. We get support from the Scottish Government as well.

Marlyn Davidson, Action for Children

Working together with local charities allows for the project to be sustainable. *"Resources can only matter where they matter. If we give all our resources out, we won't have that blood bank of resource there for emergencies. So, we reach out to these organisations, we go back and check discretionary funding and make it happen"* (Marlyn Davidson)

Impact factor: direct intervention

The programme provides foundational support to make sure everything's in place for the learner before they begin their learner journey at college, including assisting with college inductions, finance, travel, and other administrative arrangements. A pre-college induction occurs in June. Bringing the care experienced learners to campus before the official start date, helps create a positive and welcoming environment for the learner, and aids retention: learners know where to go to for support before the College year starts. Additionally, STAY provides support with other essential factors that can prevent a learner from accessing education due to health and identity status, such as helping learners sign up to GP practices, and applying for passports, birth certificates, and the Young Scot Card for travel.

“ I'd made referrals for learners to get ID documents that they didn't have. Getting birth certificates which helps them with opening bank accounts, applying for the young person's free bus travel, their student funding applications for college, to get their EMAs, their care experienced bursaries as well. A lot of young people, due to their backgrounds, maybe they've moved around a lot, or maybe are no longer with their families, or they just don't have the document, being able to access that stuff's vital.

Fiona Templeton, Glasgow Kelvin College

Some of the most crucial work provided by the STAY programme is around crisis management, and this direct intervention prevents drop out.

“ Going back to lockdown, quite quickly we realised that a lot of learners we were trying to support didn't have access to devices or internet, and straight away we got a whole bunch of referrals in, and they were delivered to these young people's houses during the restrictions, so they were able to access their college work and continue.

Fiona Templeton, Glasgow Kelvin College

STAY supported a learner who was struggling due to a relationship breakdown negatively impacting their financial situation. The programme helped with utility bills and essential food, enabling the learner to continue to study during a period of stress and hardship. The learner's college attendance improved, in addition to experiencing increased motivation and confidence to continue studying.

“ STAY has been a great support. They listened and understood my issues and worked closely with Action for Children Manager and Maggie from the College to overcome some of my barriers. I can't believe they helped me pay off some bills, got me food and helped to keep me on track. I am looking forward to achieving my qualification and planning the next step of my life.

Anonymous beneficiary, STAY

When emergencies arise, the staff are ready to act. Each Action for Children staff member has a case load, but additional emergency cases emerge. The College and Action for Children staff liaise to ensure support is provided immediately to prevent further disadvantage.

“ We had a learner whose family home was destroyed by fire. Straight away these guys [Action for Children] came in and got emergency supplies for the young person who was one of our students at the time. We were able to get her clothes and emergency food and things like that sorted out. That was the very next day. That really preserved that learner’s relationship with the College and the support available through their team and us. I think we could have easily lost that young person at that point and that didn’t happen because she had somewhere safe to fall back on.

Fiona Templeton, Glasgow Kelvin College

The programme has had additional benefits to the life of the College, such as the mental health support provided through the ‘Walk and Talk’ activity: taking learners out of the College building to ask how they are doing. This service is provided by the STAY programme mentors and is implemented to support learners who struggle with eye-to-eye contact when discussing mental health issues. This function of the STAY programme is filtering into different aspects of college provision.

“ I was delighted to hear that one of the College staff has taken up this approach for learners who require someone to talk to but don’t want eye-to-eye contact. So what we’re doing seems to be working and we hope it will reach much wider going forward.

Marlyn Davidson, Action for Children



Success factor: supporting transitions

The STAY programme not only provides support to learners while they are studying on a college programme but assists with transitions when learners are ready to move on to more advanced courses. The Action for Children staff don’t see people who leave the College as no longer under their care. They also provide assistance for learners beyond the College system. They can find other courses and ways to help the people.

“ If it turns out that college is not for that young person, if they drop out, we don’t say, because you’re not a student anymore we can’t work with you. We will find that young person another destination, another positive, whether that is a shorter-term training course just to build their confidence, whether it’s finding them a job, whatever it is that they want to do next, we will help them get on that path. And it could be that in 10 years’ time they come back to college and that’s the right time for them. So, we do work with the young person and always encourage them to stick to college, but if it isn’t for them, we will support them to find their next positive destination.

Claire Lumsden, Action for Children

STAY supported a learner who was displaying disruptive behaviour at college. With the support of STAY, the learner was able to find a more appropriate destination and continues to stay in education.

“ The STAY worker helped me fix out my situation as the course was not for me. They fixed my money out and helped me with my application to my next course. I was not settled but feel better now and to know that STAY are just a call away is so good.

Anonymous beneficiary, STAY

Success factor: a programme without borders

STAY at Kelvin cuts across boundaries. It started as an initiative to support care experienced learners; now, the programme's remit has extended to any learner identified as vulnerable. No one is turned away.

“ The other thing about the Action for Children guys is that if we present them with a case, or a young person, or a student, that doesn't 100% fit the criteria, one of the beauties of this project which sets it apart, is that they will look at it. And even if they can't do something exclusively, they will do something indirectly. Where we can give something, we'll give something. And these guys [Action for Children], all the time, respond positively. So, it started initially as just care experienced, and just in three Glasgow colleges, and has significantly evolved.

Maggie Murphy, Glasgow Kelvin College

The programme is no longer solely about retention of care experienced learners; it's about safety, health, and wellness for any learner considered vulnerable.

Impact factor: community intervention

One of the key benefits of the programme is that it does not operate strictly to the College term time. Action for Children staff understand that learners can become distant from the College over holiday periods. The STAY programme facilitates events over the summer: some specifically for care experienced learners, but also activities for generally vulnerable learners. This additional support maintains the link between the College and the learner all year round.

“ We don't work exclusively to term time which is a huge benefit to the work we do. So over easter holidays and summer holidays when a student might need that one positive adult in their life, we can be that over that time. If we're not there, they could quite easily fall off the face of the earth and not return to college. But we're there to try and stop that over non-term time. Over term time when the College is closed, we'll check in over the phone, Microsoft teams meetings, texts message chats, we meet in the community, at cafes, libraries. When lockdown was a thing, we were meeting in the young person's house if that was allowed [...] we do go into the community and provide that support.

Stephen O'Donnell, Glasgow Kelvin College

The impact of the STAY programme at Glasgow Kelvin College extends from the College learner to the family and filters out to the community. The programme begins with the learner and has grown to provide community support to individuals and families living in areas of multiple deprivation. Via the College, STAY aims to provide life and finance support to the community; the impact of the programme transcends the College.

“ A lot of the support we provide it’s not just to do with college work and making sure they attain at college. We provide a lot of support in the community as well. So we deal with support about relationship breakdowns, or if they’re having housing issues, or financial issues, stuff like that. [...] because we do this it transcends further than the student itself; we go into families and provide a lot of family support as well. The family is an extension of the student. We take a holistic approach, looking at every aspect of the student’s life and provide what support we can to ensure the College environment is a better experience for the student and make sure that they’re well supported.

Stephen O’Donnell, Glasgow Kelvin College

“ When you go in to support the student, they’re at the forefront of your mind, the forefront of your intentions for providing some sort of support. We’re not going in with the intention of providing support for the family, but if offshoots from the primary support when you see the circumstances the student may be living in. You see the background that they grew up in [...] when I’ve been supporting students sometimes its financial ... then it’s about providing advice to the parents whether it be advocacy advice about benefits or referring them to foodbanks or pantries and stuff like this. It’s not expected support for families but because it does transcend from providing support to students, we do that.

Stephen O’Donnell, Glasgow Kelvin College

The consequences of the Covid-19 lockdowns extended the remit of the STAY programme further into the community. Action for Children staff delivered tech equipment to ensure learners could continue to access their studies. However, they were delivering not only devices, but food, sanitary products, welfare bags with shaving foam, shavers,

underwear etc. The direct intervention provided to learners during the lockdown isolation periods, also supported the learners’ families, and the community.

“ [...] the whole balance starts with the family, or the care place the young person’s living in, or the street they’re living on. We do our best to just bring them back to life and through giving them that extra blood support we’re able to then build their strengths up [...] we try to make that young person’s life count in every way possible.

Marlyn Davidson, Action for Children

Before the lockdowns, the STAY programme had not previously supplied connectivity. This extension to the support provided, and the structure of how the learners were being reached during the lockdowns, enabled the programme to continue to support learners and their families at those crucial times. Being able to hand the device over to learners at home allowed Action for Children staff to make sure the learners were safe at a time when they couldn’t go to college.

“ The engagement with us, even from a wellbeing perspective, that meant we could check in with them and see how they were doing and was the family OK for food and all these things as well, you know. Just to be able to maintain the communication was vital in those early stages. Allowing them to progress with their college work despite the restrictions and the lockdowns.

Fiona Templeton, Glasgow Kelvin College

The support extended further during the Christmas period and Action for Children staff delivered food vouchers to learners and their families on Christmas Eve.



Barriers/challenges

While the STAY programme has been highly successful at Glasgow Kelvin College, changes in Action for Children staff have created pressure on the smooth functioning of the programme. However, this has not adversely affected the learners at the heart of the programme. The Action for Children staff and Glasgow Kelvin College staff are integrally connected and overcome challenges as they arise in order to continue to deliver crucial support to vulnerable learners.

The main barrier to gaining permission for the roll out of the programme has been around finding a space to work. It is the hope of Action for Children that promoting the success of the STAY programme at Glasgow Kelvin College will encourage other colleges to adopt a similar structure.

“ The biggest challenge has been trying to find a space to work from [in the College] and feeling you’re part of a team. Basically, with Kelvin we’re a family.

Marlyn Davidson, Action for Children

Moving forward

Referrals for the STAY programme at Glasgow Kelvin College continue to grow as more college staff realise the benefit of the programme to vulnerable learners. Consequently, the programme continues to expand, from supporting care experienced learners to other learners in need, and the type of support provided to learners is evolving too.

“ Self-evaluation is important for us. Looking at case studies and identifying recurring themes. If we’re seeing recurring themes around homelessness for example, then that’s what we should be responding to. If that’s what coming to us, that’s what’s being faced by learners on the front line, so it’s about us being able to respond to that.

Maggie Murphy, Glasgow Kelvin College

The impact of the STAY programme has surpassed the expectations of the Action for Children staff.

“ Way surpassed. Our initial intention was to support care experienced learners on a journey. When I came in, I didn’t think there was going to be support to grow, although I had my own agenda of where I wanted to take this, and shape it, and right now, there’s nothing to stop us doing what we’re doing. It’s about growing and looking at what the environment needs, and if a student needs something different [...] we find a different thing that I hadn’t thought would be an issue, that they would come to us with that issue, but we respond to it.

Marlyn Davidson, Action for Children

Funding for the STAY programme is set to continue for a further three years at least, with The Robertson Trust and Glasgow City Council Education Services now providing support in addition to the Glasgow Colleges Regional Board. Glasgow City Council Education support allowed Action for Children to employ three additional staff members to work on the programme. The Robertson Trust's input has allowed for the STAY programme to grow further: *"people are recognising how this is evolving"* (Marlyn Davidson). It is the hope of the Action for Children team that other institutions will see the benefit of the programme for vulnerable learners and that the programme may be implemented in universities and other educational institutions.

“ Glasgow Colleges Regional Board have funded us for another year we expect that to continue. The Robertson Trust is only 6 months into play, so we're going to be around for at least another three years. We're also looking at expanding wider to other local authorities to duplicate what we're doing because it's worked here. We now have the evidence that it has worked. And to make that shine in those areas too. I think in as much as there's been recognition that there was a gap [for care experienced learners]

no one was taking it on board. I think with Maggie [Glasgow Kelvin College] being aware of where those gaps were, and then me coming in and delivering on it, has made the programme such a success. We're not ever going to be short of students that need support. If we take each student, and provide what they need, we can't do much better than that. And I can see this going into universities and wider. I think there's a definite need for this alongside what the College does just now. And the crucial point of any of that is communication, and if we can have open transparent communication, understanding of what's needed then we can deliver on it. That's my ambition. My ambition is that we can have a conversation in 20 years' time when I'm retired and this team here are all flourishing, and we'll be showing our success. That's my ambition. We don't know what's ahead in Scottish government or how it's going to pan out, but if it's within my control it will still be here.

Marlyn Davidson, Action for Children



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