

Children, Young People and Families COVID-19 Evidence and Intelligence Report

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Executive Summary

This report provides an overview of the latest evidence and intelligence about the impact of COVID-19 and the response on children, young people and families, in particular, those experiencing the greatest challenges. Concerns have been raised about the impact on the rights of children and young people (CYP); and a review of learning from past pandemics has underlined the importance of involving CYP and developing responses tailored to their distinct experiences. This report follows on from two previous reports (published in April and May) and aims to inform national and local strategy and service developments.

Data on Vulnerable Children

Data collected over the 13 weeks since Easter shows that there have been significant reductions in child wellbeing concerns and child protection concerns/planning compared with the same period last year. However, on most measures, there has been an increase in activity in the last four weeks compared with the same four weeks a year ago.

Proportionally, domestic abuse has been identified in more child protection cases than in the same period last year.

Children and Young People

- Children's Parliament survey (8 to 14 years): The majority of children who responded are faring well, enjoying good family relationships and feeling safe, but still a significant proportion (and more girls than boys) report boredom, loneliness and worries. However, for those respondents (and other children) who are not experiencing good family relationships and are not feeling safe, the potential consequences are significant and concerning.
- 'Lockdown Lowdown' survey (11 to 25 year olds): Respondents are most concerned about exams and coursework, and their future. There are also concerns regarding social relationships and mental health/wellbeing.
- The highest proportion of issues discussed with Childline counsellors are about mental health, family relationships, and suicidal thoughts and feelings.
- Key reported concerns for care experienced CYP are: poverty, digital inclusion for accessing learning and services, and mental wellbeing). However, some CYP in residential settings have reported increased stability/predictability.
- Key reported concerns for CYP in the justice system are lack of contact with others, isolation and access to resources; impacting on mental wellbeing and exacerbating pre-existing difficulties.

Families

- We know that many families have adapted well and demonstrated resilience during the crisis, but for some there have been increased worries and stressors.
- Calls to Children 1st Parentline have increased and are commonly related to financial worries, struggles with having children at home and child behaviour and mental health and emotional wellbeing concerns, as well as issues about parental mental health and contact with children for separated parents. A number of parents have contacted Children 1st talking about the needs of children with additional support needs and how life has been for them at home without their usual supports. There has also been a reported significant increase in calls to the Lone Parent Helpline.

- Financial pressures have increased for many families on low incomes, and reported increased costs or difficulties with accessing resources to support their children's education. Eligible families valued the support towards the cost of replacing free school meals.
- Families with additional support needs have reported difficulties with: contacting /accessing services; missing the help from their support workers and advocates; and uncertainty about access to childcare hubs and school placing requests (with related worries about transitions).
- Key reported concerns for families with disabled CYP are: educating and entertaining children at home, managing children's health and wellbeing, decreased income; reduced support from services (following ELC and school closures); worries about protecting children from the virus; and transitions to ELC, school or adult services.
- Key reported concerns for kinship families are: mental wellbeing of CYP and distressed behaviours; mental and physical health of carers; financial worries; home learning; access to education hubs; safety of school return (where carers have health conditions); and worries about virus transmission within families.
- Domestic abuse support services have reported that children affected by domestic abuse have had more severe experiences during lockdown and a lack of access to safe spaces. A wide-range of abusive behaviours from perpetrators have been reported, related to child contact during lockdown. Specific challenges for Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) women were reported, related to habitual residency criteria, legal delays, access to universal credit, and reduced employment opportunities.

Services

- Universal health services, including school nursing and Allied Health Professionals (AHP) community services for children, have largely continued throughout the pandemic. Coverage rates for health visitors in the earliest weeks following birth and uptake of immunisations have remained high.
- Children's attendance at A&E has been low.
- Local authority social work services have maintained regular contact with families already known to them. Reported concerns included where there was less support available due to a family member shielding and where children had minimal or no engagement with education. However, increased engagement and the development of trusting relationships were also reported; and that some children were more settled because of not being in school. A potential increase in new child protection concerns is anticipated as lockdown eases.
- Local authorities have adapted processes to maintain and support fostering, adoption and kinship care during lockdown; but some local areas report pressure on care placements and services at capacity.
- Youth justice practitioners have overcome barriers (e.g. lack of technology or privacy at home) to keep in touch with CYP. Face-to-face contact has been important for CYP where there are concerns for their welfare and wellbeing.
- Children's Hearings have used video technology to ensure critical and high priority decisions on statutory protections; but this has been about 30% of the normal capacity of hearings and there is a significant backlog of cases. There has been positive feedback about virtual hearings, but also challenges with connectivity and access to devices. Plans are underway for adaptation of physical hearings (allowing for physical distancing) and to also continue with virtual hearings.

- There are an estimated 29,000 young carers in Scotland. Although most local carer services have been unable to provide face-to-face support, most have been offering alternatives such as telephone counselling and online sessions.
- Third Sector organisations have responded quickly and effectively to meet a wide range of new and increased challenges for families and CYP, including financial assistance and advice, helplines, digital support tools and access to digital resources, emotional and practical support, and resources to support wellbeing of parents/carers and activities with CYP.

It is apparent that different impacts have been felt by children, young people and families in different circumstances, but there are number of core, key issues for attention including: income, emotional wellbeing and mental health, education, adaptations to service provision, relationships, and the impacts of the virus itself.

Introduction

1. This is the third report from the Scottish Government with SOLACE and other partners to provide an overview of the evidence on the impact of COVID-19 and the associated lockdown measures for children, young people and families, in particular for those experiencing the greatest challenges. A wide range of evidence sources were reviewed (references are detailed at the end of the report) and thanks are due to the many organisations (detailed in Annex A) who contributed to this report.
2. A COVID-19 Children and Families Collective Leadership Group involving senior leaders across the children's sector was established in May to review intelligence about the impacts on children, young people and families and to provide local and national leadership in delivering a response. The intelligence includes weekly data reports from the 32 Chief Officer Groups and Police Scotland and broader evidence reports. Two evidence reports were published on 24 April¹ and 24 May². The Leadership Group considered this latest, third report at its meeting on 9 July.
3. Activities across services for children and families are included in the Scottish Government's C-19 Framework for Decision Making: *Scotland's route map through and out of the crisis*³ (updated 18 June). Moving along this 'route map' creates challenges, as well as potential opportunities, to chart a way forward to support Scotland's children, young people and families, as part of our continued commitment to Getting it right for every child.
4. This evidence report aims to assess the impacts of the COVID-19 on children, young people and their families in Scotland and help inform national and local action. The first section below sets out the central importance of children's rights, followed by sections detailing the evidence regarding:
 - A. Trends in data on vulnerable children
 - B. Views and experiences of children and young people
 - C. Impact on families
 - D. Impact on service delivery
 - E. Conclusion

Impact on Children's Rights

5. There are widespread concerns about the impact of COVID-19 and the response to it on the rights of children and young people, including by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child who published 11 recommendations for governments⁴. The Scottish Government has produced two reports for Together (Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights) on the action being taken in relation to these recommendations⁵, and have committed to providing further updates. The Scottish Government is continuing to undertake Child Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessments (CRWIA), during the current emergency for new policies and legislation^a. This enables assessment of the impacts on children's rights and wellbeing and mitigations to be put in place.

^a CRWIAs have been published for the: [Coronavirus \(Scotland\) Act 2020](#), [Coronavirus \(Scotland\) \(No.2\) Act 2020](#) and the [Education \(Miscellaneous Amendments\) \(Coronavirus\) \(Scotland\) Regulations 2020](#). An [initial impact assessment](#) was undertaken as part of the Excellence and Equity during the COVID-19 Pandemic – a strategic framework for reopening schools, early learning and childcare provision in Scotland

6. One of a number of areas of concern highlighted by the Children and Young People's Commissioner for Scotland⁶, is the impact the closure of schools and the cancellation of exams has had on children and young people not only in terms of their education, but also in relation to: mental health; access to food; and inequalities. The Children and Young People's Commissioner has commissioned the Observatory of Children's Human Rights Scotland to conduct an Alternative Children's Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA)⁷. The Alternative CRIA will provide an independent assessment on the Scottish Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on children's Rights. It is expected that this will be published in later in July. In addition, the Equality and Human Rights Committee is conducting an inquiry into the impact of COVID-19 on equalities and human rights⁸.
7. The crucial focus on children's rights is reinforced by learning from previous pandemics reviewed by the Institute for Inspiring Children's Futures at the University of Strathclyde⁹. The review concluded that children can be physically and socially invisible in the context of public health containment measures. Therefore, it is essential to develop responses tailored to the distinct experiences of children and young people; ensuring they are included and their agency recognised.
8. Although there is currently little historic evidence on the impact of disease containment measures on the wellbeing of children and young people, from the evidence available the review found that in previous epidemics existing child wellbeing concerns were exacerbated and new ones emerged. New or exacerbated experiences of poverty and low income were found to affect access to services, nutritious food, adequate housing, and risks children's survival and development. In addition, emergency measures to restrict movement were found to impact everyday childhood experiences (including friendships, access to play and education, autonomy, and access to birth families for those in alternative care). These measures also create new vulnerabilities, compounded by the impact on parenting, due to isolation and a lack of external support. This leads to increases in the number of vulnerable children (including issues of online exploitation, sexual exploitation, domestic abuse, neglect and challenges to children's mental health).

A. Trends in data on vulnerable children

i) Child protection and looked after children

In the 13 weeks since Easter up to 17 July, it is clear there has been significantly reduced activity, compared with the same period last year. However, on most measures, there has been an increase in activity in the last four weeks compared with the same four weeks a year ago:

- 3% reduction in child wellbeing concerns being generated by Police Scotland over the last thirteen week. Over the last four weeks, however, there has been an increase of 6% compared with the same four weeks last year.
- 12% reduction in child protection concerns being generated by Police Scotland over the last thirteen weeks, whereas for the last four weeks there has been a 4% increase compared with the same period last year.

- 6% reduction in cases where Health, Police and Social Work have identified sufficient evidence to consider planning a child protection investigation in the last thirteen weeks. In the last four weeks, there has been a 16% increase compared with last year.
- 11% reduction in the number of children identified as needing child protection plans over the last thirteen weeks compared with the same period last year, and a 7% increase over the last four weeks. The size of the reduction for domestic abuse being a significant factor in children being identified as needing child protection plans was 7% over the last thirteen weeks and the increase over the last four weeks was 7%. This means that, proportionally, domestic abuse has been identified as a factor in more cases in 2020 compared with 2019.
- 51% reduction in the number of children becoming 'looked after' over the last thirteen weeks, narrowing slightly to 48% over the last four weeks. The reduction was larger among children becoming looked after at home (74% over the last thirteen weeks, and 65% over the last four weeks) compared to those becoming looked after away from home (36% and 40% respectively)¹⁰.

ii) Attendance at learning hubs and uptake of free school lunches

The last evidence and intelligence report provided data up until 13 May. Over the nine weeks since then, there was a steady increase in the numbers of children and young people attending school hubs up until the school holidays started. Since the initial large drop in the first two weeks of the school holidays, numbers have been fairly stable. It has been a similar pattern for numbers of vulnerable children, with week on week increases up until the school holidays with numbers being stable since then. Free school meal figures increased slightly between 11 May and the school holidays and have since fallen as some local authorities adjusted their eligibility criteria for the holiday period and fewer pupils attended hubs to receive a free school meal. Figures show:

- 58% increase in number of children and young people attending hubs between 13 May and 24 June.
- 35% decrease in number of children and young people attending hubs between 24 June and 15 July.
- 60% increase in number of vulnerable children and young people attending hubs between 13 May and 24 June (compared to a 41% increase among children and young people of key workers).
- 53% decrease in number of vulnerable children and young people attending hubs between 24 June and 15 July (compared to a 33% decrease among children and young people of key workers).
- 2% increase in total number of free school meals taken in a hub, vouchers, direct payments or home deliveries provided by local authorities between 13 May and 24 June.
- 9% decrease in total number of free school meals taken in a hub, vouchers, direct payments or home deliveries provided by local authorities between 24 June and 15 July¹¹.

B. Views and experiences of children and young people

i) The early years

We currently know very little about how COVID-19 has been affecting the health and wellbeing of younger children in Scotland. Public Health Scotland have been running a new survey to seek to address this. The COVID-19 Early Years Resilience and Impact Survey (CEYRIS) undertaken with parents and carers of children aged 2 to 7 asked about experiences of life at home during the pandemic and how this may have affected the health and wellbeing of families. The survey was live from 22 June to 6 July and as of 30 June, there had been almost 14,000 responses. Analysis is currently underway.

ii) Children and young people aged 8 to 25

Findings from The Children's Parliament 'How are you doing' survey with 8 to 14 year olds^b were published from the initial survey in April and from the following survey in May. The key findings reported in May¹² were:

- A high majority agreed that they have fun things to do (75%), enjoy learning new things (78%), can be creative (92%), and know there are things they're good at (92%), but a significant proportion also report feeling bored (58% of girls and 49% of boys).
- Most children reported they could access information (89%), express opinions/ideas (77%) and feel their rights are respected (80%).
- Over half reported feeling cheerful and in a good mood (61%), and higher proportions reported having plenty of energy (78%), feeling they would be ok, even if they're having a difficult time (70%), making healthy choices (73%) and getting enough exercise (73%). However, a sizeable proportion do report often feeling lonely (23% of boys and 31% of girls).
- For respondents to this survey, most enjoy being with their family (92%), their family gets along well together (80%), they feel safe at home (96%) and online (82%), and feel happy with (90%) and supported (83%) by friends. However, we know there are significant concerns where children are not experiencing good relationships or feeling safe.
- Between April and May, there was an increase in the number of worries identified by children. Girls were more likely to identify more worries than boys. In May 48% of girls identified 4 or more worries compared to 38% of boys. The two most common worries were about the health of their family (61%) and about the future (55%).
- A high proportion have someone in their family (92%) and outside their family (77%) to talk to about their worries.
- In terms of what helps children currently feel good, fewer reported that doing school work (26%) or home learning (33%) helped, and as might be expected, parents/carers were most reported (81%) to help children feel good. High figures were also reported for siblings (60%), friends (61%) and pets (54%) helping children to feel good.

^b The Children's Parliament re-ran its survey 'How are you doing?' in May, when 3,698 children aged 8 to 14 took part. The survey looks at wellbeing across a number of domains including learning and activities; access to information, expressing opinions and experiencing rights; health; and family and friends. Respondents are also asked about their worries and what makes them feel good. The survey is continuing to run monthly to track trends. The survey is online but Children's Parliament staff assist children to complete the survey over the phone where their digital access is limited.

The findings of the Lockdown Lowdown survey^c of 11 to 25 year olds published in May¹³ found that overall:

- Around half of respondents stated they are moderately or extremely concerned about exams and coursework.
- Two-fifths of respondents stated they are moderately or extremely concerned about their mental wellbeing.
- Two-thirds of respondents stated that they are moderately or extremely concerned about the impact of COVID-19 on their future.
- Two-fifths of respondents are not confident about accessing the information on mental health, and over half don't know where to access information on financial support.
- Respondents stated that decision-makers should improve the impact on education and make restrictions even stricter.

There were few significant differences in the views and concerns of young people about the impact of COVID-19 across different demographic groups. There were no differences in concern between male and female respondents. Young people who identified as non-binary and those in mixed/multiple ethnic groups were less confident in how to access information. In terms of differences by area deprivation, young people in the most deprived areas were slightly more concerned about the mental health and wellbeing of others than those in less deprived areas. Young people in less deprived areas were more concerned about educational outcomes and social relationships than those in the most deprived areas. In terms of differences by age, younger people (aged 11-15) were more concerned about social relationships than older young people. Those aged 16 to 18 year olds were more concerned about educational outcomes and over 18s were more concerned about mental health and wellbeing of others than other age groups.

Findings from an additional weekly condensed survey^d found that overall:

- 97% of respondents are concerned about the impact of coronavirus on their future
- 85% are concerned about their social relationships
- 77% are concerned about their mental health and wellbeing
- 57% are concerned about the ability to access their rights as a young person.

iii) Childline

NSPCC Scotland provides monthly briefing on issues children are raising with Childline counsellors.^e There has been a small increase in the number of counselling sessions provided by Childline since lockdown (April was 5% up on pre-lockdown and May was 1%

^c The Scottish Youth Parliament, Youth Link and Young Scot published the findings of their online Lockdown Lowdown survey of young people (aged 11-25) in May. The survey was self-selecting, with 65% of respondents female, and over 50% from SIMD Quintiles 4 & 5 (least deprived).

^d In addition to the main Lockdown Lowdown survey, the three organisations run a condensed weekly version. This survey asks young people to rate how they are feeling about their mental health and wellbeing, social relationships, ability to access their rights and the impact of the coronavirus on their future. Since 24th April, this survey has been run each weekend from noon on Friday to midnight on Sunday. There have been a total of eight surveys completed. The survey also poses an open question to respondents which varies in topic from week to week. Across the eight weeks, topics have ranged from how young people feel that coronavirus has impacted their rights, what decisions should be taken around the re-opening of schools and how they are reacting to the easing of lockdown measures.

^e The current briefing compares the pre-lockdown period (6 January – 22 March) with the post lockdown period (April – May). Children and young people are also visiting the Childline website which offers a wide range of information, advice and resources.

down on April). The proportion of counselling sessions about mental health has increased from 33% pre-lockdown to 37% in May 2020. Mental health remains the top concern for children and young people contacting Childline. The 2nd main concern is about family relationships which has increased from 10% pre-lockdown (when it was the 3rd main concern) to 13% in May 2020, when it overtook suicidal thoughts and feelings to become the 2nd main concern. Whilst the proportion of counselling sessions about most types of abuse have remained low, they have overtaken some of the other main concerns: sexual abuse (up from 9th place to 6th), physical abuse (up from 10th place to 7th), emotional abuse (up from 14th place to 10th). The number of counselling sessions about domestic abuse have increased from an average of 212 over a 30-day-period pre-lockdown to 264 in May (up 25%). The main concerns that have decreased are: bullying (6th place to 9th) and school/education (8th place to 12th)¹⁴.

iv) Care experienced children and young people

Who Cares? Scotland published a report¹⁵ on the impact of COVID-19 on care experienced people in April and May based on intelligence from its ongoing work which includes advocacy support, helpline, and participation activities. The following three key themes were identified:

- **Poverty:** Many care experienced people (including care experienced parents and kinship carers) were struggling financially, including not having enough money for food. This was partly due to the increased costs of food and utility and digital access bills during lockdown, and partly because some care leavers, living independently for the first time, were not being adequately supported during this transition and are struggling to manage their finances. Reductions in access to financial support and delays in the social security systems were reported.
- **Information and participation:** Concerns were raised about a lack of digital access; leaving some young people feeling isolated and without a voice, and preventing them from accessing services and education.
- **Health and wellbeing:** Increased existing, and new, mental health concerns (associated with social isolation, bereavement and tensions within personal relationships) were reported, particularly for young people living in temporary accommodation away from their usual support networks.

The Centre for Excellence for Children's Care and Protection (CELCIS)^f, has noted that the COVID crisis is likely to have been especially challenging for care-experienced children and young people with histories of unresolved trauma in their families of origin, whose emotional foundations and sense of safety are already fragile. In particular, for those who are living at home in difficult circumstances, adolescents seeking to manage their distress through self-harming behaviours, and care leavers whose networks of support are limited. CELCIS reports, however, that mental health support has been hard to access at this time when wellbeing and mental health issues are exacerbated. They note that there have been reports from local teams of an increase in self-harming and hospital admissions.

^f All references to information from CELCIS throughout the document are taken from intelligence provided by CELCIS, based on an appraisal of information and feedback gathered through a range of direct work and support with services, and practice forums and networks with practitioners and managers.

v) Young people leaving care

The Scottish Throughcare and Aftercare Forum (Staf) undertook work⁹ with practitioners and managers to explore their concerns around the impact of COVID-19 on care leavers. Feedback was also sought from young people themselves. The issues identified included:

- Loneliness, social isolation and mental health
- Digital exclusion
- Food poverty
- Financial precarity, access to social security, bills and debt
- Childcare provision for care experienced parents

These issues were felt to be particularly acute for young people with care-experience within the justice system serving custodial sentences, with practitioners concerned about young people's access to support and throughcare and aftercare services if they are liberated during COVID-19 and the long term impact that this could have on their lives.

While clear challenges were identified, Staf also found that for some young people, lockdown had been a positive experience that provided more stability and security¹⁶.

vi) Children and young people in the Youth Justice system

Research by the Centre for Youth and Criminal Justice^h undertaken in May found that the biggest issues facing children and young people in the justice system were isolation and lack of contact with others. This was compounded for some by a lack of resources (e.g. a phone or phone credit). Despite this, almost all respondents reported being able to keep in touch with family and youth justice services.

Boredom, lack of activity and being stuck at home were reported by children and young people in complying with restrictions. As a result, issues in terms of mental health, family conflict, breakdown of home circumstances, substance use, compliance with restrictions and the risks associated were noted. The need for ensuring children and young people have things to do and access to technology/data is crucial – to help maintain social connections, improve/maintain mental wellbeing and engage in education. People in custody may have heightened needs in terms of requiring more purposeful activity and resources (e.g. phone credit) and access to contact with friends and family.

Most children and young people were reported as complying with COVID-19 restrictions. However, this was reported to become more difficult with time. There are some children and young people for whom the impact of COVID-19 and associated restrictions was reported to be more significant, exacerbating previous experiences and issues such as addictions issues, mental health concerns, lack of support, and care experience, as well as for those with their own children, or without/with insecure accommodation.

⁹ Information gathered informally in April 2020 via Staf projects, Focus Groups and e-mail contact with member organisations. Also consultation with around 16 young people, mainly aged 16 to 26.

^h The Centre for Youth and Criminal Justice^h (CYCJ) at the University of Strathclyde conducted a short qualitative research project on the impact of COVID-19 on those involved in the youth justice system in Scotland to provide a snapshot of the views of children and young people - in contact with or with experience of youth justice services - and youth justice practitioners. The report captures the views of approximately 50 young people aged 12-25 which were mostly gathered by service providers and responses from 36 practitioners during the month of May.

Some young people raised the impact of delays to court and Children's Hearings and on progression of plans (e.g. from custody) as an issue, which, as acknowledged by practitioners, can cause stress and uncertainty.

Requests of government from children and young people included more financial help and reassurance that police are there to ensure their safety and to support those whose care placements may be breaking down. A lack of information and uncertainty about the current situation was also highlighted, underlining the importance of targeted messaging for young people¹⁷.

C. Impact on Families

i) Concerns expressed by parents and carers

Since the beginning of March, Children 1st Parentline¹⁸ has reported a 158% increase of calls about finances and employment. The main concerns raised by families include: loss of income, need for benefit checks, grant application support, utility issues and payment holiday requests. Children 1st has also reported that many of these calls are from families who would not have previously sought their services, including families who are in settled employment where furlough is impacting.

Particular concerns have been raised by parents and carers in relation to education, including:

- The lack of supported transitions into primary school and high school. Children have experienced loss at the lack of endings as they transition into new life stages.
- The 'blended learning' model – parents have reported they have struggled because they are not teachers, don't have all the resources they need and don't know how to do it. Many children and young people struggle without the structure and direct support from teachers and home learning expectations have been variable.
- Fears amongst school leavers about their prospects re further and higher education (what the impact of Covid-19 will be on this), apprenticeships and job opportunities
- Children and young people are worried about what they have missed; what they have not been able to do; what they have not achieved during lockdown
- There has been a sense of feeling that schools have prioritised achievement/ attainment over wellbeing during lockdown and families have reflected that they have felt lots of individual responsibility in terms of managing learning and expectations without clear recognition of existing trauma and pre-existing challenges in addition to new challenges posed by the pandemic itself.

Children 1st Parentline have also reported experiencing a high number of calls from separated parents who are asking questions about keeping in touch with their children. Many calls are about the difference in rules between England and Scotland and how this can be managed when both parents do not live in Scotland.

Children 1st Parentline is now providing a service for families who are having virtual Children's Hearings, helping to talk them through the process and ensure their views and voices are heard.

ii) Families on low incomes

A report from Save the Children and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation¹⁹ sets out new research and modellingⁱ looking at the incomes of families on low incomes during the pandemic, the extra costs families face and the impact on their ability to cope financially.

There were 412 responses from families in Scotland which showed that almost half reported a reduction in income since March and that almost nine in ten reported rising household costs. More than half of families on Universal Credit (UC) or Child Tax Credits (CTCs) have been pushed to borrow money since the start of the crisis. Over half have fallen behind on rent or other household bills and 71% have had to cut back on food and other essentials. 65% of those surveyed said the pressures were impacting negatively on their mental health.

In May, the Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland (CPAG) undertook research^j about the experiences of school closures for children and families. They found that 40% of low-income families were missing at least one essential resource to support their children's learning. One third of the families who were most worried about money had to buy a laptop, tablet or other device. Families that were most worried about money were also more likely to have bought educational resources for their children and were more likely to say they found it difficult to continue their children's education at home. When children can go back to school, parents' primary concern is children's wellbeing. Children and young people reported that they value contact with teachers and classmates. Secondary school pupils were more likely to report doing 'a lot' of schoolwork at home if they were regularly keeping in touch with teachers.

Families that were eligible for receiving support towards the cost of replacing free school meals valued this support and most advised they preferred to receive support through direct payments to their bank accounts, as this method allowed flexibility, dignity, safety and convenience²⁰.

Early insights from Children's Neighbourhoods Scotland research^k (published 8 May) with services supporting families living in high poverty settings during COVID-19 identified very significant concerns including: overcrowding, job losses, access to financial support and food, relationship strains, and additional stresses for families dealing with additional support needs and caring responsibilities. Digital access, both to devices and to the internet, was a reported issue for many families, including those with children and young people expected

ⁱ A survey was undertaken with 3,105 parents of children under 18 in the UK who claim Universal Credit or Child Tax Credits, including 412 respondents in Scotland. This asked them about their financial experience during this crisis, including increased costs, debt, cutting back on essentials and other financial pressures. Economic modelling was also undertaken of low-income families' income loss.

^j Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland (CPAG) conducted surveys during May 2020 to gather the views of families in Scotland in order to understand their experiences of learning during lockdown, with a particular emphasis on the experiences of households living on a low income. They heard from 3200 parents and carers and 1000 children and young people across Scotland on topics like learning resources, replacement free school meals, support for wellbeing, financial advice and priorities for returning to school.

^k Children's Neighbourhoods Scotland (University of Glasgow) is undertaking research, in partnership with Policy Scotland and local authorities, to understand the impact of COVID-19 on families with children living in high poverty settings, and how third sector services and organisations are responding to it. Interviews were conducted with representatives in the public and third sector providing support to families across a range of services such as health, education and family support.

to access online learning. Some families were reported to prefer to engage with the third sector, rather than formal education.

Families who were managing or 'just coping' at the beginning of the lockdown period were reported to be living in difficult circumstances and seeking support. There was a reported need among families for intensive and regular emotional support from external agencies. This was being provided via the phone and video calls. There was a reported concern that volunteer groups established at the start of the lockdown may not have the capacity or structures to continue in the longer term²¹.

Findings from two surveys undertaken by Family Fund Scotland¹ indicate that many parents or carers of disabled children are experiencing decreased income yet higher expenditure, and that one of their key concerns is how to entertain and educate their children at home. Both surveys suggest a large reduction in the availability of both formal and informal support.²²

iii) Single Parent Families

Since lockdown began, One Parent Families Scotland²³ has reported a 300% increase in calls to their Lone Parent Helpline and on-line chat. In response to COVID-19, the organisation has developed a new website with a live chat function and a coronavirus hub with information and advice. Their new 'COVID-19 Single Parent Family Impact Monitoring System' is also gathering views and concerns from parents.

iv) Families with disabled children and young people

Intelligence from the aforementioned Family Fund surveys, Inclusion Scotland²⁴ and stakeholders has highlighted a number of key issues for families with disabled children and young people, including:

- **Decreased Income:** Many families have experienced decreased income, diminishing savings, yet higher expenditure, (particularly in relation to food and energy costs). The second wave of the Family Fund Survey undertaken in May 2020 found that nearly half of the 200 families who responded in Scotland had lost income as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak and 85% were experiencing increased household costs. Priority items families reported they needed included: outdoor play and leisure equipment, tablets, computers and laptops, and sensory toys / equipment.
- **Decreased Support:** In many cases, in addition to losing the protective and supportive environment of the early years or school setting, some families reported the reduction or cessation of services their child would often also receive in the school or early years environment. Notably, this included therapeutic interventions such as speech and language therapy, educational psychologists, physiotherapy and occupational health. In addition, there was also evidence of a decrease in both informal and formal support to the parents/carers due to the lockdown restrictions; the need to shield and/or the reported reduction or cessation of social care support packages. The second wave of the Family Fund Survey found that 55% of parents and carers in Scotland reported that managing their own physical and mental health was a key concern.

¹ Family Fund Scotland provide grants to families on low incomes raising disabled or seriously ill children and young people. Family Fund issued two surveys on the impact of coronavirus to families with disabled or seriously ill children and young people across the UK. The first survey was undertaken between 27 March and 3 April 2020. The second was between 30 April and 4 May 2020.

- **Recovery:** Many parents and carers have expressed concern about keeping their disabled child/young person safe from COVID-19 as we move through and out of the crisis. Many disabled children and young people have disabilities/medical conditions which have required them to shield, and have intimate care, moving and handling, specific equipment and communication needs which require close interaction and contact.
- **Transitions:** Many disabled children will be starting a new school or nursery for the first time in August 2020, or have now left school for the summer. The Health and Social Care Alliance raised concerns in their response to the Education and Skills Committee Inquiry, that children and young people transitioning into primary or secondary education have not had the opportunity to engage in their new environments and with their new staff. In addition, that lack of social work input and assessment regarding transition has resulted in family carers feeling stressed regarding the future packages of care for their young person leaving children's services and entering adult services.

v) Families with children with additional support needs

Children in Scotland run additional support for learning services and have captured a range of concerns from parents and carers regarding support for their children and their families. Parents and carers of children with additional support needs have reported to Enquire^m that they are struggling to contact school, local authorities, social work or CAMHS and are having difficulties accessing support services (an issue further compounded by digital exclusion for some parents and carers). It is also reported that families are struggling to cope without seeing their usual support services such as advocates and support workers in person, who usually help them to understand information that is sent out to them (e.g. school placing request decisions). There were questions raised about how to access the childcare hubs for children with additional support needs, as there was uncertainty about who qualified for a place. There were also reported concerns from parents and carers about not knowing about placing request decisions and where a child will be going to school in August, which is raising anxiety levels for children and their families as this delay affects the ability to plan for and implement positive transitions.

vi) Kinship Families

Engagement work with organisations supporting kinship families undertaken by Scottish Government officials²⁵ found that the COVID-19 pandemic has both created new challenges for kinship families, as well as exacerbating existing underlying issues.

At the outset of lockdown, the Kinship Care Forumⁿ was brought together by Scottish Government officials during the pandemic as a means to co-ordinate support, collaborate and share information about the issues arising for kinship families.

^m Enquire is the Scottish advice service for additional support for learning. The Enquire helpline has been providing specific advice about how coronavirus has affected the law and guidance on providing additional support for learning to parents and carers of children with additional support needs over the period of the lockdown. There have been over 150 enquiries and, where known, most of the enquiries have concerned autistic children.

ⁿ The Kinship Care Forum includes Who Cares? Scotland (WCS), Children's Health Scotland, the Kinship Care Advice Service for Scotland (operated by Citizens Advice Scotland), the Kinship Care Alliance, Children 1st, Big Hearts and Nurture Scotland. Each of these organisations has specialist knowledge about kinship families' common experiences. Information has also been shared by Family Rights Group UK relating to Scottish kinship families.

Key issues and concerns that have been raised during COVID include:

- The mental wellbeing of children, young people and their carers
- Carer health
- Managing children's distressed behaviours
- Financial worries and poverty
- Lack of access to education hub provision
- Managing learning
- Contact
- Safety of and arrangements for children returning to school (particularly where the carers are formally shielding or have underlying health conditions).

CELCIS reports that for foster carers and kinship carers, there have been ongoing concerns about transmission of the virus within their families and the need for contingencies if carers become unwell. CELCIS stated that there have been varying local approaches to assessing vulnerability and suggest this has led to inconsistencies nationally regarding which children and families have been offered support via Hubs.

vii) Families affected by domestic abuse

A qualitative study undertaken by Scottish Government Justice Analytical Services^o explored the experiences of individuals and families experiencing domestic abuse during the first 8 weeks of lockdown (30/03/20- 22/05/20).

Services reported that, in some cases, children have experienced domestic abuse more severely during lockdown. There were reports of children being present in the room during domestic abuse, including physical violence. Services reported significant difficulties in engaging with children by telephone or other digital platforms, particularly younger children. Many practitioners perceived that because children do not have access to safe spaces or other trusted adults, there are fewer opportunities for them to report incidents and therefore perpetrator were being less cautious. Many services reported that, although perpetrator tactics did not change significantly, the impact and risk of domestic abuse was magnified by lockdown.

In relation to child contact, services reported that in some cases, parents who had been advised to shield were experiencing conflict over child contact as they felt unsafe to facilitate contact despite court orders/informal agreements. There were continued reports of perpetrators of domestic abuse socialising with friends and family in different households and thus exposing their child/children to other people during contact visits. In some cases, perpetrators were communicating their activities to their ex-partner, causing high levels of stress and anxiety, and, in some cases, this prompted mothers to stop contact.

Services have reported a range of abusive behaviours apparently specific to lockdown related to conflict over child contact. It was commonly reported that perpetrators were

^o Evidence for this report was gathered from three sources: semi-structured telephone interviews with 42 Scottish statutory and third sector organisations involved in supporting people experiencing or perpetrating domestic abuse or other forms of VAWG; documentary evidence provided by organisations involved in supporting people experiencing or perpetrating domestic abuse or other forms of VAWG; and written qualitative empirical examples provided by members of Police Scotland's Domestic Abuse Champions' network. The majority of organisations that participated primarily supported female victims of domestic abuse and the majority of incidents referred to involved a female victim and male perpetrator.

asking children to show them round the house during video-contact. Services and clients perceived this as a means of extending their abuse by monitoring the victim and/or establishing where they live. There were some reports of abuse, taking place during handovers, particularly in cases where handover was previously facilitated by third parties such as schools. A number of services reported that women were facilitating child contact outwith the conditions of agreements/orders, in order to placate perpetrators and manage abuse. Services reported that guidance and legal advice from solicitors in family court cases was very varied. Some solicitors advised that clients may stop contact if they have concerns the child will be exposed to the virus, and in other cases solicitors advised clients to facilitate contact regardless of identified risks.

Referral rates for the majority of organisations decreased, significantly for some, in the initial 2-3 weeks of lockdown, but there were some indications that referrals were increasing as lockdown progressed. Digital exclusion was reported as a barrier to engaging with some clients. In some cases, where women had some limited device/internet access, this was prioritised for their children to allow them access to home schooling. Across the board, there were continued reports of clients contacting domestic abuse services for general support, particularly around gas and electricity, housing and food access. The majority of practitioners anticipated a potential increase in reporting and referrals once lockdown restrictions begin to be relaxed.

There were some specific challenges related to lockdown for Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) women, particularly related to legal applications and appeals, and separation from abusive partners. BME support organisations reported that women who are European Economic Area (EAA) nationals were not meeting habitual residency criteria and this was impacting on access to universal credit. This was exacerbated by lockdown due to delays in legal applications and the lack of employment opportunities. Services also reported that gaining access to the necessary documentation required for legal appeals (such as banking documents, proof of income, housing information) has been particularly challenging during lockdown²⁶.

viii) Black and Ethnic Minority Children, Young People and Families

Aberlour has reported a rise in applications to their Urgent Assistance Fund^P for financial assistance from black and ethnic minority families due to COVID-19, in particular, from asylum seeking families and those with 'no recourse to public funds' (NRPF). Licketyspit^Q has reported that they have encountered black and ethnic minority children who have English as an Additional Language (EAL) having to translate for anxious parents and experiencing anxiety and low feelings.

Evidence on the impact of COVID-19 on black and ethnic minority children, young people and families is still very limited. Further research is underway and more work is needed to understand the impact for these families, including the impact on refugee and migrant families.

^P Aberlour Urgent Assistance Fund

(<https://www.aberlour.org.uk/service-category/urgent-assistance-fund/>)

^Q Intelligence received from Licketyspit- a national specialist early years theatre company with expertise in child-centred and intergenerational Play.

D. Impact on service delivery

i) Health Services

Home visiting continued where it was essential, based on professional judgement and assessment of need. Universal health services for pregnant women, new mothers and those with pre-school children during the lockdown period, ensured that all families continued to be contacted either through essential face-to-face visits or through virtual means such as NHS Near Me. Practitioners had to adapt quickly to new ways of working and overcome challenges to access the right equipment and platforms to communicate well. Adaptations in the way these contacts were delivered to more blended model, have, in the main, been well received. Services have shared that engagement levels were high, in most cases, and near normal service levels were achieved. The School Nursing service also continued to deliver to school-aged children and young people in their care, despite the closure of school facilities, through face-to-face and virtual means. The role of these services, collectively supporting women and children to identify and respond to need has been crucial as part of ongoing GIRFEC planning.

Data from Public Health Scotland²⁷ shows that coverage rates for the Health Visitor first visit remained high during the pandemic. For children who were due their review in March and early April, coverage continued to exceed 90%. Data on the 6-8 week review, 13-15 month review and 27-30 month review was published on 8th July and although rates remained relatively high for the younger age group, the data from later reviews is much lower. There are reasons for this, associated with the data collection process, and trends will continue to be monitored to see how this can be improved as lockdown measures are eased. Uptake rates for immunisation have also remained high during the pandemic, with uptake continuing to exceed 90% for children aged 8 weeks of age who were due their first dose of the 6-in-1 vaccine in March and early April.

The data also shows that attendance at A&E for all children has been very low, around 45% less than this time last year, and is not coming back to normal levels at the same rate as adult A&E. This could be partially explained by lack of outdoor activity and other related factors.

Advice and support for parents has also been made available on the ParentClub website^r, including free access to the Solihull Online parenting resource from the antenatal period up to age 18.

ii) Local Partnership Services

Local partnerships have reported a positive, flexible and creative response from services to the challenge of continuing to deliver high quality, timely support across a range of services during the lockdown period and as lockdown started to ease. There is much new work happening that, in many cases, has been put in place quickly and in difficult circumstances in response to fast changing and emerging local needs. The key themes identified from the feedback provided by local partnerships are summarised below, and examples of adaptation by services provided by some local partnerships are detailed in Annex B.

^r ParentClub Campaign, Scottish Government
www.parentclub.scot

- **Contact:** Services reported that regular contact had been maintained with vulnerable families already known to them; including children and young people on the child protection register, looked after children, those in aftercare and those with a multi-agency plan. In certain cases, this contact was face-to-face and home visiting continued to take place where essential for those at higher risk. In other cases, practitioners were maintaining weekly, fortnightly or monthly contact via text, calls, video calls or social media contact. Increasingly, face-to-face contact is reported to be possible and is being used more as lockdown restrictions ease with appropriate use of PPE and physical distancing and as families' fear of virus transmission has decreased.
- **Concerns during lockdown:** There were reported concerns about families where family members are shielding and may have less support available. There were also concerns about some children either not engaging or engaging minimally with education. There was a sense that the lack of structure and routine may lead to an increase in concern. Some services reported concern about the potential impact of a reduced service from educational hubs over the summer on vulnerable children and families – especially those with additional support needs. Some areas reported that they are working closely with Third Sector partners to address that need during the summer holidays.
- **Positive developments:** Some families, whose children present with anxiety, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, or challenging behaviour or where children were being bullied at school, have reported to services that their children (and family life) are more settled during lockdown. There is a recognition that these families may need increased support as school returns. Across a number of local areas, services reported that the pandemic has enabled the greater development of trusting reciprocal relationships and creative ways of working. Some staff are working beyond their usual roles and in different ways with partners and with children and families themselves. Some children, young people and families are also engaging more or better with services than they were pre-COVID. For example, youth justice workers have reported improved relationships and engagement with young people due to the use of technology, having more time to engage and more regular contact enabling young people to feel more comfortable to discuss issues openly. Another example is that, with children's plan reviews, LAC reviews and reviews of child protection case conferences taking place virtually, there has been an increase in the number of young people actively participating in their own meetings in some areas. These positive developments may present opportunities for further positive change in the future assuming they can be maintained.
- **Care placements:** Services have worked hard to adapt processes to maintain and support fostering, adoption and kinship care during lockdown. For example, through direct support and supervision, support materials and short break arrangements where necessary. Even so, in some local areas, there is high pressure on care placements and services are reported to be at capacity and links are being made with the Care Inspectorate regarding the potential need for emergency provision.
- **Anticipated increase in referrals:** Services report that it is likely there has been suppressed demand for some services during lockdown and that a range of difficulties are likely to be have been experienced, but not necessarily reported (including, domestic abuse, parental alcohol and substance misuse, emotional abuse and neglect, teenage anxiety, self-harm and suicidal thoughts). Many report that, as lockdown eases and more issues come to light, there is the potential for child protection concerns to rise. Services also anticipate that, at the same time, there will be increasing levels of financial difficulty and poverty as the impact of furlough and redundancies take effect.

Services reported that they are planning for the next steps to be able to manage the anticipated increase in referrals to ensure children and their families are referred appropriately and receive appropriate and timely support.

CELCIS reports that there is evidence of significant innovation and efforts to maintain carer assessment and care planning with local areas using telephone, teleconferencing and virtual technologies. More rural and remote areas who had technical systems already in place pre-COVID have been better placed to work in this way. Care planning reviews are reported to be continuing in all local authority areas; and that where possible children and parents have been included using a range of methods (e.g. online questionnaires to children, telephone calls to parents and support from advocacy services (where available) for both children and parents).

CELCIS have also found that there have been some positive reports across residential settings that there is increased stability and predictability for young people with less shift changes, less visitors and the pressure of attending school taken away. For care leavers, however, they note that social and physical distancing restrictions have exacerbated social isolation and loneliness, which for many has had a detrimental impact on their mental health and emotional wellbeing. However, CELCIS report that Throughcare teams have often been going above and beyond to provide individual support (whilst maintain physical distancing or providing online support). CELCIS note that local authorities are not always permitted to utilise consistent user-friendly social media platforms, meaning that young people, and local area staff, are not always able to maintain digital contact.

iii) Childminding services

During lockdown, an average of 700 childminding settings (15%) across Scotland remained open weekly, prioritising service provision for key workers and vulnerable children. The Scottish Childminding Association (SCMA) state there were anecdotal reports from members that the education hubs were not always in locations accessible to vulnerable children and families, and that this may have had an impact on uptake. In response, SCMA secured a grant from the Wellbeing Fund to provide approximately 100 childminding placements for vulnerable children, taking direct referrals from other national or local Third Sector organisations who have been unable to provide physical family support during lockdown and who may continue to have reduced capacity^s. As of 3 June 2020, all childminding settings were allowed to re-open during Phase 1^t of the 'route map'. Priority will continue to be given to providing critical childcare for key workers and vulnerable children. Capacity restrictions are expected to be reviewed and lifted during Phase 3, when the wider Early Learning and Childcare sector are allowed to re-open.

iv) The Children's Hearings System^u

The Scottish Children's Reporters Administration (SCRA) report that there have been 1,397 'virtual', video enabled children's hearings between 4th May and 29th June. This figure represents around 30% of normal capacity. This virtual approach has been a key part of ensuring that those children who urgently need legal protections have access to them. At

^s Intelligence from the Scottish Childminding Association (SCMA)

^t Childminding settings were allowed to re-open earlier than larger settings on the basis of evidence from other countries where childcare has already re-opened which has found that the overall risk of COVID-19 transmission can be reduced by focusing on five aspects of practice, principally based around caring for children in small groups, which are very close to the established childminding model.

^u Intelligence from Scottish Children's Reporter Administration, 15 July 2020

the same time, there has been a decrease in referrals to the Reporter of 29% (-2430) since lockdown commenced. Referrals continue to be received weekly, mainly from Police Scotland and continue to be assessed by Reporters alongside Local Authority Social Workers and other relevant professionals and prioritised on the basis of need for compulsory measures. Panel Members, children, young people and family members/ relevant persons, social workers, Reporters and, where necessary, safeguarders, legal representatives and advocates have been able to use virtual hearings to ensure as many of the core elements of a children's hearing can be retained in reaching decisions on the best interests of each child or young person.

A national virtual hearings team has been put in place to support all potential participants to make the most of the virtual experience – including testing devices, advice/training and providing financial support for data for families. A large amount of targeted information about virtual hearings has also been provided to hearing participants across various social media platforms^v. Experience and ongoing evaluation conducted by Children's Hearings Scotland (CHS) and SCRA of virtual hearings at this stage continues to be relatively mixed. SCRA reports that when all of the key ingredients work together they can work really well however, key issues around consistent connectivity and access to appropriate devices continue to be at times problematic. Work is ongoing with the Scottish Court and Tribunal Service to ensure efficient prioritisation and expediting of proof hearings and appeals against Hearing decisions. However, the necessary limitations on court time has led to some delays in establishing grounds and ongoing prioritisation will continue in this regard.

Children's Hearings can vary widely in terms of the number of participants involved. They are by their very nature designed to be inclusive and discursive. Because of this, the actual number of hearings which will be able to take place in some adapted physical form is currently uncertain as is their overall contribution to recovery of the hearings workload. Significant adaptation of Hearing rooms has been required to allow for physical distancing to be ensured. Face to face hearings recommenced in the week of 13 July and will gradually increase across the country over the next few weeks. Given the limitations in the size of hearing rooms across Scotland there will be a need to considerably change the physical hearing model and adopt a 'mixed methods' approach. SCRA has produced an update on preparation for face to face hearings^w and CHS and SCRA will continue to work over time to optimise the approach and delivery of hearings and will continue to develop virtual hearings alongside that of the developing physical hearing model.

CHS and SCRA have also been engaging and consulting with hearings experienced children and young people involved in 'Our Hearings Our Voice' and the Foster Network, on what hearings need to look and feel like and how hearings should be delivered^x. SCRA has published a full response to the engagement and consultation^y.

Whilst significant prioritisation on all fronts, including the most urgent hearings, will continue for some time, a sizeable backlog in hearings is emerging which will require to be carefully managed across the remainder of 2020/21. Initial mapping and mapping recovery planning and need for resource deployment will continue.

^v https://www.scra.gov.uk/young_people/virtual-hearings/

^w <http://www.scra.gov.uk/2020/07/face-to-face-hearings-update/>

^x <http://www.ohov.co.uk/2020/07/07/face-to-face-hearings-ohov-consultation-response/>

^y <http://www.scra.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/SCRA-reponds-to-consultation.pdf>

v) Youth Justice services

The aforementioned qualitative study by The Centre for Youth and Criminal Justice (CYCJ) found that overall, children and young people have had limited contact with the Police during this time and that the responses by Police have been appropriate. That said, there were reports of young people actively avoiding police contact (due to anxiety) or experiencing negative contacts (e.g. being arrested or feeling unfairly targeted by police). Some practitioners have seen a reduction in offending, whilst others have seen a change in types of offences (e.g. increases in shoplifting and COVID-19 related offences like spitting). Practitioners also highlighted a small number of concerns about wider criminalisation of children and young people.

Experiences of remote service provision are consistent with other studies: barriers include lack of technology and privacy at home, and the challenges of building new relationships. However, services were found to be using a range of creative methods including various technological platforms, to keep in touch but also to run activities and projects. This ability to provide light-hearted and fun support has been identified as particularly important for young people's morale, wellbeing and mental health. Face-to-face contact (e.g. physically distanced walks) has been important for more isolated children and children where there are concerns for their welfare and wellbeing.

The report emphasises the need to be prepared for the persistent effects of COVID-19 on mental health and wellbeing as lockdown is eased and beyond. Therefore, it was stated that it is important that practitioners maintain efforts to keep in touch with children, young people and their families and continue to provide individualised practice and emotional support; as well as enabling children and young people to stay in touch with family and friends, including the provision of devices and internet data.

vi) Support for young carers

There are an estimated 29,000 young carers in Scotland and more young people may have taken on a caring role during the pandemic. The Scottish Government Policy for Carers Team has been receiving information on young carers and the impact the pandemic has had on them from a variety of organisations including: Young Scot, Carers Trust and the Scottish Young Carers Services Alliance. This information is helping inform policy development and responses during this time.

Although most local carer services have been unable to provide face-to-face support during lockdown restrictions, most have been offering alternatives such as telephone counselling and online sessions. Scottish Government funding was provided to help local carer organisations adapt to supporting carers remotely and additional financial support has been provided alongside the existing Young Carer Grant to enable young carers to take breaks from caring responsibilities.

vii) Third sector services

A range of third sector organisations have reported intelligence about the observed impact of the crisis on CYP and families, and the ways in which their services have been responding. Undoubtedly, the third sector organisations report significant challenges that CYP and families have been dealing with, but positives have also been reported for example (as noted above) children in residential homes have welcomed the continuity of

staff. The key overarching themes are summarised below and further information from specific organisations is provided in Annex C.

Key Impacts reported on CYP and families:

- Increase in child protection concerns
- Increased reporting of domestic abuse
- Increased pressure and stress, including from children being at home all the time or the pressure of home-schooling, resulting in relationship fracture or breakdown
- Mental health and emotional wellbeing concerns
- Financial problems (including need for urgent assistance)
- Digital exclusion

Third sector services report an increase in demand for additional supports for families in vulnerable circumstances, and many anticipate the level of need will continue to rise. They have adapted quickly and provided a range of help to families and CYP, including:

- Urgent financial assistance (including for utilities) and income maximisation advice
- Food packages and vouchers, and referrals to foodbanks
- Support for families affected by domestic abuse (remote or face-to-face emotional support, as well as practical e.g. with moving to new accommodation)
- Provision of digital devices, data allowances, etc.
- On-line information, support, courses and toolkits (e.g. to help with stress and support wellbeing)
- Telephone helplines and support chats
- Doorstep visits or physically distant works
- Provision of medicines
- Provision of packs to support creativity and play

On behalf of the Third Sector Interface (TSI) Network, Glasgow Council for the Voluntary Sector (GCVS) ran a national survey in May²⁸ to further understand the impact of the pandemic on the third sector and the people and communities it supports². The headline findings are presented in Annex C.

E. Conclusion

This report summarises the latest evidence and intelligence about the impacts of COVID-19, and associated measures, on children, young people and families in Scotland. It highlights that there have been differing impacts for CYP and families, depending on their specific circumstances, which will continue to require tailored responses. However, looking across the evidence and intelligence outlined in this paper there are a number of key, core issues for attention:

² The survey was circulated via 32 TSIs across Scotland to local forums and networks. 1180 third sector organisations responded and from those responses, 243 organisations stated they provided services to children under 16, young people or families. The survey covered a range of adult and children services meaning some of these 243 organisations may also provide services for other client groups. Also, although responses received cover all 32 local authority areas, some organisations may operate across more than one local authority in Scotland.

- **Family Income** – existing financial difficulties and experiences of poverty have made it more difficult to cope with the impacts of the crisis and have been exacerbated by the crisis; and further impacts on employment and income will be felt. Ensuring adequate family income is the key challenge to be addressed to improve outcomes for all CYP.
- **Emotional wellbeing and mental health** – the impacts on the emotional and mental wellbeing of CYP require attention across the whole population, but, in particular, for CYP who have greater challenges in their life, have experienced isolation and loneliness, and have past traumatic experiences which have been exacerbated by the pandemic crisis. Emotional wellbeing and mental health issues will not necessarily be easily resolved by the easing of lockdown and there is a need to prepare for the longer-term and persistent effects of COVID-19 on the mental health and wellbeing of CYP, as well as parents/carers.
- **Education** – CYP and families have had mixed experiences of school closures and home learning. There have been challenges with digital access, low engagement with education for some CYP (depending on their individual and family circumstances), and worries about exams and future prospects (in particular for older young people). However, school closures have led to improved wellbeing for some CYP. These variations underline the need for tailored approaches to address different needs and support the wellbeing of CYP on their return to school. Transitions are highlighted as a key issue, in particular for disabled CYP and CYP with additional support needs.
- **Service provision** – the reduced contact with some services as a result of lockdown has inevitably impacted CYP and families, and contact is increasing again as lockdown is eased. However, in some areas challenges will be felt for sometimes (such as the backlog in court cases and Children’s Hearings and capacity of care services). There have also been reported positive developments which can be built-on going forward, for example, different types of engagement, the use of technology, and the development of trusted relationships.
- **Relationships** – as noted above, relationships with practitioners are clearly central to the support for CYP and families to date and going forward. However, the fundamental importance of all types of relationships, including within families, with friends and wider support networks, has been brought to the fore by the pandemic crisis. CYP have reported the crucial importance of family support to their wellbeing. Greatest concerns are for CYP who have relationship difficulties and adverse experiences (domestic abuse has been highlighted as a key concern during lockdown). This “relationship inequality” has been exacerbated by the pandemic crisis and without the right support could have long-term negative effects.
- **Virus** – lastly, it is important not to overlook the impacts of the virus itself and the resulting worries, in particular for CYP and parents/carers with underlying health conditions. For some families these worries may become more pronounced as lockdown is eased. The impact of bereavement has not been covered in this report, but are also an important issue for attention, for families who have been impacted by COVID-related or other deaths, and constrained opportunities to process grief and connect with support because of lockdown restrictions.

This period of increased stress and pressure to date has taken its toll on CYP, families and practitioners, as well as beneficial changes having occurred in some contexts. Continued adaptation and support will be required going forward to respond to the specific impacts on CYP and families in different circumstances and to build-on positive developments.

Annex A- Groups and Organisations who contributed to this report

Aberlour
Action for Children
Barnardo's Scotland
Centre for Excellence for Children's Care and Protection (CELCIS)
Chief Executives, Local Partnerships
Chief Social Work Officers
Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland
Children 1st
Children in Scotland
Children's Hearings Scotland
Children's Neighbourhoods Scotland, University of Glasgow
Children's Parliament
COSLA
Education Scotland
Glasgow Council for the Voluntary Sector
Includem
Institute for Inspiring Children's Futures, University of Strathclyde
Joseph Rowntree Foundation
Licketyspit
NSPCC
One Parent Families Scotland
Parent Network Scotland
Police Scotland
Public Health Scotland
Save the Children
Scottish Childminding Association
Scottish Children's Reporter Administration
Scottish Youth Parliament
SOLACE
Starcatchers
The Centre for Youth and Criminal Justice (CYCJ), University of Strathclyde
Third Sector Interface Network
Who Cares? Scotland
YoungScot
Youthlink Scotland

Annex B- Practice examples from Local Partnerships

- **Dumfries and Galloway** has stressed the role of heightened partnership working as key to delivery in some areas at the speed required – enabling both sides to work together in a different way – collaboratively and with shared ownership. For example, they worked in partnership with homeless colleagues to support young people who are care leavers, and creatively used community options which have included creation of supported accommodation throughout the region such as colleges, guest houses and hotels. And they have continued to support those commissioned services and independent providers who provide services to support the day to day functioning of Statutory Social Work Services and from third sector agencies across the region that were already established in communities. Examples include:
 - **Action for Children** and **Barnardo's** providing a direct support as well as administering an emergency fund for young people and families
 - **DGHP** have continued to offer direct support via the telephone, FaceTime, etc. for young people living in supported accommodation
 - **Quarriers** have continued to link directly with families to support them and in exceptional circumstances have continued to offer direct support
 - Brokerage placements have continued for those vulnerable families who require such services
 - Support from communities themselves for the additional support to our most vulnerable – telephone calls, delivery of food parcels/medication/shopping
- In **Dundee**, a **risk rating assessment framework** was adopted to determine whether vulnerable families supported by Social Work were seen on a face- to- face basis weekly, fortnightly or monthly. Overall, out of 1,200 families receiving support, 40% were seen at least fortnightly and the remainder monthly, with additional support provided through regular telephone and video calls with many. In some teams supporting particularly vulnerable groups, such as a team which supports pregnant women with babies who are at risk of harm, 80% of families are seen and supported at least fortnightly. The attendance of some of these children and young people at one of 8 Community Support Centres has informed these assessments and forms part of overall support. In relation to Looked After Children, proportionate support is similarly provided, including in relation to their digital engagement with learning to try and avoid further widening of the attainment gap.
- **East Lothian** set up **youth work sessions for vulnerable older young people** whose needs were not being met by the hubs. Many of these young people had poor mental health, were at risk of home/placement breakdown or of offending. 70 referrals were received. The service (which it is hoped will continue over the summer and perhaps beyond) demonstrates productive multi agency working from a wide range of professionals including the third sector with staff working beyond their normal roles to support the young people through sport, music and the arts.
- In conjunction with **Child Protection Committees Scotland**, **East Renfrewshire's** Communications Team ran an **Eyes and Ears Open Campaign** during April 2020 to highlight the additional vulnerability that children and young people were facing when not in school.

- **Residential Children's Services in Glasgow** worked incredibly hard post lockdown. All 20 homes and 143 young people were settled and after 12 weeks in lockdown there were only 2 placement breakdowns – an amazing reflection on staff dedication and the remarkable young people themselves. Equally, in terms of foster care of 729 placements there were again only 2 placement disruptions in 12 weeks and only 6 placement disruptions out of 1300 children in kinship care placements.
- **Highland CHAMPS** have worked with a local vet to deliver dogs for the day to support young people living in aftercare on their own. The dogs have reduced loneliness and boredom and improved the young people's mental health and physical activity levels.
- **North Lanarkshire Virtual School Covid Support** has provided a range of resources to support families and young people including family activity packs, outdoor learning packs, parenting leaflets as well as direct contact with young people who are struggling but not at a hub. This latter support often takes the form of nature walks or outdoor activities to allow young people to discuss their concerns safely with a trusted adult. A range of support is being offered over the summer holidays including a Forest Summer Camp.
- **South Lanarkshire** set up **Meals at Home** delivering a hot meal every day to enhance the family or young adults' existing care plan. The service started in April and has delivered over 20,000 meals since. Volunteer staff involved in the project are local authority employees unable to undertake their usual work due to lockdown and they include librarians, lifeguards, architects and joiners.
- In **West Lothian**, Social Policy identified premises, staffing, transport and delivered weekly sessions for some vulnerable children – for under 8's at **Livingston Family Centre** and the COZ resource in Bathgate owned by **Children 1st**, and school age children at **Simply Play**, a third sector play organisation for primary age children. This came into operation on the 3rd April. Numbers were determined so that social distancing could be observed and compliance with Care Inspectorate and Health and Safety parameters. A service was provided for 170 children per week. Children are transported to and from home, provided with a hot meal and a food parcel for their family.
- Also in **West Lothian**, families caring for children affected by significant and complex disabilities were experiencing significant pressures due to usual routes of breaks from caring and support for them being reduced. Alternative supports were developed and an outreach service delivered jointly by **Social Policy and Education** to provide respite for families. A respite resource was also created at **Inveralmond Community High School** that enabled carers of children with disabilities to have a break from caring

Annex C- Practice examples from the third sector

Aberlour

Aberlour published a report on how its services have responded to COVID-19²⁹. The challenges in delivering services in the current climate are described, alongside some positive changes. Some specific examples of how their services have adapted to respond to COVID-19 include:

- The number of applications to Aberlour's Urgent Assistance Fund has increased by nearly 1400% since March of this year. The organisation has supported over 1100 families with grants amounting to more than £300,000.
- As previously noted, there has been a rise in applications to the Urgent Assistance Fund for financial assistance from black and ethnic minority families due to COVID-19, in particular from asylum seeking families and those with 'no recourse to public funds' (NRPF).
- Aberlour's family support services have worked with a wide range of community partners to purchase and deliver food packages, hot meals and food vouchers to families. This support has included 12,000 additional children, young people and parents previously unknown to Aberlour's services.
- There has been an increase in referrals to services where domestic abuse is identified as a risk factor and the dedicated domestic abuse team in Glasgow has developed ways of remotely supporting the families, in addition to risk assessed home visits for the most vulnerable families.

Action for Children

Action for Children³⁰ reports that they have created an Emergency Fund to provide one-off support to families faced with an unexpected expense or crisis, or additional pressures such as domestic violence, disability or poor health. To date, the fund has supported 392 families worth a total value of £82,277.

In April, Action for Children were awarded £202,000 from the Scottish Government's Wellbeing Fund and during a six week period supported over 856 families. Through a partnership bid with Barnardo's, Action for Children were recently awarded a further Wellbeing Fund payment of £400,000.

A range of key services have been adapted and expanded, including:

- Face to face contact including: delivering food, booking taxis and moving people's belongings to new accommodation after issues with domestic abuse.
- Emotional and physical health and wellbeing support, including: 'walk and talk' sessions to young people, medication pickups, and mental health first aid sessions via telephone chat sessions.
- Ongoing digital contact services and follow-up, via telephone, text, Zoom, Skype and Microsoft teams, offering support to adults and creating activities for children such as online/community bingo, art projects, book and film clubs and 'music weeks',
- Financial support including: support to arrange electricity and gas suppliers, supplying mobile phones and laptops, assisting with Universal Credit applications, delivering cash payments and other wellbeing funds.
- Sourcing accreditation for online training courses from the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA)
- Working practices and rotas to create 'staff bubbles' to maximise help and support to children and families in our residential support settings.

Barnardo's Scotland

Barnardo's Scotland has published a series of weekly "In This Together" reports on its website which summarises the range of challenges children's services providers have been navigating and sets out how Barnardo's Scotland services have adapted to meet the additional needs resulting from the crisis³¹. The reports have highlighted that families' financial pressures emerged as the main concern, due to not having access to daily free school meals, alongside families being home all day using more food, gas and electricity. The reports continue to highlight digital exclusion as a key issue, with many families not having access to smartphones, tablets, laptops, Wi-Fi or money to top up data credit.

Barnardo's Scotland has supported families initially through emergency payments from its own resources, then – in a joint bid with Action for Children – through funding from the Scottish Government's Wellbeing Fund. Barnardo's Scotland received an initial award of £178,000 from the Wellbeing Fund, with a subsequent allocation of £270,000, allowing them to support hundreds of families across Scotland. In addition to the provision of digital resources, technology, food parcels and other practical support, Barnardo's family support workers have delivered substantial telephone contact, facilitated online groups, undertaken doorstep visits, delivered essential medicines, and gone on walks (safely and socially distanced) with young people to keep them physically and mentally healthy as well as offering respite to parents.

Children 1st

In addition, to their Parentline service (outlined in Section C), Children 1st has reported a number of ways in which they have adapted their services to provide practical and emotional support alongside families. They have recently begun training all family support workers on domestic abuse in the context of the pandemic.

Children 1st has provided the following practical and financial help to families:

- Distributed 100 Chromebooks to families through the Scottish Government Connecting Scotland initiative.
- Raised over £285,000 for families since March 1st through their income maximisation work. They have also been helping refer families to foodbanks.
- Supported 64 families to access funds through their partnership with the Aberlour Urgent Assistance fund, to the value of £16,049 total.
- Children 1st's own Activity Fund has helped 657 families (in the form of food vouchers, games, Kitbags and other items) to the value of £28,815.

Includem

Includem has been developing and adapting their delivery of support to include online and telephone models of contact. Through its Young Person's Fund, financial and material support of over £17,000 has been provided to young people and their families. This has included providing 33 young people and families with the equipment they need to become digitally included such as mobile phones, top-up cards, data allowances, laptops, tablets and chargers^{aa}. Includem surveyed 150 families via phone call, to understand their current access to digital devices and services, the barriers they might be facing and any concerns they may have. A third of respondents did not feel they would be able to afford ongoing

^{aa} This has been supported by donations from the Corra Foundation and Foundation Scotland's Community Response, Recovery, Resilience Fund.

costs. A fifth reported that they do not have access to all the devices that they need. Barriers to digital access included not having devices with video call functionality and worries that using video calling would put pressure on their data allowances³².

Licketyspit

Licketyspit is a national specialist early years theatre company with expertise in child-centred and intergenerational Play. The Licketyspit approach to drama and drama-led play is rooted in children's rights, community engagement, and a belief in the power of inter-generational, drama-led play. Over last 6 weeks Licketyspit have regularly worked with 94 1 to 7 year olds from 57 families in areas of high poverty and have adapted their practice to incorporate interactive group play/social Zoom sessions

Parent Network Scotland

Since the outbreak, Parent Network Scotland have developed all of their courses onto an online tool. The organisation has continued to engage with the 90 families it was connecting with before lockdown and has had to employ another 7 community facilitators to help meet demand. Via technology, apps and social media, there has been engagement with over 1500 families. A Wellbeing Toolkit has also been developed for parents to use with their children to reduce anxiety and stress. Food vouchers have been distributed to around 300 families and over 30 Halal food packs have also been delivered.

Starcatchers, Scotland's National Arts and Early Years Organisation

Starcatchers describes how COVID-19 initially resulted in the cancellation of almost all planned delivery for the first quarter of 2020/21^{bb}. In a submission to the Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee for its inquiry on the impact of COVID-19 on Scotland's culture and tourism sectors. Engagement would normally be face to face in the community with children aged 0 to 5 and their parents. Activity was quickly adapted and, where possible, is now being delivered remotely via online groups and resources. These are now being complemented by physical resources such as creativity packs delivered directly to some of Scotland's most vulnerable families by working in partnership with children's sector organisations such as Children 1st.

Who Cares? Scotland

Who Cares? Scotland has established a helpline to support Care Experienced people across advocacy, participation and employment, recognising that they are particularly vulnerable during this crisis and that they may disproportionately impacted by the measures in place. The support has extended to Care Experienced people, carers and workers across all 32 local authorities in Scotland and to date has received 535 calls, with 277 of these being ongoing cases. Who Cares? Has also reported that the majority of their participation work has moved to digital formats and they recently hosted a Digital Festival for Care Experienced people.

Youthlink Scotland

YouthLink Scotland has provided training to around 750 youth workers during lockdown and this has impacted about 20,000 young people often with a focus on addressing digital poverty. The organisation is also supporting the delivery of six food insecurity projects during the summer holiday period in Moray, Dundee, South Lanarkshire, East Ayrshire,

^{bb} Submission to the Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee for its inquiry on the impact of COVID-19 on Scotland's culture and tourism sectors

Falkirk and Scottish Borders. The SG funded pilot is targeted at young people (S1-S6) affected by poverty, focussing on food insecurity and closing the poverty related attainment gap. Each project will target 20 young people and their families and has been designed in creative ways to meet the current challenges³³.

Third Sector Interface Survey- Findings

On behalf of the Third Sector Interface (TSI) Network, Glasgow Council for the Voluntary Sector (GCVS) ran a national survey in May to further understand the impact of the pandemic on the third sector and the people and communities it supports^{cc}.

Effects on Communities

Organisations highlighted the areas they were most concerned about in relation to the communities they serve:

- A significant majority highlighted the effects of mental health on their communities (92%)
- This was closely followed by concerns regarding loneliness (80%).
- Also important were concerns regarding communities missing out on opportunities (60%), increased poverty (64%), safety, abuse and neglect (52%) and physical health (52%).
- However, 80% felt that there has been a positive impact felt from within communities by people looking out for each other and people making the best of it (70%).
- In addition, 49% could see improved collaboration between organisations and 42% noted the positive impact on new connections and better relationships.

Changing Services

The survey found that services have had to significantly adapt their models of delivery to respond to need:

- 48% have adapted their delivery models,
- 12% have completely changed what they do to support their community or service users.
- Almost 78% have moved their support to online or phone based support.
- 43% believe they are doing 'really well' with adapting to digital provision, while 43% believe they are coping.
- 21% have been unable to provide activities needed and they have stopped meaningful delivery.
- Close to 41% have needed to furlough some, or all, of their staff.

^{cc} The survey was circulated via 32 TSIs across Scotland to local forums and networks. 1180 third sector organisations responded and from those responses, 243 organisations stated they provided services to children under 16, young people or families. The survey covered a range of adult and children services meaning some of these 243 organisations may also provide services for other client groups. Also, although responses received cover all 32 local authority areas, some organisations may operate across more than one local authority in Scotland.

Needs of the Sector

Organisations stated a number of concerns and needs, particularly around finance and funding:

- 71% believe that their financial position is likely to worsen with almost 40% believing that this will cause them challenges. Mainly this is reported to be from a decrease in income from fundraising, funding applications and trading.
- 14% felt they had the necessary funding to get through the crisis, 15% have been able to access the funding they need from additional sources, 44% have been able to access some of what they need, while 12% did not believe the available funding suits their circumstances.
- Organisations reported that the following would assist them in responding to the needs of the pandemic. 55% require additional funding, 34% need advice with digital provision, 31% would like advice with funding or fundraising and 21% require access to PPE.

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