



COMHAIRLE NAN EILEAN SIAR

Building our communities

How Foyer aims to help young people improve their start in life

By Katie Macleod

Not every child gets a positive start in life. Some need to be looked after, while others are affected by homelessness, mental health issues, substance misuse, and long-term health problems, and it's young people like these that Western Isles Foyer, the independently-funded local charity, works to support.

Based on Bayhead Street in Stornoway, Western Isles Foyer works with vulnerable young people aged 16-26, supporting them in finding accommodation, developing independent living skills, and assisting them with housing, health, education, and training.

"We aim to prevent and alleviate homelessness and social disadvantage," explains Western Isles Foyer Project Leader, Rebecca Mahony. "Our objective is to support young people to secure a safe place to live that they can call home; to support them to feel more socially included, valued, and respected; and to support them to have access to opportunities to make a meaningful contribution to their local communities."

Now in their 13th year of operation, Western Isles Foyer does all this through a variety of dedicated services. One of these is the Supported Accommodation Service, which consists of nine self-contained flats in and around Stornoway for young people who need them; the young people living there are assisted in all areas of their lives where support is needed. "Support is continued when young people move into tenancies, to ensure they have the skills to live independently, sustain their tenancies, and make positive progress," says Rebecca.

Western Isles Foyer also provides a Drop-In Service, which offers a safe space for young people to access Foyer services on an informal basis, and Independent Living Skills support, which aims to support young people to develop independent living skills and help them progress to the next step in terms of education, employment, and training.

"The level of support input required varies according to the young person's assessed need," Rebecca explains. "Some just need support with building their confidence and self-esteem, while others need support to address chaotic lifestyles or long-term health issues before they are ready to move on to education, training, or employment."

Since January 2017, Western Isles Foyer has also been a member of the Children's Services Partnership Group, which includes Children's Services from Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Action for Children, and Harmeny Education Trust, and builds on the informal collaborations that were previously in place.

"Although we have always worked in close partnership with other local agencies, including the Comhairle's Children's Services, the partnership represents a positive formalisation of partnership working protocols to ensure best outcomes for the young people we collectively work with," says Rebecca of the



Partnership. "It facilitates a more co-ordinated approach to support packages for young people and allows better forward planning. This in turn gives young people positive opportunities for development to help them reach their full potential, fitting in well with our organisation's own ethos and values."

The charity has seen numerous benefits from the new working structure, including increased financial stability, which in turn allows them to provide a consistent service to the young people they work with. In the last year, funding provided by the Partnership has been used by Western Isles Foyer to part-fund project staffing costs, and helped them match-fund SVQ qualifications for two front-line support workers. The charity has also received support for the running costs and service delivery activities from organisations such as NHS Western Isles, the Point and Sandwick Trust, and the Co-op Community Trust, among others.

Collaborating across organisations has proved helpful, too. "As a very small organisation, with a current staff team of four, it is great to be working in such close partnership with the other members," notes Rebecca. "We have already been benefitting from inclusion in joint staff training events, and hope that this more flexible joint working approach will benefit both our organisation and the vulnerable young people that we work with."

Rebecca adds that Western Isles Foyer is "very grateful" for the opportunities provided by membership of the Children's Services Partnership. "We would also like to take this opportunity to thank our service-users for all their hard work, passion and enthusiasm in engaging with our services; all of our funders for providing us with the resources to provide our services to young people; staff and volunteers – including our Committee members – for their hard work and dedication; and to the local community for their continued support."



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."