

Agenda Item	7
Report No	HSW-04-24

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Health, Social Care and Wellbeing

Date: 14 February 2024

Report Title: Home to Highland Programme - Evaluations

Report By: Executive Chief Officer Health and Social Care

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report provides members with oversight of two evaluations of the Home to Highland Programme which works to return care experienced young people to the Highlands from out of authority residential placements, whilst developing services in Highland to prevent young people requiring to move out of authority.
- 1.2 The report also highlights both the challenges and the successes of the programme highlighting areas for improvement and next steps for the programme.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are invited to note:
 - (i) and comment on the report and evaluations; and
 - (ii) the areas for improvement and next steps contained within the evaluations.

3. Implications

- 3.1 Resource – The evaluations consider the resources associated with the programme to achieve the outcomes.
- 3.2 Legal –The evaluations have a focus on meeting the requirements of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- 3.3 Community (Equality, Poverty, Rural and Island) – The report and evaluations highlight some of the challenges for equality for young people living in rural areas and acknowledges the socio-economic impacts on families.
- 3.4 Climate Change / Carbon Clever – Not applicable
- 3.5 Risk – The financial risks associated with the programme are highlighted in the evaluations.

3.6 Health and Safety - None

3.7 Gaelic – Not applicable

4. **Background**

4.1 Home to Highland is the strategic approach and service for care experienced children and young people (CECYP) with a key purpose of enabling them to remain living and learning in the Highland area.

4.2 The vision of the Programme is to return care experienced young people to the Highlands from out of authority residential placements, whilst also developing services in Highland to prevent young people requiring to move out of authority. Home to Highland is a fundamental component of Children's Services Families 1st Strategy - *to safely maintain children with their families in the Highlands.*

4.3 Although the work to support both the care and educational needs of the children on the programme are fully integrated, for the purpose of evaluation, it was agreed that in addition to the evaluation of the entire programme, there should be an additional external evaluation of the education programme. The scope of this education evaluation was agreed across both the Health and Social Care and Education and Learning directorates.

4.4 As integral to the Health and Social Care services quality assurance arrangements, the review of the Home to Highland programme was undertaken in November and December 2023. The education evaluation was undertaken in early December 2023.

5. **Home to Highland Evaluation Report**

5.1 The report at **Appendix 1** subtitled, "Don't be sorry for me, this is the best care home in the World" outlines the vision and drivers and key aims for the programme, it provides detail on the programme team and the work undertaken with partner agencies and organisations. It provides detail on the range and purpose of the children's houses and the services developed within the programme.

5.2 The second part of the report highlights key quantitative and qualitative data used to evaluate the programme and concludes with areas for improvement and future development.

6. **Home to Highland Education Evaluation**

6.1 The report at **Appendix 2** entitled, 'A review of the Home to Highland Service with an exploration as to whether this is the best model for meeting the educational needs of care experienced learners' was written following a three-day visit from Jennifer King from the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (ADES). The terms of this review were agreed across both the Health and Social Care and Education and Learning directorates.

6.2 The report sets out the rationale for the evaluation and provides some background and context detail. It highlights what the research says about education provision for Care Experienced children and young people with reference to virtual schools and 'alternative' provision. The methodology used to undertake this appreciative enquiry is

detailed and the views of the range of participants including key stakeholders, young people and their families rehearsed.

- 6.3 The overall findings and reflections are detailed towards the end of the evaluation which concludes with a section on what change looks like.

7. **Next Steps**

- 7.1 The work of the programme is underpinned by a detailed programme plan. The key areas for improvement articulated within the evaluation are outlined within the improvement plan with a clear articulation of priorities, actions and timelines for completion.
- 7.2 The home to Highland Education manager also has a detailed plan which has been updated to include the recommendations contained within the external evaluation. Colleagues from the Education and Learning service are working alongside the team to ensure that we achieve improved collaboration across the systems articulated within the evaluation.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer Health and Social Care

Date: 18 January 2024

Authors: Ian Kyle – Integrated Children’s Services
Margaret McIntyre - Head of Children and Justice Social Work Services
Malina MacDonald-Dawson - Programme Manager, Home to Highland

Home to Highland Self Evaluation Report

“Don’t be sorry for me, this is the best care home in the World.”

Contents

Background and Context to the Home to Highland Programme.....	2
Vision and Drivers:	3
Key Aims:.....	4
Programme Launch, Development and Governance.....	4
Programme Team and Associated Colleagues.....	5
Home to Highland - Care Experienced Education Team.....	6
Work with Partner Agencies and Organisations.....	6
Project Management.....	6
Services Developed by the Programme.....	7
Core and Cluster Model.....	7
Small Houses for Younger Children.....	8
Houses for Children Living with Complex Disabilities.....	8
Àrach Respite Care and Outreach Centre.....	8
Sylvan.....	9
Clachnaharry.....	9
Merkinch Primary CEYP Education Base (Former Family Resource Centre).....	10
New Education Base and Respite House.....	10
Braeside Residential House.....	10
Headline Quantitative Data.....	10
Greatly Reduced Number of Children in OOA Residential Placements.....	10
Cost Avoidance.....	11
Highland Council Quality Award 2019.....	12
Shift in Balance of Spend.....	12
Budget Management and Savings.....	12
Budget for CEYP Education Workstream.....	12
Data Gathered.....	13
How Work is Recorded.....	13
Return Destination Table.....	13
What the Data Tells Us.....	14
Changes in Need and Complexity of Children.....	14
Impact of Covid on the Programme.....	14
Qualitative Data.....	15

Programme Achievements:.....	15
Improved lives.....	15
Services and Tracking Already in Place	16
Top-down and Bottom-up Support.....	16
Positive Relationships Across the Council.....	16
Positive Relationships Within Children’s Services	16
Changing the Culture	16
Programme Maintains a Whole System Approach.....	17
H2H Staff Members.....	17
Areas of Improvement & Development:.....	17
Family-based care	17
Singleton placements.....	17
Continuing Care Requests.....	18
Adults Living in the Orchard.....	18
Annual Evaluation of Home to Highland.....	19
Appendix: Children, Family and Staff Voice and Testimony	19
Lead Professional for Child with Complex Disabilities Returned to Highland	19
Mother of Child with Complex Disabilities Returned to Highland.....	20
Shirley Jack, Manager, Highland	20
Case Study of Child Returned to Residential House in Highland	20
Case Study of Child Returned to Residential House in Highland Then Foster Care.....	21
Case Study of Older Young Person Moved from Residential OOA to Flat with Support	21
Case Study of Older Young Person Returned to Parents from OOA.....	21
Case Study of Older Young Person Moved to College from Residential.....	22
Video Testimony of Two Residential Managers.....	22
Testimony of a Further Residential Manager	22
Testimony of Placement Officer	23
Testimony of H2H Programme Special Projects Coordinator	23
Testimony of Forensic and Clinical Psychologist.....	24

Background and Context to the Home to Highland Programme

In 2018, The Highland Council agreed an ambitious Business Plan to further develop in-Highland resources for Care Experienced Young People (CEYP). This followed the success of the Alternative to Out of Authority (OOA) Programme, which had returned young people from outwith Highland, and achieved a Bronze COSLA Excellence Award in 2016, for achieving better outcomes for children.

Children’s Services had reviewed the outcomes of young people placed in OOA provisions, and were confident care, education and wellbeing outcomes could be improved. It was considered that

we had become reliant on placing young people outwith Highland particularly for children and young people requiring specialist support within mainstream school or at home, those children presenting with distress response behaviour within Highland residential provisions and young people with an ASD diagnosis, sometimes with other co-morbidities.

There was a tendency for young people to stay in these OOA placements for a considerable time with many not returning until they were 18 or 19 years old because Social Workers considered these were the best placements and considered that there were no suitable alternatives in Highland.

A clear rationale was developed by the Programme Manager to assess which services currently out of Highland were financially viable to be replicated in-area, whilst meeting children's needs. This required data analysis to determine cohorts of young people with similar needs and assessing the financial implications of developing accommodations and supports in Highland. The Programme Manager and Placement Officer, worked collaboratively with multi-disciplinary front-line professionals to identify children whose needs could be met in Highland.

In addition to improving outcomes, a key driver was cost, as these budgets were increasing year on year and the Council wanted to ensure funding was being used more equitably for as many children as possible rather than a very large budget being spent on a comparatively small cohort of children.

In June 2018 Children's Services were instructed to continue to spend the full CEYP budget (£10.9 million), but to shift the spend from OOA placements to new services in Highland, which would benefit local children.

Vision and Drivers:

The vision of the Programme, now called Home to Highland (H2H), was to return care experienced young people to the Highlands from OOA residential placements, whilst also developing services in-area to avoid needing specialist, OOA provisions.

This was to enable Highland children to remain in their communities they knew rather than living far away from their families, friends and schools and feeling disconnected from them. Families would then not have to travel considerable distances to visit their young people, likewise Social Workers.

The feedback from young people and families was that they experienced a different culture in their OOA placements, and they reported trying to fit-in and developing different accents for example. One boy reported asking about whether there was a local shinty team and being ridiculed. Their clear message was that children wished to remain in the communities they have grown up in and near their families, people, and places they know whenever possible.

Another key driver was the Children's Act 2014. It was believed the Act would have the impact of more children remaining in care to an older age of up to 21, therefore this was a further impetus to obtain a more varied suite of accommodations for our CEYP.

Emphasis was placed on building and maintaining positive relationships. In line with the Children's Act (and now the Promise), Highland Council has strived to retain the positive relationships young people have in their lives, including with their care staff. Having these staff support their transition to new accommodations and the development of their independence skills until they are ready for their own tenancy was agreed to be optimum.

Key Aims:

The Programme's central aims were to:

1. Reduce spot purchased OOA residential care placements.
2. Retain more young people in the Highland area.
3. Shift the balance of spend from OOA to in-area.
4. Improve educational achievement and attainment for CEYP.

Programme Launch, Development and Governance

The expanded Programme was launched in June 2018 through a series of briefings and workshops across Children's Services, with external stakeholders and third sector organisations such as the Police, Who?Cares Scotland and NHS Highland.

Project ideas and new services came from extensive consultations with staff, Managers and former CEYP who were asked to contribute to the development and ideology of projects, with larger services developed, as a result of smaller successful pilots.

The Programme Manager's role was to identify relevant research, projects, and good practice in other Councils across the UK. These findings were integrated into the project planning, although many of the projects are bespoke to Highland. The impact each project had on the numbers of children returning and the outcomes for children were evidenced and new services which proved cost effective and successful were replicated across Highland.

A Communication Strategy was developed and implemented to ensure all stakeholders were kept abreast of actions and a monthly Programme Board governed the implementation of the Programme Action Plan. This was then subsumed into the Council's Budget and Change Programme and monthly Programme Boards were held within that framework. Concurrently, the Programme work, and progress was reported to the Council's Health & Social Care Committee via dedicated reports and quarterly updates were provided through the Revenue Report on the budget, return numbers, services developed with improved outcomes to children's lives detailed. This continues to be the formal governance route now that the programme is no longer within the Council's Change Programme.

Internal governance and scrutiny is through the Children's Services Management Structure with the Programme Manager reporting to the Head of Performance and Improvement and the Head of Children's Services. Day to day progress and implementation is monitored at a monthly Operational Programme meeting attended by the programme team and associated staff and managers and is chaired by the Strategic Lead for Care and Support. Children Services Managers update the meeting on children's placements in conjunction with the Placement Officer. Progress on projects is updated by the Programme Manager and the Special Projects officer.

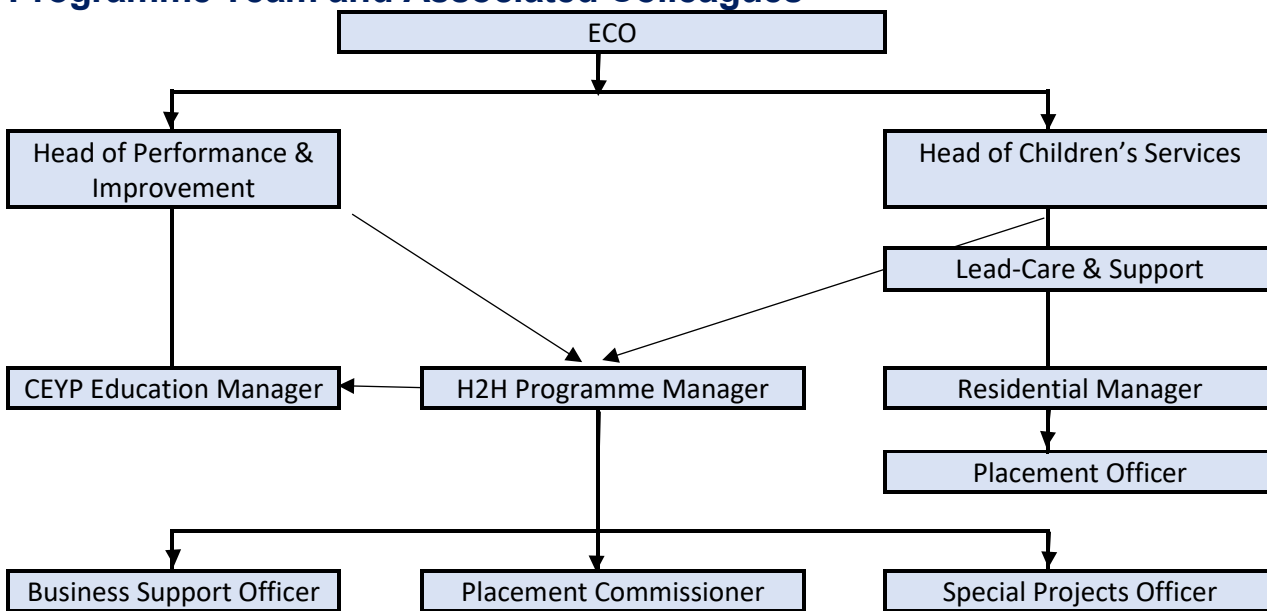
Higher level progress and scrutiny is through a 6-weekly, Home to Highland Scrutiny meeting chaired by the Head of Children's Services. Any operational issues that aren't resolved by the operational meeting are escalated there. The Capital Projects are submitted to the Capital Board by the Programme Manager for approval using robust business cases as the vehicle for governance.

External governance of the residential provisions developed by the Programme is offered by the Care Inspectorate. The Care Inspectorate are informed of individual project plans and have voiced congratulations on Highland's forward thinking, pro-active approach in meeting the needs of our young people. This has required innovation and flexibility on both sides due to the uniqueness and originality which did not always fit the historical registration model. This flexible

approach has increased recently as Programme staff are now finding that OOA placements are less available for our children who demonstrate behaviours that challenge, and very creative solutions are developed extremely rapidly when OOA placements break down.

Engagement and support to Councils and 3rd Sector organisations over the years has been undertaken to learn more about our projects. Links have been established with Moray, Argyll & Bute, Perth & Kinross, Dundee City, East Lothian and East Ayrshire Councils. Partnership working with Quarriers, Right There, Barnardos, Highland Homeless Trust, Children 1st and Action for Children have continued to support and develop the work of the programme. The Programme Manager is contacted on an ongoing basis by Councils and organisations wishing to learn from the work of the programme. This work has also been presented at national level through the Scottish Government's Young Peoples Improvement Collaborative.

Programme Team and Associated Colleagues



The team consists of:

1. Programme Manager, who leads on programme management, project implementation, reporting, budget monitoring, finances, and performance of the programme.
2. Strategic Lead Care & Support who chairs the operational H2H monthly meeting.
3. CEYP Education Manager, who leads on the development of bespoke education, alternative return packages and several new off-site education bases for returned children.
4. Placement Commissioner who purchases placements through developing Individual Placement Agreements and Children's Services contracts.
5. Special Projects Officer who coordinates work on a small number of very complex projects for children who have returned from OOA.
6. Business Support Officer who coordinates property maintenance, project tasks and administration.
7. Placement Officer who coordinates all placements in and OOA.
8. Residential Resource Manager who manages new residential services developed by the Programme team.

Since its inception, The Home to Highland Programme has benefited greatly from attracting dedicated, conscientious passionate and extremely creative staff who are driven to improve the lives and outcomes of care experienced young people. Each team member has their own set of individual skills and experience, and everyone is vital to the effective running of this programme.

Home to Highland - Care Experienced Education Team

In 2018, the Programme Manager and Head of Service determined that a manager with expertise in education was required to objectively assess the achievement and attainment of children in OOA placements. In 2019, the newly appointed CEYP Education Manager assessed the standard of education in OOA placements which showed disappointing results: Children were regularly not attending school, the quality of education was poor at times and children were not deemed to be sufficiently achieving their potential.

A key aim of the programme was to improve educational achievement and attainment of CEYP and as a result, access to a suite of services to supplement school placements is underpinned by the Scottish Government Attainment Challenge Funding for Care Experienced Young People. All children returning from OOA receive a bespoke education/positive destination package and children on the edge of care (often on part-time timetables) also receive individualised education packages to enable them to stay in Highland.

Extensive services include dedicated Additional Support Need Teachers, Pupil Support Assistants, three Transition Coordinators, specialist outdoor learning, and off-site education bases at Clachnaharry, Merkinch and Leault. Children are assisted by tutors to obtain qualifications, learn music, dance, and sports, families can attend parenting workshops, a mentoring programme through MCR pathways, a sexual health and relationships project from Waverley Care, bereavement counselling, cooking classes, adult learning, and support to re-integrate young people back into school, especially appropriate for young people returning from Out of Area.

**A separate report has been developed by an external consultant on the H2H education work with CEYP. This wider H2H report includes the development of new buildings for alternative education through the Programme as that work is carried out by the Programme team in conjunction with the H2H Education team.*

Work with Partner Agencies and Organisations

The Programme works extensively with external partners: Aberlour, Barnardos, Right There and Action for Children to maximise both the number of children returned to appropriate accommodations and to improve outcomes for young people in Highland on the edge of care. The team also works with Adult Services in the NHS to improve transitions to adult services for young people with complex needs and disabilities. There is also significant partnership with 3rd sector through Who Cares the national advocacy agency for CEYP.

Project Management

Various project management tools such as Risk Logs, Driver Diagrams, Ease and Effect Matrices and Gantt charts are utilised extensively to prioritise the projects within the Programme and to ensure they remain within timeline and on budget through optimum scheduling.

The Programme has a dynamic risk register with over 50 live risks which are constantly assessed, and actions recorded to mitigate the risks with a lead dedicated for each action.

To assist the work of returning young people to Highland, a tracking process is in place which continuously assesses the young people out of area helping to identify who would be most

appropriate to return. The Placement Officer then contacts the Lead Professional for the child and discusses care, education, achievement, health, and well-being of the young person. If a return to Highland is deemed the optimum solution, the Placement Officer contacts the CEYP Education Manager, and a bespoke education package is developed. Herein lies the objective scrutiny of the OOA placements but the H2H team do work collaboratively alongside family teams. There is also a quarterly placement review between the Placement Commissioner and Lead Professionals to ensure that the provider is working within the terms of the individual placement agreement made with Highland Council.

Services Developed by the Programme

The Programme has developed the following CEYP services:

1. Two small, specialised residential houses for young people with disabilities: Broom Drive & Applegrove,
2. Two small residential houses for younger children to remain for their childhood: Killen & Culbokie,
3. A crisis care centre – Àrach.
4. Six supported core and cluster flats for 17-26 year olds: Old Perth Road,
5. Eight supported move-through flats across Highland for 17-26 year olds.
6. Two residential contracts with third sector organisations providing 15 beds: Aberlour & Barnardos-Northern Lights,
7. Commissioned Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) from the NHS to work with CEYP to build resilience and remain in family and residential placements.
8. Complex Case Forum with NHH to plan supported accommodation packages for young people with complex disabilities transitioning to NHS Highland adult care.
9. Six modular flats for Young People leaving residential care: Kenneth Street.
10. Emergency care provision in Caithness: Gable house (now closed).
11. Redevelopment of property to serve as a residential for a singleton return: Holm House.
12. Repurposing a former residential house as a bespoke education base and possible respite care house for a returned child with complex needs: Leault,
13. Redevelopment of a residential house to return two young people from OOA to two singleton placements: Braeside, Daviot,
14. Centre for CEYP to meet, train, receive secondary education - Clachnaharry,
15. Off-site primary education provision for returning children – Merkinch,
16. Bespoke education packages to improve attainment and achievement of CEYP and those on the edge of care.

New buildings have been purchased, but Council owned property has been maximised such as houses on or near school sites which would be difficult for our Council Housing Service to utilise. This has kept the capital spend as low as possible.

The programme had obtained and developed a range of property which were quickly redeveloped. The Programme Manager keeps tight control on the use of these properties which are vital to the success of the Programme.

Core and Cluster Model

Through data analysis, reflective practice in addition to staff and child/family consultation, it became clear that traditional, larger residential units were seldom the correct provision to meet the needs of our children OOA or older young people moving out of residential units. A Core and Cluster contract was developed for Young People capable of living semi-independently at Old Perth Road, Inverness using Council houses.

The Programme has established that young people really need to be 17 years old and above to manage this level of semi-independence. In general, it has been found that young people moving out of residential care have required more support than was originally thought. This support is provided by 'Right There' within the core and cluster and when young people move on to further independence, they are supported by Barnardos.

In addition, eight Council flats across Highland were obtained, refurbished within Caithness, Ross-shire, Inverness, and Fort William supported by a third sector organisation. This provision has been extensively utilised by young people, although this has reduced this year due to availability of third sector staffing.

Small Houses for Younger Children

It became evident that a significant number of young people required living accommodation where there were fewer children and the Programme's focus became to develop smaller houses. These were centred around nurturing, trauma-informed therapeutic practice. Several provisions have been developed as homes for children to live for the duration of their childhoods.

Killen is a fully staffed residential house in Ross-shire and the two CEYP living there have thrived since returning. It was awarded grade 5 'very good' by the Care Inspectorate in 2022. The work has proven so successful that the Programme has developed a further house to the same model for another three young people, who are also thriving. It was awarded grades of 4 and 3 'good and adequate' by the Care Inspectorate in 2023. There is further feedback on the children returned to these houses later in the report.

The work to develop these properties, staffing and the transition of the children was extensive, taking well over a year with precise attention to detail and scheduling. Team members developed a transition document with CAMHS which included specific CYP centred information. Everything was done to try to reduce the trauma of the move. Project debriefs have shown that multidisciplinary staff involved felt this was very well managed.

Houses for Children Living with Complex Disabilities

Data analysis and consultation with families and staff highlighted that additional residential provision was required for children with complex disabilities. The Council's centre for children with complex disabilities, the Orchard, had previously only provided short breaks for children but over the years had accommodated a number of young people full-time and this requirement was growing.

In 2017 a house opposite the Orchard was purchased by the Programme and developed into a move-through house called Broom for older young people from the Orchard. This served as a stepping-stone into adult services care for 2 young people at a time.

In 2019/20, a number of younger children with disabilities came into care and to avoid them going OOA, the Programme redeveloped the janitors house opposite the Orchard into a residential house for two children, Applegrove. The Orchard received a grade of 5, 'very good' at last inspection.

All new services require social care staff to be recruited and trained and those employed have demonstrated they are of high standard according to feedback from parents, carers, and Lead Professional testimonies. This is also demonstrated in the Care Inspectorate grades for Killen, Culbokie and the Orchard.

Àrach Respite Care and Outreach Centre

A significant project within the H2H Programme was Àrach, a multi-disciplinary, respite care and outreach hub in Fodderty, Strathpeffer. The aim of the service, based on the No Wrong Door

model, to prevent Highland young people having to be looked after OOA and to support families at times of crisis.

The intention was that Àrach would serve as a child-centred Hub where a young person on the edge of care could access all relevant services including: support to remain at home, residential, fostering, kinship or bespoke accommodation packages through assessment following referral from their Lead Professional. Although the hub would have a residential component, it was proposed that the hub would not reach full capacity and would not be a permanent residence for young people. A return home would be the aim for the majority of young people. This would be achieved by developing a team to work both in the hub as residential staff and with families in their homes in order to sustain children at home.

The H2H Programme successfully identified, purchased, and developed a suitable building using an innovative process whereby the seller handed over the purchased property with all necessary renovations complete. Extensive planning went into how the service would operate and an in-depth recruitment process was undergone. However, in the commissioned review of residential childcare in Highland Council by Fred McBride (March 2022), it was noted that the original intention of the services “has not worked... due to pressure on beds and Àrach House is now essentially functioning as an additional medium to long term residential house.”

Although Àrach has avoided a number of children going OOA, this has been accomplished through it performing as a residential unit. The building was never intended for medium to long-term stays as it lacks the homely, nurturing environment necessary. Children’s Service’s is planning to reset the service.

Sylvan

One of the Programme’s earlier obtained properties was rapidly repurposed in late 2023 to return an older young person from OOA when their current placement broke down. The Special Projects Coordinator determined that the property required minimal modifications to satisfy Care Inspectorate requirements, but emergency registration was needed via a variation from another residential house.

Urgent staffing was coordinated through a combination of Highland residential staff known to the Special Projects Coordinator and third sector organisations. A formal recruitment process is underway with a third sector partner to staff the house permanently. The young person returned to the property is enjoying their new home and there is more specific positive feedback on the young person returned to this house later in this report.

With so many children now returned to Highland, and the needs being more complex, there is now significant pressure on Highland residential houses and the Home to Highland Education team to accommodate these children within existing services. In-Highland residential home beds are consistently full, and there are pressures on H2H teaching staff regarding the increasing numbers and complexity of young people. Significant effort is ongoing into trying to meet these challenges.

Clachnaharry

This building had been developed by H2H several years ago to act as a centre for CEYP. The Home to Highland Education Team moved to the building and have been working out of the old school for over a year. Young people of secondary age returned from OOA placements attend the old school for education if they are unable to attend their roll school.

Merkinch Primary CEYP Education Base (Former Family Resource Centre)

There was agreement in 2023 to temporarily use this centre as a base for primary children who were suddenly returned to Highland from OOA. The children were unable to attend a mainstream school so the H2H team redeveloped the building to act as an education base for them.

This project is another example of the demanding timescales the team has had to work within. Property staff, Programme staff and H2H Education staff all had to work together to achieve success alongside significant additional workload. The crisis nature of this work has escalated this year with OOA provisions closing and a number of specialist placements breaking down with no alternative living arrangements being available. This has meant that the Home to Highland team have had no choice but to try and work within exceptionally tight timeframes.

New Education Base and Respite House

Due to the complex needs of a youngster returned to Highland in October 2023, the Programme Manager sought permission to repurpose a former residential house as a bespoke education and possible respite care base.

The building was up and running in November 2023 as a school base with two highly skilled teachers and a Pupil Support Assistant. Work is ongoing with a third sector organisation to bolster education staff and offer 52 week support with two further staff recruited. There is also the possibility that short break residential provision will be required for this child to further support their home placement. This will again add further complexity to this project and necessitate additional team working by Home to Highland, associated family teams and a partner third sector organisation to recruit further staff.

Braeside Residential House

A property formerly purchased and developed by H2H has been identified as a possible return location for a young person OOA.

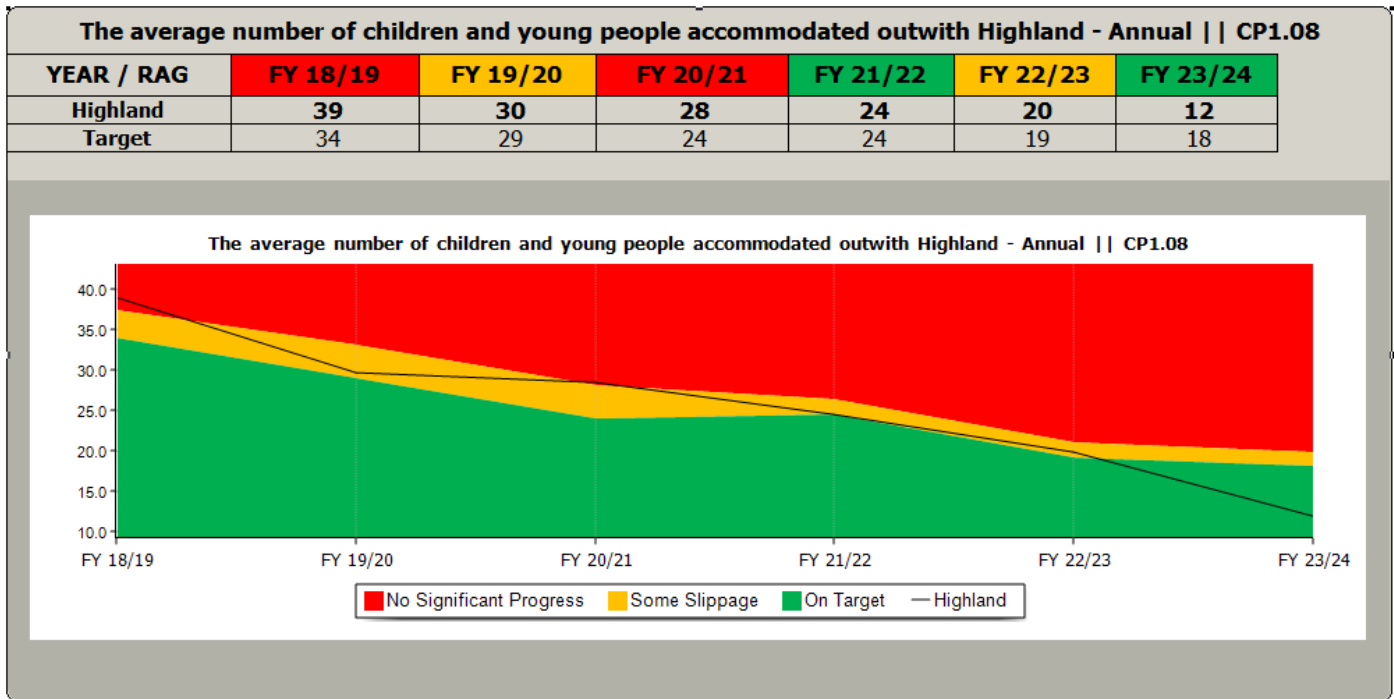
Alterations are planned to enable two children to live in singleton placements within the house but there is an ongoing complication with insurance works requiring the property be returned to its original design following flood damage. It is hoped that in time, further children can be assessed to return to the house.

This requirement for singleton placements is against a backdrop of Highland Children's Services wishing to reduce the use of residential care by offering outreach services to retain children at home when safe to do so, in line with the Promise. These new outreach services are not yet in place and will likely take some time to embed within the system and for the number of residential placements requested to reduce.

Headline Quantitative Data

Greatly Reduced Number of Children in OOA Residential Placements

A key aim set for this Programme, was to reduce the number of children in OOA residential placements. These figures are reported by the Programme Manager monthly, through the Council's PRMS system.



The number of children placed in residential placements OOA has reduced from 48 in June 2018 to 12 in Dec 2023 after achieving the lowest number ever (at 9 OOA) in Oct 2023. (When data reporting through PRMS began, the number of OOA placements had already fallen from 48 to 39, as can be seen in the graph above).

The total number of spot purchased residential placements both in Highland and OOA is 17 at Dec 2023 with the intention that a further 3 children will move out of these placements by financial year end.

Through consistent analysis and dedicated working with Social Workers and Family teams, 11 children have been returned to Highland or moved-on to semi-independence this financial year.

Cost Avoidance

A vital driver for the Home to Highland Programme was to reduce spend on spot purchased placements. The average cost of an OOA placement in 2023 is £280,000 per child per year but there have been a small number of singleton, specialist placements that have cost upwards of £627,000 per year and secure placements costing almost £400,000 per year. Clearly work to identify an alternative living arrangement for a child which meets their needs and is less costly is of great benefit for children, families, and the Council.

Between June 2018 and Dec 2023, 94 children have returned to Highland or moved-on to semi-independence avoiding costs of over £16 million pounds as compared with the young people remaining OOA for a year. The cost of the young peoples' new placements for a year has been £3.863M, less than a quarter of the OOA cost, clearly a much improved financial position. There are however, two new in-area solutions that are likely to cost a similar amount to OOA due to the complex needs of the particular children. It is estimated that there will be further children in this position with no viable placements OOA therefore the Programme Manager needs to be mindful that further bespoke accommodations may be required going forward. The existing properties and young people placed in them in area also need to be constantly under review to ensure resources are being used effectively.

Number of children: June 2018-Dec 2023	Cost per Year OOA	Cost of Return Option in Highland per Year	Costs Avoided
94	£19,906,970	£3,863,118	£16,043,852

Highland Council Quality Award 2019

As a result of finding alternative, less costly solutions for Children’s Services, the Home to Highland Programme won the Improving Services award at the Highland Council’s Quality Awards in October 2019.

Shift in Balance of Spend

Another key aim of programme was to shift the balance of budget spend from a comparatively small number of expensive OOA placements, to a suite of new services in Highland to benefit a much larger number of children.

The full budget was originally all spent outside of Highland but now in 2023/24, it is estimated that 70% (of the now £12.9M) budget is currently spent on in-area services for Care Experienced Young People.

This has enabled the development of the over £8 million per year of in-area services detailed earlier in this report, which help stop children going OOA and serve as places for children to return to.

Services to retain children at home with families whilst reducing the use of in-Highland residential care are being prioritised by Health & Social Care going forward in line with expectations of the Promise. It is intended that once in place, these outreach services will reduce the demand for residential spaces as families will be supported to retain their children in the family home when safe to do so. It is expected that it may take some years for this new support to impact on the numbers of residential placements required.

Budget Management and Savings

Budget monitoring and reporting on the number of children in placement is a significant priority. Estimated spend can be calculated instantly on any day of the year so that we can be confident we are fully cognisant of the budget situation. The budget spend is extremely fluid with children moving in and out of placement having a significant effect. This information is used for operational and strategic meetings and in any report writing and business case development. There is also a close relationship with the service Accountant and a very experienced shared business support Administrator works on the budget and invoicing for placements. A Placement Commissioner coordinates all placement commissioning and contracts within Children’s Services developing an Individual Placement Agreement for each spot purchased placement.

On several occasions in recent years, the council has performed peer reviews of the Programme by Senior Managers across the council. In all instances this work has determined that Children’s Services are overseeing this extremely complex area of work effectively and efficiently and are dealing well with the management of a very fluid budget.

Budget for CEYP Education Workstream

The H2H Education workstream of the Programme has always been provided using the Scottish Government’s Attainment Challenge funding, Highland allocation (approx. £380,000 per year). However, in 2023, the sudden return of 5 children from OOA, all of whom required very bespoke,

new education provisions, meant that a significant additional spend was required (estimated £400,000 in 2023/24 as part-year). The wider H2H budget has been used for this and discussions are ongoing between the Head of Performance and Improvement and the Education Service as to the proportion of this spend that will be met by the Council's wider Education Service. This action demonstrates again the flexibility of the Programme and the benefit of services being within this much wider budget framework, decision-making and staffing arrangement. It enables the Council to be very responsive to need which is a child-centred approach.

Data Gathered

All children supported by H2H are recorded in a budget sheet for financial purposes. This ensures that Children's Services know exactly what children are in which placement and invoices received can be approved accordingly.

A master spreadsheet is used to determine and follow the core group of children that the programme is actively working on returning with family teams. A further tracking sheet is used as the basis for discussion at the operational meetings as it captures the wider picture of young people in and out of area and purchased placements. The Placement Officer also captures this data in a one page graphic which is most helpful. The councils PRMS system is updated monthly by the Programme Manager to show the number of children in out of area placements.

Annually, the Programme works directly with between 15-20 children and families in terms of the active return to Highland work. This has proven to be a very stretching number, due to the workload that this entails in addition to the projects and services the team are developing at any one time. The number of children on the edge of care within Highland supported by the H2H education team is much larger. **As detailed, an additional report is being produced on the Home to Highland educational work.*

The optimum method of recording placement numbers has been found to be a snapshot of children in placement. This is because children can move placement and counting the number of placements over a timeframe as opposed to children can give an inaccurate view of the situation.

How Work is Recorded

The work of the team is recorded at a high level in the programme Gantt work plan. This optimises and demonstrates the scheduling of the many projects within the programme. Project action plans and specific Gantt charts for each project are also kept up to date and help the wider team ensure tasks are carried out in order and concurrently.

Return Destination Table

This next table shows the destination of the 94 children returned to Highland or moved on into semi-independence out of area. It shows that the most utilised destination were residential units in Highland at 22% of returns. The next most used destination was a flat with support in Highland at 18%. The third most common return was to home at 16%. 10% of young people have moved on to care with adult services in NHS Highland and 9% have moved on to semi-independence with support out with Highland. A further 9% have returned to Highland to a supported core and cluster model of accommodation in Inverness. It is clear that a wide spread of accommodations and destinations have been required for young people. The Programme works hard with Lead Professionals to determine the optimum return package for young people.

Residential in Highland	21	22%
-------------------------	----	-----

Flat with Support in Highland	17	18%
Home	15	16%
Adult services care	9	10%
Flat with support OOA	8	9%
Core n cluster	8	9%
Family	5	5%
Foster care	3	3%
Further ed	4	4%
Left care	1	1%
Prison	1	1%
Transferred place of residence	2	2%
total	94	

What the Data Tells Us

Clearly the data shows that the programme has successfully reduced the number of OOA placements purchased by Highland Council. This has been through the H2H team working consistently with family teams to return young people. This has necessitated increasing workers confidence in new Highland provisions and bespoke education packages. It also requires continual assessment of need and identifying gaps in Highland provision which then must be soundly implemented.

Changes in Need and Complexity of Children

There has been an evident increase in the need for residential placements for children living with complex needs and disabilities. The Orchard has moved from previously providing respite care only, to accommodating 8 full-time residential placements and 3 shared care in area.

There is evidence that schools are challenged to meet the needs of complex young people.

A more recent development is the ending of OOA placements by external providers and no other providers in the UK being willing to accommodate certain children. This is a national issue reported by other councils also. This makes the work of the Programme even more complicated as bespoke accommodation; education bases and specialist staff have had to be developed within a timeframe shorter than ever experienced before. It is felt that the H2H programme has been best placed to respond to this latest challenge due to the flexibility of team members, expertise, budget flexibility and very creative decision-making but there is not the capacity to keep adding to this number of bespoke arrangements, buildings, and specialist staffing.

Impact of Covid on the Programme

The COVID-19 pandemic placed unprecedented pressure on families, which in turn put pressure on the H2H Programme. Vulnerable families and those sitting just below the thresholds for referral before the pandemic, experienced increased need in addition to those who experienced adversity as a direct consequence of C-19 through loss of family income, social isolation and increase in parental difficulties/adversity.

It is well documented that children experiencing significant change to their schooling also suffered during the pandemic and the full extent of this is as yet unknown. However, it is likely this will increase the needs within children and further support will be required which may well include further pressure on the H2H services.

During the pandemic, there were excellent examples of crisis-driven innovations across Children's Services including 6 children taken into HC residential care as families struggled with the implications of lockdown. These in-area units were used as flexibly as practical to keep as many children in Highland as possible and staff and Managers are to be commended for managing very challenging circumstances.

At the beginning of the pandemic a number of new OOA placements were required. Also, young people could not be returned to area during the lockdowns and work on developing new provisions was delayed despite all design and planning being actioned as far as is possible during this period. This impacted significantly on the Programme's ability to avoid costs during that year despite a C-19 budget from the Scottish Government covering the relevant placement costs.

Qualitative Data

The practice and provisions of the H2H programme have been developed as a result of consultation with children, families, and staff of children's services. This began in 2014 with the Programme Manager interviewing all managerial staff with responsibility for care experienced young people and holding workshops with formerly care experienced young people. Throughout all returns and developing projects over the years, the voice of the child and family is sought by the H2H team via the Lead Professional and Placement Officer and indeed other professionals such as CAMHS and Education Psychologists. A quarterly review of each spot purchased placement is also carried out by the Placement Commissioner via the Lead Professional to ensure the placement is meeting the child, family, and Lead Professional's expectations.

Programme Achievements:

With a large Programme of projects of such breadth and depth over a number of years, it is difficult to make a definitive list of all the achievements. There are of course the quantifiable achievements such as the:

- The 94 children returned to Highland or moved-on to semi-independence,
- The £16 million in avoided costs,
- The lowest number of children OOA ever (9 in October 2023),
- The shift in spend from 100% OOA to an estimated 70% in Highland this year,
- The long list of bespoke services developed in-area which enabled children to return,
- The Cosla and HC Quality Awards for different categories of excellence.

Improved lives

However, the most important achievements are the improved lives of the majority of children and young people returned. Children themselves, their families, their Social Workers, teachers, residential staff, and Placement Officer saying they are happier and are enjoying and achieving in their education, hobbies, and lives. Ultimately that they feel they are cared for and belong here. Violence and aggression forms are greatly reduced for a number of returned children. They are receiving bespoke education packages tailored to their needs, likes and abilities. Several have been found to be significantly more capable than over several years OOA. These are the achievements that most motivate the H2H team and encourage them to go the extra mile for Highland's CEYP.

There are also examples of young people who have been supported to remain in their OOA placement as partners to their plan and the H2H team are content that this is the very best living and education placement for them. The Programme continues to pay for these placements.

The Programme is clearly evidencing the five foundations of the Promise – Family, Care, Scaffolding, People and Voice.

Services and Tracking Already in Place

Local Authorities who contact the Programme Manager to learn about the Programme comment that the consistent development of services over the years to return children, and the tracking and planning for all children in residential care, puts Highland in an excellent position to deal with these new challenges. We have obtained and developed a stock of property to utilise, we have continually identified children to return, and we have developed services to help retain children in Highland. Even the significant increase in Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children coming to Highland in 2023 has been adeptly managed by existing staff obtaining property with Housing colleagues and more recently recruiting staff to work with these young people. Team members are very confident in the work they do as skills and experience have been honed over the years.

Top-down and Bottom-up Support

The creative thinking of H2H team members and ability to translate that thinking into successfully implementing projects is to be lauded. As is the support of Senior Managers in agreeing business cases developed and agreeing budget spend. None of this would be possible without the continued support of Highland Council Members through the committee system which has continued to offer H2H the £12.9 million budget to use as is deemed optimum by Children's Services. Top-down and bottom-up support and buy-in is apparent. It is hoped that this work will soon offer the Council savings through the continued decrease in OOA placements and an overall reduction in residential requests when the outreach service is fully embedded.

Positive Relationships Across the Council

There are also evident, strong relationships between Programme team members and other services and departments of the Council developed over the years. The three peer reviews carried out by the Council into the Programme has enabled the Programme Manager to spread the message of the importance of this work. Comprehension of the Programme and an understanding of corporate parenting responsibilities across the organisation, has enabled the Programme to obtain land, Council property, purchase buildings, redevelop houses, and initiate protocols to name but a few. The red tape that can be encountered in such a large organisation can really slow progress and the ability of the Programme Manager to know who to contact in a variety of situations has been beneficial.

Positive Relationships Within Children's Services

Ultimately the relationships developed within Children's Services with Social Workers, Practice Leads, Children's Services Managers and associated Senior Managers have been critical to the success of this Programme. The H2H team are successfully changing the culture from the heavy use of residential care, to developing practice that looks at all other interventions for a young person before this is considered and indeed agreed by the Head of Service.

Changing the Culture

The team are challenging the belief that expensive out of area placements are preferable because they offer better outcomes, as the team's work shows this is not the case. Culture change is one of the most difficult things to alter and requires consistent messaging and actions that demonstrate that the Team mean and believe what they say about OOA placements. There are many examples of team members having to be very resilient, remaining calm under fire, checking, and double

checking long lists of actions that are required and long-term negotiating with colleagues all with the goal of improving the life of a young person. Sometimes this has involved keeping the faith and holding one's ground under considerable pressure from colleagues who believe that a planned intervention won't work.

Programme Maintains a Whole System Approach

The Programme is assessed using a whole system approach with a helicopter view of children's services and the entire journey of a child entering care to them leaving. All links within this journey have been assessed and attempts made to fill the gaps with the necessary services and practice to enable young people to move through the system with access to what they need at the correct time.

H2H Staff Members

What should have become evident by reading this report, is that this Programme is blessed with dedicated, enthusiastic, creative thinking and passionate staff members. Each and every one is vital to the success of the projects as each hold their own specific skills and experiences. The work has attracted flexible team members who are very supportive of one another due to the challenging nature of the jobs. The team are also adept at identifying future staff who can add to the combined expertise of the team.

Areas of Improvement & Development:

Family-based care

In line with the Promise, the plan for Children's Services to develop family-based support and outreach is intended to retain more children at home (if safe to do so) and to reduce requests and requirements for residential care both in and out of Highland by offering appropriate support as earlier intervention and also as crisis support. There is also a plan to emulate the Kinship Programme in Fife Council which much like H2H, operates a specialist team to work alongside Lead Professionals. In this case to find family-based solutions for children. In time, these developments should see a reduction in the number of residential placements in Highland and a further decrease in the number of specialist placements utilised OOA.

Singleton placements

In juxtaposition to family-based care, currently the observed requirement through data analysis, child, family, and staff consultation is for singleton residential placements in Highland in order to return children from OOA who can't tolerate larger units and have no family-based options. This need for singleton placements is further exacerbated by the fact that OOA placements have been much less easy to find this year, and more are breaking down than before.

Corporately, the Council is seeking to reduce its establishment of property, but this needs to be very carefully considered in relation to the H2H Programme. A lack of the correct accommodation will put us in an impossible position when children are suddenly returned to Highland.

Forecasting the requirement for bespoke residential provision for a particular need in a particular location of Highland is notoriously difficult. By the time we are aware of a young person's needs for a specialist development they are often already in crisis, but the team need a period of significant months to develop a provision and staff. As a result, the team are constantly scanning needs and placements near breakdown in an attempt to keep ahead of this, but it is by no means an exact science. Families have different tolerance levels, and some can manage whilst others break down.

Additional Support Need data collated by the Education Service can be utilised to signal levels and cohort of needs coming through Highland schools and can be mapped against existing and planned projects of the Programme.

Continuing Care Requests

The recent propensity for older young people to request Continuing Care in Highland residential placements is beginning to have resource implications. This is because young people may occupy a residential placement from 18 to 21 years old, meaning this space is unavailable to any other young people in need. The Programme has a suite of flats and a supported core and cluster model which are already prioritised for young people leaving residential care. There is also a further option being investigated at the moment whereby an unused property may enable two older young people to live very close to their current care staff but vacate the fulltime residential beds.

Adults Living in the Orchard

The fact that adults are occupying three placements in Children's Services centre for children with disabilities (the Orchard), is placing continued, considerable pressure on the Programme.

Child Plans to Contain Strengths

It has been observed by the H2H team that Children's Plans can be negative at times and do not always highlight the strengths of a young person. This cultural and practice shift is changing but will take time to ensure the balance between risk factors and strengths are the focus, given the significant implications for the young person's identity and self-esteem, but also the complex resource implications.

Young People Who Have Not Benefitted from Returning

From the 94 children returned, there are a handful who have not done well returning to Highland (as seen through data and information from Lead Professionals and the Placement Officer). It is impossible to know if this would have been replicated had they remained OOA, but the Programme seeks to **learn** from these instances. A small group of young men returned by the Programme have continued to be involved in criminality and have been moved to secure care. A previous employee of an intensive support service in Highland has been employed by the Programme to work directly with these young men and their families due to previous relationships and success with these hard-to-reach individuals. It is hoped that working with this new staff member will improve these young people's lives. Again, this demonstrates the response, creative and flexible approach taken by programme team members.

Link between H2H Education Team and Education Service

The H2H education team have demonstrated considerable flexibility in developing bespoke education packages for children returning from OOA. This has historically been paid for by the Scottish Government's attainment challenge funding. However, this year, a group of children suddenly returned to area has necessitated that Health and Social Care (through the Programme) fund new staff, equipment and even two new buildings for education in addition to Clachnaharry.

As detailed earlier in this report, agreement is being sought to agree what share of these new developments and staffing will be paid by the Education Directorate. The Programme Manager and author of the H2H Education Team Evaluation, feel that further links with the wider Education service are required. These young people have some of the most complex needs in the system. The Head of Performance and Improvement is seeking to cement these links with the relevant Managers in the Education Service. This will include agreement on what proportion of additional spend for H2H education bases, staffing and equipment will be negotiated.

Victims of Own Success

As can be the case with projects that are proven to benefit young people, oversubscription and an unsustainable increase in referrals can become a problem. The nature of Social Work is that workers want to respond to need and as the team with the skills to return young people, develop education packages and experience of developing new services, requests for assistance are high.

Unfortunately, this year, external forces have necessitated a crisis response from the team to develop urgent new provisions, recruit staff and work in tandem with family teams to return a small number of extremely complex children. This has caused major challenge and is not sustainable. Scheduling and planning of projects are critical and have been the building blocks for the success of the programme.

Annual Evaluation of Home to Highland

Whilst the Programme has always experienced a high level of reporting, monitoring and scrutiny through Committee and wider Change Boards, there is a recognised benefit from ensuring evaluation on an annual basis. The Inspection carried out into Children's Services in 2022 reported that there was significant activity through the H2H Programme, but that evaluation of the impact would be welcomed.

Building Voice

This report details the Programme's history, projects and services developed whilst also detailing case stories in addition to child, family, and staff testimonies. However, the Programme Manager believes that this could be built upon by listening, engaging, consulting and continuing to capture the outcomes of the children who have returned Home to Highland through the programme.

Appendix: Children, Family and Staff Voice and Testimony

The following are excerpts of fuller case studies and interviews with children, families, and staff to offer the richness of their opinion on the Programme and its impact on outcomes.

Lead Professional for Child with Complex Disabilities Returned to Highland

"Wow, what a journey it has been with 'Oliver', I have not come across a young person like him- unprecedented numbers of VIR's (Violent Incident Reports), heart-breaking self- injury, sobering child plan meetings, and some tricky moments for us all along the way in the process of bringing him back to Highland. It is hard to find the words to express how pleased I am for him, the team working with him and his family that he is making such good progress. The change we have seen over the summer will pave the

way hopefully for Adult Services to find provision for him in Highland, which is what his mother wanted. Thanks for everyone's support with this."

Mother of Child with Complex Disabilities Returned to Highland

Hi Shirley,

Obviously the most important aspect of getting 'Oliver' back in the Highlands was him being close to his family and re-introducing the regular face to face contact/interaction with his Mum, dad, and sister. him living such a distance away removed that joy! And the continued extension of Oliver living away (I believe) had a negative effect on him.

My views were always considered. All professionals worked together to make sure Oliver's transition to the new house was a success. New staff/carers were sourced (making sure they are capable to manage such a challenging wee man). The staff/carers were also heavily involved in the transition including new staff/carers spending time with Oliver in the OOA provision before transition. And I also met with new staff/carers to talk about who Oliver is, what he is like when he's with his family, what he likes and dislikes, how he copes with different environments.

The success is all down to the professionals and staff being able to support each other, making changes and risks to see positive changes. I couldn't ask for anything more from everyone as even through the difficult times they have always stuck by Oliver to make his life and ours a happy one. Thank you. "

Shirley Jack, Manager, Highland

"This really captures (and underlines beautifully) why children and young people who may have to leave Highland for a period of time, should come back as soon as possible to be with their family and return to their local area.

We're so pleased with the progress that 'Oliver' has made and the positive changes in his life and that's a huge thanks to you for supporting the team and being there for them to share your knowledge of Oliver and keep us on the right track. Working together has made all the difference to Oliver's success in returning to us and we're so proud of him!

Case Study of Child Returned to Residential House in Highland

The programme initiated a project to develop a small residential house for two children who had been OOA for four years. A multidisciplinary team of professionals in Highland worked very hard on practice for the transition being centred around nurturing care. The same could not be said for the external placement who were not happy that Highland Council were returning the children and wrote to Senior Management saying so. One child left the external placement without their teddy (a Highland worker travelled for 5 hours to retrieve it) and both arrived without toothbrushes and very few items of clothing which were not clean.

In addition, only two weeks after the children returned, education colleagues found that one child was much more able than previously thought. These examples again highlighted to the Home to Highland team that education and care provision out with Highland are not always of appropriate quality despite the cost of the placement.

Some months after returning from OOA to the new residential house in Highland, one of the young people moved to secondary school. They were explaining to their new teacher that they lived in a children's residential house. The teacher responded in a manner that sounded like sympathy to the child who replied to her,

"Don't be sorry for me, it is the best care home in the world."

Case Study of Child Returned to Residential House in Highland Then Foster Care

A young child returned from OOA to a small residential house in Highland. This enabled them to experience a close family environment centred around nurturing care. By using the PACE approach (Playfulness, acceptance, curiosity, empathy), Care Workers were able to explore and reflect on the triggers that resulted in very challenging behaviours. This helped the child gain an understanding of their emotions and why they would respond in certain ways.

Meanwhile, the team ensured the child still regularly met with their brother who had been fostered. After a short time, the same foster family expressed an interest in fostering the child in our residential house. The child is now able to cope with and benefit from a family setting, and it is unlikely that this would have been possible without the time this child spent at the small residential.



Case Study of Older Young Person Moved from Residential OOA to Flat with Support

A young man (18) who had been OOA for 3 years had an apprenticeship and friends in the area he had been living residentially. He had a very good relationship with his Lead Professional who suggested he might be ready for his own flat. The young man wanted to stay in the area to keep his friends and job, so the Programme supported this. He was offered a flat by the Council in that area, but it was three buses from his job, so this was declined, and the Programme continued to pay for his placement until a month later he was offered another flat nearer his work. The Lead Professional is still in touch with the young man, and he continues to do well. The Programme genuinely tries to work alongside Lead Professionals and support the optimum decisions for young people. The Lead Professional has received a Christmas card from the young man thanking him for always being there for him and signed the card "*Your lad Billy*".

Case Study of Older Young Person Returned to Parents from OOA

A young person (16) was OOA in a secure care placement. He had stopped attending school when in Highland and had got involved in taking drugs and had become involved in significant violence. He said to his Lead Professional, "*I don't care if I live or die*".

Over time his Lead Professional gained his trust by visiting him consistently OOA and supporting him, saying he would be there and help as much as he could. Over time the boy started staying in his family home in Highland for overnights from secure care. A plan was made to return him home and to attend an off-site education provision in Inverness called the Bridge. The young man is

now living back home permanently and attending education fulltime. He is also being supported by Action for Children's Intensive Support Service (ISS) as they have proven expertise in assisting young people returning from secure care. Most importantly, he now says he sees a future for himself.

Case Study of Older Young Person Moved to College from Residential

Around five years ago, the Programme assessed returning a small number of children from an OOA provision. It was found by a multidisciplinary group, that the children were being cared for in an exemplary fashion and were achieving in their mainstream education. The children had very few family connections in the Highland area. As a result, the Programme opted not to return these young people but continued to pay for the placements for 5 years.

Two of the young people have advanced to attending college in another part of Scotland and the Programme pays for them to return to a property rented by their previous residential provider who continues to offer support and contact to these young people. The third young person is about to join the armed forces. These are very positive destinations and outcomes for these young people. This again demonstrates that the programme seeks to support optimum outcomes for Highlands CEYP as opposed to simply looking to reduce costs of placements.

Video Testimony of Two Residential Managers

The Programme Manager interviewed two Residential Managers about the H2H Programme. A sample of comments from their testimonies are below:

"One child returned has improved developmentally by two years in 6 months."

"Over a million pounds spent on a child OOA but they didn't find the child to be more able".

"The OOA placement treatment of the child was awful, very little human contact."

"We trained the social care and education staff together so they would have the same practice and approach".

"We have a very skilled and committed staff group, they were nurturing and close but needed a lot of support".

"We got a lot of support from CAMHS".

"We can now accommodate young people of different ages in more suitable environments".

Testimony of a Further Residential Manager

The Programme Manager asked a further Residential Manager of a Small Residential House about the Home to Highland Programme. Below are condensed comments made on various topics raised by the Residential Manager.

"Overall, the benefits for all our children of returning through the H2H Programme has been huge. They are in a safe and stable environment with a team focussed strongly on a therapeutic approach, within this we adapt to their individual needs. All their education situations have improved, and all their health and wellbeing needs are being met and championed where necessary.

All our children are achieving and happy. Two of the children refer to the house as their home yet we also respect the fact that they have their own families so put a huge focus on keeping them involved and nurturing their relationships.

From my perspective, one child in particular would not have had such a positive experience without the Home to Highland team, and if it wasn't for our tenacity and the input from H2H this would not have been as positive as it is. "

Testimony of Placement Officer

The Programme Manager interviewed the Placement Officer about the Home to Highland Programme. Below are condensed comments made on various topics raised by the Placement Officer.

“Returning children through this program is aligned with the family first approach and wanting children to be at home. It is also aligned with the Promise which tells us that a large proportion of children do not want to be away from home. Highland Council must respond to this.

There is a young man recently returned to his family from secure care who is very settled and feels safe and loved. I think his outcomes will likely be greatly improved as a result.

OOA placements wanting to end placements sends a message to the child that they are not wanted, and this is so damaging.

We need our young people to know we care, to build relationships, to build trust, see our unconditional positive regard, and that we are alongside them on their journeys where possible, the good and the bad. They have the lived experience, they are the experts in what’s gone on in their lives, and all those supporting must work tirelessly to earn the trust, to get our children to the point where they are safe enough to share. Lead Professionals should be working to become this constant professional in their lives.

Strengths of H2H Programme: once children are returned, we are able to link them and connect them with what they know and enjoy. Lead professionals staying in touch with young people past 18 is important and I do that too, when I know the young people. This may just be a coffee, a text message, a quick call to check in to see how they are. Again, the trust and good relationships are critical here.

Creative thinking - all team members in the Programme are encouraged to think creatively to determine bespoke solutions for our young people, one size most certainly does not fit all. Well thought out solutions and business cases are presented to senior managers and very often agreed.

The Placement Officer within the programme is in a key position to identify when further work is required to enable a child to remain in area who is on the edge of care. They can alert Action for Children’s ISS service, Barnardo’s Rise service for Child Exploitation and the Youth Action Team.

Challenges: The sheer size of the Highland area is a challenge. There may be appropriate service in one area of highland but if a child who needs it lives five hours away.”

Testimony of H2H Programme Special Projects Coordinator

The Programme Manager interviewed the Special Projects Coordinator about the Home to Highland Programme. Below are condensed comments made on various topics raised by the Special Projects Coordinator

“I think that young people returned by the Programme feel they are claimed, and wanted back in their communities, therefore feeling they do belong to somewhere/someone and are loved. Young people who express they want to return and then are supported to return will feel listened to and this can help with development of self-esteem, sense of empowerment and agency in their lives and future.

I think that a young person recently returned by the Programme feels valued, cared for and loved in a way they were not in other placements. The team are able to be honest and direct in saying, we want you back, we want you with us which sometimes can’t be said in other placements. I think this has fostered an immense feeling of security for the young person – despite the incidents!

Whilst OOA is necessity at times, it is clear that there has been a lack of evidence of the work which we thought would have been done while out of authority – and that being back in Highland we are able to keep

a more focused lens on the progress re outcomes and a fuller appreciation of if the work isn't happening, what the reasons are for it not happening.

Health – *A recently returned young person did not trust the previous organisation they were living in, so as part of their self-expression did not engage with health services re guardianship. I think it is clear that the young person's recent engagement in the process now that they are back in Highland, demonstrates a level of trust and security by being in Highland community again.*

Another recently returned child did not receive the CAMHS support when OOA but is now being assessed.

Outcomes - *Engagement with adult services, education and processing guardianship are all quantifiable outcomes for a recently returned young person. This young person's ability to open up and explore experiences and emotions is a massive outcome in my opinion.*

For another recently returned child – they are now attending education after a considerable period of not attending and living much more successfully with their family than 4 years in placements away from home.

Wellbeing - *From the 2 young people that have come back recently, in my experience their wellbeing has improved – with one expressing some very deep and intense experiences, exploring emotions, and reflecting on their life in a way their Lead Professional has not been aware of before. I think these conversations and insights, initiated by the young person, although very painful, indicate that overall, her sense of wellbeing is in a better place to be able to so do this with the people supporting her.*

For the other young person– the level of incidents have dramatically reduced since being returned. This reduction of life endangering activities that they were placing themselves in has been significantly less – which in my opinion indicates that they feel better within themselves and their surroundings. They have also been able to have an overnight with extended family which has been a milestone for them and their family. For their family, the stress of having their child live so far away has changed the dynamic.

Overall, I think the team returning and supporting the young people are highly committed and motivated to the needs of the young people and with small, focused caseloads they can create packages which are person centred and should yield positive outcomes for young people, their families and wider service delivery. And mostly because the team have a very supportive wider network. ”

Testimony of Forensic and Clinical Psychologist

An independent Forensic and Clinical Assessment report of another returned child clearly stated that their presentation had improved markedly since return to Highland. Incidences of violence and aggression were much lower, smearing, and self-harm had ceased altogether with consistently lower destructive tendencies than ever witnessed for four years in residential placements. The consultant's opinion was that the bespoke arrangement developed by H2H would be infinitely more suited to the young person than OOA placements, as heightened sensitivities to change can be much more effectively managed.

“Many individuals with Autism rely heavily on predictable routines and familiar environments to feel secure and function effectively. Disrupting these routines is deeply unsettling, leading to an increase in stress and potentially challenging behaviours. It is not possible to maintain idiosyncratic routines for children in a unit or ward setting. Residential, secure units and hospital wards can be overwhelming in terms of sensory stimulation. The noise levels, lighting, and even the smells and textures in these environments can be extremely difficult for someone with severe Autism to process, leading to sensory overload and subsequent angry or violent behavioural responses. It might seem that nothing is triggering children but if they cannot explain what is triggering them, it could be anything, a small seemingly insignificant noise or smell that grates on them. A key aspect of managing Autism effectively involves maintaining a sense of control and autonomy which is just not possible even in a flagship trauma-informed unit.”

Appendix 2

A review of the Home to Highland Service with an exploration as to whether this is the best model for meeting the educational needs of care experienced learners.

Summary

Home to Highland is the strategic approach and service for care experienced children and young people (CECYP) including unaccompanied asylum seekers, with a key purpose of enabling them to remain living and learning in the Highland area. By taking a collaborative appreciative inquiry approach, the features associated with evidence-based practice in relation to how well the model works, and how it can change in order to be able to respond to future challenges, were explored and identified.

Many of the current features reflect effective practice from research about CECYP which include a relational and trauma-informed approach to care and education planning with a personalised curriculum for most young people. There is a coherent and holistic approach towards transitions and employability which is aligned where necessary to diversionary activities.

The family focus and persistence to work with parents/carers who need a differentiated approach is commendable and has been adapted for different communities. Many partners referred to the 'stickability' of the service in continuing to work with young people and their families in order to overcome barriers and build their sense of agency and affiliation with staff and learning experiences.

Measures of achievement and attendance show improvements for the weekly sessions and curricular focus which the H2H service provides for each young person, but are not yet analysed enough nor fully take into account measures for the same young people in their mainstream schools. There needs to be more shared accountability for improving outcomes.

Recommendations for improvement planning include focussing on which of the current evidence-based strengths are having the most impact and can be extended for the more complex needs which are anticipated in younger children not yet known to the service. In order to do so the tensions and disconnect with education systems needs to be addressed by building more effective strategic planning, practice and processes between education and social care services.

Suggested next steps:

- The Education Manager to have better links with other leaders in Education through networks of peer support and access to key professional learning and QI support/challenge. A mentor would support her in the day-to-day challenges of managing people and delivering a service.
- Refine the focus and range of work which the service does with a review of the SIP
- Extend the current referral group membership to include Social Work and Education reps to enable a wider perspective and shared accountability of decision-making; and consider moving to a monthly meeting (with virtual decisions for more immediate high risk cases)
- Improved partnership with the Children's Houses to enable shared practice in relation to life skills; routines; and all aspects of health & wellbeing
- Tracking and monitoring of those who are not receiving direct support from H2H, are on a mainstream school roll but not attending school
- Projections of future needs must inform development of the service, e.g. younger children; Neuro-Developmental; Trauma and Dysregulation; family needs

- Involvement of the Educational Psychology Service in supporting organisational change.

1. Rationale for collaborative self-evaluation and Jennifer's involvement

The purpose of Jennifer King's (ADES) involvement has been to provide a perspective on the future direction and purpose of the provision H2H which should meet the needs of care experienced young people at most risk of not engaging with mainstream education.

The approach taken during the 3 day visit was to collaborate (using Appreciative Enquiry) with a range of Education and Social Care staff, young people, Police and parents/carers - all who have a role in how improvement can be taken forward.

2. Background and context of Home to Highland

Home to Highland (H2H) was established 5 years ago in order to reduce the number of CECYP out-of-authority (OOA), on the basis that their care and education needs could be better met at home in Highland, and at reduced cost to the local authority.

The main purpose of the H2H Education Service is to transition children and young people back into Highland/local community and school by providing support to family and their education. Children and young people remain on the roll of a mainstream school although attendance in their mainstream school is variable.

It is mainly SAC funded (£380,000) although some costs are met from the revenue budget which is reinvested from OOA placement costs.

Young people are supported in different settings, primarily around the Inverness area and include:

- Living at home or in kinship care, attending their local school
- Repurposing a former residential house as a bespoke education base and possible respite care house for a returned child with complex needs.
- Redevelopment of a residential house to return two young people from OOA to two singleton placements.
- Centre for CEYP to meet, train, receive secondary education – Clachnaharry (35 currently)
- Off-site primary education provision for returning children – Merkinch (Former Family Resource Centre - 3).
- Bespoke education packages to improve attainment and achievement of CEYP and those on the edge of care.

The number of children and young people and nature of needs is as follows:

- Across Highland there is a total of 627 Care Experienced Children and Young People
- 527 are enrolled in a school
- 96 have left school
- Approx 195 have support/involvement from the Home to Highland service

All children and young people have experienced some trauma in their lives as a result of their family circumstances. In addition they are likely to have had some interruption to their learning which will have caused gaps in their knowledge and progression in the curriculum. All care experienced children and young people are presumed to have Additional Support Needs (ASN) unless assessment evidence indicates otherwise (Additional Support for Learning Act, amended 2009).

Co-located with the H2H service is the support provided for **unaccompanied asylum seekers**. Approximately 35 young people who are UACS receive innovative and robust support from the CCW

and Teacher. All young men are on the roll of a mainstream school and therefore immersed in the local community. Achievements need to be seen more widely than national performance outcomes which many will not achieve due to language barriers and their age on arrival. However, wider measures discussed with the UASC team indicate the resilience and potential these young people have to achieve far more over time. The 'right to remain' issue is their greatest concern.

More widely the profile of ASN in Highland reflects the national trend with the most predominant needs being those associated with social and emotional learning needs – which will often be reflected in how care experienced CYP present. To place Highland's profile in some context a sample of other local authorities and Scotland's data is included.

The ASN Census data should be treated with some caution due to the variability across Scotland and within authorities. However it has stable long term trends in relation to the reasons for support for pupils and could therefore offer some indication of projections of need; and how this might be compared or moderated with other local authorities with similar profiles including rurality.

3. What does the research say about education provision for Care Experienced children and young people; with reference to virtual schools and 'alternative' provision ?

In making any comparisons or judgements about the quality of provision, the research in relation to care experienced young people and alternative provision was referred to. A synthesis of the research indicates that the main principles related to effective practice which should be evident in Home to Highland includes:

- Stable planning horizons, ie planning for young people which is based on anticipated need and with adequate time for transition planning (Harrison et al 2023)
- Timely enrolment with educational provision, avoiding delays (Harrison et al 2023)
- Coherent additional support provided by skilled and informed practitioners (Harrison et al 2023)
- Engagement with local authority improvement and/or scrutiny processes (Harrison et al 2023)
- Strong trauma-informed and attachment-aware practice (Harrison et al 2023)
- Adequate care placements and strong engagement with families/parents (Harrison et al 2023)
- Improving educational attainment alongside emotional wellbeing is a key priority for VS service delivery (Drew & Banerjee, 2019).
- This aligned with an emphasis on a needs-based system which extends 'achievement' beyond qualifications and includes subjective concepts such as 'engagement'. Small steps of progress might also include averting negative events and minimising escalation of risk, e.g. entering the community justice system (Harrison et al 2023)
- Multi-agency working which includes more personalised provision for service users and a more knowledgeable workforce (Drew & Banerjee, 2019).
- Challenges might be evident in relation to professional cultures and shared priorities (Sebba & Berridge, 2019)
- The role of the VS in offering bespoke support was in alignment with key legislation. However, the VS model was largely perceived to be reactive with a concentration on a within-child deficit model (Waterman, 2020) suggesting a clear area for improvement.
- The inclusion of pupil voice in decision making and service development was also emphasised as an area for improvement, particularly within the literature (Waterman, 2020).
- Closer partnership working, broader use of different data types, and increasing the use of pupil voice in service planning and evaluation were noted as areas where future attention could be focused.

4. How was the collaborative self-evaluation carried out, ie methodology

The following activities provided the basis for gathering information in collaboration with H2H staff:

- Observations of day-to-day activity at Clachnaharry, Merkinch and Leault
- Taking a closer look at current self-evaluation evidence gathered by the H2H team
- Interviews and focus groups with partners (Social Work; Police; Education CLO; Principal Educational Psychologist)
- Interviews and focus groups with H2H staff
- Phone and video calls with parents (5)
- Informal conversations with young people (4)
- High level analysis of 10 case studies:
 - a young person in S3 with a stable shared placement between H2H and Dingwall Academy
 - an adopted young person in S3 with an improving shared placement between H2H and Grantown High School
 - a family of 3 adopted young people who have all settled well into post-school destinations
 - 4 young people who have all returned recently from residential care and are being fully supported by H2H
 - 2 young people whose risks to their safety in the community have been addressed immediately into their curriculum
 - A family of children who have returned to living at home and will need sustained support

5. Participants' views

- The majority of stakeholders were very positive about the service provided by H2H and the impact it has had for young people and their families. They valued the opportunities which young people have to learn in different ways. Several participants spoke about the 'stickability' of the H2H team who sustain their involvement and support through barriers and resistance, gradually engaging young people and their parents over time.
- Some participants said that they would welcome opportunities to be more joined-up with Education staff and processes.
- All 5 parents who were interviewed spoke highly of the holistic support that they and their children had received and the positive difference it has made to their achievements; wellbeing; engagement with learning; and pathway to a more positive post-school destination.
- Young people themselves were clearly able to relate well to staff and in a few occasions to each other. They spoke positively about the curriculum they were following and the support they received from the H2H team.
- Social work/care staff were overwhelmingly positive about H2H in relation to their responsiveness; quality of education and care; and the close connections and planning that they have with the team.
- The Police Scotland officer with oversight of youth justice is a key partner with the H2H service and spoke highly of how it has provided diversionary activities for some care experienced young people.
- Mainstream school staff were not well represented among participants, with only 2 joining the focus groups and a further 2 having previously taken part in H2H's own survey. This is a gap

in the self-evaluation evidence and may be a reflection of the limited connections and how they are formed between H2H and schools.

6. Overall findings/reflections

In understanding how well the H2H model works it is important to acknowledge that it was established at a time when education and social care services for children and young people were one service in the local authority. Its development since then has taken place during significant change as a result of the service being split. This has affected how well the H2H service is connected to both service areas. Cultural and Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) was therefore used to identify where understandable tensions exist that might have affected the intended outcomes for H2H. These tensions relate to: the locus of leadership and quality improvement planning; pressures on the budget and resources; how much time a young person has at H2H; and to what extent H2H is a part of the wider educational provision in Highland.

As such it was not possible to make a fair or valid judgement about the self-evaluation which H2H staff have carried out. Self-evaluation activity is evident across all of the main quality indicators (HGIOS 4 – see appendix A) but is not yet used systematically enough to inform cycles of improvement planning. However, there is evidence of the following:

- Safeguarding processes are in place with weekly updates of young people; chronologies, use of child concern forms, policy and CP training are all in place; analysis of young people's vulnerabilities which are acted upon in their PSE, e.g. girls and knowledge of 'time' and body parts. The risk for young people is tracked using a matrix from the point of initial H2H involvement.
- Good systematic analysis of attendance and engagement, albeit only for the sessions H2H provide.
- Teachers participating in moderation activities in relation to their professional judgements for QI 2.3
- Tracking and monitoring of Wellbeing and engagement, although this could be improved by using a nationally recognised framework such as the Glasgow Motivation and Wellbeing Profile [Glasgow Motivation and Wellbeing Profile \(GMWP\) \(education.gov.scot\)](http://education.gov.scot/glasgow-motivation-and-wellbeing-profile)
- Teachers taking account of inclusive pedagogy is at an early stage but reflects nationally recognised practice – [CIRCLE resource to support Inclusive Learning and Collaborative Working \(Primary and Secondary\) | Resources | Education Scotland](http://www.education.scot.nhs.uk/resources/primary-and-secondary/circle-resource-to-support-inclusive-learning-and-collaborative-working)
- The curriculum is centred around young people's interests, strengths and gaps in their learning. It is built around a relational approach and for young people at the secondary stage is aligned as closely as possible to post-school destinations
- Employability opportunities and destinations (including work experience) are evident for almost all young people.
- Transition planning is a key strength but has recently been affected by limited time in which to plan for educational provision for young people returning home from specialist placement
- Self-evaluation activity is undertaken by all staff across the service priorities, which have been informed by young people's needs and the national CELCIS framework.

7. What does change need to look like ?

- Self-evaluation for improvement planning needs to be more systematic with fewer key priorities and have shared accountability with education officers and schools

- Strengths of H2H can only be sustained with opportunities to regularly have systematic planning connections with other educational practice in both mainstream and alternative provision
- Extend the current referral group membership to include Social Work and Education reps to enable wider perspective and shared accountability of decision-making; and consider moving to a monthly meeting (with virtual decisions for high risk cases)
- Improved partnership with the Children's Houses to enable shared practice in relation to life skills; routines; and all aspects of health & wellbeing
- The balance of secondary age young people to those at the primary stage is significantly higher, which is a reflection of the age/stage at which a young person will have become care experienced. However, ASN data indicates that children's needs are becoming more complex at an earlier age and therefore projections of how their needs will present, and the intervention/support required needs to be anticipated now – earlier intervention at the primary stage might prevent escalation of needs later on. This would require a shift in the focus of the H2H service along with other services such as The Bridge – ie a more holistic view of provision.
- Tracking and monitoring of those who are not receiving direct support from H2H, are on a mainstream school roll but not attending school
- Use of more meaningful tools for self-evaluation, e.g. thematic analysis of case studies to illuminate 'why we do what we do'
- Trust and shared understanding with other service areas – facilitated by CLO and EPS/PEP starting with shared professional learning and development
- Build on strengths in family work, e.g. Deciders Skills; Seeds to Supper; UHI links (North Area)
- Introduce evidence-based approaches which promote peer assisted learning between young people
- Introduce use of the Glasgow Motivation and Wellbeing Profile and build on the Circle Framework for Inclusion (already on the SIP)
- Ensure that analysis undertaken with the new attendance system is joined up with schools' seemis data
- Transitions need time for adequate planning which has been challenging with some recent young people returning at short notice – but is not sustainable for the longer term complexity of needs and resilience of care and education provision. Transitions which are well planned are more likely to achieve sustainable outcomes.
- Share and celebrate the very good work which is being done for unaccompanied asylum seekers team.

References

- Berridge, D. (2012). Education of young people in care: What have we learned? Children and Youth Services Review, 34(6), 1171-1175 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2012.01.032>
- CSRR Mapping Integration and Outcomes Across Scotland - Summary - CELCIS - August 2023 03304_Looked_after_and_learning_Jan20.pdf (celcis.org)

- Drew, H., & Banerjee, R. (2019). Supporting the education and well-being of children who are looked-after: what is the role of the virtual school? *European Journal of Psychology of Education*, 34(1), 101-121. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10212-018-0374-0>
- Harrison, N, Sebba, J., Wigley, M., Pryor, R. and Blyth, F. (2023) Improving the Effectiveness of virtual schools. University of Exeter/KPMG/NAVSH/Rees Centre
- Scottish Government. (2016). Children, Young People, Families, Early Intervention and Adult Learning and Empowering Communities Fund evaluation: baseline report. Scottish Government Publication
- Scottish Government. (2022a). Education Outcomes for Looked After Children 2020/21.
- Sebba, J., & Berridge, D. (2019). The role of the Virtual School in supporting improved educational outcomes for children in care. *Oxford Review of Education*, 45(4), 538-555.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2019.1600489>
- Waterman, V. (2020). "It depends on the individual": A psycho-social exploration of designated teachers' and virtual school advisory teachers' experiences of supporting looked after children in education. [Doctoral dissertation, The University of Essex. University of Essex Repository
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0190740923005467>