

ACTION FOR CHILDREN

CashBack Positive Changes Phase Five: Evaluation and Learning Report

2020 TO 2023



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1. CASHBACK POSITIVE CHANGES

Action for Children runs the CashBack Positive Changes programme for young people aged 14 plus who are experiencing challenges, facing inequalities or at risk of involvement in the justice system.

The programme includes an average of 26 weeks of needs-led support. This includes:

Community engagement	4 weeks	➔	Each participant has a dedicated key worker providing holistic one-to-one support. Together they co-produce a personalised support plan with agreed goals, actions and outcomes.
Structured programme	6 to 10 weeks	➔	Participants come together in three to four interactive sessions each week, focusing on behaviour change, wellbeing, core skills and inclusion.
Progression and aftercare	16 weeks	➔	Participants are supported to gain positive destinations including further education, training, volunteering or employment, with additional aftercare to support transition and ensure retention.

The programme is delivered in communities and schools within the most deprived parts of Glasgow, South Lanarkshire, North Lanarkshire, Inverclyde and Edinburgh, based on the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation.

Most of the programme is schools based, targeting young people who are disengaged from school or at risk of not achieving positive destinations. In two areas, Edinburgh and South Lanarkshire, Action for Children provide community based employability programmes for young people aged 16 plus who have left education.

PHASE FIVE DELIVERY

Positive Changes worked closely with schools, throughout the Covid-19 pandemic when restrictions and closures were in place for a significant period of time. In year 1, in the context of lockdowns and extended restrictions in place, the schools programme ran in two ten week blocks in September 2020 and January 2021. The programme ran two mornings a week for ten weeks, using online and blended learning, for senior phase young people who were opting out of mainstream school sessions due to a variety of issues. Young people got an insight into the world of work, focusing on construction, hospitality, social care and ICT. Young people gained an SQA qualification Wellbeing Award SCQF 3 or 4, through personal development, motivation and self-awareness sessions.

In year 2 the offer to schools was expanded and built on. Schools were open, but remained in a state of flux. A four week pre-programme was introduced, with doorstep visits to young people to build relationships and rapport with young people before they started the programme and to identify other barriers to participation and personalised support needs.

In year 3, work with schools continues. The programme was promoted through schools, and there was an increase in interest and referrals from schools. Most of the young people on the programme were referred from schools, with the programme continuing to be delivered outwith the school environment to build a positive alternative learning environment.

2. PARTICIPANTS

Total participants

Across three years of the programme, CashBack Positive Changes has worked with 288 young people. This is slightly more than the programme aimed to engage - 270 young people over three years.

Year 1 participants	79
Year 2 participants	91
Year 3 participants	118
Total	288

Age

Most participants were aged 14 to 18. In years 2 and 3, CashBack Positive Changes saw a higher proportion of younger participants aged 14 and 15 due to a strong focus on schools-based work.

	14 to 15	16 to 18	19 to 24
Year 1	29	50	-
Year 2	43	42	6
Year 3	73	43	2
Total	145	135	8
%	50%	47%	3%

Deprivation

Most participants were from areas of high deprivation, based on the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD).

	20% most deprived areas	20-30% most deprived areas	30-40% most deprived area	50% least deprived areas
Year 1	53	12	9	5
Year 2	46	12	13	20
Year 3	61	23	12	22
Total	160	47	34	47
%	56%	16%	12%	16%

In years 2 and 3, there was an increase in participants from less deprived areas. Around half of all participants in years 2 and 3 were from the 20% most deprived areas, compared with two thirds in year 1. Action for Children targeted schools in areas of high deprivation throughout phase five, but has found that pupils in need of the programme can be from across all levels of deprivation, with needs for all young people exacerbated by the pandemic.

Sex identity

Approximately two thirds of participants identified as male and a third as female.

	Male	Female
Year 1	56	22
Year 2	55	35
Year 3	68	45
Total*	179	102
%	64%	36%

*Two indicated they would prefer not to say

Wider characteristics

The CashBack Positive Changes programme worked with young people with a wide range of challenges in their lives, including young people with care experience. Many of the young people Positive Changes has worked with were at risk of isolation, gambling and using drugs and alcohol. Many young people were dealing with anxiety and struggling to leave the house and attend school.

Between 2020 and 2023:

- Participants identified 142 different disabilities, mainly learning, understanding, concentrating, social or behavioural issues. Overall 52% of participants said that they did not have a disability.
- 8% of participants (22) were minority ethnic.
- 15% of participants (44) identified as having a religious belief.
- 8% of participants (22) identified as gay, lesbian, bisexual or other sexual orientation.
- A very small number of the participants said that their gender was different from that assigned at birth.
- All of the participants were single.
- Two participants were pregnant.

WORKING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE WITH CARE EXPERIENCE

Positive Choices worked closely with the virtual school for young people with care experience in Glasgow, to develop a bespoke programme for young people with care experience. Glasgow Virtual School supports young people with care experience and disrupted learners whose education has been impacted through health reasons or other exceptional reasons. Positive Choices worked with the virtual school to identify a group of young people who could benefit from the programme. The young people travel by taxi from school to the centre where the course is delivered on a face to face basis, one day per week.

The course involves tasters in first aid, catering, barista training and hair and beauty courses as well as sessions on drugs and alcohol, gambling, team building and positive relationships. The virtual school team works closely with Action for Children to follow up and support young people after the course.

3. IMPACT ON YOUNG PEOPLE

Introduction

This chapter sets out the impact of the project. It is based on evidence from surveys and discussions during April 2020 to March 2023.



Survey of young people

An online survey was issued to participants and received a total of 159 responses. This includes 18 responses in year 1, 57 responses in year 2 and 84 responses in year 3. Survey responses were lower in year 1 due to the pandemic and restricted delivery, but overall were received for more than half (55%) of the participants across Phase 5 - a very high response rate.



Discussions with young people

Research Scotland spoke with 34 young people. This includes two discussion groups involving a total of 16 young people, and 18 individual discussions with young people.



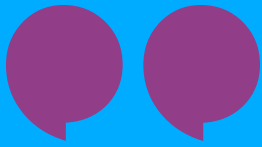
Survey of stakeholders

An online survey was issued to stakeholders and received a total of 64 responses, from parents, referral organisations and other organisations supporting young people accessing Positive Changes. This includes 5 responses in year 1, 28 in year 2 and 31 in year 3.



Discussions with stakeholders

Research Scotland held individual interviews with ten stakeholders, including staff in education, outdoor learning, pupil support and parents.



I feel more confident in myself."

Young person

Confidence and resilience

Young people taking part in Positive Changes became more confident, resilient and able to overcome problems.

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Average
Young people demonstrate increased confidence	100%	96%	96%	97%
Young people feel more resilient/ can overcome problems	94%	91%	99%	95%
Young people report positive changes in their behaviour	100%	99%	99%	99%
Stakeholders report perceived increases in confidence and resilience	100%	93%	100%	98%
Stakeholders report perceived positive changes in behaviour in young participants	100%	92%	97%	96%

Almost all wider stakeholders felt that young people had increased confidence and resilience, and changed their behaviour positively. The few stakeholders believing that young people did not increase confidence, resilience and positive behaviour indicated that the young person did not attend the full course.

Evidence from years 2 and 3 provides more detail on the changes in how young people feel about themselves. In year 3, there was a particular impact around supporting young people to believe in themselves, feel they could overcome problems and feel more motivated.

	Year 2		Year 3	
Because of Positive Changes ...	A lot	A little	A lot	A little
I feel determined to achieve my goals	63%	28%	56%	43%
I feel positive about the future	55%	42%	40%	55%
I feel more motivated	44%	55%	49%	48%
I can overcome problems	44%	47%	46%	53%
I believe in myself	25%	69%	40%	56%

Many of the young people taking part in Positive Changes were no longer engaging within society, isolated and not leaving their home or their room. Many were not attending school. Young people felt that the course helped them to get out of the house, talk to other young people and make friends.



I feel like I'm better at socialising.

It has just made me more confident in myself and let me speak to people without feeling anxious or nauseous.

Starting to make more pals. It's the first time I have done that in a long while.

I met a new friend its the first I have been out the house for a while and travelled to places.

I actually spend it with my new friend that I made here and her friends...instead of just sitting in my room all day doing nothing, I actually go out with my new friends.



Young people

Feedback from parents of the young people involved also indicated that they noticed a difference in their children, going out more, using public transport, being happier, chattier, more confident and more able to try new things.

●● She was withdrawn and tearful. Dramatic change quickly. Happy, chatty and joining in with life again."

●● My son is more likely to try new things now he has the confidence in himself."

Parents

Feedback from wider stakeholders, including school staff, said that young people were now leaving the house, coming out of their shell and talking to others. Many felt that they also had a more positive outlook and a better daily routine.

●● The 5 pupils that attended have become more personable and approachable since attending the course."

School staff

A few wider stakeholders fed back that young people were doing things they wouldn't have done otherwise, because of the course.

●● Definitely confidence. The change has been unbelievable. One's now attending college. Two girls engaged with other services which they would never have done before. They come to see me each week now...Those two girls had never even been to see me at the office because they couldn't leave their house..."

Referral organisation

Stakeholders felt that the course helped many young people with how to interact and behave, including not swearing, not smoking or vaping during the course, turning up on time, having breakfast before they come in and learning how to act responsibly in a public space.

- I have noticed improvements in their personal skills, with regard to how they interact with their peers and the appropriate adults in their lives."

Stakeholder

One stakeholder working with young people with care experience said that the course had made a big difference to young people who have not been attending school at all. This stakeholder observed young people shifting from being withdrawn to chatting with one another and with Action for Children staff, becoming more outgoing and becoming more respectful to the staff.

CASE STUDY

David* got involved with Positive Choices when he as having a very difficult time at school. He wasn't understood by his peers and the environment affected his mental health. He was regularly getting into difficulty at school.

After a few weeks of attending, his parents noticed a change in his mental health and demeanor.

He has started to become a leader in the group, supporting the younger people and working positively within the group. He has started dealing with situations less physically, and by discussing issues and engaging with the staff.

David has been studying maths through the programme and moved up quickly from Nat 3 maths to Nat 4 and 5 qualifications, over a matter of weeks. David has also started volunteering for another organisation as a youth worker. The change in David has also had a wider impact on the family. They feel more positive and relaxed, and confident that he has support.

- Where he is with his physical and mental wellbeing is night and day really. "

- He's conscious of his decision making now...They make him think of some of the consequences of his actions."

- We're more relaxed about life now... It means there's less tension in the family... We have time to breathe now."

- It's honestly amazing to see the positive changes in David."

Parent

**Name changed to protect identity*



It got me out of house I don't attend school and I got some qualifications."

Young person

Physical and personal skills

Through the programme 197 young people have achieved accreditation for their learning.

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Total
Young people gain accreditation for learning and skills development	33	61	103	197
Young people report their skills are increasing	94%	94%	98%	95%
Stakeholders report skills are increasing	100%	89%	100%	96%

Overall:

- 173 young people gained an SCQF level 3 award
- 5 young people gained an SCQF level 4 award
- 8 young people achieved 67 non-SCQF qualifications or accreditations.

Young people reported developing their skills in terms of:

- IT skills
- health and wellbeing, first aid and being active
- understanding risk, how to stay safe online and how to make choices
- working as a team, communicating, presenting and listening to others
- understanding others, particularly people who are different from them
- routine and time management.

●● "I'm keeping healthy and talking to more people."

●● "Will make me a better person, be more respectful to people and be responsible for myself and my behaviour."

Young people

Young people were pleased that these skills had helped them to gain qualifications. Young people were also using their skills while at school, or hoped to use them in the future when they got a job.

●● Helped get my qualification quicker.”

●● I have realised there are other ways of learning and getting qualifications rather than just having to go to school.”

Young people

Many young people talked about the importance of developing their IT skills. Many had not been confident using computers, and were pleased to have a qualification and develop skills that will be useful for the future. Some mentioned that they were already using these skills to look for and apply for jobs or college places online.

●● I hadn't used computer before ... But now I feel more confident and got a qualification in ICT that I wouldn't have got.”

Young person

Young people also reported developing job sector skills like using tools, construction, mechanics, how to lift heavy things properly and hospitality skills like carrying plates, making drinks and making healthy food, through taking part in a range of sessions and activities. Some said that this gave them experience to talk about during interviews, and would help them to get work in the future.

●● I have learned lots about my future and helped me make more better decisions.”

Young person

Stakeholders also noted that young people had developed their skills and were more confident about what they could achieve.

●● Young people are more positive about their own capabilities.”

Referral organisation

●● All the young people I referred to them are challenging for various reasons. All have things going on in their lives that we would struggle to deal with. And they're all doing something now. None of that would have happened without the programme.”

Stakeholder

EXAMPLE: ACTION FOR CHILDREN CAFE

Young people in Glasgow exploring their hospitality skills through Positive Changes have the opportunity to work at the Action for Children café. The café provides young people with practical work experience, learning barista skills, serving people, working in the kitchen, baking and making sandwiches.

The young people work towards a community achievement award through Glasgow Kelvin College. The young people do 40 hours of activity in the café and provide evidence of what they've achieved. An assessor from the college attends to assess their evidence. The connection with college has been helpful, as it means that the young people are now enrolled with the college, and it will be easier for them to apply for other courses.

CASE STUDY

Zack* was referred to Positive Changes in September 2020. At the time, he was not engaging with school. He had stopped attending when he was 15 because he was being bullied. Although he felt free after leaving school, he also felt very isolated and was trying to find a way to get into college. The Positive Changes programme was recommended as a good option for Zack, to help him find a suitable path forward after he left school.

●● I was told it was the thing to help get into college."

The course

The programme was delivered out of school. Zack was part of a small group of pupils aged 14 to 17. At first he was worried about joining the group because he hadn't been out of the house mixing with others for a while. But he enjoyed the course.

●● It seemed like a way for me to get out of the house and to get to do what I want to do."

●● It was the first time in a long time that he was getting up out of the house and going somewhere."

AFC Worker

During the course, Zach developed his skills, gaining two qualifications: SQA level 3 Core Skills ICT and SQA level 3 Wellbeing Award.

CASE STUDY

Impact – learning and skills

Zack has a strong passion for cooking, inspired by his mum. His dream was to go to college and train to become a chef. However, he didn't know where to begin, and was not sure about joining college remotely. He was also having a difficult time at home. Through Positive Changes, Zack looked at a range of potential college courses. He was supported to apply for college and prepare for the interview.

Zack wrote applications for three different courses at different colleges, and practiced mock interviews. In 2020 he got into the professional cookery course he wanted. He felt that the interview preparation he did with Action for Children really helped him when it came to his college interview.

●● I thought it was going to be really stressful but it was actually really relaxing."

Action for Children then supported Zack and his mother to apply for a bursary and sourced a laptop for him. Zack is now in college. He is enjoying the course, and is learning a lot.

●● It's going amazing. I've been doing a lot of work and my lecturers are really helpful. They always make sure that you know what you're doing before assessments."

Zack loves being around people who have the same interests as him, and has made friends.

●● I've never really had like a friend who stuck around. It's really nice. I feel more energetic and happy now."

Over time, Zack has shown a real increase in self-esteem and confidence. Before he started the programme he wasn't sure about his next steps, but he now has a clear path forward in his chosen career.

●● It was like a sigh of relief being able to do something I wanted to do, instead of vegetating in the house."

CASE STUDY

●● He knew what he wanted to do but didn't believe it could happen."
AFC Worker

●● He seems a lot more contented in himself."
Mum

The future

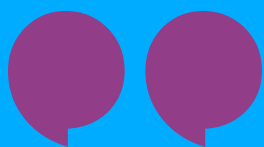
Action for Children will continue to support Zach through the programme for a further six months, and will be on hand for ad hoc support beyond that.

In future, Zack plans to start a level 6 cookery course. Longer term he would like to travel the world and learn to cook different cuisines. Eventually he would like to open up his own restaurant

●● It's the first time ever that I feel like I'm going somewhere."

●● In that 10 weeks his life turned around and I can see a massive difference in him."
Mum

**Name changed to protect identity*



I feel like I'm actually doing something with my time."

Young person

Wellbeing

All of the participants in Positive Changes said that their wellbeing had increased as a result. Wellbeing was a core part of the programme and over the 3 years, 243 young people improved their participation in structured wellbeing activities.

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Average
Young people report increases in SHANARRI indicators	100%	100%	100%	100%
Stakeholders report perceived increases in SHANARRI indicators	100%	92%	97%	96%

Young people felt safe, included, cared for, successful and respected.

The project has helped me feel:	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Average
Safe	100%	95%	99%	98%
Included	100%	98%	100%	99%
Cared for	100%	100%	99%	100%
Successful	100%	96%	94%	97%
Respected	100%	96%	99%	98%
Active	94%	91%	96%	94%
Responsible	94%	93%	95%	94%

Taking part in Positive Changes helped young people with their routine. Many said it gave them a reason to get up, to get out of the house and to do something useful. a few had started being more physically active, getting up and going for a walk or a run.

●● It gets you up and it's something do do in the week.”

●● It helps to give you a routine.”

Young people

Young people said that through the course they had become more positive. A few said that they had better mental health and that anxiety or panic attacks had reduced.

●● Just when I'm in the house my mental health is all over the place. When I come here I'm not stuck with my thoughts if you get me...coming here it just distracts me from my mental health and then when I go home it's not that bad.”

●● Feel happier and confident.”

Young people

Stakeholders noted particular improvements in young people becoming more positive and proactive. Stakeholders noted that many of the young people referred to Positive Changes have social, emotional and behavioural needs. Through Positive Changes they are learning to have more positive relationships, be calmer and increase respect and cooperation with others.

●● I've seen a real change in young people. They're having very powerful conversations about how they feel. It all seems to have changed in a short space of time.”

School staff

EXAMPLE: LEARNING HOW TO RELAX

One of the Positive Changes courses involves a partnership with an outdoor organisation. At a woodland skills course, the young people learn a wide range of skills, including how to relax outside and enjoy being in the woodland, not being afraid of the space. Young people also take part in physical activities in learning woodland skills, and become more physically able over time. This helps to build fitness and skills for construction and physical exertion in any future work roles.

- Just learning to sit in silence for ten minutes, they really learn to relax. I think it's good for those with a disruptive home life."

A few stakeholders indicated that young people had become more aware of the importance of routine, had become more active, improved their sleeping patterns and begun eating more healthily. A few pointed to positive changes in mental health, with young people becoming less anxious, less stressed and more relaxed.

- There is always a significant improvement in young people's mindsets when they have been supported by Action for Children."

Referral organisation

A few stakeholders mentioned a wider positive impact on families.

- The parents report feeling less stressed and worried because they can see a bright future for their children with AFC support."

Referral organisation

CASE STUDY

Emily started Positive Changes when she was 15. She had been struggling at school and had been asked to leave because she wasn't attending, and when she was she said she was being destructive. She said she had no goals, was "shutting down" her life and self-harming.

Emily attended all of the course activities and enjoyed it.

- At first I didnae really want to...But after the first day I realised it wouldn't be so bad. The work wasn't so hard."

Positive Changes staff helped Emily to identify that she had dyslexia. They got her an overlay to help her to read written documents, which helped a lot. She also studied English at Positive Changes and worked to get qualifications. Emily achieved Maths and English level 3 qualifications, with the help of her key worker at Action for Children. Emily felt really good about achieving these qualifications.

Emily went on to a training course focusing on supporting mental health, before progressing to a general employability programme. She discussed her choices with her worker at Action for Children and she is really enjoying it. The overlay and support understanding her dyslexia has helped her a lot. Positive Changes also gave her the confidence to join other new courses, with new people.

●● Without positive choices. I wouldn't be on any of the courses I am now."

Emily also feels a lot healthier and is more active. She has developed a positive routine and feels better in herself.

●● I feel better, and I can remember things... I used to drink every day, but now I only drink on the weekends, and not even every week... I used to have lots of cuts and bruises from drinking and falling over and self-harming and I don't have that anymore."

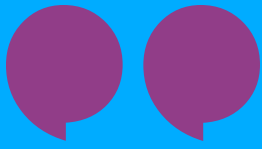
●● It's changed my routine a lot, so I'm not lying about ...I'm less moody and angry because I'm not inside all the time."

Because Emily has reduced her smoking and drinking she feels she is making better choices and is no longer in trouble with the police so much.

●● I'm making better choices because I'm not drinking as much and I'm being careful with what I do."

Emily also did some volunteering with a charitable organisation, learning to be a peer educator and talking to people about her own experience with drugs and alcohol. She is now looking for a part time job. Longer term she would like to work as a family intensive support worker.

●● It feels like things are starting to get better. I'm actually planning for my future."



It helped me to overcome my fears about education."

Young person

Employability and learning

Across three years of the programme, 217 young people have moved on to a positive destination. This includes remaining at or returning to school, as well as moving on to training. A small number of young people have moved into employment.

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Total
Young people achieve a positive destination	41	86	90	217
Young people improve school attendance	-	10	25	35
Young people improve school attainment	-	16	23	39
Young people feel more confident starting employment, training or education	100%	95%	96%	97%

Young people progress to...	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Total
Further education (including remaining at or returning to school)	12	64	46	122
Training	26	20	32	78
Employment	3	1	9	13
Volunteering	0	1	3	4
Total	41	86	90	217

Action for Children figures show that 35 young people have improved school attendance, and 39 have improved attainment at school. However, attendance at a positive learning activity has increased for all Positive Changes participants. Many were not attending school. Attainment has also increased - for example with 197 young people gaining accreditation for their learning.

Stakeholders highlighted that the young people engaging with Positive Changes were not coming to school, were not leaving their homes and were sometimes not even getting out of bed all day. But they are attending Positive Changes, and the act of turning up every week shows a significant increase in capacity.

- Just that they're getting up and attending is huge."
 - Pupils who were previously non-attenders and school refusers have become more engaged with their learning..."
 - The programme 100% boosted the young people's engagement in school and gave them something to work towards on a weekly basis."
- School staff

Across the programme, Action for Children figures show that 219 young people improved their participation in group sessions and 245 improved their engagement with their key worker. Positive Changes helps people to work through wellbeing issues, re-engage with learning and learn in a positive environment.

- The programme acts as a bridge to get them back into a strong routine and it makes them feel that they can contribute positively."
- School staff

Young people found that learning in an environment away from school helped them to re-engage with learning. Young people highlighted that before attending Positive Changes, most had not been attending school and were not doing much. Some said that coming to the course got them away from drama, bullying, stress or problems at school.

- Got me a way from school. I enjoyed coming here don't need to do loads of writing and learned things in a different way."
 - It has been good to get away from school its less stressful and everyone who is hear is sound."
 - I don't go to school and if I do go I just leave. This is the only place I have come to every week. I like that it's not like school."
- Young people

Young people said that they would find it easier to plan what to do next in terms of learning and working, as a result of Positive Changes.

- Moving on to a new programme will be easier now I have done this.”
 - I would say that it has helped me feel more confident about finding a job and what I want to do with my future.”
 - It has helped me just look forward to the future and what it may bring.”
 - When I’m here, it’s more chilled out and so I like trust them a bit more and it’s made me feel better about planning out college and everything.”
 - They’ve taught me what I can achieve if I do certain things.”
- Young people

Stakeholders agreed that the programme was supporting people into further learning, training or employment.

- They’re learning about other training programmes and college places. They’re finding out more about what’s available just by coming to the training.”
- Partner

EXAMPLE

Michael* joined Positive Choices as he was leaving school. He hadn’t been attending school regularly as he felt a bit anxious and didn’t like going into classes. The cycle of not attending and then falling behind made him feel worse.

At first Michael was worried about attending the course due to social anxiety, but he started and felt fine and able to cope in the environment. It helped that the group was small. Through the course he learned a lot about emotions, and although he still experiences anxiety and doesn’t enjoy attention, he now feels more confident.

- Yeah I feel more confident, just getting on with my life, you know just doing day to day activities, like talking to people.”

EXAMPLE

Michael also feels more confident about his future. He has developed his CV and feels more positive about his future.

●● ...after the course I was like, ok maybe I have a chance.”

Michael is now starting a course with Impact Arts, to keep him busy until he starts a photography course at college. Taking part in Positive Choices helped him to feel confident attending these courses.

EXAMPLE

James* joined Positive Choices because he didn't enjoy school and wasn't attending. He enjoyed Positive Choices and attended the programme consistently. He completed a SVQ level 3 wellbeing award and took part in CPR training – which he used a few days later in an emergency situation.

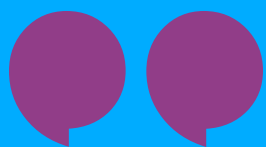
James liked the programme a lot, and felt that it helped him to establish a routine and feel better both physically and mentally. His confidence increased, and he became more able to control his emotions.

James developed his career plans through Positive Choices. He feels positive about his future, and is on a uniformed services course with the aim of becoming a fire fighter. He also feels more motivated to get a part time job while at college.

EXAMPLE

Lucy* joined Positive Choices when she wasn't attending school as she found it difficult to learn there. She enjoyed the sessions, and built her confidence speaking to people and established a better routine.

Lucy didn't know what she wanted to do when she started the course, but the programme helped her to understand what she could achieve. She increased her aspirations and is now going on to study at college. Before the programme she thought college would be boring, but because she enjoyed Positive Choices she is now looking forward to it and thinks it will be fun.



They are out in the community more than isolated in the house."

Referral organisation

Community contribution

Through Positive Changes, young people built their sense of belonging to a community.

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Average
Young people's perception of their neighbourhood improves	73%	86%	86%	82%
Young people have a heightened sense of belonging to a community	100%	88%	92%	93%
Young people feel their contribution and links with communities are improving	83%	78%	86%	82%
Stakeholders perceive contribution and links are improving	100%	64%	87%	84%

Over the three years of the programme, 196 young people completed a 'Your Community' session and activities, and 181 completed a bespoke Circle of Support.

Some young people had gained confidence through Positive Changes to go on to join community groups or do similar courses.



I have joined community groups and feel more confident about it."

Young person

Most stakeholders indicated that young people were taking part in more activities locally – such as walks in the parks, joining local gyms, getting local work experience and going out in the local area. Some stakeholders felt that doing outdoor work, such as woodland maintenance, helped young people to take pride in their local area and feel more socially conscious.

- The outcomes have been overwhelmingly positive and the staff have contributed to turning the young person's life around and empowering them to contribute to their own communities and society.”

Referral organisation

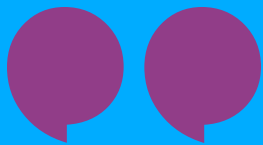
- It makes them appreciate their natural environment more. You can see how proud they are that they’re building that knowledge.”

Delivery partner

Some stakeholders felt that while some young people were more engaged in the community, some were more interested and talking about going on to join local groups but had not done this yet. Some said this may be something that would develop in the future.

EXAMPLE

In partnership with Glasgow Virtual School, young people get to go to the Clay Café, a local community café, where they work and serve customers. This helps to build their confidence in the community, as well as getting experience of work. Young people who worked in the café in 2021/22 went on to mentor young people during 2022/23. All young people who work in the Clay Café get a Level 3 Community Achievement Award and a barista qualification.



I have found out and thought more about what could happen to me if I go into things the wrong way.”
Young person

Diversion

Most young people felt that they were less inclined to take part in antisocial or criminal behaviour since taking part in Positive Changes.

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Total
Young people report reduced antisocial and/or criminal behaviour	62%	56%	72%	63%
Young people feel less inclined to participate in antisocial and/or criminal behaviour	67%	71%	88%	75%
Young people take part in behavioural change sessions and activities	46	88	50	184
Young people have a risk assessment and risk reduction plan	32	35	13	80

However, Action for Children emphasised that many young people were at home during the early stages of the pandemic and therefore unlikely to have been involved in antisocial behaviour or offending. The profile of young people involved in Positive Changes has also involved many who are anxious, shy and have social and emotional issues, and spend more time at home than out in the community.

The course includes early intervention support around gambling, drug and alcohol misuse and harm reduction. Young people found that they learned about how to make positive choices, and the consequences of their decisions. A few said that they were now making better decisions.



I used to sit about the house a lot, or just waste my time going about with my pals, drinking and stuff, but now I'm going out with my smarter pals...being productive, going to get something to eat, going walks or going to the gym and that.”

Young person

●● It's made me think smarter, not to be daft and just react."

●● Well I was drinking a lot, and I haven't like been drinking as much, like only at parties. And then like instead of just hanging about parks and stuff, like doing stuff that's illegal I've been doing different stuff."

Young people

A few stakeholders mentioned that young people's involvement in antisocial behaviour had reduced.

●● A number of our pupils who were known to the police have reduced their criminal and anti-social behaviour as a result of engagement with AfC."

School staff

Two stakeholders talked of participants with a history of offending behaviour, a long list of charges or engagement with gangs. Both said that since the course these young people had begun thinking a bit more. Previously, some had not engaged with support at all, and now they were engaging and thinking about their decisions. Stakeholders felt that these young people were beginning to realise that they don't want to go down that path and were speaking with staff about their experiences.

●● Their behaviour in their local community has improved and they are not taking part in risky behaviour."

School staff

CASE STUDY

Simone* is in S4 and attends Positive Changes. Simone was co-supported between additional support needs and mainstream education, but wasn't really attending or engaging. Her mum felt that Simone didn't really fit with secondary school, and that school was seriously affecting her mental health. She was frequently pulled out of class because she struggled with the work, and had to sit alone in the corridor at a table outside a teacher's office. Her mum felt that Simone wasn't learning and that being at school made her very unhappy, so she decided not to send Simone to school any more.

●● It was soul destroying, seeing her struggle with mental health. There were constant calls to and from school. It had a negative impact on my home and work life. Now that whole weight has just been lifted."

Mum

CASE STUDY

Simone was initially apprehensive about attending Positive Choices, but she found it very friendly and welcoming and got on well. It was a small group and Simone had a key worker who was able to work to build confidence and life skills. In this environment, away from school, Simone was able to get support to achieve some qualifications and awards.

- Action for Children has really been about Simone, about what Simone needs. They make her feel like she won't be judged or criticised or ridiculed... She's been absolutely buzzing at the end of the day."

Mum

Simone is dyslexic and her literacy skills have improved at Positive Choices. Her mum thinks she is less stressed about learning in the Positive Changes environment.

- She's more confident about her writing and spelling."

Mum

Simone has made friends, and has started going out with young people from the group after the sessions. She has friends over to the house to stay over, and goes out to do things with her friends.

- Absolutely huge changes in a short period of time... Simone hasn't seen a single school friend since September, before she started with Action for Children. She hardly left the house. She just declined to such a point where she wasn't 'Simone' any more. She wasn't eating much either, and she was getting support from CAMHS."

Mum

Simone's health and wellbeing has also improved. During her time at Positive Choices, Simone has been able to reduce her weekly visits to CAMHS to fortnightly and then monthly. She is hoping to reduce her medication and her sleep pattern is better. Simone used to drink a lot and drink at school, resulting in significant events and problems with the police because of her drinking. This has now reduced significantly and Simone says that she wouldn't drink and then go into school any more. Simone is also much more motivated to get up and do things. For example, she's thinking about joining sports clubs in the local area.

Action for Children is helping Simone to transition out of school. Simone is doing a placement at a nursery and wants to work with children with additional support needs and have a job with meaning and purpose in the future.

- Now I'm not worried, I'm excited."

Mum

4. LEARNING DURING 2020 TO 2023

Learning about young people's views

- It's probably the best thing I've ever done."
Young person

Young people at Positive Changes enjoyed the programme. They liked that it was fun, chilled and there was no pressure. In particular young people liked how the staff engaged with them, like adults. Young people said that they felt staff showed they cared, weren't judgemental and were easy to talk to.

- They're not strict. It's not like school."
- They listen to what you say."
- They're pure genuine people, like they actually speak to you."
- Honestly I couldn't have asked for better people...they've been amazing with me...that's what every young person deserves in their life."
Young people

Parents agreed that the staff were a key part of why the programme worked. Parents also appreciated that the number of young people was relatively small, and the programme was bespoke.

- They're providing positive mentoring role models. It's had such a positive impact on his self-belief."
Parent

Young people liked the structure of the programme. Some who were in one day a week said that they would like to be in two or three days a week. And some would like the programme to last for a longer period of time.

- I would like it to have been on longer because I am worried I will feel a bit lost on a Wednesday now."
Young person

Stakeholders agreed that the staff were a critical part of the programme, supporting the young people well. Stakeholders liked that it was the same staff throughout, providing consistency for the young people.

- They're quite good fun, and I think they make the young people feel like they can be themselves."

Stakeholder

Learning about delivery

The programme has evolved over time to meet the needs of the young people. This includes a stronger focus on mental health and wellbeing, and the introduction of more interactive approaches like emojis and posters, and pictorial rather than written portfolios for young people.. Staff have undertaken more mental health training and the wellbeing sessions have worked well.

- We made a real shift towards mental health support."

Staff

- The programme needs to be dynamic, so it continues to meet the needs of young people over time."

Staff

Action for Children has also focused on enhancing and developing its approach to creating an informal, encouraging and nurturing environment for young people from the start of the programme. They can see the value of the pre-programme support and doorstep visits, seeing how young people's confidence builds and this results in them being able to fully engage with the programme and talk to their peers.

- You can see the difference before your eyes...The doorstep visits really helped to build confidence."

- The visits gave us a chance to speak with families and to encourage them to support their child to go to the training - to get them up in the morning."

Staff

During year 3, staff were more able to go out and meet young people before they started the course, without the restrictions of the pandemic. This really helped, with young people getting to know project workers before they came to the sessions. This has helped some young people to deal with their anxiety issues before attending the course.

Staff have also worked to create an informal and relaxed environment at the course and the way it is delivered supporting young people to make friendships and stay in touch.

●● We build in lots of breaks during the sessions, this encourages them to get to know each other.”

●● They are all disengaged from school, so they have something in common. They feel less judged and more comfortable together.”

Staff

Staff highlighted that although the programme is structured, it is flexible and can be adapted to meet the needs of groups and individuals. They are very aware that young people learn in different ways and at different speeds, and can adapt the programme to suit this.

●● We can give them time when needed. It is less pressured than school.”

Staff

Stakeholders agreed that the environment was welcoming, friendly, casual and relaxed. A few mentioned that the time commitment was not too demanding and was light touch, which suited the young people involved.

●● They just give him the freedom, they treat him like a human being.”

Parent

●● The amount of time and the amount of care that's offered to those kids is so very different from an education setting.”

Partner

Learning about working with schools

The Positive Changes programme is delivered through close work with schools to refer young people, but is deliberately delivered outwith the school environment. Young people, parents, stakeholders and staff all felt that being out of the school environment was good as it took the young people away from the school environment which many had disengaged with and had negative associations with.

●● We provide a safe place for them, an environment where everyone feels comfortable and can share their thoughts and feelings and support each other.”

Staff

Schools highly valued the partnership with Action for Children, and felt that the support provided to pupils was positive and valuable. Schools particularly valued how flexible and person centred the Positive Chages programme is.

- It's a great partnership. They bend over backwards to support young people."

Education partner

- It's good to have partners like them who are flexible. They're so responsive and proactive. And they're very focused on individual circumstances."

School staff

- AfC have always been supportive, flexible and inclusive with regards to how they work with some of our most challenging pupils. The outcomes have been overwhelmingly positive and the staff have contributed to turning the young person's life around and empowering them to contribute to their own communities and society. The support we receive from AfC has been utterly invaluable."

School staff

However there have been some issues in some cases with covering transport costs to get young people to the venue, or availability of taxis to transport young people. While bus passes can be provided, some young people are not confident using public transport or the bus timetables or routes make public transport complex. Action for Children is exploring how they can work with schools to ensure that transport is not a barrier.

Learning about partnership

The Positive Choices programme is delivered in partnership with a wide range of organisations, including:

- Scottish Drugs Foundation – deliver drugs awareness sessions
- St Andrews Ambulance – deliver first aid training
- Fast Forward – deliver drugs and gambling awareness sessions
- Edinburgh and Lothian Greenspace Trust – provide access to local greenspaces where young people can experience nature
- High Hospitality – training on hospitality sessions
- Cruden Build – visits to construction sites
- SAMH – mental health awareness sessions
- Nil by Mouth – tackling sectarianism
- Army Youth Development Team – skills like problem solving, resilience training, developing communication skills and team building.

Staff felt that working with partners made the sessions more varied and allowed young people to learn new things. All of the partner sessions were felt to be very practical and activity based, which kept the young people engaged.

●● It's great working in partnership with others, it means we can get the best outcomes for young people."

Staff

●● AfC is a good organisation to work with. We have a really good working relationship."

Delivery partner

As well as working in partnership to deliver the programme, Positive Changes has built up a strong referral network. This has been important as there have been some challenges getting referrals from local authority routes, despite initial interest, due to wider priorities and staffing issues within partner organisation. Action for Children has therefore worked to bring in new partners to refer young people to the programme.

EXAMPLE: WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

Action for Children works in partnership with other organisations to deliver the Positive Changes programme. For example, a local environmental organisation delivers woodland based activities for one day a week, over 12 weeks.

Every week the young people do something different, and learn practical skills to do with working in woodland and transferrable skills that apply to any workplace. They learn about woodland management, footpath management, plant management, fencing and posts, knife and axe skills, woodcraft, construction, joinery and bushcraft. They also develop teamwork and communication skills, and respect and appreciation for their local area. The young people are given a lot of responsibility, using potentially dangerous tools, and learn how to use equipment safely.

At the end, the young people can earn a Saltire Award and are guaranteed an interview for the Rural Skills course at a local college. The work is done in partnership with City of Edinburgh Council and Newbattle Abbey College.

Appendix 1

Progress against targets

	TARGET	YEAR 1	YEAR 2	YEAR 3	TOTAL/ AVERAGE	MEASUREMENT
Overall number or participants	270	79	91	118	288	AFC monitoring
Outcome 1: Confidence and resilience						
Young people demonstrate increased confidence	80%	100%	96%	96%	97%	Survey (Yr1:18/Yr2:57/Yr3:84)
Young people feel more resilient	75%	94%	91%	99%	95%	Survey (Yr1:18/Yr2:57/Yr3:84)
Young people report positive changes in their behaviour	75%	100%	99%	99%	99%	Survey (Yr1:18/Yr2:57/Yr3:84)
Stakeholders report perceived increases in confidence and resilience	75%	100%	93%	100%	98%	Survey (Yr1:5/Yr2:28/Yr3:31)
Stakeholders report perceived positive changes in behaviour in young participants	75%	100%	92%	97%	96%	Survey (Yr1:5/Yr2:28/Yr3:31)
Outcome 2: Physical and personal skills						
Young people gain accreditation for learning and skills development	75%	33 (42%)	61 (67%)	103 (87%)	197 (68%)	AfC monitoring
Young people report their skills are increasing	80%	94%	94%	98%	95%	Survey (Yr1:18/Yr2:57/Yr3:84)
Stakeholders report skills increasing	75%	100%	89%	100%	96%	Survey (Yr1:5/Yr2:28/Yr3:31)

	TARGET	YEAR 1	YEAR 2	YEAR 3	TOTAL/ AVERAGE	MEASUREMENT
Outcome 3: Health and wellbeing						
Young people report increases in SHANARRI indicators	70%	100%	100%	100%	100%	Survey (Yr1:18/Yr2:57/Yr3:84)
Stakeholders report perceived increases in SHANARRI	70%	100%	92%	97%	96%	Survey (Yr1:5/Yr2:28/Yr3:31)
Outcome 4: Learning, employability and options						
Young people achieve a positive destination	80%	41 (52%)	86 (95%)	90 (76%)	217 (75%)	AFC monitoring
Young people improve attendance	75%	-	10 (11%)	25 (21%)	35 (12%)	AFC monitoring
Young people improve attendance at sessions/engagement with worker		44 (56%)	78-88 (86%-97%)	97-113 (82%-96%)	219-245 (76%-85%)	AFC monitoring
Young people improve attainment	75%	-	16-61 (18%-67%)	23-103 (19%-87%)	39-164 (14%-57%)	AFC monitoring

	TARGET	YEAR 1	YEAR 2	YEAR 3	TOTAL/ AVERAGE	MEASUREMENT
Outcome 5: Community contribution						
Young people's perception of their neighbourhood improves	70%	73%	86%	86%	82%	Survey (Yr1:18/Yr2:57/ Yr3:84)
Young people's have a heightened sense of belonging to a community	70%	100%	88%	92%	93%	Survey (Yr1:18/Yr2:57/ Yr3:84)
Young people feel their contribution and links with communities are improving	75%	83%	78%	86%	82%	Survey (Yr1:18/Yr2:57/ Yr3:84)
Long term outcome: Diversion from involvement in the justice system						
Young people report reduced anti-social and/or criminal behaviour	70%	62%	56%	72%	63%	Survey (Yr1:18/Yr2:57/ Yr3:84)
Young people report feeling less inclined to participate in anti-social and/or criminal behaviour	70%	67%	71%	88%	75%	Survey (Yr1:18/Yr2:57/ Yr3:84)

