

North Partnership NQSW Conference

On 24th April we held a North Partnership conference for our Newly Qualified Social Workers. The event was open to final year students and Social Workers in their first two years of practice working across Children's Services, Justice and Adult Services.

The event at the Drumossie Hotel attracted 88 delegates from across Highland, Moray, Argyll and Bute, Shetland, Orkney and the Western Isles. Funding from the Scottish Government enabled this rare and highly valuable opportunity for staff across the North and West to come together to learn and support each other.

Neil Thompson Author, Educator and Social Work advisor gave the keynote speech 'How to Survive and Thrive in Social Work' and attendees joined two workshops of their choice. The central role of good relationships and strong values was a feature throughout discussions.

Workshops included Understanding the UNCRC and rights based practice, Utilising Supervision and Support, Professional Identity, Professional Curiosity and Trauma Informed Practice with a focus on Therapeutic Life Story Work.

This was a fantastic occasion used to invest in the next generation of social workers and celebrate the critical role of Social Work in society.



Brighter Beginnings – Inverness Family Centre

The Brighter Beginnings event held on 3rd March at Eden Court welcomed approximately 500 children under 5 (mostly under 3!) along with their parents/carers to take part in fun and free activities. The event was organised by Gillian Forbes, PEEP Co-ordinator at Inverness Family Centre, and supported by a range of partners. The event included presentations from Dan Wuori, an international specialist in early childcare, and local speakers. The event was also used to launch the updated 'Consulting with our

Youngest Children' toolkit developed by CALA and the Child Protection Committee. Feedback from families was that they wanted more days like this and the Integrated Children's Service Board Vision 26 event will take place on 11th August, again in Eden Court and this time welcoming all children under 12 years.

Service Achievements – Child Protection Committee

Bairns Hoose:

Scottish Government has awarded £587,000 Bairns Hoose funding to Highland for 2025/26 to help us create four rooms approach to ensure children and families receive the right support from all services when they have experienced abuse and/or witnessed harm. The money will be used to create and develop safe spaces across Highland for children having to give evidence and those requiring further support. It will also be used to support the roll out of Bairns Hoose standards in Education, recognising that Education staff have the most contact with children and are in the best place to provide support to help children recover from their experiences. The funding will be used to support the development of a partnership project between Action for Children, Barnardos and Police Scotland, working alongside The Anchor Project to help children and families at risk of exploitation. It will also be used to provide support for staff working with children who have experienced abuse or witnessed harm.

This funding will build on work undertaken to date on houses in Inverness and Wick which we aim to have fully functional in this financial year. So far, we have been able to offer direct support to individual children and families, group activities, work on safe spaces and specialist training for staff. We now have Wendy Lowrie in post as the Children's Service Manager for Bairns Hoose to help us embed the standards in practice across Highland.

As an Affiliate partner to the national Bairns Hoose project, Highland will continue to develop trauma informed responses for children, families and staff, and the team have been asked to speak at national events highlighting the good practice which has taken place to date.

Domestic Abuse Commissioner (England & Wales) Report: "Victims in their own right; babies, children and young people's experience of domestic abuse".

Earlier this week I asked Mary to share a link to the above report with you. This Report was published and presented to Westminster Parliament on Tuesday. It is a lengthy and comprehensive document and given that its focus is on services in England and Wales I would not be surprised if you have been unable to allocate time out of your busy days to read it. However, I did want to draw your attention to the fact that colleagues here in

Highland made a significant contribution to the report following a two-day visit from the Commissioner's team to Inverness last year. They met with members of the CPC and the VAWP, members of the S&T Steering Group and frontline staff who had undertaken the S&T training. The feedback and insights the team got from colleagues here in Highland is reflected throughout the report particularly in the phrase: "social workers participating in the roundtables". But there is a specific reference to Highland in the Report that I have extracted for you here:

CASE STUDY

Safe & Together

The Safe & Together (S&T) model enables a whole system's approach to safety and children's wellbeing by filling gaps in knowledge and shared practice principles across the multi-agency response to domestic abuse. The focus is shifted to the choices of perpetrators as parents, as they are held accountable for their actions. S&T Implementation Leads located within partner services work closely with VAWG teams, children's services, and partner agencies, such as police, health, and education, to help embed the model in the local Coordinated Community Response to domestic abuse. This is done through training, case discussions, monitoring the progress of the project via ongoing case file audits, and by evaluating social care/agency data.

Within the wider context of the Scottish GIRFEC (Getting it right for every child) approach, the Safe & Together model has brought in a cohesive, systemic approach to the domestic abuse response in the Highlands, Scotland. Backed by a robust partnership and governance arrangement between the Highland Violence Against Women Partnership and the Highland Child Protection Committee, the model has strategic and operational buy-in from statutory partners beyond social care, including Marac chairs, criminal justice, health and other multi-agency partners. There is a tiered approach to training for the general workforce, direct workforce and specialist workforce. This ensures shared language and principles across agencies, which recognises the protective parent and the needs of children experiencing domestic abuse.

"The training has been invaluable as there is a lot of emphasis on perpetrator patterns of behaviour. It is helpful for probation staff when working with families where men are convicted of non-domestic abuse crimes but can still identify domestic abuse, and also for female offenders who may be experiencing domestic abuse."

CJS S&T participant, Highland, Scotland

I would like to thank all those staff who agreed to meet with the Commissioner's team and were prepared to talk openly and honestly about their experience of S&T training and the challenges they face in working with families affected by domestic abuse. I know it was appreciated by the DAC Office, and I don't think it is coincidental that the following phrases from the Highland Case Study all feature in the Commissioner's recommendations:

a cohesive, systemic approach to the domestic abuse response ... a robust partnership and governance arrangement ... strategic and operational buy-in from statutory partners beyond social care ... a tiered approach to training for the general workforce, direct workforce and specialist workforce ... ensures shared language and principles across agencies.

The Care Inspectorate working in Partnership with Social Workers

Recently launched a presentation aimed at sharing more about the role of the regulatory inspector.

The aim of the presentation is to help social workers understand the relevance of the corporate parent in supporting outcomes for looked after and accommodated young people. The inspectorate has asked that the presentation be shared with your social work teams and Members are likely to have an interest. There is a short video with three discussion topics at the end which can be used to consider the relevance of the inspector role.

A link for this is available and will be circulated by Democratic Services after the meeting.: <https://youtu.be/K-nVHXnRsRs>.