



COMHAIRLE NAN EILEAN SIAR

Building our communities

Group sets out to guide help to disadvantaged children

By Katie Macleod

For disadvantaged children, receiving the right support can help them fulfil their potential, and even change their lives.

In the Western Isles, part of this support comes from the Children's Services Partnership Group, comprised of Comhairle nan Eilean Siar's Children's Services and representatives from Action for Children, Western Isles Foyer, and Harmeny Education Trust.

Established in January 2017, the Children's Services Partnership Group has been meeting monthly, and offers a model of service delivery that sets out how the four core partners will work together to meet the needs of vulnerable children.

"The Partnership Group takes referrals for children and young people who we are working with, but who are going to require additional resources, and who would benefit from their needs being looked after from a partnership perspective," says the Comhairle's

Children's Services Manager, Graeme Miller.

The team around a child assess their needs – whether individual or family-based – and, where possible, meets these needs within the family, school, or community by accessing Education and Children's Services, primary care, or Third Sector services. In some cases, more resources are needed, and it's then that the Partnership Group comes in.

The partners come together "where there's an unmet need in relation to a child or young person, and there's a chance of meeting that need by working together rather than working as individual agencies," explains Graeme. "By pooling our resources, we can do something that we can't do on our own."

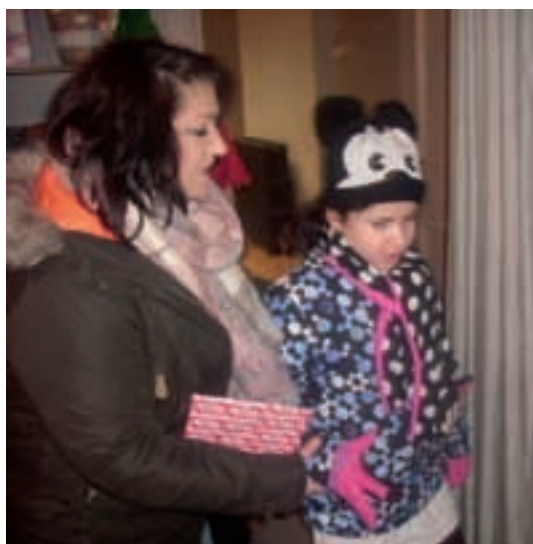
In these situations, the Partnership Group reviews the referral, agrees a way forward, and confirms the resources to be provided. Resources, staff, and funding are all available to the Partnership, and can be moved between agencies as needed to ensure the level of

service for young people is sustained.

Over the last year, the Partnership Group has dealt with regular referrals of children and young people. 67 per cent of completed referrals led to positive outcomes, including young people being supported to move from supported accommodation to individual tenancies; children and families receiving respite care both on the island and on the mainland; and young people being supported to transition to adult services provision.

Outside of referral discussions, the group has invited representatives from local organisations to offer their specific input, ensuring there is an accurate view of the resources available. "Providers who have attended to date include Lewis Street Project, Hebrides Alpha, Macaulay College, and Ark Housing," notes Graeme. "The overall aim is for us to be able to concentrate our resources where there is the greatest need."

How Action for Children fits into Partnership



By Katie Macleod

As a national children's charity, Action for Children help disadvantaged children reach the UK from before birth until they reach early adulthood.

It's the only dedicated children's charity in the Western Isles, where this year they'll celebrate 20 years of helping the region's most vulnerable children.

"We have a whole range of children that we work with, and we offer support in whatever area they need it," explains Children's Service Manager Valerie Russell, who has been with the organisation locally since its start in 1998.

Action for Children helps children in a variety of ways, and in Stornoway the charity has two bases: the Bayhead Resource Centre, where they deliver outreach respite and community services, and Hillcrest Residential Unit, which is the only residential unit for children on the island.

Because they are local to the island, but a national organisation, Action for Children can bring skills and knowledge from across the country

to help young people in the Western Isles. A wide variety of services are offered, including residential care for looked after young people at Hillcrest; respite and flexible care for children with complex needs and disabilities; Early Years Services; a Maternal and Infant Nutrition Group; and an Early Intervention Substance Misuse Service.

Since January 2017, Action for Children have been a member of the Children's Services Partnership Group, which includes Children's Services from Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Action for Children, Western Isles Foyer, and Harmeny Education Trust.

"We've always worked in partnership with lots of agencies, but this is a more formal arrangement with the council," says Valerie of the Partnership Group. "It's about accessing services and working together so that we provide better outcomes for all the children we work with."

Although Action for Children already receives funding from the Comhairle – as well as support from the NHS and Scottish Government – the Children's Services Partnership Group represents a

new service-level agreement. As Valerie explains, within the partnership, Action for Children "can provide one-off input, or can do something that might last years, so it's meeting their needs when we can. The benefits are for the children, because they're at the centre of it all."

While there had been some concerns in recent years that Action for Children may have to close locally, the organisation is as strong as ever as it celebrates two decades of work in the Western Isles. "We've strengthened our partnership by having this new agreement," adds Valerie, "and it will help make sure the island children get their needs fully met."

Under the new partnership agreement, Action for Children helps provide a number of services. These include the use of Hillcrest Residential Unit for residential support for looked after children, and for residential respite support for children with additional support needs; outreach respite support for children at the Bayhead Outreach Centre and elsewhere in the community; and provision of transport for the children and young people involved with Children's Services.

Even outside of the Children's Services agreement, partnership working is a central component of the services provided by Action for Children. In their efforts to meet the needs of children and young people, Action for Children work with a variety of organisations, from schools and community groups, to the local police and food bank.

Their Assessment and Therapy Unit (ATU) service, for example, is fully-funded by Western Isles Health Board, making it unique in Scotland, while the monthly S'math Sinn Saturday Club, which hosts fun group activities for teenagers with additional needs, involves working alongside the likes of An Lanntair and the Sports Centre.

"At Action for Children we're very versatile, and we always try to respond if there's a gap in services," says Valerie. "All our funders are very supportive, and we get a lot of support from the community; we've been very fortunate with people fundraising on our behalf."

"We want to say a big thank you to everyone that's supported us in the past, and continues to do so."