Family experiences of navigating out-of-school provision in Inverclyde

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About this Report

This is a report of from research conducted by the Poverty Alliance[1] and the Scottish Poverty and Inequality Research Unit (SPIRU) [2] in Inverclyde. This work was commissioned by the Scottish Government, as part of an exercise to better understand the complex landscape of out of school provision across Scotland. The Poverty Alliance and SPIRU have no vested interest in this work; this is independent observation.

About SPIRU

SPIRU is an interdisciplinary research group based at Glasgow Caledonian University, which often works in partnership with other stakeholders to investigate and develop effective responses to poverty and inequality in Scotland and beyond. SPIRU is committed to advancing GCU's mission to promote the Common Good and to align its research to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. SPIRU contributes to these ambitions through applied research, policy analysis and engaging with policy makers, campaign groups and community stakeholders.

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About The Poverty Alliance

The Poverty Alliance was established in 1992 and has more than 400 members drawn from across civil society and the public sector. The Poverty Alliance has five strategic areas of activity: influencing policy and practice; working with grassroots organisations and individuals experiencing poverty; network development; awareness raising; and research and knowledge. In all this activity, the Alliance takes a preventive approach, seeking to influence policy and practice 'upstream' to reduce poverty. In relation to the content of our work, we focus on addressing low incomes in and out of work, improving services for those experiencing poverty, enabling the participation of people in poverty in policy development, and addressing attitudes towards poverty.

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Executive Summary and Key Recommendations

About this research

This is an independent appraisal by The Poverty Alliance and the Scottish Poverty and Inequality Research Unit (SPIRU) of how families navigate holiday and out of school provision in Inverclyde. This is part of a larger project that also includes a mapping of out of school provision in Inverclyde (and three other local authority areas in Scotland) and evaluating the work of four projects. We were invited by the Scottish Government in the Spring of 2020 to undertake this work. Initial plans to complete the work over the Summer of 2020 were interrupted with the onset of the coronavirus pandemic.

The research in Inverclyde was conducted between December 2020 and March 2021, and involved ten interviews with parents living on mixed levels of incomes in Inverclyde, although with a particular focus on low-income households. Fieldwork was led by The Poverty Alliance, who were also undertaking a separate Get Heard consultation in Inverclyde at this time. The conclusions reached in this report are independent.

Research aims

The broader project comprised four local mapping exercises and four project evaluations. It considers:
1. The extent to which current provision meets the needs of children and families living in poverty;
2. The scale and nature of current provision of out of school care and holiday programmes/activities;
3. How services can work better together to provide community-based childcare, activities and food provision where it is needed most;
4. The outcomes that different models of provision achieve for children and families, with a view to identifying learning that can help improve provision elsewhere.

This research is primarily focused on appraising the extent to which current provision meets the needs of families living in poverty in Inverclyde (Aim 1). However, it also provides insight into each of the other project goals (Aims 2-4).

Why holiday and out of school provision matters

Inverclyde Priorities
- **Supporting families / Tackling poverty**. As with many other local authorities in Scotland, Inverclyde Council acknowledges the role of childcare (one form of out of school provision) in facilitating the labour market participation of parents which, in turn, can contribute to tackling child/family poverty.

- **Extending Holiday Provision**. Inverclyde Council is currently piloting holiday provision (October 2020 through October 2021), as part of the Scottish Government's *Access to Childcare Fund*.

- **Local Challenges**. One of Scotland's smallest authorities, Inverclyde has a declining population and has concentrated pockets of multiple deprivation in Greenock and Port Glasgow.

What the Scottish Government Wants for Scotland

- **Eradicating Child Poverty.** The Scottish Government has legislated to eradicate child poverty. Childcare is understood to be one of the drivers that enables families to tackle poverty. Annual progress reports on child poverty continue to reinforce the centrality of childcare provision to achieving this goal.

- **Tackling Food Insecurity**. The Scottish Government is committed to reducing food insecurity in Scotland. There is growing recognition that food provided in school and out of school settings makes an important contribution to tackling child food poverty.

- **Holiday Provision**. The Scottish Government is committed to reviewing provision of holiday out of school provision in Scotland.

How families experience out of school provision in Inverclyde

Demand

- **Demand exists**. Parents shared experiences of how their children had engaged with out of school provision in Inverclyde. There was clear demand for these services, although these were valued for different reasons.

- **Primary function**. Breakfast club and after-school clubs were largely valued for their functionality to families, facilitating labour market participation. Holiday and general out of school leisure activities was valued for the 'enrichment' or quality of life gain for children through participation. However, the gains to the family extended beyond these primary functions.

Levels of Provision

- **Mixed opinions**. Some families considered that there was much to do locally, while others considered that there was a lack of things to do. Parents of children with additional support needs (ASN) were concerned at the lack of provision that was appropriate for their children.

- **Service lost**. Concerns were expressed that there was less provision compared to what was available in previous generations. Specific concerns were raised about whether provisions would return that were paused through lockdown.

Awareness

- **Lack of information**. Although all of these families had accessed at least one mode of out of school provision, there was a sense among many that not enough information was available about options.

- **Personal contact**. In some instances, awareness was raised by existing professional or family contacts.

Enablers and Barriers

- **Key contacts**. Key contacts not only raised awareness, but also provided the encouragement, direction and support to enable families to access services that would benefit them and their families.

- **Family support**. Notwithstanding challenges and particularities of family circumstance, families were often a key source of childcare support enabling parents to engage in the labour market, and provide 'respite', emotional and sometimes financial support to families.

- **Cost**. Without question, cost was a barrier to participation for those families on low income. This led to non-participation, drawing on wider family resources (if they were available), or using alternative, lower-cost provision. The costs of private sector leisure was found to be particularly difficult to meet. On the other hand, low cost provision was welcomed.

- **Small sums can be major matters**. What may seem like small costs, can prove to be beyond the reach of many families, particularly when there are hidden or incidental costs to participation and for larger families.

Impact

- **Children**. There was little articulation of benefits to children in terms of the specific focus of the activity (e.g. developing skills if participating in a dance class, being well nourished if accessing a breakfast club). Rather, benefits to children were described in general terms as providing opportunities to 'get out' and to meet other children.

- **Parents**. Some of the clearest articulation of benefit related to parents. Children's out of school provision often provided them with opportunities to overcome social isolation and share experiences with others in similar positions.

- **Breakfast clubs are for working parents**. There was a clear understanding that the value of breakfast clubs rested with their functionality in faciliating parental participation in the labour market.

- **Solidarity**. Although not prevalent, more than one family alluded or made direct reference to the injustice that other families were accessing provisions, when their own family – judged to be equally or more deserving – is not.

Learning from Lockdown

- **Heightened awareness**. The loss of provision during lockdown seemed to heighten awareness among families of the key role of out of school provision in family life.

- **Intense impact**. Although lockdown presented challenges for all families, family circumstance dictated that the intensity of the challenge was much greater for some (lone parents, large families and families with children with ASNs).

- **Well-being**. Many parents reported a sense of greater social isolation, heightened stress and more financial pressure as a result of lockdown. For some, this was exacerbating pre-existing problems.

Family Complexity

- **Care beyond the family household**. It was clear that a complex web of caring responsibilities featured for many families. Caring often extended beyond the family household (with formal and informal support provided to elderly parents), while parents also supported the family, sometimes financially and sometimes as providers of childcare.

Food Provision

- **Emergency provision**. Emergency provision during lockdown enabled families to sustain their families. Once more, lockdown highlighted the importance of the food support that had been provided through out of school provision.

- **Personalised service**. Although the food was the essential provision, it was often the way it was delivered that impacted to bolster mental well-being. It was also acknowledged that it was more difficult to cater for particular needs during the pandemic.

What needs to happen now?

Informing Inverclyde's Access to Childcare Pilot

- The findings are pertinent to the on-going work of Inverclyde Council regarding out of school provision. Parents' experiences reaffirm the concerns of both Inverclyde Council and the Scottish Government to improve the provision of breakfast clubs and holiday provision.

Focus on Poverty and Access

- It is clear that cost is a barrier to participation, further complicated by supplementary barriers that hinder the participation of low income families. Any review of provision to better serve the most disadvantaged children must appraise the availability of options that are presented at low/no cost.

Improving Access to Information

- There is a demand for a more comprehensive directory of list of available options that are available.

Information Brokers

- Trusted partners who engage with children and families – in education, social work and community settings – seem to be best placed to signpost families to provisions that would enrich the lives of the children in Inverclyde. An appraisal is required to ascertain how more families could benefit from this work. At present, signposting seems to take place on an ad-hoc basis. Much could be gained if this work was viewed as a core responsibility of those who engage children and families.

Family Model of Provision for Children

- School aged childcare not only affords opportunities for: parents to engage in paid work; younger children to learn through play; and older children to develop wider competencies through enrichment activities. As Scotland moves to extend the provision of school aged childcare to more families, it is timely to appraise the wider range of benefits that accrue to parents and the wider family through provision of out of school activities for children. We need to be fully informed of the many benefits to families and wider society that result from the provision of out of school childcare.

1. Introduction

Introduction

This report explores families' experiences of using out of school provision in Inverclyde. In this introduction, we state the aims of this research, describe what it comprised, introduce Inverclyde and outline the structure of this report.

Aims of this Report

This research is part of a larger project on out of school care and holiday provision in Scotland. The broader project comprised four local mapping exercises and four project evaluations. It considers:

1. The extent to which current provision meets the needs of children and families living in poverty;
2. The scale and nature of current provision of out of school care and holiday programmes/activities;
3. How services can work better together to provide community-based childcare, activities and food provision where it is needed most;
4. The outcomes that different models of provision achieve for children and families, with a view to identifying learning that can help improve provision elsewhere.

This research is primarily focused on appraising the extent to which current provision meets the needs of families living in poverty in Inverclyde (Aim 1). However, it also provides insight into each of the other project goals (Aims 2-4).

It seeks to add to insights gleaned from engaging users and service providers in the four project evaluations. Here, we look beyond a particular service to consider how the provisions in an area are navigated and utilised by families.

The Research

We primarily focused on needs in relation to childcare and activities for children. In relation to these, we also considered access to nutritious food. Of subsidiary interest was access to wider services that might influence families' needs for childcare and activities for children.

Although a small-scale research exercise, comprising interviews with ten families, we sought to engage a wide range of families. Reflecting the focus in the wider project on care and food, this was conceived as comprising:

- 'Care' required for children who are not food insecure
- Food provision required for children who do not need 'care'
- 'Care' required for children who also need food provision
- Neither 'care' nor food provision required

The research delivered what was required, and is detailed in Annex 1.

Structure of this Report

This report comprises six sections. Following this introduction, Inverclyde is introduced (section 2) and the key concepts are clarified (section 3), before the wider interests of Inverclyde Council and the Scottish Government in relation to out of school provision are described (section 4). Findings are outlined in section 5, before conclusions are reached in section 6. Supplementary Annexes provide detail about the research.

2. Inverclyde

Introduction to Inverclyde

Inverclyde is a one of the smallest local authorities in Scotland, ranking 27th (of 32) in terms of population size (77,800 in 2019) and 28th in terms of area size (160 km^2). With 485 people per km^2, it is among the top third of Scottish local authorities in terms of population density.[3]

The bulk of Inverclyde's population live in the conurbation comprising its three large towns Inverclyde (Greenock, Port Glasgow and Gourock), although smaller settlements can also be found on the coast (Inverkip and Wemyss Bay) and inland (Kilmacolm and Quarriers Village)[4].

Inverclyde faces several contemporary challenges over-and-above those faced in other parts of west central Scotland.

Inverclyde is one of the few areas in Scotland, and in particular one of the few urban areas in Scotland, to have a declining population.[5] Over the last twenty years, the population of Inverclyde has fallen by 9.4%, a loss of over 8,000 people, the greatest in Scotland, at a time when the population of Scotland has risen by 7.6%. Inverclyde's population is estimated to have fallen every single year over this period. This population decline is projected to continue over the next decade, with the expectation of a 6.1% decease, reducing Inverclyde's total population to less than 74,000.

Since the turn of the millennium, despite population decline, the number of households in Inverclyde has increased by 2.6%. However, this rate of household growth is much lower in Inverclyde than in other parts of Scotland (average growth of 12.9% over the same period). Lone adult households are most common in Inverclyde (44.2% of all households). This household type is expected to increase by 7.6% over the next decade, while two adult households with children and households with three or more adults are expected to be less common (falls of 18.3% and 9.8% are projected, respectively).

As with the rest of Scotland, Inverclyde's population is also ageing.[6] Although those in 'late middle age' remain the most populous age group (45-64), there has been a significant increase in the proportion of older citizens (a 24% increase in the 75 and over age group since 1998). Notably, the proportion of younger adults (25–44-year-olds) has fallen by 29.1% over the same period.

Inverclyde has the third highest standardised death rate in Scotland (12.3 people per 1,000 population).[7] The most common causes of death for men is heart disease (15.6% of deaths), dementia and Alzheimer disease (9.5%), and lung-related disease (6.7%). For women, the main causes are dementia and Alzheimer disease (16.6%), respiratory diseases (8.6%) and heart disease (7.6%). While contemporary life expectancy at birth is higher for both men and women (75.2 years for men; and 79.6 years for women) than it was in 2000, life expectancy in Inverclyde is lower than the Scottish average, with no notable improvements in recent years.

Inverclyde also has more than its fair share of people living in multiply deprived areas. Approaching one half of Inverclyde's small areas are considered to be among the 20% most deprived in Scotland (44.7%), with one small part of Greenock Town Centre being ranked the very most deprived area in Scotland in 2020.[8,9]

3. Key Concepts

Introduction

Here, we define the two key concepts we refer to in this report - out of school provision and holiday provision.

Defining Out of School Provision

In this report, we adopt an expansive definition of out of school provision, using it as an umbrella term for the diverse range of provision that is available to cater for children and young people outside of the hours of the school day. This includes, but goes beyond, those child care services that are registered with the Care Inspectorate.[10]

Childcare provision and holiday provision are concepts that are more widely used and understood in Scotland. However, each of these is imprecisely defined, and the connotations of each are limited in scope. Childcare tends to be associated with younger children (aged 5-10)[11], and is typically understood as that which wraps around the school day facilitating the participation of parents/guardians in work. During holiday periods, older children, aged 11-13, are more likely to receive informal care (e.g. grandparents, siblings) than formal care whereas, children aged 5-7 are more likely to receive formal care only during school holiday.[12]

Our interest includes, but also extends beyond, childcare provision and holiday provision. In this report, out of school provision includes what might be understood as childcare provision and holiday provision, in addition to other provisions that are not associated with each.

By definition, out of school provision includes that which is available on the 175 days of the year when children of school age in Scotland are not obliged to attend school. However, out of school provision also includes that which is available before and after school hours on the 190 school days in Scotland.

Out of school provision in Scotland is diverse. Differences can be discerned according to:
- **Age-groups**; babies, toddlers, pre-school, primary school, or secondary school age;
- **Daily temporal frame**: before-school or after-school; morning, afternoon or evening;
- **Weekly temporal frame**: day of week; weekday or weekend;
- **Seasonal temporal frame**: Autumn, Winter, Spring or Summer;
- **Workforce: Employee Status**: Paid workers or volunteer;
- **Workforce: Qualification Status:** Whether or not staff have specialist qualifications;
- **Activity focus**; whether registered childcare or a local playscheme.
- **Outcome focus;** whether or not participation leads to acquiring/developing a specific skill or certification;
- **Food provision**: whether or not food is provided;
- **School association**: whether or not provision has a link to schools;
- **Scale of organisation**: whether or not the organising body is a local group that is part of a wider organisation;
- **Sector**: Private, state, or community/Third Sector;
- **Cost**: free, subsidised or full cost;
- **Open or restricted:** whether characteristics other than age are used to determine participation;
- **Residential or day-based**: whether or not the activity involves an overnight stay;
- **Geographical range**: whether targeted geographically, and if so, whether by neighbourhood, settlement, local authority district, or other.

Although possible to generate a universal typology in which a specific provision is described in terms of all of these factors, this would be unwieldly. A more productive approach may be to focus on the primary character of any given provision. For example, in terms of whether not provision is linked to schools, distinctions can be drawn between:

- **Before school provision**, *e.g. breakfast clubs*;
- **After school provision**. Including out of school care providers registered with the Care Inspectorate, as well as local clubs and centres providing activities for children and young people (e.g. gymnastics club);
- **School-linked provision in school holiday periods**, *e.g. examination revision provision in Easter holiday period*;
- **Non-school based provision**. Provided in the space of the school outside of school hours, but not associated with the work of the school, e.g. community and sporting clubs using school facilities on school-day evenings, weekends, or school holidays.

Individual providers may be aligned or registered to a national body. For example, the Scottish Childminding Association[13]; Boys and Girls Clubs Scotland[14]; National Day Nurseries Association Scotland[15]; or Early Years Scotland[16], are among national member-based organisations in Scotland. However, apart from the Scottish Out of School Care Network, the national umbrella organisation which provides a range of support and training to over 1,000 school-aged children services in Scotland[17], there is no overarching organisation responsible for all out of school provision in Scotland.

Defining Holiday Out of School Provision

Holiday out of school provision is a subset of out of school provision, which relates to the 175 days when children of school age in Scotland are not obliged to attend school. This is widely understood to include the four 'long' school holidays in Scotland:

- Summer;
- October;
- Christmas/Winter;
- Easter.

However, school holidays also include shorter breaks during term-time, which may be:

- long weekends in which typically the Friday and Monday are non-school days;
- single day holidays.

4. Local and National Interest in Out of School Provision

Introduction

Here, we summarise the interest of Inverclyde Council and the Scottish Government in the issue of out of school provision.

Inverclyde Interest in Out of School Provision

As with every other local authority in Scotland, Inverclyde Council is committed to tackling child poverty and, in partnership with the local area Health Board, prepares an annual Local Child Poverty Action Report to review local work.[18]

Childcare features prominently in the latest annual report, with recognition given that fewer children are registered with childcare services in Inverclyde than Scotland as a whole and that fewer families in Inverclyde claim childcare costs through Tax Credit or Universal Credit. Indeed the report poses the question as to 'whether the current quantity and mix of childcare meets local need' (p.42).

Although the latest report only makes one reference to the holiday period (noting that Inverclyde Libraries run a Summer Reading Challenge to ensure that reading levels do not 'dip' over the summer holiday period), Inverclyde Council has secured £250,000 from the *Access to Childcare* Fund[19] to contribute toward the delivery of holiday hubs, which would provide childcare for children aged 5-8, eight and over, and those with additional support needs.[20] These hubs will operate Monday through Friday in secondary schools between 0800 and 1800 over four school holiday periods (October 2020, Easter 2021, Summer 2021 and October 2021).

Inverclyde Council is also involved in wider anti-poverty work and is currently leading a locality exercise exploring local needs and, prior to the pandemic, had invested £1million in an anti-poverty fund.[21]

Scottish Government Interest in Out of School Provision

In recent years, the Scottish Government has made several commitments and investments in childcare and holiday provision.

The 2017-18 Programme for Government committed to publish a framework for after-school and holiday childcare.[22] In response to this commitment, the Scottish Government consulted the sector in 2019,[23] and published a summary report of consultation responses in November 2020.[24] In March 2021, the Scottish Government published a progress report on school age childcare providing an update on the outcomes of the consultation and setting out the vision, aims and policy direction for the future of childcare for school age children.[25]

Providing new support for childcare after school and in the holidays was a specific action in the Child Poverty Delivery Plan, 2018-2022.[26] In response to the commitment in the Child Poverty Delivery Plan, the Scottish Government introduced a £3 million *Access to Childcare* fund in 2020 to support childcare provision and activities in local communities. Managed by Children in Scotland, fifteen organisations were funded in September 2020 (through to March 2022) for work that aims to explore how childcare can become more accessible and affordable to low-income families. As noted above, Inverclyde Council is one beneficiary of this fund.[27]

5. Navigating Out of School Provision in Inverclyde

Introduction

In this section of the report, we summarise the findings of our research with families in Inverclyde.

Parents across this study were asked about their experiences of accessing childcare, food provision and use of out of school activities during term time and school holidays both pre and during the pandemic.

The circumstances of the families within this study varied in terms of where they lived, household/family size, family type, caring responsibilities, age and stage of children and access to informal support networks. Most, but not all, could be described as 'managing, but with challenges to overcome', in terms of their financial circumstance.

We start by sharing their thoughts on Inverclyde as a place to live, before moving on to consider experiences during the pandemic. This provides important context, before turning to address more directly the focus of this report.

Access to food is discussed, although families had more to say on childcare and their children's use of activities. We first consider the inter-related issues of what is available and awareness of provision. We review patterns of utilisation, and consider the enablers, barriers and shapers of experience. Impact on children and families is considered, before reflecting more directly on the experiences of families with children who have additional support needs.

On Inverclyde

Inverclyde was viewed positively, with families speaking highly of their neighbourhood (family 3 below), their support community (family 4, first) and Inverclyde Council as a whole (family 4, second).

> *"… there's absolutely no need for us to move we absolutely love it here."* (Family 3)

> *"… we have got a really strong community. If something goes wrong, we all get on Facebook and we all rally round and there so many services out there for families … the Branchton community centre is my local and it's fantastic."* (Family 4)

> *"… a lot of people will kick Inverclyde Council for the way that they do everything, but I cannot fault them in anyway."* (Family 4)

However, it was acknowledged that Inverclyde was a deprived area, and that this presented particular childcare challenges for families with children:

> *"… it's one of the most deprived local authorities in Scotland and there are kind of real issues around poverty and access to work … There's not a lot of local jobs in the area. A lot of the jobs are in Glasgow ... People have to travel. I just think it's so important for a local area like Inverclyde to have accessible childcare … It is an attractive place to live, but if you want to encourage people to live here and … put up with the commute… you need to have all of the other kind of support in place. Like childcare provision …"* (Family 9)

The families in this report were not disillusioned with Inverclyde. On the contrary, many had lifelong ties to the area,

and/or acknowledged its merits, having migrated to it. Any concerns raised in this report reflect a desire for specific problems to be addressed, rather than general criticisms of Inverclyde as a place to live.

COVID-19 Context

The COVID-19 pandemic was a disruptive experience for families. Households were neither prepared for it emotionally or financially, and the loss of daily structures due to closures of schools and other services (particularly during the initial period following lockdown) required families to adapt their daily lives very quickly.

All families, regardless of their circumstances, reported that the pandemic had impacted adversely on family life. The challenges of day-to-day living were exacerbated in the pandemic, with the loss of support networks, impacting both on children (family 7, first) and their parents (family 6; family 7, second). Parents and caregivers reported children picking up on the stress within the household.

> " When my daughter sees people on the street, she starts panicking because … she's not been around people." (Family 7)

> "… the social isolation is always, always a difficulty." (Family 6)

> "I've got health problems as well and I'm not very active myself which makes it hard as well because obviously when they're two years old it's really demanding. … after she has had her nap, then you know, we'll read some books and maybe try and do some painting or something just to kind of occupy her until dinner. And then dinner time, she'll have her dinner and then afterward again we'll sit and read some books or something and then get her in to bed. It's pretty boring." (Family 7)

In the early stages, the expedited process of lockdown, presented schools and early year settings with limited opportunities to assist families with activities or tools for home schooling. It was not only the task of home schooling that was challenging, but that this task added to the existing day-to-day responsibilities of shopping, housework, working from home and general caring related responsibilities. The impacts of the second lockdown in winter were particularly challenging. There was a sense that many parents were drained of energy:

> "Trying to get things done has been so difficult, and maintaining … mental health has just gone." (Family 2)

> "I don't know, it's hard to explain… It's just there is nothing to look forward to, nothing to kind of keep our spirits up and things like that." (Family 7)

Parents acknowledged that others might have found the circumstances even more challenging; those with gardens noting how they were 'fortunate' compared to those living in flats without access to outdoor space. However, not all families with access to outdoor space were well placed to utilise it:

> "I've literally just managed to get a fence built … many kids are in [our] area and … we weren't supposed to be mingling with other households…I'm right in the middle of two other households. … my kids can't go out because my two oldest ones, they don't realise… like you can't tell them no, you can't go and play with your friend right now. … and my youngest she has no boundaries." (Family 8)

Here, an additional cost was incurred by the family to enable them to utilise the taken-for-granted resources that are readily available to them.

For families who were shielding and families with high levels of occupancy, lockdown was especially challenging. Some households reported an 'extended lockdown' experience due to complexities of protecting shielding family members within the household or within their broader support network.

Similarly, in the lead-in to the first lockdown, some parents reported withdrawing their children from educational/early years settings (as well as other activities) due to perceptions of vulnerability within their households on the grounds of health conditions and/or disabilities. Once more, there is a clear sense that the lockdown experience exacerbated existing worries within the family and challenges faced by it.

For the purpose of this report, it is significant that reductions in the availability of care/support made life particularly challenging, with these pressures being felt most keenly by mothers. Lockdown restrictions led to the removal of many different forms of 'out of school provision', initially at short notice. What becomes clear is that this support plays a critical role in sustaining family well-being, and that there is a clear need for a whole family approach – it was notable that almost all families discussed how the emotional and physical wellbeing of their household had been decreased throughout the pandemic.

The experience of the pandemic also seems to have heightened self-awareness among parents of the role of childcare/activity provision in family life. Families were sensitive to their own mental wellbeing and that of their child/children, acknowledging adverse and possibly long-term impacts resulting from the loss of broader social contact from wider family and friends.

Parents and caregivers were keen to re-engage. Accessing out of school provision during and beyond term time was perceived as a key tool to help families mitigate the long-term impacts of the pandemic and to provide some normality for children.

There was a sense that the re-opening of all forms of out of school provision would be critical in terms of re-establishing normal routines for families, enabling children to adjust to lockdown, and move on from it.

Precarious lives in the COVID times

Many of the families in this study were already living on low income, precarious income or in precarious circumstances. Competing priorities had to be met with limited resources, and vulnerability is ever-present when striving to meet essential household costs such as food and fuel. Instabilities were challenging, such as coping with unexpected circumstances, fluctuations in social security or waged income, and deteriorations in health conditions. Careful management and planning were often required.

> " I always make sure my gas and my electrics done and we've got food to last … I make sure we've got enough food, got enough bread, got enough milk, got enough of all the kind of essentials and I work out for the week when we are going for the shopping… that'll do Mondays food, that'll do Tuesdays teas and Wednesdays tea. But I'm really lucky that way I've never had to go to a food bank." (Family 3)

While those in less precarious and more secure financial positions were able to utilise resources to manage changing circumstances, not all have recourse to these resources. For some, the stresses are regular, cyclical and an inadvertent outcome of the way the social security system functions:

> " … there's always that fourth week where money is very, very, very tight … The way my benefits work out, I get money every week apart from that (fourth) week I don't get anything for about ten days … oh god. I hate that week in case anything pops up and you've just not got the money for it because we've not got any savings or anything so I do try and save. I maybe save a fiver … I'm going to have to break into that and buy bread." (Family 3)

The pandemic was particularly challenging for families whose financial situation was already vulnerable. Lockdown measures and

restrictions resulting in increased costs and often unexpected costs.

"It's been harder. Like obviously with it being so cold as well, like trying to keep the house heated…like extra wee bits that you go 'stop turning that light on.'" (Family 1)

" My heating's on 24 hours, shopping's through the roof because the kids are just bored and eating constantly they've been on holiday now at school the internet's running, the TVs on, the heating's on the electricity's running, so it's affecting families in a big way." (Family 4)

"Well, it has been tough because you find the kids are eating more, they are in the house and like you're spending more on electricity and gas, you're using more of that up [because] the kids are at home all day, every day so…it is tough." (Family 5)

No one commented favourably on reduced expenditure resulting from not spending money to sustain participation in out of school activities. As noted previously, the non-financial costs of such loss of service were more pressing.

Reduced levels of staffing and adaptations to operations sometimes meant that service and support was delivered remotely through telephone calls, for those children not able to secure places within hubs. Although welcomed, these were understood not to deliver the same level of service.

It is also significant that caring and pastoral responsibilities were often not limited to the family household unit. Families were often managing their own family life in challenging circumstances, while supporting others within their own networks of families and friends.

"My mum (laughs) she thinks that I can drop everything and run to her like the drop of a hat when it's not possible. To be fair we only lost my dad last year so…but I do understand it and…she's struggling without him." (Family 3)

"My mums got … got a really bad chest but she's on all sorts of inhalers and, they put it down to she's actually allergic to like soil. So, see when the weather's nice and people are out in their gardens, she can't breathe at all. … my dad, like as I said he had a stroke so… it's just kind of making sure they are all…they're in their 70's." (Family 1)

One clear outcome was the worsening in emotional and physical health within many households. Delayed appointments, lack of communication and the loss of critical support such as respite care had increased the pressures and weakened the resilience of families, as well as heightening pressure on household spending with higher food and fuel costs during lockdown and increased time in the home space.

Access to food

In contrast to activity and childcare provision, there was some evidence of access to food provision being up-scaled during the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, as noted above, the increased time being spent at home as a result of lockdown had resulted in pressures on household spending, with more food being consumed within the family home. Similarly, while emergency food provision provided critical support during the pandemic, other forms of community food support had been withdrawn:

"You know the Belville Community Gardens? We used to go there to get a lunch and get some shopping and stuff … we used that in the past when we were struggling." (Family 6)

On the other hand, providers of emergency food, and some providers of family support, were able to adapt their service to ensure that they were able to continue meeting the needs of families during the pandemic. With reference to Homestart Renfrewshire and Inverclyde[28]:

"They've been really great through the lockdown. They've arranged fruit and veg baskets, and all different things. … we even did a cooking class as well to learn how to make … like soups and little things on low budgets, and how easy it was to make them. … I'm a lot better with my cooking now." (Family 8)

Specific needs around food were identified across the study, with some children reported to have specific dietary requirements. While these specific needs can be recognised and catered for outside a pandemic, it was more difficult to meet specific needs when food support was delivered at a distance. Fixed food delivery such as premade pack lunches and food parcels posed difficulties for families who had specific needs and the lack of choice resulted in parents and caregivers feeling embarrassed at having to ask for changes.

"You've got a lot of kids with problems with textures and not liking the feeling of things. So, like from my experience, my wee boy basically just eats toast." (Family 8)

However, the strongest sentiment was one of gratitude for the food support that was provided during the pandemic. As with childcare, there was a sense that awareness of the critical role of 'regular' food support (free school meals, community provision, food associated with activities) was heightened when this was no longer available.

Parents discussed examples of how provision had adapted in order to continue supporting their family over this period. For example, free school meals shifted from packed lunches that were collected from a designated pick-up point, to food parcels and then to a direct cash payment of £25, which was reported to help meet food needs:

"That [£25 payment] just goes into the bank and we just go when it comes in and buy, it's towards a packed lunch so we just go and buy packed lunch stuff and she gets that." (Family 1)

The community responses to food support during the pandemic were also reported to be dignified and personable. It was also reported how there was less pressure involved in receiving the emergency food support during the pandemic than having to get a referral to access a foodbank. Tellingly, the way in which the service was presented was important. It was noted that the community food share also provided supplementary 'treats' such as flowers and cakes, which made them feel more valued.

Free school meals were discussed by some parents, with initial entitlement being presented as a watershed moment for families of children entering school, as well as being a cause for concern for parents of children who were set to lose eligibility on grounds of age.

"Because they were in nursery in the first lockdown, they weren't entitled to anything. And they hadn't been getting meals at the nursery. But … after they … started school and were getting school meals I think they were entitled to it [equivalent of free school meals] for the second lockdown." (Family 6)

"She's only Primary 3 just now so she gets the school meals… We're kind of praying that it gets extended a wee bit because again that's like an extra outgoing isn't it." (Family 1)

As the final extract highlights, the importance of free school meals in supporting family budgets is not limited to those entitled to receipt on account of very low income or passported benefits.

Demand

It is clear that there is demand for childcare and out of school activities by families in Inverclyde. This was both expressed directly, but was clearly evident through sharing the activities that children had engaged prior to lockdown,

> *"Pauline does eh dancing so, we'd be at dance class a couple of nights a week and competitions at the weekend." (Family 1)*

> *"Well, for (Branchton) the wee youth club they go to, its 50p each." (Family 3)*

> *"Monday, the kids went to Beavers, Tuesday and Thursday the kids went running, they're part of an athletics club, Glenpark athletics." (Family 4)*

> *"… when we weren't in lockdown they went to a gymnastic group after school. … other than that, I think during the lockdown there's just, there's not really been anything." (Family 6)*

> *" … they needed in before 8.30 to go to breakfast club. Erm and they get like cereal or toast and fruit juice and I think they get to play games as well." (Family 7)*

> *" … before COVID and things, I had a, they call it a befriender. So, they would come into the house and they would sit with the kids and do fun things with them. Erm, because (Sarah) this is the one that was, is waiting to get diagnosed and on a waiting list. Erm, any time (my back was turned) he was away getting up to no good. So, they would come down one day a week and help entertain like at dinner time for me. That was the time where I was trying to go back and forwards in the kitchen and keep an eye on her." (Family 8)*

> *" … swimming lessons and rugby on a Sunday. Rugby class, yeah. Used to go to football but I think that got cancelled with the pandemic." (Family 9)*

On the other hand, as children aged, their interest in these provisions was reported to wane:

> *" … my oldest son he's just getting too old to go into the hub. (cannot hear) when his pals aren't there. So, he's just on his laptop and he's quite happy doing that." (Family 5)*

Some of the families reported making greater use of the freely accessible resources around Inverclyde as a result of having fewer alternative provisions during lockdown.

> *"I'll take them out. … and maybe at the weekends … it's just trying to get them out and about and do something with them. … there's not really anywhere else to go or things to do apart from walks. " (Family 6)*

> *" … we went on plenty of walks, I mean we must have walked about 500 miles. During lockdown we walked so much, up in the hills. We went and found tadpoles, we raised them to frogs and we released them again. … Made a stair slide out of boxes so they were up and down that all the time. " (Family 2)*

These informal alternatives were valued, but were not presented as a preferred alternative to the provisions lost through lockdown.

Parents were aware of the difficulties that were encountered by those seeking to provide services, with reference made to services that had to be withdrawn due to lack of demand, or have costs raised as they were not meeting needs. It was also acknowledged that sometimes the problem was lack of demand for services that had been made available, but could not be sustained:

> *"We did breakfast club in the morning that's what it was so we dropped them off at breakfast club and it was free so it was great I dropped them off at 8:30 and went straight to work. …. But then the put a hold on it so I was like £2 a day to put my kids in." (Family 4)*

" … they brought them in for a while to do additional days where you could pay. So, I think they did a bit of research at first to find out if parents were willing to pay and yeah, I was like fine I don't mind paying at all. … that was in place as a pilot, but they came back and said the pilot didn't work because there wasn't enough demand for the before school provision and I think that's again because a lot of people in Inverclyde do have family and friends around and you know, it's not… it's maybe just not as needed." (Family 9)

More generally, breakfast clubs, after-school clubs and holiday clubs were also used and valued. Breakfast clubs were associated with schools serving as a food-based setting, usually about an hour before school starts, which also provide a place for children to socialise. After-school clubs were not exclusively on school premises, and sometimes involved providers collecting children at school and taking them to the provision.

Evaluation of range of provision

As might be expected, families' evaluation of the availability of 'out of school provision' was made through the lens of their own family circumstances. Age of children, size of household, locality of provision, affordability as well as the quality of the provision on offer each shaped perceptions of provision in Inverclyde.

"I would like to see something more for kids with disabilities. … I know they've put like for wheelchairs in parks they've put like roundabouts that's wheelchair accessible and things. But see just even just having something in the summer, like a play scheme that, for kids with… on the spectrum that have somewhere safe and not going to get judged or left out because of their, their issues." (Family 8)

Notably, Inverclyde Council's pilot for the Access to Childcare Fund recognises the need to provide for the particular needs of children with additional support needs.

More surprising, given reports of children using out of school provision, was the opinion that provision was lacking, and that provision had been more extensive in the past.

Many parents commented that they used to regularly go to *Fun World*,[29] the private sector soft play facility, lamenting its closure. Parents felt that activities such as this met the needs of both children and parents, enabling parents to have a break.

"To be honest there's not much to do with the kids in Inverclyde … It's not the most exciting of towns to be honest." (Family 1)

" Now that's [Fun World] gone. There's nothing around here for kids. Not that's easy to access anyway. Unless you have got a car. They are all well out of the way." (Family 2)

"they [other provisions, such as Art Venturers][30] were all in Fun World. But obviously Fun World is gone now." (Family 7)

"They really miss the soft play. We used to go to the soft play quite a lot … even for meeting up with like another mum and it's even just to get a bit of peace myself. … It definitely was a really good resource especially with the reduced rates through the week." (Family 6)

" … there's not really, there's no really a lot… to do in Inverclyde. Like there's not really, there isn't. There's really nothing. Like you've got like the swimming and ice-skating, but the swimming pool is always freezing." (Family 5)

On the other hand, some parents considered that there were sufficient options available. Interestingly, the first extract below is a contradiction (or nuanced clarification) on the earlier assertion that there is 'nothing to do'.

"I think there are plenty of places in Inverclyde. There's plenty of afterschool clubs and things like that but it's all to do with money." (Family 5)

"… my general opinion that there are services there and if you want to go get them you go for them, they're there." (Family 4)

" … there's so many good things happening in Inverclyde … like through the community centres, … like I went to like a fitness club that was like you know, like a pound a session. … a lot of families can't you know like afford to sign up for like a gym membership and stuff. But they can go along with like people from their local community if a community centre is providing something." (Family 6)

Opinion was also mixed in terms of holiday provision, some describing the availability of holiday fun clubs as a positive (Family 2 below), while others were critical of the lack of provision, perceiving it to have scaled back over the generations (Family 8 and 9)

"You could fill up your week with holiday clubs in different schools. The only time we didn't have anything on was over the Christmas holidays". (Family 2)

" … when I was a kid, I stayed in a wee bit in Port Glasgow Robert Street and there was a play scheme just literally right in the school and I could just go in the school for I think £2 it was and you got a big summer trip. Like to me I don't think there's enough really about here." (Family 8)

"When I was a wee girl you had like you had your clubs, you had the school activities, you had erm… in the summer you had your play schemes." (Family 9)

One family noted provision reflected levels of deprivation. The reasons for this were acknowledged, although potentially exclusionary, making it more difficult for those outside the area to access.

"It's basically a family (fun) club. It's something for you to do during the school holidays that's free and they put on activities and they put on a lunch as well. Erm, and its so that it's done in areas and schools that are given the attainment funding. So, schools that are in a lower poverty area. … the schools that are in a more well off, more affluent area don't get the funding. They don't hold them." (Family 1)

This sense of being aware of what was available elsewhere also extended to access to free school meals in other local authorities that were adopting a different approach to Inverclyde.

"… I think there are certain councils that do it up to primary four." (Family 2)

Concerns were expressed over future provision. There was recognition of the broader financial pressures that impacted on Inverclyde. On-going closures of community spaces and reduced numbers attending activities were identified as potential risks. There was a sense that provision had already been reduced, and concerns that it would reduce further.

"… unfortunately that's [Wevolution][31] closed … and I think that was supporting a lot of mums with like kind of anxiety and mental health issues. …, to support themselves and gain confidence and erm, better self-esteem. So, there's a lot of good things going on and sadly this has closed a lot of them down." (Family 6)

These wider service losses were made worse by the loss of face-to-face support in many forms of provision as well as the loss of wider statutory services such as respite provision.

Awareness of provision

Some parents intimated that they had a lack of awareness of what was available, either during lockdown (family 7), with regards to specific service availability (family 9), at specific times (family 8), or more generally (family 6).

> *"I've not really been able to access anything from you know the council run classes and stuff. I don't know what's going on. I don't know where they are, you know, there's nothing. The only thing I've actually heard of is actually being invited to the book club session at the libraries. " (Family 7)*

> *" … is there somewhere you can go to kind of find out what's available. I think childminders they're always quite booked up quite a lot … so, it's quite hard to look at childminders." (Family 9)*

> *"For like summer wise. Well, if there is, it's not very advertised." (Family 8)*

> *" … there is a lot of good things out there. It's just people need to know, like what's happening and where." (Family 6)*

At first, this might appear to contradict earlier findings when families reported on their experience of using out of school services and were able to appraise overall levels of provision. However, the issue may be (as family 6 reports) a sense that not all of the information is reaching families. Even when information was provided, sometimes, the communication was not considered effective:

> *"They [the school] send some leaflets out but a lot of the time it's see like through like email and things like that and by the time you've read them through you've like missed half of the information you know … you'll get bombarded with maybe 8 or 10 emails at the one time." (Family 1)*

Furthermore, those who managed to access services sometimes reported that they had been informed 'by chance'. By this, they mean that a professional contact had signposted them to a service that might meet their needs:

> *" … it was really hard to find them. It wasn't … advertised or anything. I think it was just by luck I found it. I think someone I knew was a teacher and then they said have you heard of this group … so I managed to get them to take him afterschool." (Family 9)*

Other family workers were acknowledged as playing a key role in raising awareness of opportunities, and encouraging and facilitating participation. Valued as this was, there was also some demand for more systematic and comprehensive listings of what was available:

> *" … collating a list of all resources available would be very helpful … from pre-school to high school." (Family 6)*

> *"I think maybe if there was information about childcare provision you know like in one place. Erm, I know there's websites like chilcare.co.uk and things but there's big gaps on it." (Family 9)*

In particular, there seems to be a need for better signposting of services that wrap-around the school day. Schools were acknowledged by some, but not all, as a key source for obtaining information about this form of out of school provision. Some educational/early years settings were praised, but this was largely a result of relationships with specific staff members within settings as opposed to the service routinely providing this information. Where out of school care was not directly situated in the school, parents and caregivers had more difficulty navigating the landscape of provision.

Utilisation – shapers and enablers

Decision-making processes in terms of choice of early years provision or schooling were shaped by geography and the needs of children and young people. Several households within the study reported children or young people travelling across Inverclyde to attend specialist forms of educational provision to provide support for disabilities or some other specialist health need. The need to managing daily life sometimes led families to choose not to use their most local provider.

Key contacts in local organisations were instrumental to accessing the support that families needed. This contact was sometimes from voluntary agencies, although also statutory agencies such as social work and education. The key was that there was trust and empathy in the relationship between workers and the parent/caregiver.

> "We had a very good families' worker at the practice we were at and she was very good at kind of linking us up with service that could support us and the family." (Family 6)

> "… it's usually through one of the schools but its arranged by the family support worker at Bluebird[32] but it's a council initiative." (Family 7)

> "… Home Start … are quite good at digging round and finding out things for you." (Family 2)

The role of schools was reported in different ways. Some parents acknowledged schools as a source of local intelligence on what was on offer (family 6), while others suggested that schools could be more pro-active in this area (family 7).

> "If the councils would give more (autonomy) to the schools, who generally know the needs of the pupils that they are working with, I think that would give a massive head start." (Family 6)

> "… if like as part of the communication with the school you know you sign up and you're doing all your registration stuff. It would be helpful if that was part of the, the discussion. Erm, I don't think it was really kind of massive consideration." (Family 7)

At times, support was also targeted at the parents. Once again, the personal awareness of key contacts in local organisations was identified as being the enabler:

> "… it just teaches you basic cooking. Lisa basically dragged me into it she was like, I know you don't need help cooking but I thought it might be good for you in terms of getting out and doing something socially because I know you don't get out very much. Erm, so I went on that and I had great fun with it." (Family 2)

> "… that was through Laura …. Because she knows that we're quite isolated and obviously there's not a lot on." (Family 7)

Wider community connections also served as enablers, including other parents and caregivers, family members and friends with knowledge and understanding of local infrastructure. Word of mouth information as well as the role of social media connections also played a critical role in terms of effective information provision.

> "… my nephew went to that nursery so; I know what the set-up is like. I know the people are nice and stuff, I felt more comfortable (kind of) getting her in there when I've actually been in you know, to see it before." (Family 7)

About half of the parents we spoke to had family support locally for childcare which enabled them to take children to different activities as well as have time for themselves

"… my mum and dad are really good. Eh, like I'm with her all the time anyway. So, but eh you know sometimes you go I need 10 minutes break I can say to my mum, can I leave her here with you? And I go over the road just like go and make the tea and go and pick her back up. They're really good like that they are." (Family 1)

It is also important to acknowledge the initiative that was taken by parents to attend to the needs of their own child, or to provide for the needs of their own child and others.

" … myself and my husband to help to get a group up and running for children with additional support needs because there was plenty of groups in Greenock for children who are XXX, but it was for just for children with XXX." (Family 2)

"… a lot of the kids and families that go to the club, are in a similar situation where they don't have a lot of money. So, we do the fundraising as I say throughout the year to try and raise the money for that, so people don't need to worry about summertime." (Family 3)

"The girls as well, they were going to be missing out on an education so, I got a printer, and I joined a web page. It's I X L learning which had things, it's a great website. My mum actually paid for it. It's like £18 a month. Eh and it had everything on it that you could possibly get that they would be getting in school so, that was all printed off for them." (Family 3)

Provision is only one ingredient of success. There are a range of enablers – including the active initiative of parents themselves – that facilitate the participation of children and families in out of school provision.

Utilisation – barriers

Although out of school provision was used – or had been used – it was clear that cost considerations were limiting or shaping the engagement of many. Cost was clearly identified as a barrier to participation.

" I think there are plenty of places in Inverclyde. There's plenty of afterschool clubs and things like that but it's all to do with money … they were going to gymnastics, but I had to stop that because it was just too expensive." (Family 3)

"… we'd require specialist childminders for [child], and it just costs a phenomenal amount." (Family 2)

"… it's extortionate, it's ridiculous eh." (Family 1)

" … obviously it costs quite a bit of money as well going to these clubs. … it's like £5/ £6 a class." (Family 7)

Cost is not only incurred in terms of a participation fee. Some of the activities required specialist equipment, clothing, or footwear that was an additional ask of families with limited resources. Some clubs had mechanisms to support families meet the cost of participation, some families reported choosing providers that minimised costs or buying second-hand equipment (and selling used equipment) to finance participation.

"She goes to … Port Glasgow. … only like £4 a class. So, it's not extortionate compared to a lot of places." (Family 1)

"So, it's not too bad the kilts, they don't really lose value, does that make sense? As long as you look after them. So, we were really lucky that they bought her, her first set so, when she outgrew them…When I sold them it basically bought her new ones." (Family 1)

What might seem like small or incidental costs to families not experiencing poverty, were

described as being difficult or impossible to manage for many families.

> *Parent: "[child] club was £3. Well £5…his entry fee is £3 and the girls are a pound each so… it was £5 for that a week, and then again they had a tuck shop at that so it was another pound each for that."*
> *Interviewer: "Is there ever been any times that they've had to miss it because of finances or anything like that?"*
> *Parent: "Yep, aye there's been a couple of times that happened." (Family 3)*

> *"I think it was only like £5 for each day but I'm like if you counted that up over the 7 weeks, like it's a lot of money." (Family 8)*

Others rely on the support of wider family to sustain participation.

> *"… my mum and dad, they sold their house a couple of years ago so, her first set of kilts they bought them." (Family 1)*

For some, even what appear incidental costs could not be met, with this being particularly challenging for those on precarious financial circumstances and those with larger families. The financial costs were described as a huge barrier particularly for larger families.

> *"£20 each a month. So, that was £60 a month for the three of them to go. That was just money I couldn't afford." (Family 3)*

> *"… like the trampoline park can be like if I'm paying for 4 kids and myself, that's like nearly 20 odd pounds by itself and then to get them their food and their drink as well, you're spending like maybe £30/£40. … For the hour. It's probably the worst £40 for an hour to me." (Family 8)*

Alongside cost, quality and location of after-school provision was also important. One parent reported discomfort with a service picking their child up from school and taking them to the service premises; a preference

was expressed for the child to have remained on the school premises.

> *"I didn't really know who was picking him up from school and it was quite a long walk as well to the out of school club. So, yeah it was a bit. Yeah, I was a bit nervous." (Family 9)*

Challenges with managing childcare were more frequent and more difficult for lone parents who described not getting any time for themselves.

> *"It's hard, very hard, especially when you're doing it on your own." (Family 3)*

Formal childcare services were made available in ways that were not always convenient to families, leading either to additional costs (family 4) or impacting on major decisions, such as whether to sustain work (family 9, first), or the need to use a placing request to fit schooling around the need for childcare (family 9, second).

> *"I think they [children] finished at 12 and I finished at 12:15 and had to pay for two hours service for 15 minutes." (Family 4)*

> *" … what's your other option... You give up your, you end up going down to part time or someone has to give you a job and you know it almost like tips that balance to having to come out of work or depend on benefits because it's not worthwhile. … it's just not worth the hassle." (Family 9)*

> *"I had actually thought about putting him into Gourock Primary and putting a placing request into Gourock Primary only so that… because the nursery was near there and the only reason that I was going to do that was not because I was bothered about the school or anything but just so that Denise Street school nursery could come and pick him up and take him there." (Family 9)*

Even small changes to the timing of the school day can present significant challenges to parents trying to combine work and family life.

> " … they changed the school hours as well from 3:15 to 3 o'clock … that's just been implemented this term. This is my first two weeks back at work and the kids haven't been to school yet so I'm not sure how this is gonna impact." (Family 4)

Family circumstance can also hinder participation. The health needs – of both parent and child – can be a barrier to participation.

> " I kind of have to like psych myself up to a lot of things. … if somebody says like you're going to do this, like now…a panic. … I over think everything." (Family 1)

Concerns were also expressed at difficulties meeting the cost of venue hire for activities, or even finding a suitable place in which to host activities, a problem that was (understandably) more acute when conditions began to relax during the pandemic

> "I know like speaking from her dance classes point of view… we struggle to have somewhere to hold a class. Especially with the pandemic like we were using St Francis' chapel hall." (Family 1)

Cost is clearly a significant barrier to participation for many families. However, this is sometimes exacerbated by other issues that make it even more difficult for families to utilise out of school provision.

Impact on children

Parents and caregivers prioritised children's needs within the households over their own and the focus of their daily life was ensuring their children's needs were best met. Resources in household (both financial and emotional) prioritised the children.

Breakfast clubs were valued for providing opportunities for peer interaction, as much as for the access to food, which was the headline offer.

Parents recognised the importance of activities in terms of their child's development, but more often this was expressed in terms of how it enhanced the quality of the child's life.

> " … it would probably help because she's not a breakfast kind of person. So, it probably would have helped her, see like being amongst other kids that maybe like, not to say peer pressure. " (Family 1)

Families reported that out of school provision provided important benefits to children. This included interaction and connections with peers. This was also valued when it provided opportunities for interaction with other parents and caregivers to socialise and connect with others sharing similar experiences.

Impact on families

Different types of provision offered different benefits to families: breakfast clubs provided at a time when it was more difficult to access other forms of care, whereas holiday provision provided entertainment and structure during a time of extended breaks from school.

Breakfast clubs were viewed by participants as opening opportunities to engage more fully in work or study. They also made it easier for families to manage the start of the school day when their children attended different educational settings.

> " … meant I could take my daughter to nursery, instead of trying to juggle the two runs at the same time." (Family 6)

> "An after-school care for families after school [would be welcome], even if it's to 4 o'clock because families working days don't finish at 3 o'clock, I don't care if I need to pay. Breakfast club was fabulous, it worked." (Family 4)

Breakfast clubs were understood in terms of their benefit to working families. Notably, one parent explained that despite being offered as space at the club, it was not appropriate for them to take it due to limited spaces and the fear that it would remove a 'space' or provision opportunity from a parent within employment.

> "… the school had mentioned about breakfast club a while ago but I kind of felt that see because I wasn't working… it was a shame to like to take a place away from…do you know what I mean like someone that maybe their mum was like rushing away to work …"   (Family 1)

What emerged from the interviews was a clear sense that provision for children often had strong benefits for parents, providing opportunities for respite and socialisation. These benefits were reported to accrue from both formal provision which they attended,

and by drawing on informal support, which gave them time away from their children.

> "Wednesday their grandma gets them after school to give me a bit of a break." (Family 4)

> " … we do have a parent group which has been going on for a couple of years now. … That is an absolute lifeline to parents. If you've got wee ones that aren't in nursery, you can bring them." (Family 2)

> "it's good that way as a support network that way but we haven't seen each other the whole way through lockdown." (Family 3)

> " … that's quite good because you don't need to pay anything, and you know the kids can just play around and (we'll) just have a coffee and that. So, that's good just to kind of be able to socialise with other parents as well." (Family 7)

> "If you wanted or, you could just come yourself if the kids were in nursery or school and it's for like an hour and a half, two hours…. And get a coffee, just like a wee catch up. So, like if you ever need help with anything." (Family 8)

Childcare was often described as pivotal to facilitating participation in the labour market. Nevertheless, childcare alone would not ease the participation in the labour market for all families, some of whom described a complex mix of factors that were complicating everyday life and restricting their ability to engage in work and leisure.

One strong theme to emerge across the interviews was a degree of social isolation that was experienced by parents in Inverclyde. This was acute during the pandemic, but pre-dated it for many. For one lone parent, the closure of organisations meant not being able to see people during lockdown, which had left her very isolated and responsible for the constant care of her toddler without support. All of the parents shared experiences of anxiety or stress as a result of often being confined to their home

space for prolonged periods of time a day with their children

Lack of mental health support for parents was identified as a key issue. Several parents mentioned trying to access support through their GP during the pandemic but had not heard anything about a referral to mental health services. A couple of parents mentioned receiving counselling support from a local organisation but were not able to afford the costs for a second referral.

A few of parents mentioned that taking up a voluntary role prior to the pandemic had provided them with vital opportunities for connection and had improved their mental wellbeing.

The role of out of school provision for children in alleviating or ameliorating the difficulties faced by parents should not be under-estimated.

Experience of families with children with additional support needs

Four of the parents we interviewed had children with autism and/or ADHD, and they reported struggling to access appropriate respite support, childcare provision and family activities. The opinion was conveyed that many services and activities provided by Inverclyde Council and other organisations are not always well suited to children with additional support needs.

Particular frustration was expressed in accessing support via social services for their children, when their children's need for support had been identified by a third party. The length of time taken to progress these cases, was also reported to a significant strain on the family.

"There was three years of fighting to get him something." (Family 2)

Some concerns were also expressed at the lack of information that was forthcoming about requests for services. One parent described how she had been trying to access respite support with the support of a social worker prior to the pandemic and had been waiting for an allocation meeting, but had received no information about when this might take place.

"So it's difficult trying to split myself three ways…and it would be appreciated If I could get help, but I know social workers are stretched thin." (Family 1)

" … were trying to get social work involved, for support. For him and for me. I was trying to contact them. We had home start who were trying to contact them as well and it took, that was twelve months of pretty much, weekly phone calls. From two agencies and myself and the paediatricians. And we weren't getting any response. At all from them." (Family 2)

Even when providers were able to secure support, it was observed that although welcomed, it fell short of what was ideally required.

"The school is not fully opened. … he [son] was really starting to struggle. … she managed to get him a space because he just wasn't coping, just wasn't coping at all. … we tried to get him in during the first lockdown but there, they just couldn't get him in. There wasn't the space for him. … this time, we have managed to get him in, but it is only once a week that he is in at the moment." (Family 2)

Not only were these parents not able to access their usual forms of childcare provision (e.g., after school clubs), but they also reported not being able to access statutory services such as healthcare during the pandemic. For example, one parent whose child has autism said that they had not seen a paediatrician in 18 months; the appointments would usually be six-monthly pre-Covid.

*"It's now been 18 months since we last
saw his paediatricians for his Autism."
(Family 2)*

*"I know social workers are (stretched
thin) but it's annoying when you see some
people getting the help and you think, you
really don't deserve it. Sounds terrible but
it does make you bitter when you
genuinely need it." (Family 3)*

The end sentiment was not only limited to
these families. More generally, a sense of
injustice at not being able to access adequate
provision was undermining solidarity and
leading to resentment being directed toward
those who were receiving services.

*" … obviously I understand that you need
to allow people to work or people that
are in poverty and being able to kind of
provide support so that people can get
into work and training and you know go
to college and things but also think about
people who are kind of working full-time
as well and being able to kind of maintain
employment who could afford childcare
and are willing to pay to be able to kind of
sustain employment I think maybe, just
kind of having a focus on that side of
thing." (Family 9)*

The break from routine during the pandemic
had created significant challenges for families
with children with additional support needs.

6. Conclusions

Needs Being Met?

COVID-19 has introduced uncertainty into the landscape of out of school provision within Inverclyde. Uncertainty over what is available, compounds the challenges that families have encountered during the pandemic.

Uncertainty aside, it is clear that there is currently unmet demand, and that costs of participation are a significant barrier – particularly private sector provision – for many low-income families.

Families were met with multiple challenges during COVID-19 impacting on their childcare arrangements. During lockdowns, families experienced a loss of formal and informal support networks. They also had to juggle meeting the needs of their children alongside other responsibilities, for example, increased care for other family members and working from home. Most parents reported increased stress amongst children and on themselves.

Lockdown has highlighted the importance of this provision to children's lives. Navigating and utilising out of school provision will be important for family and children's well-being across Inverclyde as we begin the process of recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Supplementary Insights

Although primarily concerned with whether the needs of families living on low-incomes were being met, this research also provided insight into each of the project goals of the wider project of which this is part.

It is clear that more comprehensive information is required on scale and nature of current provision of out of school care and holiday programmes/activities. While there is evidence of services offering advice on other provisions, there is a need to strengthen signposting and heighten awareness among key contacts about what provision is available. There is also a particular need to attend to the specific requirements of children with additional support needs.

What Needs to Happen Now?

Building back from the pandemic will require strengthening of out of school provision. The cumulative impact of the public health effects of the lockdowns of 2020 and 2021 have yet to fully emerge. However, it is clear that current provision is not meeting all families' needs. Services must be delivered in ways that meet the expressed needs of both parents and their children.

Wherever possible, financial barriers should be removed to ensure low-income families can access the services they need.

Trusted intermediaries have a key role to play in facilitating family participation, which is reported to be as important for parental wellbeing, as it is for children's development.

Annex 1: Our Approach to Engaging Families in Inverclyde

Introduction

In this section, we describe and appraise the approach taken in this research.

Objectives

As noted in the introduction, our primary objective was to appraise the extent to which current provision in Inverclyde meets the needs of children and families living in poverty.

We were also mindful to contribute to the aims of the wider project of which this is part, and to provide insight into (i) the scale and nature of current provision of out of school care and holiday programmes/ activities; (ii) how services can work better together to provide community-based childcare, activities and food provision where it is needed most; and (iii) the outcomes that different models of provision achieve for children and families, with a view to identifying learning that can help improve provision elsewhere.

Research Team

John McKendrick (SPIRU) managed and designed the overall project. Fiona McHardy and Laura Robertson (The Poverty Alliance) undertook the fieldwork. Interviews were recorded and fully transcribed by SPIRU. Each member of the research team analysed each of the interview transcripts. The report was co-authored by the whole team, with Fiona McHardy and John McKendrick leading on the writing.

Research Design

The interview schedule (Annex 3) was drafted by John McKendrick, and amended by Fiona McHardy and Laura Robertson. The Scottish Government team that commissioned the research approved the schedule.

The interview comprised open-ended questions and was adapted in the field to avoid repetition, and to address the most pertinent issues for each participant.

The research aimed to shape an understanding of experience beyond the particularities of contemporary circumstance. Families were invited to reflect on their experiences of out of school provision before and during the pandemic, and to reflect on future needs. These future needs were considered in the context of possible changes in family life, such as changes in working patterns and changes associated with their children moving through different age-stages.

Research Ethics

The Ethics Committee of the Department of Social Sciences at Glasgow Caledonian University approved the fieldwork. At each stage of the research design and administration, steps were taken to ensure that the research adhered to recommended practice. Specific steps taken included:
- Providing interviewees with information about the purpose of the research and the research requirements, to ensure that participation was based on informed consent.
- Only collecting personal details (names and contact details) for the purpose of arranging for the receipt of a voucher (for a store of their own choosing), as a token of appreciation for their participation.
- Asking for permission to record interviews and explaining the reasons for recording.
- Storing research data securely, for example, password-protecting interview transcripts.

- Removing personal details (names and contact details) from data files and storing in line with General Data Protection Requirements.
- Offering interviewees the opportunity to receive copies of the final report.

More generally, we approached the work in line with ethical principles and guidance as outlined by Social Policy Association.[33]

Researching during a global pandemic presents its own particular challenges and requires a careful and considered approach. Although aware of potential challenges in advance, additional challenges and needs emerged within the research process. We drew on wider learning and best practice from wider work being conducted with low-income families during the pandemic, for example from the Covid Realties Project.[34]

Examples of adaptations by the team included a stronger focus on the aftercare and exit process from the research interview. Time was taken (where this was convenient to the participants) to ensure that they were ready to move on from any issues raised in interviews. Participants were encouraged to take a few minutes for themselves following the interview (for example to have a hot drink or, where possible, to engage in a relaxing activity) to enable them to transition between the research and the multi-faceted and often challenging roles that comprised their everyday life.

Accessing Participants

Inverclyde Council were supportive of this research and offered to assist in accessing interviews. It proved difficult to find participants in the early stages of the research, perhaps due to research fatigue (as Inverclyde had been the focus of several COVID-19 related research projects) and perhaps due to timing. Originally, it was hoped to complete this work in the late Autumn.

Connections were made to local third sector organisations serving children, young people and their families, following a presentation by Professor McKendrick to CVS Inverclyde's *Best Start in Life Network* in December 2020. Contact was re-established with organisations attending the seminar to enlist their support in accessing families who might be interested in taking part in the research.

Thereafter, research recruitment involved targeted advertisements promoting the research. Frontline workers in community organisations and local childcare providers acted as gatekeepers to potential participants. Organisations that supported with recruitment were Inverclyde Council, Belville Community Garden and Home Start Inverclyde. Prospective participants were provided with an information leaflet (Annex 2).

To incentivise participation, and to acknowledge the time voluntarily given to this research, each participant received a £25.00 voucher for a store of their choice.

Arranging Interviews

With contact brokered through trusted partners, our approach was to be responsive to expressed interest. Interested parties were invited to register interest with Fiona McHardy, the nominated contact within the project research team, via text message, phone call or email.

On receiving an expression of interest, Fiona contacted potential participants in advance of the research interview to clarify any queries, and to agree arrangements that were convenient to participants. Participants determined whether the interview would take the form of a video-call or a telephone-call, and if the former, whether their camera would be activated.

Timeline

The first interview was conducted in December 2020, although most interviews were conducted in March 2021.

Participant Profile

Every effort was taken to ensure that the participant profile reflected that specified in the research brief:

- 'Care' required for children who are not food insecure
- Food provision required for children who do not need 'care'
- 'Care' required for children who also need food provision
- Neither 'care' nor food provision required

It proved very challenging to access participants. The research comprised ten interviews, meeting the objectives to engage a range of family experiences.

Household	Household details
Family one	I child, single parent, carer
Family two	2 children, one child with ASN, volunteers , partner works full time.
Family three	3 children, one child has ASN and parent full time carer
Family four	2 children, both parents in employment
Family five	Four children in household, 2 children suffer from MH issues.
Family six	2 children in household, one with disability, single parent, part time working
Family seven	1 child lone parent.
Family eight	Four children in household
Family nine	Five children in household, 2 children with ASN.
Family ten	Full time employment, one child and living with partner

The research was not designed to be representative of all families' experiences within Inverclyde. Rather, it purposively sought to learn from the experience of a range of families in Inverclyde.

Data Collection

Interviews were conducted by phone at a time deemed suitable for families and lasted between 35-40 minutes.

No participants were distressed as a result of discussing the issues raised in the research. However, it was judged necessary to signpost some participants to local support that would assist them to manage some of the challenges that they faced.

Data Analysis

The interviews were transcribed verbatim. Each interview was analysed by to members of the research team, working collectively as an interpretive community. John McKendrick analysed each interview, before handing over to the field interviewer (Fiona McHardy or Laura Robertson) for a second round of analysis.

Although focused on meeting the research objectives, key themes were allowed to emerge from the data, as analysis was approached in an inductive manner.

Reflections on Researching in the Pandemic

Researching during the pandemic resulted in alterations to the research process. Some of these adjustments involved heightened sensitivity to issues, which already informed our research practice. For example, we approached recruitment with a recognition of the pressures that households were likely to be experiencing. Similarly, when preparing a list of support services to which it might be helpful to signpost families, we were mindful of the particular challenges being faced by families at that time.

This research fieldwork took place during the COVID-19 pandemic when many forms of educational provision and out of school provision were affected.

The lockdown measures and other public health measures from the pandemic resulted in the loss of in person schooling and out of school care provision for prolonged periods of time. Exemptions were put in place for vulnerable children and those children of key workers to attend local hubs.

Conclusion

Notwithstanding the challenges that were faced, the fieldwork delivered what was required, enabling the research team to offer insight into the experience of a diverse range of families as they navigated out of school provision in Inverclyde.

Annex 2: Information Leaflet

'Time to Prosper?' – Learning from Families in Inverclyde

What is the research about? This research is being undertaken for the Scottish Government by the Poverty Alliance and the Scottish Poverty and Inequality Research Unit. We are looking to understand parents'/caregivers' experiences of the services that they use out of school hours. We are particularly keen to learn about the holiday periods.

What services are of interest? We want to find out more about activities/clubs that children attend, childcare services that are used, and whether this childcare/activity/club also provides food.

What families would we like to talk to? We are keen to hear from families living anywhere in Inverclyde. We are keen to speak to those on a low income (***either living in poverty or on the cusp of living in poverty).*** We are keen to hear about what you think about activities/clubs your child attends that may or may not provide food, and childcare services. We want to learn about experiences for all age ranges (pre-school, primary and secondary) during school term and holiday periods. We are hoping to talk to families with working parents, families with non-working parents, or families who might have a mix of working and non-working parents. We are hoping to speak to lone parent and two parent families.

What will the research involve?

- We are looking to conduct interviews with 12 families in Inverclyde during January and early February,
- The interviews will be telephone or video calls (whatever suits the Parents/caregivers)
- The interviews will last around 45 minutes.
- The parent being interviewed will be sent a £25 gift voucher of their choice as a thank you for their participation.

What will the Information be used for? We will use the information in reports and other outputs as part of our research. We will make sure that participants' names are not included in anything we write. Recordings from will be stored on password protected computers.

Who should I contact to take part? Fiona McHardy, The Poverty Alliance, Fiona.mchardy@povertyalliance.org. or call or text 07469 457525.

Annex 3: Interview Schedule

Introductions covering standard topics
- Thank them for agreeing to be interviewed
- Aims of the research
- Explain who research is for
- Explain who 'we' are
- About the interview
- Explain how interview will be used (reassuring them that this will be anonymous, and that only GCU / Poverty Alliance researchers will have access to these data)
- Ask for permission to record (confirming informed consent)
- Explain that they can stop the interview at any stage, or choose not to answer any particular question
- Ask if they have any questions, they want to ask

{ How some questions are pitched, may depend on how they have answered the previous questions }

The first group of questions is about you and your typical family week.

1. Can you tell me a bit about yourself and how long you have been living in Inverclyde?
- Household type and composition
    - Is there a spouse/partner living in household?
    - Any other adults living in household
    - Age/sex of each child
    - Do children live there throughout week (details if split between parents / other family members)
- Where they live
    - How long lived in the area
    - Exactly where they live just now
    - Where else they have lived in area (if applicable)

2. What does a typical week look like for the family? Here, I am thinking about paid work, volunteering, unpaid 'work', managing home and family, and clubs/activities that family members may be involved in?
- Is there a typical week?
- Ask whether they prefer to describe (i) by family member (ii) by day of the week. Either way, for each family member, get descriptions of:
    - Themes
        - Work / Volunteering
        - Caring
        - Activity/Clubs
- Ask whether there are any 'pinch points' where managing the commitments becomes challenging?
    - What causes 'pinch points'
    - How are these managed?

We know that – whether we are rich or poor, single or partnered, in paid work or not, in good health or not – managing family life can be a juggling act.

The next group of questions is about the challenges of managing family life in Inverclyde

3. **How much of a challenge is it to manage family life and all it involves?**
   - And, if not a challenge …
     - **What is it that you do that makes it manageable – doing without, not getting involved, something else?**
   - And, if a challenge …
     - **What makes it challenging?**
       - Lack of money
       - Lack of time
       - Expectations of others
       - Demands within family (competing demands / level of demand)
       - Too many opportunities, can't do everything

4. **I would like to ask specifically about food. Have there been times when you've have been struggling to get by and have not had enough money for food?**
   - And, if so, …
     - **How did you manage?**
       - Doing without / Sources of support
       - Awareness of sources of support
       - How often this occurs

5. **To what extent does managing family life impact on your ability to do paid work?**
   - And, if not (and working)
     - **How do you manage a work life around your family commitments?**
   - And, if not (and not working)
     - **What other factors stop you doing paid work?**
   - And, if it impacts
     - **In what ways does family life have an impact on work life?**

6. **Are there any times of the year when there is added pressure on household finances?**
   - When
   - What are the pressures
   - How are these managed

The next group of questions are about the challenges of managing out of school care at different times of the year

Probes for all questions in this section
- To what extent is this 'typical'
- What are arrangements
- Impact of arrangements
- How easy to deal with?
- Costs (financial or otherwise)

7. On a typical school day, how would your children get to and from school?

8. On a typical school day, where would your children go after school?

9. What arrangements do you make when there is unexpected illness in the family?

10. What arrangements do you make when there occasional midweek days off *(for example for elections in school*)?

The next group of questions continues with this theme of managing out of school care, but thinking about all of the different types of school holiday.

Same probes as previous section
- To what extent is this 'typical'
- What are arrangements
- Impact of arrangements
- How easy to deal with?
- Costs (financial or otherwise)

11. What arrangements do you make in the long summer holidays?
12. What arrangements do you make over the Christmas holidays?
13. What arrangements do you make during Easter holidays?
14. What arrangements do you make during October holidays?
15. What arrangements do you make when there are long weekends?

The final group of questions are about the local availability of care and out of school activity. Thinking about your local area.

16. **Can you tell me if you know about (or have used) each of the following in your local area?**
    - **Registered childminders**
    - **Breakfast clubs at school**
    - **After school clubs**
    - **Family to provide childcare**
        - And if used
            - How (if) used
            - When used
            - How regularly used
            - Costs/benefits
                - On Family Income (reduce/increase spend)
                - On Food (amount/healthy or not)
                - On activity (social interaction/learning opportunity/physical activity)
                - On time (how used if not caring)
        - Why not used

17. **Can you tell me if any of the following are available in your local area?**
    - **Holiday clubs**
    - **Sports centres**
    - **Sports clubs**
    - **Youth clubs**
    - **Organised youth groups (BBs, Girl Guides, etc) ?**

18. **Can you tell me if your child/ren use each of the following in your local area?**
    - **Holiday clubs**
    - **Sports centres**
    - **Sports clubs**
    - **Youth clubs**
    - **Organised youth groups (BBs, Girl Guides, etc) ?**
        - And if used
            - How (if) used
            - When used
            - How regularly used
            - Costs/benefits
                - On Family Income (reduce/increase spend)
                - On Food (amount/healthy or not)
                - On activity (social interaction/learning opportunity/physical activity)
                - On time (how used if not caring)
        - Why not used

Just a few final questions

19. In 2020, Inverclyde Council decided to provide support by offering a £25 voucher payment to families. What are your thoughts about this?
- How it was used
- Understand what impact
- Understand why this would matter

20. What, if anything, is lacking in Inverclyde that would make it easier for you to manage family life and/or work-life balance?
- Details
- Understand what impact
- Understand why this would matter

21. Is there any other messages about managing family life and out of school provision that you would like to send to people in power?

Sign off covering standard topics
- Thanking them for participation
- Confirming address details for voucher
- Explaining what happens now with the interview
- Explaining what happens with the final report

Endnotes

1   For more information about The Poverty Alliance, please visit: https://www.povertyalliance.org/

2   For more information about the Scottish Poverty and Inequality Research Unit, please visit: https://www.gcu.ac.uk/gsbs/research/spiru//.

3   NATIONAL RECORDS OF SCOTLAND (2020) *Mid-2019 Population Estimates Scotland* [online], Table 9. Available at: https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/statistics-and-data/statistics/statistics-by-theme/population/population-estimates/mid-year-population-estimates/mid-2019

4   NATIONAL RECORDS OF SCOTLAND (2018) Mid-2016 *Population Estimates for Settlements and Localities in Scotland* [online], Table 1a and 3a. Available at: https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/statistics-and-data/statistics/statistics-by-theme/population/population-estimates/settlements-and-localities/mid-2016/list-of-tables

5   NATIONAL RECORDS OF SCOTLAND (2020) *Inverclyde Council Area Profile* [online]. Available at: https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/files//statistics/council-area-data-sheets/inverclyde-council-profile.html#table_pop_est

6   NATIONAL RECORDS OF SCOTLAND (2020) *Inverclyde Council Area Profile* [online]. Available at: https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/files//statistics/council-area-data-sheets/inverclyde-council-profile.html#table_pop_est

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8   SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT, (2020) *Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation, Data to Download, 2020*. [online]. Available at: https://www.gov.scot/collections/scottish-index-of-multiple-deprivation-2020/#datatodownload

9   BBC SCOTLAND NEWS (2020) *Scotland's Most and Least Deprived Areas* [online]. Available at: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-51279966.

10 For more information, visit: https://www.careinspectorate.com/index.php/care-services

11 SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT (2019) *Out of school care parent survey report* [online]. Available at: https://www.gov.scot/publications/out-school-care-survey-parents-scotland/documents/

12 *ibid*

13 For more information, visit: https://www.childminding.org/

14 For more information, visit: https://boysandgirlsclubsscotland.co.uk/

15 For more information, visit: https://www.ndna.org.uk/NDNA/All_About_Us/Scotland.aspx

16 For more information, visit: https://earlyyearsscotland.org/

17 For more information, visit: https://soscn.org/soscn/about

18 INVERCLYDE COUNCIL and INVERCLYDE HSCP (2021) *Inverclyde Local Child Poverty Action Report 2019-20* [online]. Available at: https://www.improvementservice.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0021/23961/Inverclyde-Child-local-poverty-action-report-2019-20.pdf

19 For more information, visit: https://childreninscotland.org.uk/access-to-childcare-fund-summary/

[20]   BINKS, R. (2020) *Scottish Government 'Access to Childcare' Fund. Agenda Item 16b. Report to Education and Communities Committee* [online]. Available at: https://www.inverclyde.gov.uk/meetings/documents/13745/16b%20Scottish%20Government%20Access%20to%20Childcare%20Fund.pdf

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[28]   For more information, visit: https://www.home-start-renfrewshire.org.uk/

[29]   For more information, visit: https://funworld-leisure.co.uk/

[30]   For more information, visit: https://www.facebook.com/ARTventurersInverclyde/

[31]   For more information, visit: http://www.wevolution.org.uk/event/wevolution-launches-in-inverclyde/

[32]   For more information, visit: http://bluebirdfamily.inverclyde.sch.uk

[33]   For more information, visit: http://www.socialpolicy.org.uk/downloads/SPA_code_ethics_jan09.pdf

[34]   For more information, visit: https://covidrealities.org/