



“Five days of happiness”

Research into the impact of Hopscotch
on children and families

Final report

December 2011

“Last year, one girl rarely smiled. She had the weight of the world on her shoulders. She was having a horrible childhood. On the cable car she said ‘Could I not just stay here. I don’t want to go home.’ On the way back home, her face went back to what it had been, the sore tummies started again. But she had had five days of happiness.”

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1. Background

Hopscotch

- 1.1 Hopscotch is an Edinburgh based charity providing respite breaks for disadvantaged children from across Scotland. Established in 1998, Hopscotch believes that all children deserve to have a childhood, and works with children who experience often hard and even dangerous everyday lives.
- 1.2 Over the past 13 years, the organisation has given respite breaks to over 3,000 children at Ardvullin, its respite centre situated at Ardgour, just north of Glencoe. Ardvullin stands in five acres of its own grounds, overlooking Loch Linnhe in an area of outstanding natural beauty. It can accommodate groups of up to 12 children and their carers for a free five day respite break
- 1.3 Hopscotch has built relationships with over 50 user organisations, which now count on the charity to provide an integral part of the development and mentoring of the children in their care.
- 1.4 The Hopscotch programme lasts from April to October each year. Each respite week starts on Monday morning when the group is collected from its home base and taken to Ardvullin, where they are based until returning home on Friday. A Hopscotch Project Worker is responsible for organising and running the respite programme and adapting the week's activities to suit each group. Fun and exciting activities are combined with the opportunity to learn about local history, wildlife, birds, plants, sea life and the environment.
- 1.5 Participating groups benefit from the sponsorship that Hopscotch is able to secure and have only to pay for their food. This makes the programme accessible to groups which would otherwise be unable to afford a residential break.

Policy context

Working with children

- 1.6 'Getting in right for every child and young person' is the Scottish Government policy framework for working with children and young people. This approach focuses on integrated planning and delivery of services to children and young people, and consists of ten 'core components'¹:
 1. A focus on improving outcomes for children, young people and their families, based on shared understanding of well-being
 2. A common approach to gaining consent and to sharing information where appropriate
 3. An integral role for children, young people and families in assessment, planning and intervention

¹ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/People/Young-People/gettingitright/background/ten-things>

4. A co-ordinated and unified approach to identifying concerns, assessing needs, agreeing actions and outcomes, based on the well-being indicators
 5. Streamlined planning, assessment and decision-making processes that lead to the right help at the right time
 6. Consistent high standards of co-operation, joint working and communication, where more than one agency needs to be involved, locally and across Scotland
 7. A 'lead professional' to co-ordinate and monitor multi-agency activity where necessary
 8. Maximising the skilled workforce within universal services to address needs and risks as early as possible
 9. A confident and competent workforce across all services for children, young people and families
 10. The capacity to share demographic, assessment and planning information electronically within and across agency boundaries
- 1.7 The national 'practice model'² includes the SHANARRI 'well being indicators' ('safe, healthy, achieving, nurtured, active, respected, responsible, included'), and the 'My world triangle' which identifies the three critical aspects of a child's development from the child's perspective: 'how I grow and develop; what I need from people who look after me; my wider world'.
- 1.8 'Curriculum for Excellence' is the curriculum framework for all children and young people. Significantly, it is seen as applying not just to school based education, but also to learning environments outside the school walls, including outdoor learning. It is centred on developing the four 'capacities' - to enable each child or young person to be a successful learner, a confident individual, a responsible citizen, and an effective contributor.

Play

- 1.9 As part of an increasing emphasis on the early years, there has been a renewed focus on 'play' as a vital element of children's growth and development. 'Go play – outcomes and evaluation framework' (Scottish Government, Evaluation Support Scotland, Inspiring Scotland 2011)³ describes the research context and provides a model for evaluating the benefits of free play for children.

Working in the outdoors

- 1.10 'Building your Curriculum: Outside and In' (Education Scotland 2011)⁴ outlines the benefits of outdoor learning within the context of Curriculum for Excellence, and provides guidelines for good practice. Although mainly focused on how schools can engage in outdoor learning, there is much that is relevant for community based organisations.

² <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/People/Young-People/gettingitright/practical-tools>

³ <http://www.inspiringscotland.org.uk/UserFiles/Documents/GoPlayOEF.pdf>

⁴ http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/Images/building_your_curriculum_outside_in_tcm4-656470.pdf

Early intervention and prevention

- 1.11 Public policy attention in Scotland has recently been drawn to the value of early intervention and the use of preventative approaches. The Scottish Parliament unanimously endorsed a Finance Committee report in 2011 on the importance of prevention in public services. This was echoed by the report of the Christie Commission (2011)⁵ into the future of public services in Scotland. A series of Scottish Government 'change funds' focusing on early intervention are currently being trialled.

Research context

- 1.12 There is substantial worldwide research evidence⁶ for the value of outdoor learning going back many years.
- 1.13 Some recent Scottish focused work reinforces this. 'Outdoor education in Scotland: a summary of recent research' (SNH 2007)⁷ sets out the current state of outdoor learning provision in Scotland, identifies opportunities for development, and articulates the benefits and challenges to young people, schools, and local authorities in providing outdoor learning activities.
- 1.14 The results of a survey into 11 to 17 year olds' views on the outdoors were published in 'Enjoying the outdoors – attitudes and behaviour of young people in Scotland' (SNH 2011)⁸.

⁵ <http://scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2011/06/27154527/0>

⁶ http://www.field-studies-council.org/documents/general/NFER/A_review_of_research_on_outdoor_learning.pdf

⁷ <http://www.snh.gov.uk/publications-data-and-research/publications/search-the-catalogue/publication-detail/?id=852>

⁸ <http://www.snh.gov.uk/publications-data-and-research/publications/search-the-catalogue/publication-detail/?id=1840>

2. Methodology

Aims and objectives

2.1 The overall aim of the research was to identify the impact of Hopscotch on the children and families that it serves.

2.2 The research objectives were to:

1. Identify the nature of Hopscotch's impact on participating **children**
2. Identify the nature of its impact on their **families, parents and carers**
3. Identify the nature of its impact on the **organisations** which use its services
4. Identify the key **success factors** and **barriers**
5. Provide an evidence base to inform **future strategic planning** for the organisation

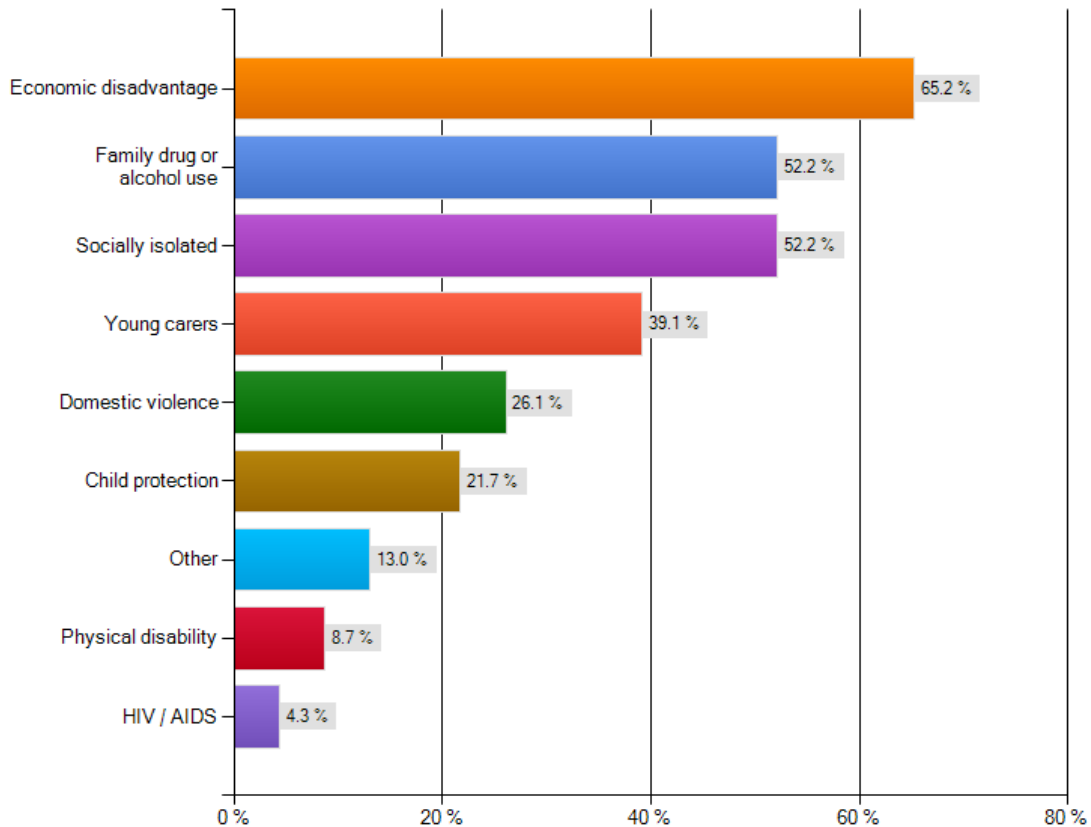
Hopscotch respite break programme 2011

2.3 Twenty five groups took part in the scheduled Hopscotch respite break programme in 2011, which ran from the 4 April until 21 October, with three weeks kept free for routine maintenance. One group cancelled at short notice. Groups came from across Scotland but were heavily weighted towards the central belt. The local authorities where the groups are located are as follows.

Local authority	No of groups
Aberdeen City	2
East Ayrshire	1
East Dunbartonshire	1
Edinburgh City	10
Fife	1
Glasgow City	5
Highland	1
Midlothian	1
North Lanarkshire	2
West Dunbartonshire	1

2.4 A total of 148 boys and 137 girls took part in the 2011 programme. The ages of the children ranged from 6 to 12 years, with a weighting towards those in the 9 to 11 age group.

2.5 Groups were asked for the main reasons for taking a group to Hopscotch (several could be given). The responses are shown below. Reasons given under 'other' included: single parent families, living in poverty; part of the transition to the Community High School; medical conditions such as ADHD/kinship/adopted young person.



Research framework

- 2.6 The approach to the research was a qualitative one, using group observation, interviews (face to face, and telephone), focus groups, and case studies. Two online surveys were used to gather primarily qualitative data. Written comments by children and parents were also reviewed and analysed.
- 2.7 A small project steering group was established to guide the development of the research work which was carried out between March and December 2011. This met three times.
- 2.8 Two approaches were adopted to collect data from groups participating in the 2011 Hopscotch programme:
- **All participating groups** were invited to complete two online surveys – one before their Hopscotch break, one on return from it. In addition, a variety of written data was collected from parents and children.
 - **A sample of groups** was chosen for more in-depth qualitative work. These were selected to represent a cross section of the type of groups using Hopscotch. With these groups, data was collected from children, staff, and parents through a series of face-to-face visits – before, during, and after the Hopscotch week. The groups were:

Organisation	Location	Nature of organisation
BIG project	Edinburgh	Community based youth and children's project
Edinburgh Young Carers Project	Edinburgh	City-wide young carers support project
Fersands and Fountain Community Project	Aberdeen	All age community based project
Fife Women's Aid	Fife	Local authority wide Women's Aid group
Reidvale Adventure Play Association	Glasgow	Local play project offering city-wide services
Rowanfield School	Edinburgh	Special school for children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties
Spartans Football Academy	Edinburgh	Community based football academy serving north Edinburgh
Waverley Care.	Edinburgh	Charity supporting people living with HIV and Hepatitis C, and their partners, families and carers.

- 2.9 Follow-up telephone interviews were held with eight organisations roughly five or six months after their 2011 Hopscotch break. This provided data on the longer term impact of the respite break week.
- 2.10 In order to obtain a further longitudinal perspective on the impact of the Hopscotch programme, some former participants were identified and interviewed. This was achieved with the help of organisations currently or recently involved in the programme. Those interviewed were typically now 17 or 18 years old.
- 2.11 All groups were invited to submit a case study on one child who had participated in the Hopscotch week. Fourteen responses were received.
- 2.12 The data collection can be summarised as follows:

Research participant	Research method	Actual number
Children	6 focus groups with 'in-depth' groups before respite break	48 children
	5 observation visits during respite break	54 children
	6 focus groups with 'in-depth' groups after respite break	42 children
	Self completed children's 'stories' from 12 groups	129 stories
	Notes from Thursday evening evaluation session	8 sets of notes
Staff	Interviews / focus groups with 'in depth' groups before respite break	16 staff
	5 observation visits during respite break	20 staff

	Interviews / focus groups with 'in depth' groups after respite break	20 staff
	Pre-visit online survey	23 returns (92% response rate)
	Post-visit online survey	21 returns (84% response rate)
	Follow-up telephone interview @ 5 – 6 months	8 staff
	Case studies produced by organisation	14 case studies
Parents	Interviews / focus groups with 'in depth' groups before respite break	17 parents
	Interviews / focus groups with 'in depth' groups after respite break	10 parents
	Self completed 'expectations' sheet before respite break	49 sheets
	Self completed feedback sheets after respite break	7 sheets
Former participants	Interviews with former participants	7 former participants

2.13 Given the large amount and high quality of verbatim data gathered through the research process, extensive use is made of quotations in the report. Individual quotes are not attributed (as this was an undertaking given to research participants), but the context makes clear whether they are from children, staff, or parents.

3. Findings: the children's perspective

Expectations, hopes, and worries

- 3.1 Before undertaking their trip to Ardvullin, children had the normal barrage of questions about going away on a respite break. Many were about the practical domestic arrangements.

"See if you don't want to eat together, can you go up and eat in your room?"

- 3.2 Some were already anticipating the possibilities of being in an outdoor environment.

'Do you know when it's outside and night, will you be able to have bonfires and stuff?'

'When it's getting dark and the sun's, like, setting, will you be able to sit on bits of log?'

- 3.3 For other children, it was hard to visualise quite where they were going to be, as they had no reference point from their own personal experience.

"What happens if you get lost in the desert?"

"Are there any air rifles?"

- 3.4 Taking part in the proposed activities and being with their friends were the two things the children most frequently said they were looking forward to. Groups usually discussed which activities to select, and so the children had a broad idea of what to expect. Some had heard good reports from friends and siblings who had been to Hopscotch on previous years.

'I heard there was horse riding there, and I used to go horse riding when I was younger.'

- 3.5 Being with friends and having fun in a relaxed environment was a common theme for all the groups. In effect Hopscotch represented a chance for an extended 'sleepover'.

- 3.6 For a minority of children, especially those coming from more vulnerable home situations, for example where there was domestic abuse or where the child was in a caring role, Hopscotch was going to be an important break. In these cases, although the term was not used, respite was the hope for the week.

'I want to get away, to have a break for a wee while.'

'To get peace from my brother and sister, because they're really annoying.'

- 3.7 For these children, often with the prospect of looming weeks of boredom over the summer period, Hopscotch offered something to look forward to.

'I'd say - going somewhere new, because we're not usually going out during the summer so it gets pretty boring.'

- 3.8 Understandably, some children expressed worries about the week away. These usually centred around the proposed travel arrangements – the length of the journey, the possibility of travel sickness, and going on a ferry.

“Boats are dodgy. You can fall off so easy.”

- 3.9 For some, the activities, although exciting, were also somewhat daunting, as was the prospect of being away from their parents and family.

“I’ve never been away from my mum and dad before.”

- 3.10 The sleeping arrangements – in small shared dormitories - were going to be a new experience for many, and a few were concerned at how this would work out. A few had heard stories from previous years, no doubt subject to some enhancement in the telling. Tales of bats in the roof had been spread by previous Hopscotch participants in one group – to mild alarm!

- 3.11 This comment from one boy, while not typical, expressed a perception of what living for five days in an unknown, distant, rural environment might be like.

“What you’re saying is a murderer could actually walk through (the house)!”

The best thing

- 3.12 The Hopscotch experience was new for nearly all of the children who attended this year. For many, it was an overwhelming episode of new encounters and fresh challenges. It was simply the cumulative power of the activities that impressed, and the question ‘what was the best thing’ became almost impossible to answer. This girl captured both the emotions and the physicality of the week.

“I liked the waterfall and when we all stood in the water. I liked the chocolate factory because I liked the chocolate there. I liked the ferry because it swished. I liked the gondola the best because sometimes it gives you butterflies in your tummy.”

- 3.13 The novelty of the experiences struck many children. Sometimes it was the more ‘routine’ aspects of the week such as the travel arrangements.

“I had the best time of my life but best of all was the ferry because I had never been on one.”

- 3.14 What tended to be uppermost in the children’s memories of their week, however, were the activities. The ones most frequently mentioned were: going up Aonach Mhor in the ‘gondola’ (small cable car); spending the day at Ardtoe beach; visiting the Chocolate Factory (a specialty chocolate shop that offered chocolate making workshops) at Oban; going indoor rock climbing; going horse riding; canoeing; fishing. The following comments give a flavour of the children’s responses, with many identifying several activities as their favourites.

“I liked when we got hot chocolate right at the top of the gondola.”

“We went to the beach. I collected some shells. It was good and fun. I felt happy every day.”

“What I enjoyed at Hopscotch most was the rock climbing ‘cause it was really high heights and things. It was fun.”

“Hopscotch was very fun. It’s brilliant. I loved the fishing when I caught two fish at the sea. Then we went canoeing. It was funny up until I fell in the water. It was very cold. I also loved the cable cars and went up the big mountain. It was good. I loved the beach. The best part of my holiday was when we were fishing. I caught two.”

- 3.15 Several children clearly relished the chance to explore a new retail environment.

“I loved when we went to Oban and we went shopping. I got my mum a Boyzone CD and a fridge magnet that said ‘sister’ on it, and got my dad truffles.”

- 3.16 Throughout the discussions, there ran a common theme. What was most important for the young participants was simply having fun with their friends and making new ones. Sometimes new friendships were established, sometimes existing ones were deepened.

“What I like about Hopscotch is you get to meet all your friends and have good fun.”

“I really enjoyed the Hopscotch holiday. My favourite part was the flying fox, horse riding, and human football table. I also met a new friend and got closer to others especially [name] and [name].”

- 3.17 Hopscotch is located in a particularly picturesque part of the Scottish highlands. Nearly all the groups came from what would be described as inner city environments, and for most of these children, exposure to the peace, tranquillity, and unadorned wildness of the Lochaber area was a new experience. This represented a certain kind of freedom which struck the children in different ways.

- 3.18 Their first encounter with this new environment was the large rambling house at Ardvullin. This invariably made a strong initial impression.

“I was surprised how big the house was. It looked small but it was massive.”

“It looked like Tracey Beaker’s house.”

“A big back garden, a big football table, and no TV. The bedroom’s orange and it’s really nice.”

- 3.19 The large garden with a playpark and ample nooks and crannies to explore was a real find for most children.

“This holiday was fabulous I really enjoyed it! The garden is amazing, it’s really beautiful.”

“I like playing in the garden. It’s just really cool.”

- 3.20 Away from Ardvullin, the natural environment drew comments from some children.

“The scenery was calming and nice. I love the beaches.”

“The scenery round this place is out of this world which was the best part of the holiday.”

- 3.21 Sometimes it was the slightly more fantastical moments which stuck in the memory.

“The walk to where Harry Potter works, because we found some gold and that was the best bit.”

- 3.22 There was an unsurprising element of ‘schadenfreude’ expressed by some children, who remembered the minor mishaps, narrowly avoided accidents, and things not quite going to plan. There were several tales of almost falling off horses and getting feet wet.

“I liked the canoe because it almost capsized!”

The most difficult thing

- 3.23 Children spoke of what had been the most difficult aspect of the week, and many were candid in their descriptions. Overcoming their fears during the activities was mentioned by several. This might be overcoming a fear of horse riding, a fear of heights, or a fear of water.

- 3.24 Being away from home and missing the family was hard for some children. This girl encapsulates the whole Hopscotch experience in a few words – from her homesickness to her eventual enjoyment of the week.

“I came to Hopscotch and felt homesick on the way there, but my mum didn’t phone so I was also homesick, and I wish I was with Daddy and Mummy because I love them lots and it’s my first time away without Mum and Dad, also [name], [name] and [name], or any of my family. But I liked it when we went horse riding and going on the gondola, but I didn’t like the journey there and when we went horse riding Nora [horse] would not stop doing bad things like stopping to do the toilet and Charlie [horse] would not stop to do a fart. But I made lots of new friends and followed the rules - but I loved it.”

- 3.25 A notable feature of life at Ardvullin was the lack of technology. There is no TV, DVD player, or computer, and mobile phones are not encouraged – not least because reception is poor. For most children, the richness of the week’s experiences meant that this was no hardship. But for a few, the enforced absence was hard to stomach.

“I missed my Facebook page. There were 100 messages on it when I got back!”

- 3.26 Several children commented on the long journeys – both travelling to and from the group’s base, and getting to the various activities during the week. While this was simply part of the experience for many, some found it hard.
- 3.27 Living at Ardvullin for five days ‘in community’ provided both highs and lows, and the domestic arrangements were not always to everyone’s taste, with difficulties in sleeping mentioned by a few.

“My holiday was fab, but it was pretty difficult to get along with people. It was really hard to sleep ‘cause nobody would shut up!”

The biggest achievement

- 3.28 Children spoke about what they felt they had achieved. These tended to fall into two categories – their biggest personal achievement, and what they had achieved as a group.
- 3.29 Managing to do the activities, often in the face of considerable fear, was mentioned by several children.

“My biggest achievement was jumping in the sea at Ardtoe beach.”

“I really liked horse riding - that was my favourite one. At first I was scared to go on, but after the girl put me on it and strapped me up, I decided to give it a shot. We went quite far, then turned back, so we went back to the stables.”

“Canoeing - it was my first time and I thought I’d be really scared, but me, [name], and Angus went round the big rocks.”

- 3.30 Being away from their parents and not being homesick was a theme for some.

“On Monday when I woke in the house I felt so happy that I forgot my mum because it was so nice.”

- 3.31 Many found that making new friends was a highlight of the week.

“I did loads of stuff and met loads of new friends. Hopscotch is the best thing I ever did.”

- 3.32 A few were quite candid about their personal achievements in relation to the dynamics within the group. This boy in an all male group was quite clear about the personal progress he had made.

“I learnt how to calm down and to share.”

- 3.33 Although a few missed their mobile devices, succeeding in living without technology was mentioned by more children as an achievement.

“You can live without technology for a week. I didn’t miss the TV at all.”

- 3.34 When it came to their biggest achievement as a group, several things were mentioned. Mostly these revolved around the group managing to get on with each other. This was no small achievement for some groups where dynamics were difficult. Even for established groups with more settled relationships, the prospect of living 'in each other's pockets' for five days was a major challenge. The shared 'team' experience was a strong memory.

"I liked it when we were all sitting in the living room because it was all nice and quiet and hot."

- 3.35 Not arguing – or at least managing to resolve disputes peacefully – was an achievement.

"We learnt not to argue. We argued a lot – especially about Hopscotch's Got Talent!"

- 3.36 A few children talked about how they had managed to care for each other, and quoted examples of how this had happened. This striking example came from an all boys groups.

"Working as a team and sharing and caring – like if someone got hurt, we would comfort them and help them get back up."

- 3.37 Sharing sleeping accommodation, while problematic for some, was clearly an achievement for others.

"I've learnt to share rooms with my friends."

4. Findings: the staff perspective

Impact on children

Hopes, expectations, and concerns

4.1 The overriding hope expressed by staff for the Hopscotch week was that the children would have a relaxing, enjoyable break, recognising that for many, this would be their first holiday away from home.

“We would hope that the children will have the time to relax, enjoy their week away from the stresses of everyday life, mix with their peers and learn social and teambuilding skills, make new friends, and enjoy possibly their first experience away from home.”

“It’s a positive experience. You could take away the activities and the kids would spend the day looking at boulders, crabs. There’s no anxiety level and the guard goes down. It’s an opportunity to experience what should rightfully be theirs.”

4.2 Underpinning this expectation was a desire that the break would provide an opportunity for the young participants to regain some of the natural freedoms of childhood.

“To have a stress free respite break away from the stresses of home life – to be a child.”

4.3 This was often mentioned in a context where children were under some pressure to act ‘older than their years’.

“It’s the done thing around this area, isn’t it? It’s not just those kids, it’s every kid, it’s a tough world. They’re all acting tough and trying to be as dominant as they can be. When they’re away, you take them away from that kind of environment.”

4.4 For some of the more vulnerable groups, the intention was clearly to provide a measure of respite – for both the child and the family.

It’s important to be able to offer this to families – especially where there’s ill health or children caring for parents or siblings. We want to be able to offer respite. If we had to pay, we wouldn’t be able to do it on that scale.”

4.5 The challenge of managing the extended free time offered by the long summer break was mentioned by some, recognising the real challenges this posed for some parents.

“Parents find holidays difficult because they can’t do much with their kids. It’s a struggle during the holidays. The first week’s fine, the second week is a struggle. Isolation is a big factor.”

- 4.6 For children in the most vulnerable situations, the respite break would be a significant opportunity to counteract the negativity of the home environment.

“That they have the opportunity to have time away from living with domestic abuse, and the opportunity to live their lives as children should.”

- 4.7 All groups had expectations that the children would build up their confidence, not least through trying out new activities, unavailable to them at home.

“Have the opportunity to experience new activities that they would not normally be able to access locally.”

- 4.8 The chance to build relationships with both peers and develop social skills was mentioned by most groups, with the Hopscotch experience sometimes serving a particular function in the child’s life at key points of transition.

“Opportunity for children to make friends, especially for those moving to [local high school] in the summer, and have the opportunity to have positive adult relationships.”

- 4.9 The contrast between the local, usually urban, setting and what was in prospect at Hopscotch was a familiar theme. Hopscotch would mean the opportunity for children to experience Scotland away from the urban environment. In some cases this could be quite a marked contrast.

“To experience things outside their environment. For example houses are always being set alight around here. Even if they have a stable family, they’ll have witnessed anti-social behaviour.”

- 4.10 The benefits of a regular daily routine were highlighted by several respondents.

“It provides a routine kids wouldn’t otherwise have: get up, do teeth, make lunch, on to the bus.”

“It’s a lot about routines. Many don’t have routines. Getting up, making packed lunches, stories, hot chocolate. The most important thing is the teamwork aspect, learning to exist together. A lot come from big families where there’s not much teamwork, they’re left to do their own thing. By Friday at Hopscotch, they’re into a routine, and this shows in their behaviour.”

- 4.11 Groups tended to have generalised expectations for their children – rather than specific care plans for individual children, recognising that Hopscotch was, after all, a holiday. Where groups had regular social work and other caring agency involvement, the plans tended to revolve around the provision of regular routine and care.

“We have a basic care plan – a bed with sheets, warmth, showers, three meals a day, consistent adult care, with discussion not raised voices.”

- 4.12 The sensitive issue of how to choose ‘deserving’ children to take part in the Hopscotch experience was raised by some groups. The Hopscotch eligibility criteria suggest a range of indicators of deprivation, for example economic disadvantage,

family breakdown, substance misuse, being a young carer. Some groups brought children from home situations of extreme poverty.

“It was probably the poorest group we’ve taken. One had a towel cut in half.”

- 4.13 Groups which were community based with regular contact with children tended to use professional intuition to help them make the selection.

“Some questions are difficult to ask: ‘Is there a drug problem?’, ‘Are you a one parent family?’. You need to read between the lines.”

“You work in an area and know which families need a bit of support”

Initial impact on children

- 4.14 Staff recognised that the outdoor environment had a profound impact on many of the children, invariably describing it as ‘calming’. Starting with the Hopscotch house and broadening out to the Lochaber landscape more generally, it was new and untried for most children.

“They learn about the wonder of the world. Some haven’t seen the sea. It’s outwith their experience.”

“It was very far from what they knew – going in to a house (all the kids live in flats). It was sunny, green, there was water, it wasn’t built up. They were instantly excited and wanted to explore. They felt free.”

- 4.15 Some went as far as couching it almost in terms of a ‘spiritual’ experience.

“The environment has a calming effect – serenity, that’s why the young people open up, much more than in other places. It can be a spiritual experience. From your soul, you’re reflecting. There’s an inner peace when you’re near water in the natural environment. Away from the hustle and bustle you can have space to yourself. It supports a child to deal with stress.”

- 4.16 The girl described here was clearly moved by her encounter.

“On the top of Aonach Mor, when we decided to go down [staff member] and [child] were sitting on the edge looking out. I thought something was wrong, but she was saying ‘Can I sit here for a couple of minutes. I’ve never seen scenes like this before, and I’m not sure if I’ll ever see it again!’ I would never have expected a wee kid to come out with that.”

- 4.17 One boy’s lack of understanding of the ways of the countryside expressed itself in a different way!

*“On the horse, one of them said ‘Where’s the engine. Don’t let it f*****g stall’.”*

- 4.18 Being outside and active for five days had the expected benefits in terms of the children’s physical health, with clear evidence of the contrast to a more sedentary home life.

“They look healthier by the end of the week, there’s colour in their cheeks, they’re hardier - they’ve been out in the elements. It’s a play environment.”

“They normally don’t get that amount of fresh air. They’re probably always on their computers and never outside. They didn’t miss them at all at Hopscotch. No-one said ‘I’m bored’.”

4.19 Supremely, it was an opportunity for the young participants to simply be children.

“The biggest thing was realising they can get a break from caring. They don’t lead a life like kids their own age. It was a chance to just be a child.”

“The best thing was the whole experience from start to finish – seeing them blossom, and the hardened faces crack.”

4.20 This was in marked contrast to what many of them experienced at home. Hopscotch allowed the children to play, free from adult pressures and adult preconceptions.

“Hopscotch is a voluntary thing that’s really pure. It’s about giving, not taking. It’s safe. There’s no-one trying to buy drugs at the front door.”

“A lot of kids get judged for what they have and wear. They’re not being judged at Hopscotch. They’re almost in a little bubble. All the time they’re judged for living in [name of area].”

4.21 The contrast between life at home and life at Hopscotch was summed up by one respondent.

“Last year, one girl rarely smiled. She had the weight of the world on her shoulders, she was having a horrible childhood. On the cable car she said ‘Could I not just stay here. I don’t want to go home.’ On the way back home, her face went back to what it had been, the sore tummies started again. But she had had five days of happiness.”

4.22 Increased confidence and a sense of independence was an outcome described by most groups. Hopscotch provided a platform for everyone to succeed, and success tended to lead to greater independence.

“I think they’ve all realised they can do something – even as simple as fishing. You had to practically prise them off the beach!”

4.23 Fishing also provided the impetus for this group.

“It was a still night and they were fishing but having no success. Everybody was feeling down because there was no catch. It was the last throw of the evening and then they caught a fish. It took three of them to wind it in. It felt like the winning goal in the world cup – all the tourists were clapping!”

4.24 Evidence of improved confidence was also reported from other sources.

“This holiday provided the children with a lot of new experiences and, through this, there was a clear increase in confidence and self esteem in the children.”

In particular it has been noticed that in school one young boy is speaking out in class more and is always smiling whereas before this holiday he was very withdrawn and seemed unhappy at times in school.”

- 4.25 Living together for a week usually had the effect of creating bonds within the group. For some this arose from the natural shared rhythm of the day, while for others it came from realising they shared the same challenges in their home lives.

“At the end of every evening we make a point of stopping, everyone would go and get dressed for their bed, then we’d all sit round the table and have hot chocolate. It was basically a time for them to calm down before they went to bed, so they weren’t still running about wild. We talked over the day and said ‘what was your best part?’ and ‘do you remember doing this?’”

“When they were away back on the bus, these children – more the boys than the girls – spoke about their individual experiences and the reasons they were at Hopscotch – how it had led up to that. So they were able to talk to other children and then understand ‘Hey this isn’t just me’. We did witness quite a few occasions when they were protective of each other.”

“The children bonded well as a group, the new children had a wonderful holiday. Two of the children had recently been bereaved and really enjoyed the respite and freedom that Hopscotch provided.”

- 4.26 The relationships built at Hopscotch were, for some, a source of support on their return home.

“For two of the participants they made friends that have lasted into high school and the community.”

- 4.27 Part of the learning process at Hopscotch was the development of a range of basic social skills needed for group living.

“They became more of a group within this week and it gave a chance for them to get to know one another and form relationships outwith those that had already been formed in previous group work. This enhanced their social skills, where they were able to treat one another with respect and work as a team. In terms of individuals, we saw a difference in confidence and self-esteem throughout the week which will benefit them in the short and long term. They got to experience new challenges in terms of activities but also in coping with new routines and having responsibilities such as dinner duty. This helped develop or enhance skills for individuals, something that they could take home with them and continue to work on. This was also a well needed break from stresses and strains of family life.”

“I was amazed that none of them mentioned home or wanted to go home. They didn’t miss the TV or anything. One of them was seven and we expected him to be on the phone quite often.”

- 4.28 Most groups reported that the children’s behaviour improved in the course of the week. This applied to general manners as well as to more troubled behaviours.

“A big impact by the end of the week was their behaviour was better, saying please and thank you, and not having their feet on the table.”

“Often a lot of bed wetters don’t wet the bed during the Hopscotch week.”

- 4.29 For some there was evidence of a ‘knock-on’ effect in the wake of the week away once they were back home.

“Their behaviour improved following the trip. Before, they played on their own in the park. After, they played in groups.”

- 4.30 A few groups described how the Hopscotch experience was a way of building up a ‘reservoir’ of positive memories that they could draw on once they were back at home - for positive encouragement and reinforcement.

“Our kids don’t have a ‘well’ of experiences.”

- 4.31 Two groups told how this would work for them.

“We take a lot of photos and make a photo album for each child so they can keep their memories.”

“There’s a photo with all the different Hopscotch photos in it and it’s going in the clubroom, so they’ll be reminded of it anyway. Hopefully that’ll be a tool or ‘anchor’ for them to remember Hopscotch.”

- 4.32 The return home at the end of the week prompted two different sets of emotions. For most it was a happy moment, with the children naturally looking forward to being reunited with their families. However, for a minority, where they would be returning to a troubled, difficult or even abusive family environment, the picture was quite different.

“[Child’s] behaviour on the bus going up was appalling, the language that was coming out was appalling. When we got there I had a long talk with him on the Monday night. He kept saying ‘I can’t help it. I can’t help it’. I went through different things with him and had a long talk with him, and we never had another swear word out of him. All day Tuesday, all day Wednesday, most of the day on Thursday. and then it started again. Literally as we approached that Forth Road Bridge, he started swearing again.”

- 4.33 A few groups had experienced a difficult week. Sometimes this was because of children’s disruptive behaviour (invariably with its roots in family circumstances), and in a couple of cases this led to children being sent home before the end of the week. Even in these circumstances, groups were consistently positive about the overall Hopscotch experience.

Longer term impact on children

- 4.34 As part of the follow up process, nine groups were contacted between five and six months after their Hopscotch respite break, in order to explore the longer term impact on the children described in the case study, the other children in the group, and the organisation as a whole.

- 4.35 Much of the data reinforced the general findings already gathered as part of the research process.
- 4.36 Every organisation was able to provide at least one example of where the Hopscotch experience had provided tangible benefits to a child in the longer term. Seven of these concerned the child in the case study. Two concerned other children in the group.
- 4.37 The identified benefits fell into three categories: developing the child's confidence – especially with its peers; strengthening the child's relationship with staff in the organisation; enabling the organisation to provide specialist support to the child.
- 4.38 Confidence, as in earlier discussions, was a recurrent theme. For one rather shy boy, the change was dramatic.

"[Child] had never been away from home before, so seeing out the week at Hopscotch was an achievement. Since coming back he has come on in leaps and bounds. Hopscotch gave him the confidence to be more vocal. He is more communicative with the workers and he stays at a friend's house – he didn't do that before. His mum sees a big improvement at school as well as in the park."

- 4.39 For another child from a family where substance abuse was a problem, the Hopscotch respite break provided a setting for her to exercise some degree of autonomy. She began to take pride in her appearance, and thereby countered some of the negative perceptions of her peers. On return from Hopscotch, this continued.

"Her mother said she was more vocal, she had a voice in the home. The feedback from the Deputy Head Teacher was that she was a totally different girl. She was vocal in class, and her appetite improved and she had put on weight (The school nurse had been monitoring her weight)."

- 4.40 A boy who was a young carer and living with his grandmother also made progress.

"[Child] went on a definite journey. It gave him the confidence to integrate with his peers and to try new things. His grandmother said it has made a huge difference. He now goes on school trips, which he would never have done in the past."

- 4.41 Many cases were described where children had strengthened their relationships with the staff in the organisation. This girl had poor school attendance and little routine in her life. The organisation witnessed a change.

"She was a priority for us to take away. She now has a good relationship with [organisation] which has grown since Hopscotch. She has built up strong trust with staff, and she now engages with [organisation] seven times a week as well as with other local services."

- 4.42 In another family, the three siblings had proved difficult to handle on the week away, but progress was made with one.

“On return from Hopscotch, we had more to do with the middle boy. The family situation was chaotic. But he had a positive interaction with a member of staff, and is now coming to the youth club.”

- 4.43 In some cases, the nature of the trusting relationships which were built up between staff and children over the Hopscotch week provided the opening for more specialist interventions and support to be offered in the period that followed.
- 4.44 With one young carer organisation, the week away revealed one girl’s level of difficulty with peer relationships that they had not appreciated. These insights proved invaluable in the subsequent support that was provided.

“Between then and now, the situation at home developed and we initiated contact with other agencies. Without Hopscotch, I’d not have been able to give such a detailed picture at the child planning meeting. As a result we got the opportunity to do six one-to-one sessions on friendship with her. There have been some critical moments recently, and if the services were not there, the family would have been in much deeper trouble.”

- 4.45 In another organisation, a boy’s father had recently died, and his mother had been a drug user. Hopscotch had had a big impact on him, and staff described how he had learnt to trust both adults and his peers again.

“He disclosed his bereavement to another child during the week, and although he wet the bed, he was supported by the other boys in the group. His mum has recently had a relapse, but he has stayed with the group. It has helped him to come through that.”

- 4.46 Organisations spoke very positively about their relationship with Hopscotch, and for many it had become built into the fabric of organisational life. One group which had the opportunity to make a second visit during the year, quoted a girl from the first visit speaking to those about to go on their first trip.

“You’ll think it’s out of this world. You’ll never forget it. It’s the best experience ever!”

Impact on parents

- 4.47 Staff contact with parents varied considerably. Some organisations had regular and sustained dealings with parents, while for others it was more sporadic. Some comments therefore came from routine interactions with parents within the community, and others arose as a result of a more intensive relationship.
- 4.48 What united parents was that Hopscotch represented a unique opportunity for their children to experience a really good holiday, in most cases one that they would not be able to provide themselves, either through circumstance or financial constraint.

“The response from the parents is very positive. Without this holiday their children would just be stuck at home. Most of them have said that their children had talked about nothing else.”

“Most parents were delighted and relieved that their child had this chance to go off and have enjoyment, knowing they were safe and well looked after. Some parents found it difficult to let their child go for, what was for them, an extended period of time. However the feedback from all parents was really positive and grateful that their child had had this opportunity.”

- 4.49 The week away with Hopscotch constituted a valued period of respite for some families.

“Most of these families had different issues going on in their lives and this holiday provided the parents with a bit of respite for the week”

“For the three boys’ dad, he had a good break and seemed less tired and more able to deal with the children.”

“The children’s parents/carers were able to have much needed respite due to on-going periods of ill-health.”

- 4.50 Staff recognised that the respite was in fact two way, with the child attending Hopscotch in some cases benefiting from a break from their own caring duties.

“It’s important to be able to offer this to families – especially where there’s ill health or children caring for parents or siblings. We want to be able to offer respite. If we had to pay, we wouldn’t be able to do it on that scale.”

- 4.51 The Hopscotch experience was seen as supporting children’s growth in independence. In several cases this first time away from home without parents or siblings had led to a noticeable increase in confidence.

“Many parents fed back that they felt more at ease now allowing their child to be away from home without them and could see the dramatic change, one parent said that she now recognised that she contributed to her child’s insecurities and worries.”

“Some of the parents remarked how impressed they were that their child managed to cope with being away from home for so long.”

“Parents have commented that as a result of Hopscotch their child has become more confident and independent within the house, helping with house chores.”

- 4.52 Space had also been made for parents to spend time with siblings.

“This is also respite for the parents which can be a time to themselves or time to spend with siblings.”

- 4.53 Several groups mentioned that as a result of the Hopscotch respite break, parents had been able to build stronger links with the organisation's staff. This ranged from quiet informal contact to more sustained relationships.

"I spoke to a couple of parents I wouldn't have spoken to before. I spoke to them about their child."

"One of the most enjoyable aspects was meeting the parents. I didn't know their names or what they looked like before. The parents now feel more comfortable coming in and discussing things."

"Mum trusts us more. We've built up that relationship."

Impact on staff and the organisation

- 4.54 The overall response to the Hopscotch experience among staff was that it was tiring but worthwhile!

"Exhaustion! Very happy to see how much the children get out of the experiences."

"You were constantly on alert the whole time. It does take time to bring yourself back down."

- 4.55 It was in particular an opportunity for extended work with children outside the 'normal' environment of their project, organisation, or school. Several commented on the scope this gave for relationship building in a more relaxed setting.

"To see the children in a different environment was very positive for the staff. Often the staff see the children wandering around the shopping centre or in the library. Hopscotch is a much more positive environment for the children."

"You grow much stronger bonds with the children. I normally only spend about two or three hours with them after school."

"The staff found it very beneficial to be working outwith refuge accommodation and in a completely different and relaxing environment."

"It was excellent for the staff as we all seen the children in a different light, it enables them to work better with the individual child as well as the group."

- 4.56 Amongst other benefits, the lack of the more routine time constraints was an advantage.

"There's only so much you can do in two hours per week. The residential experience is intense. It's the equivalent of six months weekly contact."

"When you're away with the kids for a week, you feel you've had an influence on their lives. You feel you're having an impact. You see a difference in a week and the way they react to each other."

- 4.57 The residential experience was an ideal setting for developing and nurturing relationships with the children. Although this applied to all the young participants, it was particularly valued by staff who were working with vulnerable children.
- “Children see staff differently – as a full person. The time allows for relationship building. You get a better understanding of the children. They’re more open on residentials.”*
- “The amount we learnt from children that we hadn’t seen in the therapeutic sessions [at the organisation’s base]. They would come up to you and talk at the BBQ. They didn’t see it as therapeutic.”*
- “It’s a way of getting to know the kids, building relationships that last for years. We have a different relationship with the ones who go on Hopscotch. Group work is a poor substitute for a residential. Trust grows quite quickly.”*
- “Staff and volunteers built up a really strong relationship with the children.”*
- 4.58 The more carefree context of the residential was a natural setting for staff to observe children at play, and in some cases to identify particular needs.
- “It improved our relationship with the children who we were away with, especially those fairly new to the project. It helped with the assessment of each child, meaning we were able to see them in a different light.”*
- “We’ve identified specific needs in some children.”*
- 4.59 For some organisations, children were prepared to open up about themselves and their circumstances. In some cases this led to real ‘turning points’.
- “It allows us to see the children outside of the project. We also get gentle disclosures about children. We only get a brief snapshot of the child at the project.”*
- “There was the breakthrough with (child) where he started to trust staff while we were away and ask for cuddles! His mum said that was really good because that was something that he wouldn’t do.”*
- 4.60 The impact of these deeper relationships between children and staff bore fruit after the respite break was finished.
- “Back at school, the Hopscotch week meant there was the wee wink in the corridor, some shared connection.”*
- “I ‘keyword’ [brother and sister] and I would say my relationship with them has really strengthened. My one-to-ones with them since we’ve come back have been really valuable, especially [girl]. She’s quite a closed book and she’s really opening up.”*
- 4.61 A common theme was the opportunity Hopscotch provided for staff team building, and skills development within individual members of staff.

“It brings the staff closer as a team.”

“It’s an opportunity for staff skills development. We don’t get much opportunity to do residential work.”

“It gives sessional staff a glimpse of what youth work is about.”

- 4.62 Some groups used the week as a form of junior leadership development, with young volunteers being invited to take part – half way between the role of the participant and that of the staff.

“Our two young volunteers came a lot more out of their shell and improved dramatically to become confident interacting with a group of young people.”

- 4.63 One group extended this form of leadership development to one of the children themselves.

“We used ‘role models’ as a way of getting the older ones to behave and to think about leadership and responsibilities. We said ‘if you misbehave, then they’ll want to misbehave’. It made him feel like ‘You’re captain of the team’. It made him feel really good. We’d say ‘Alright gaffer’, and he’d have a big smile on his face and he’d start behaving.”

- 4.64 There was a strong feeling that Hopscotch enabled organisations to extend and enhance the range of services they were able to offer to children. In turn, this helped organisations to deliver their own aims and objectives.

“Being able to offer this break to the most disadvantaged young people has had a very positive impact on how the organisation feels about the services we can offer.”

“It allows us to provide much needed residential to children we work with and this helps towards our aims as a project which in turn helps us gain funding on a year on year basis as funders see what we are providing as a service.”

- 4.65 One group put Hopscotch’s work in the context of Scottish Government’s ‘Getting it right for every child’ policy, seeing this as an added attraction for funding bodies.

“It fits the SHANARRI guidelines, and ticks the boxes with funders.”⁹

- 4.66 Hopscotch also contributed to organisational learning.

“It was only the second time our organisation has ever done a residential, so it was valuable experience. It gave our organisation different methods of evaluation.”

“Our organisation will be able to think about the Hopscotch model and apply it to some of our holiday programme.”

⁹ SHANARRI: ‘safe, healthy, achieving, nurtured, active, respected, responsible, included’

- 4.67 These comments were typical, stating how integral Hopscotch was to the overall work of the organisation.

“Hopscotch is part of [organisation] for under 12s. It’s not guaranteed but it’s integrated into the service. Hopscotch is almost the nickname for our residential work.”

“As a transition from the junior youth clubs to older clubs. It’s a way of saying ‘This is how we’re going to work with you – we’re going to trust you in our youth work’”

“It’s the pinnacle of the whole year for the children and staff. Hopscotch is very special. You don’t have to force it to be.”

- 4.68 Several groups said that, valuable as it was, the residential experience would simply not be affordable without Hopscotch.

“It has allowed us to offer a fantastic opportunity to our young people that we would never have been able to give them due to the current financial climate. We have been able use our experience to benefit our young people and pass on these skills to our peers within the organisation.”

“How I’d finance the holiday in any other shape or form is beyond me.”

- 4.69 An indirect impact mentioned by groups was the way that the Hopscotch respite break enhanced their organisation’s profile in the community. There was often a kind of ‘domino’ effect, with children who had been on Hopscotch on previous years ‘spreading the word’ in the locality.

“It always has a positive effect on the project, as Hopscotch is part of our legacy now. All the young people up to 19 speak about their experiences, and it filters through the generations.”

“It broadens our profile in the community. Everyone in (area) has heard of Hopscotch. Someone’s brother, cousin has gone on it. People see the benefit of it.”

“Hopscotch is part of the ongoing programme for the project. The project’s reputation in the community is that we take children on residential.”

- 4.70 This was particularly important for parents.

“I think parents/carers are able to trust the organisation and begin to understand the importance of the support we provide for their children.”

“It’s another brick in the wall of trust and credibility. If you don’t have the trust of the family, it’s difficult to maintain the relationship with the young person.”

- 4.71 Organisations also spoke of the partnership with Hopscotch. This worked well when the same values were shared. It was a practical demonstration of partnership working.

“The ethos of Hopscotch chimes well with what [organisation] is about. It’s safe and inclusive in an area where there are high rates of crime and anti-social behaviour. [Organisation] is a haven from that, creating respite from what are chaotic social and family environments. It’s a good fit.”

“It’s a great partnership with Hopscotch. We would aim to offer these type of experiences anyway. For our organisation, to be offered this at no cost in this climate is great. It frees up our resources to give other children similar experiences.”

“A residential holiday break with another charity shows a strong partnership link – we’re working for the same aims. We always mention the partnership.”

5. Findings: the parents' perspective

5.1 The parents interviewed for the research included those with children participating in 'mainstream' community provision, as well as those whose children had been referred to specialist organisations dealing, for example, with domestic abuse and long term medical conditions. The parental perspective reflected this. While many of their comments were similar in both groups, those facing difficult home circumstances brought a particularly vivid set of perceptions.

Expectations

5.2 The hope that the child would have an enjoyable week away from home, playing in a safe environment, was a common theme. This was often in contrast to life in the local neighbourhood.

"Where we all live they all play in the street with each other. In that environment [Hopscotch] they'll have that bit of freedom. We couldn't say to our kids 'go down the beach' – no chance. There, it's an environment they're safe in."

5.3 For many it would be a chance to simply be children.

"To go away with other bairns and to have the chance to just be a bairn, instead of having to play the role of being an adult – growing up too quickly."

5.4 Some children, this would be a normalising experience – one that might otherwise be unaffordable.

"My [grand] children have no parents. It's a case of them knowing they don't have to go without. They can still go on holiday and enjoy things. Because as I said before, you can't afford it all the time. I've got four of them so it's a lot of money for four of them."

5.5 Most parents hoped that Hopscotch would develop a sense of independence and self reliance in their children. They recognised that some time spent with friends and without their parents could make a big contribution to this.

"Normally if you're away, you're away with your kids, you're restricting them in what they're seeing and what they're doing and that. If they're away themselves, they're in amongst each other.... it's social skills, learning to be happy with each other and have fun with each other – without adults butting in."

"It's a good thing – separation – to teach them it's alright to be with other people. Because some children cling on so tightly to the parent that they don't want to leave them. And sometimes it's not a good thing. They have to be able to go out in the world and meet other people and be OK and not frightened when their mum's not there."

- 5.6 There were some groups where the children were exposed to extremely difficult home circumstances, and whose young lives had been blighted by a range of negative experiences. For some of these, 'normal' summer holidays held very different connotations to most children. Hopscotch offered the prospect of an ordinary summer holiday.

"Just to understand it's not all bad out there. There are nice people out there who want to help and to make sure they have a good time – to be like a normal child really. Just to teach them they can communicate with each other without lashing out or fighting with each other. It's a lot of what they've seen that they probably shouldn't have seen or heard. They're not different from anybody else."

"I think with our ones the holiday situation is very stressful and traumatic for them. The father would always cause problems and it wasn't enjoyable for them. It was a tense time in the car, it was a tense time when they were there. As soon as the holidays came and they decided to go anywhere, they would shrug their shoulders and go 'when's it going to kick off?' So it'll be nice for them to go and not have that worry."

"My kids have never ever enjoyed a summer holiday. They've always been desperate to get back to school. So this is somewhere they know they're going with people they can trust, with people who aren't going to be drinking."

- 5.7 Part of this normality would be being able to return to school with stories to tell.

"My kids have never been on holiday. At least they can go back afterwards and tell the other kids they've done something. They can brag a wee bit – about the horse riding."

- 5.8 For those particularly with a caring responsibility, it would offer a time of respite.

"I find with the older boy with us – we're older parents – he has a lot of responsibility running after the wee ones – I can't run after the wee ones. So when he goes away from all that, it's a break, he doesn't have to be responsible."

- 5.9 And this was sometimes a two way process.

"It's also good for the mothers as well – it gives them a wee bit of time out, to re-charge the batteries. It's as difficult for the mother as it is for the child. Everybody benefits from it."

Impact on the child

- 5.10 Parents commented on the value of the outdoor experience. Again this was in contrast to the home setting. The absence of computers was regularly remarked on.

“It was a safe environment, a different environment from the city. They’ve more freedom. They had the countryside, a whole different air. They don’t have that here, we’ve got the combustion of traffic, but up there it’s relaxing, they can chill. They don’t have the apprehension of somebody on their backs. They can go places.”

“I like the idea of them going back to basics, with technology and that being taken away. She’s came back and she’s not the same for the computer. She’ll be out playing a bit more, not always asking to go on Facebook a bit more.”

- 5.11 They were there on an equal basis, free from the demands and constraints of 21st century teenage life, such as designer clothing.

“For a group of kids to go there and be all the same ... they’re up there without their parents. It’s not to do with computers, it’s not to do with material things, nothing to do with what they’re wearing. Where some wee guy’s not got very much and another’s got lots, the two of them are in the same place and doing the same thing.”

- 5.12 On returning, the children frequently displayed the confidence and independence that their parents had hoped they would develop.

“A lot of the things she did I wouldn’t have believed she would have done. Even at the Carnivals she wouldn’t go on anything. It gave her more confidence anyway.”

“Before, I would be getting him dressed in the morning. Now I put his uniform next to him and he gets himself dressed, brushes his teeth, gets himself washed and in two minutes he’s ready. Before, he would sit about watching the telly in the morning. He’s very independent since he came back.”

*“What skills did she pick up?
Cheeky skills!... I’m only joking. She’s a wee bit more outspoken – not cheeky things, more grown up things.”*

“[Name] was always on the computer and when she came back she started to venture out more. She started to stand up more, because down our way I don’t let them out. She says ‘Mum, I am going to go out’. She has been standing up for herself more, and looking after her wee brother as well. That’s kind of took a lot off my mind as well.”

- 5.13 For some, home circumstances were acutely difficult and the Hopscotch week helped them to face up to these.

“The bairns have been through quite a lot, and their wee heads dinnae ken what’s going on. Especially the younger ones – they dinnae ken why people aren’t well and somebody has passed away. It’s a shame. Since he’s come back from the holiday, I think it has helped with his confidence because it’s like he went away with a muddle of stuff in his head – where’s my dad, I’m not seeing my dad any more, mum’s in bed all the time. He’s never been on a holiday like that and he’s thought ‘Oh wow!’ When they came back, I did

notice a difference with [son's] confidence, because he never sings and dances and that in front of people, and he was doing that!"

- 5.14 Underpinning this sense of confidence were the friendships that the children had built with each other during the week.

"Previously he never had a sleepover. This was his first sleepover with friends."

"They'll always have a wee bond that they've had a week away. They're at the same school and they've known each other. They trust each other, and they take that into adulthood as well."

"[Child] is inviting a girl from last year's holiday to her birthday party. It's the first time she's crossed the line. They don't know they can do it."

- 5.15 This became, in one case, an almost therapeutic process.

"The group gives support when they need to talk. When the time comes and they need support, the bonds are made. In the group, they have a closeness they don't have at school or at football. They all get on, there are no fights etc that you'd get normally. The kids sense that it's a different thing they're coming to."

- 5.16 Exposed to the staff 24 hours a day for five days, the children often saw them in a new light.

"They see a different side to the staff – a fun side."

- 5.17 This helped to cement relationships with staff members, and create an openness to dialogue. This was particularly important if other channels of communication were unavailable.

"When they were away, [son] was talking about his dad and stuff like that – to the staff and to other young folk. I've had to speak to him a few times to say – 'it's alright for you to be sad, that you're dad's dead and he's not here. You can speak to mummy whenever you want. If you want to cry, cry. Never think that I'm going to get angry. You can tell mummy anything – I'm always here.' But he wasn't talking to me."

- 5.18 Parents spoke of how the week had offered real respite for both their children and for themselves.

"For them – to relax and forget about everything that's happening. [Daughter] would be like 'I've been away for a week and I could forget about having to look after [brother], and cleaning the house and taking the dogs out. She does quite a lot of things she shouldn't be having to do at home."

"It's respite for all of us. For me to get a break is a week off. For them, it's forgetting about it. The last couple of years I've been in hospital quite a bit."

- 5.19 For a few, there were examples given of how the Hopscotch experience had been a real turning point in their child's life. This might be to do with a changed approach to domestic duties.

"[Child] came home and on the Saturday morning asked me if I wanted him to be on breakfast duty!"

- 5.20 Or in one case, the father described how the week had been a catalyst for major change in his son's life.

"The residential was like taking a plant in the desert, and putting it in fertile soil. He bloomed. It was a safe, warm and comfortable environment. He had a good time but it was also therapeutically good for him. He was able to take his guard down. He'd been wearing this emotional armour but now he was able to take it down for four or five days. Hopscotch had a massive impact on [child]. He was able to open up and realise that he's not abnormal."

6. Findings: the former participants' perspective

6.1 The young people interviewed, who had been on a Hopscotch respite break as children, now ranged in age from 15 to 18 years. This meant that on average it was at least five years since they first went. Two had returned on subsequent occasions.

6.2 Many of the interviewees started by saying they did not remember much about Hopscotch as it was some years ago. The ensuing conversations tended to give the lie to that!

Memories of Hopscotch

6.3 There were strong memories of the journey in the minibus, and the fact that it was long. For many, the ferry was a new venture.

"It was also the first time I'd been on a ferry. I was quite excited."

"I hadn't been on a big boat that carried buses before."

6.4 Arrival at Ardvullin was a pivotal point, with young people retaining vivid memories of the building.

"It was a big building, lots of space, quite open, a brilliant view"

"We were glad to arrive at this big building. Once you go in, the first thing you do is run up the stairs and find your room. There's a sitting area where we used to play games."

"I can probably remember where every room was because we were always in and out of the house. It was really big so there was a lot of things to do like hide'n'seek and stuff. The rooms were really big so you feel safe in there."

6.5 This was also true of Ardvullin's expansive garden.

"The garden was amazing, a big assault course, and the swings."

"When you go into the back garden, it's massive with the football goals and that."

6.6 Groups played games, often ones that children had not played before.

"We used to play sardines and stuff."

6.7 And although one or two said they missed having access to a TV, for most this was not a problem.

"It's only a week away. I wasn't bothered with the TV. I like TV but I can handle a couple of weeks without it."

“We never actually bothered that we didn’t have a TV or anything, because we always had activities all day, then played in the park later on in the afternoon. After that time we were all just tired and excited about what was going to happen the next day.”

- 6.8 The young people generally recalled the beauty of the natural environment – and the calming effect it had on them.

“It was nice to look at as well. There wasn’t cars and big buildings. Even at night it was nice to look at – just quiet and peaceful.”

“The scenery was relaxing – you opened up a lot more there. Here, you get caught up in things, you’re so busy. Up there, you’d have a talk, go for a walk. Time just stops. You’re more carefree, you can be yourself.”

- 6.9 Food was a strong memory – both what was eaten, and the shared experience of preparing it together

“I was always a fussy eater – I didn’t want to eat. An African worker from [organisation] made an African meal. I loved it – tomatoes, eggs, rice. And two kids from Africa made something with spinach and peanut butter. I didn’t like spinach, I didn’t like peanut butter, but together it was nice. I tried quite a lot of foods.”

“I definitely learnt how to cook, and how to chip in and help a bit, to get know people and stuff.”

- 6.10 All the young people spoke fondly of the organised activities they had taken part in at Hopscotch, with a strong sense that these filled the days.

“We were out all the time – boat trips and that.”

“I remember we went to a beach and we were fishing. There was a jellyfish. At first you think jellyfish aren’t real, but then we caught one!”

- 6.11 A strong recurrent theme was going up the mountain (which nearly everyone recalled as Ben Nevis rather than Aonach Mhor!). This was evidently an awe inspiring experience.

“I remember going up Ben Nevis in the gondola. It was scary. The gondola was shaking in the wind. We ran straight into the building at the top.”

“Going up the mountain, I would never have got there first, if they hadn’t been encouraging me. They took a picture of me. it gave me a great sense of achievement.”

“We went up Ben Nevis. It’s not like you can go up a big huge mountain every day [in Edinburgh]. It was fun. You could just see everything when you were up there.”

“We went up Ben Nevis, I thought I was going to fall. I was crapping it. There wasn’t a lot of breathable air!”

- 6.12 Several young people recalled moments of mischief – the ‘off curriculum’ aspect of the week away!

“I remember making fun out of [staff member] – calling him ‘caveman’ – he had a big bushy beard. He was much more stressed there!”

- 6.13 In general, the Hopscotch experience contrasted sharply with life at home.

“The best thing was just being away from [area] and a week off school.”

“It was better because you can just relax and have a laugh and you’re not getting any complaints because you’re noisy. “

“If you’re walking round this area, I personally don’t feel safe – really anywhere in town at night. Out there you feel safe, you feel you can be with your friends and have fun. You don’t have to worry about what’s going on elsewhere. In that place it’s like a nice environment. When you’re here, you lie in your bed all day. There, it’s like there’s a routine, get up early, have a full energetic day, and you were in your bed for 9 o’clock at night. When you’re here, you sleep all day and are up and out all night doing whatever. ”

What the experience meant

- 6.14 The young people effectively distinguished between the immediate impact of the respite week and the longer term impact of the experience. Some spoke of what effect it had had in the relatively short term, while others described more lasting consequences.

- 6.15 In one case, it had helped to support a child during the transition from primary school to high school.

“It got me to know more people for when I went up to high school. The whole point was everybody was going to [local high school].”

- 6.16 Another recounted how the experience of being part of group had helped her.

“I learnt how to become part of a group. I used to moan about everything. I realised it wasn’t all about me. It was better being involved in a group than being by myself and moaning.”

- 6.17 For some, there was clearly a respite function.

“It was nice to have a break – some respite. Mum wasn’t well and there were constant arguments in the family. I got talking to my brother and sister about how they were getting on. I found out how they were doing at school and with their pals. Some other children on Hopscotch were in care and had lost a

parent. I realised how much we had in common, and the way we were feeling.”

- 6.18 As for the longer term impact of Hopscotch, responses ranged from ‘nothing’, to some quite moving accounts. Among these, there were a few common themes. It had clearly acted as an introduction to the outdoors in general, and the Scottish Highlands in particular

“Now I would still love to do the things I did back then, even though I’m older. That’s probably the bit that sticks with me the most.”

“I’m planning to go up north with some pals this year. They said ‘What’s up there?’ I tried to explain how relaxed you’d be.”

- 6.19 There was a sense also in which the experience had served as an informal introduction to the world of youth work and informal educational work with young people. One young person was now working as a youth worker, one was a volunteer, and one was thinking about a career in youth work.

“It definitely set me off to do more, because I’m basically working in the outdoors now. It was one of my first experiences of being away in the outdoors. That definitely had an impact, I found out how much I enjoyed it. Now I’m away quite a lot of times a year going camping and doing residential.”

“I can go back as a volunteer because I’m old enough to do that. I’ll hopefully get a job out of it. It’s good for your CV.”

- 6.20 An important, yet hard to define, aspect of the Hopscotch week was the way in which it had created a bank of positive memories for the children which they would take into later life.

“When I was getting into angry situations, I’d remember how I was on Hopscotch, and be more relaxed. When I used to get angry, I’d bottle things up and just sit in my room. Now I try and find a nice environment - I sit in the garden or go for a walk on Arthur’s Seat. I take time out and breathe. It helps you relax.”

“The impact it has had on my life is quite fun. It’s been locked away in the back of my mind. Your brain is like a maze, with lots of tunnels and memories and every memory leads to a different tunnel...pretty much all fun ones.”

7. Findings: the case studies

7.1 The case studies submitted by groups participating in the Hopscotch 2011 programme are reproduced below. The structure of the case study intentionally reflects the 'Getting it right for every child and young person' triangle. This provided scope for organisations to describe the impact of Hopscotch on: the child's growth and development; their relationship with parents and the family; their place in the wider community. All names have been changed to preserve anonymity.

7.2 Case study 1

Learning to take your turn

The child

Tanya is an eight year old girl who comes from a very needy background. Both parents are registered drug users on a methadone programme, and heavy drinking is also an issue. The family is under close supervision by social work and other agencies. At present there are nine children in the family and the father also has two teenage children from a previous relationship who are also involved with the family. Several of the children have at times been taken into care, and then gradually re-integrated into the family home. The home is very chaotic and the older children are given a lot of responsibility for looking after the younger ones. The children, including Tanya, are given a lot of freedom to play out and about in the local area unsupervised by adults, and often until late into the evening.

The Hopscotch week

Tanya got a lot from the week, both from the structure within the house and from the variety of outdoor activities – for example eating at regular times at the table, conversing with others, learning acceptable table manners. The structure of the day, with regular bed and getting up times; morning and evening hygiene routines, also helped. She took an active part in the activities, enjoying the outdoor play on site as well as the outings.

Impact on her growth and development

Tanya got on well with other members of the group. She enjoyed the company of the adults in the party and was responsive to adult instruction. In many ways she was already fairly independent, as being one of nine children she was used to asserting herself to get attention, but she did learn to take her turn, to share and to give due attention to the needs of the other children.

Impact on her relationship with her parents or carers

This is difficult to assess as there is very little contact and feedback from the parents. Tanya arrived on the day of camp by taxi with no accompanying parent. On return from camp, the home had to be phoned to remind them to send an adult to collect her.

Impact on her place in the wider local community

Since the Hopscotch week Tanya has shown more independence, and has made contact with the project to enrol herself on the summer holiday activity programme. Her relationship with the leader has also improved. In discussion with her class teacher and school learning assistants, however, it would appear that they have not noticed any difference in her school behaviour and relationships either with the adults or with her peers.

7.3 Case study 2

Things you would never dream of

The child

Before attending this trip, Darren (9 years) was very shy with others and only had one or two friends. He was also really close to his mother and had never stayed over with family or friends in his life. Mother was hesitant to allow Darren to attend Hopscotch, and felt that he was likely to withdraw a week before the trip.

The Hopscotch week

On arrival at Hopscotch, Darren was a little teary eyed as reality sunk in, although staff and friends supported him. When it came to eating, he was wary of any type of food he had not tried before, and refused to eat much unless he was comfortable with what it was. Bedtime was very challenging, as this was often when he missed his mum most. During the activities, he was again hesitant. However, he was determined to give everything a go, despite being nervous or upset. By the end of the week, he had attempted everything, tried new foods and become more comfortable with his surroundings.

Impact on his growth and development

Over the week and on returning home Darren's confidence had greatly improved. Although still a little shy, he has got a great relationship with staff and other children, and is willing to give things a go.

Impact on his relationship with her parents or carers

Darren has become more independent, with his mother commenting on the change she has seen. He now helps around the house, gets himself ready in the morning, and has already asked about staying over at a friend's house - all things he would never dream of doing previously.

Impact on his place in the wider local community

Darren is now more confident in interacting with others, and as a result has a larger group of friends. He also attends our project more regularly - and on his own, and has a good relationship with staff and communicates more frequently.

7.4 Case study 3

Healthier

The child

David is seven years old. He has severe social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. He currently attends special education in order to support these needs. He appears to have communication difficulties.

The Hopscotch week

The staff team had reservations about how David would manage, given his age and stage of emotional development. However, he blossomed on holiday, and seemed to enjoy every

minute of the experience. He showed no signs of homesickness and he came over as a happy child.

Impact on his growth and development

David made the most of being able to experience the outdoor activities, and was constantly running round the playpark at the house (even in the rain). Physically, he looked healthier from this experience, and staff believe he lost weight through being able to play outside in a safe environment. He became more biddable, and was more able to form relationships with staff and other children.

Impact on his relationship with her parents or carers

David's parents were delighted that he had the opportunity to go on Hopscotch, as his family circumstances would not have offered this type of experience. His parents also benefited from the respite which allowed them to spend time with their daughter of a similar age.

Impact on his place in the wider local community

Seeing David's vulnerability and lack of awareness of personal safety has given us a greater understanding of the difficulties faced by his parents in trying to access community resources such as playparks and after school provision. He needed close monitoring (1:1 support) while on holiday, as he has a tendency to take flight without warning and with no apparent triggers. He could become aggressive when challenged on this behaviour. In the future we believe that David will need 1:1 support, such as a befriender, to allow greater access to local community provision.

7.5 Case study 4

A completely different boy

The child

John is a lively nine year old boy who has a lot of energy to burn. For a small chap you can always hear his voice, especially in confined spaces! He is a determined boy who looks to develop and improve all the time, but can be easily misled by his peers to misbehave and get himself in to trouble and fights. Like any normal person he just wants to be liked by his peers, but goes about it in the wrong manner at times. He appreciates attention, as he is not used to this.

The Hopscotch week

We took a chance by taking John to Hopscotch, as he was continuously getting into trouble at the youth club and was never lasting the whole two hours. So we prepared for the worst. To our surprise, he was one of the best behaved. He would always offer to help with housekeeping duties and cooking. When the rest of the young people were 'playing up' he would take himself out of those situations and go have a cup of tea and a chat to stay calm because he didn't want to get into trouble. The staff took 'The BFG' book to Hopscotch to use as a tool to keep John calm. Instead of the staff suggesting to him that he read it, he would come and ask for it himself. At times he became 'hyper', but that was expected as it was his first holiday away from home and everyone gets excited participating in new activities and being in new environments. During all the activities he listened very well, did what he was told and, most of all, had fun. These activities gave him the experience of a lifetime.

Impact on his growth and development

Hopscotch helped John's growth and development. For example, in certain situations when his peers were misbehaving, he would take himself away from these situations and do something else because he didn't want to get into trouble. He developed his manners by the end of the week, with 'please' and 'thank you' coming automatically to him. There was a significant improvement in his listening skills, as he either listened first time or only had to be reminded once. This wasn't the case before the Hopscotch week. His relationships with staff developed positively, as they saw him as a completely different boy. This has created the opportunity for the relationship to become permanent. He became more independent as he managed a whole five days away from home.

Impact on his relationship with her parents or carers

Being away from home for this length of time without his mum, created the opportunity for her to miss John, and appreciate the joy of having him as a child. She emphasised that his listening skills had improved, and commented that they don't have to constantly repeat themselves as they used to. She also noticed that John wasn't getting into as much trouble as before he went to Hopscotch.

Impact on his place in the wider local community

John is not getting into as much trouble in the local community now. When he is seen out in the area by staff, he is always polite, calm and smiling - which is great to see.

7.6 Case study 5

Loss and lollipops

The child

Mark, now aged eight, started attending our group one year ago. His mum and dad were both Hep C Positive, and his dad was very poorly and had only several months to live. Mark was extremely withdrawn when he first starting attending and found it hard to cope in a group situation. We provided Mark with emotional support and began pre-bereavement work, supporting him with his father's imminent death. His father died in April this year and it has been a difficult time for the family.

The Hopscotch week

We decided to take Mark on the residential as he needed a bit of respite from all the stresses of his everyday life. He had been looking forward to the holiday. He was quiet on the way up in the mini-bus, as it was his first time away from home. After his first evening at Hopscotch he began to grow in confidence and became more communicative with the staff and his peers. He loved the table football and was constantly asking the staff to take up the challenge of beating him. Mark participated well in all the activities, and his confidence began to grow. He loved the horse riding and talked confidently to the women who ran the stables. He was also able to build up close relationships with his peer group during the week.

Impact on his growth and development

Mark had never been away from home before, and he loved being in the countryside and having the freedom to run about outside in a safe and secure environment. He built up relationships with staff and peers, which helped him grow in confidence. He had a lovely encounter on the residential, when he spoke to one of the girls about his dad, what had

happened, and how he felt. Then they both sat side by side eating their lollypops! Residential holidays are able to facilitate important moments like this.

Impact on his relationship with her parents or carers

Mark had been through an emotional time with his mum and sister, because of his father's illness and subsequent death. I think the holiday supported all the family to have much needed time and space to reflect on their own pain and sorrow. Taking time out allows for families to have a break and then re-build their relationships once again.

Impact on his place in the wider local community

Mark had a week away from the stresses of everyday life. He was able to grow in confidence and self-esteem, and returned to school much happier. The school had been worried about his emotional well-being, but noticed a marked improvement in his attitude and all round development.

7.7 Case study 6

Growing in confidence

The child

Peter is nine years old and lives with his grandmother and two older siblings. They were removed from their mother due to her drug misuse over five years ago, and will never be placed back into her care. The family are still heavily involved with the social work department and other services which provide support to them. Peter is the youngest of the family and the one who has been achieving the most at school. He is a bright boy, but struggles to understand his family circumstances. He is very attached to the family, but is in a constant battle to get attention from the adult figures in his life. He does not take part in any structured activities outside of school, and spends most of his time out at the park or playing in the street with pals. He does not get a lot of opportunities to go away on holidays or even do the things other children would do.

The Hopscotch week

Peter was very attached to the staff during the group work we had leading up to the residential (and was particularly attached to one male worker). It took some time for him to relax and gain confidence to play with rest of the group without having to get reassurance from staff. He thoroughly enjoyed the residential and all the activities. He took part in everything, and it was obvious he was loving being away on holiday and had no worries. He cooperated well in the house, doing what was asked of him, and coped well with new routines.

Impact on his growth and development

Peter developed his confidence in meeting new people in general, and gained a sense of achievement from completing new activities and challenges. He has become more independent in terms of coping better without being with his family, has developed certain life skills (such as looking after himself, and taking part in cooking), and is better able to cope with new routines. His social skills were enhanced, and he communicates better with people and has been able to make new relationships out of his experience.

Impact on his relationship with her parents or carers

Peter is very attached to his family and to his grandmother in particular. He was removed from his mother at an early age, and maybe experiences a sense of anxiety about not knowing if something will happen if he is away from home. Because of this, he was reluctant to come away at first, and his grandmother did not think he would go. This residential gave a much needed respite for his grandmother and also the realisation that Peter is growing up and he can cope with more than what she may have originally thought. It may help the grandmother be more encouraging towards him when tackling new challenges and new activities.

Impact on his place in the wider local community

The confidence that Peter has gained will hopefully help in school in a social capacity with peers while listening and sharing in class. Experiencing new things may help him to be more enthusiastic about trying out new activities in his local community.

7.8 Case study 7

Going swimmingly

The child

Marie is a quiet, thoughtful ten year old girl who can appear to be older than her years. She is a pretty girl and has a very positive self-image. However, she lacks confidence in her ability to tackle unfamiliar things or to deal with unfamiliar situations. She can be strong-willed, and is clearly used to getting her own way and determining her own boundaries

The Hopscotch week

Marie was reluctant to participate in activities to begin with, but as the week went on she became a keen participant and was happy to take part in most things. She missed her familiar routines, for example, at bedtimes and required patient handling to facilitate her co-operation.

Impact on her growth and development

Marie gained increasing confidence in swimming, and succeeded beyond her expectations. Socially she had no difficulty in making new friends. She enjoyed trying new foods, and being involved in meal preparation appeared to support her need for independence and responsibility, but within a collective and co-operative environment.

Impact on her relationship with her parents or carers

Marie missed her mum, and phoned her most evenings, but she did not experience extreme anxiety. She looked forward to returning home and telling her mum about her holiday.

Impact on her place in the wider local community

Marie has recently moved house and started at a new school. She has had a number of disruptions and moves over the years. I believe her experience at Hopscotch and the confidence she has gained will benefit her and help her to settle into the new area.

7.9 Case study 8

Clean teeth and nails

The child

Kirsten's mother left her father following several violent incidents which the girl had seen and overheard. Kirsten is now seven and has two younger brothers. Her mum had a stroke at the age of 16 and has limited mobility down one side of her body. Until recently all three children were on the child protection register due to the risks posed by the father. She has contact with her dad at a contact centre, but he frequently does not turn up. There are limited boundaries in the home, and all the children are keen to get their mum's attention. The mum had moved to a new area in Glasgow in time for the children to start the new term at a new school. Before coming on the Hopscotch holiday the head teacher had called to discuss concerns over the girl's behaviour and presentation.

The Hopscotch week

Kirsten engaged well with other children on the whole. There were some behavioural issues when she felt she was not getting her own way, but these decreased throughout the week. There were some issues at bedtime with regards to settling down and disturbing the other children when they were ready to go to sleep. When I spoke to her about this, she said that it was because she was used to a lot of noise at bedtime. She absolutely loved the activities and thrived in terms of achievement and confidence.

Impact on her growth and development

Kirsten's appearance improved in terms of clean nails and having her hair tied back from her face. She ate really well. We ensured her teeth were brushed morning and night (previously it had emerged in a support session that she had not brushed her teeth for weeks).

Impact on her relationship with her parents or carers

I feel that it was beneficial for them both to have a short break from each other. Kirsten's mum reported an improvement in her behaviour a couple of weeks after the holiday - both at home and in school. Her mum stated that she was better at sharing and fairness after returning from the holiday.

Impact on her place in the wider local community

The school has reported a significant improvement in her behaviour since the holiday, and she won a behaviour award.

7.10 Case study 9

A showcase for you

The child

Beth is six years old and one of seven children. She has lived with severe domestic abuse over a number of years, which led to her being taken out of her parents care for a period of time. She has also had eight moves, and recently moved to a new tenancy after 16 months spent living in our refuge.

The Hopscotch week

Beth engaged positively both with her peers, the workers and in all of the activities she experienced. There had been prior concerns from her family about her ability to sustain being away from home for five days. However, she continued to thrive over the week, and said that she did not want to return home on more than one occasion.

Impact on her growth and development

Beth was given the opportunity to showcase her own identity that has been overshadowed within the family dynamics for some time. There was the opportunity for her to identify her own likes and dislikes, and to realise her potential.

Impact on her relationship with her parents or carers

Beth has been more vocal about her own needs, wishes, and wants, and has found her own identity within the family unit.

Impact on her place in the wider local community

Having recently moved in to a new community, Beth has been confident enough to source, attend and engage positively in local groups/clubs.

7.11 Case study 10

Think for yourself

The child

Robert is an only child who lives with his mother in an area of multiple deprivation. He is nine years old, and is a quiet young person, who likes to attend a variety of activities run by the youth organisation. He does well in school and does not like to have time off.

The Hopscotch week

Throughout the Hopscotch week, Robert was independent, and surprisingly, did not ask for his mother during the stay. He got himself organised without any fuss, and enjoyed the week's adventures.

Impact on his growth and development

The Hopscotch holiday gave Robert space to think for himself and to be with a group of people of his own age. He had the opportunity to choose how he spent his free time, and he chose to spend time in the garden or art room.

Impact on his relationship with her parents or carers

Robert's mother missed him more than he missed her. This was possibly because he had a full timetable, and was with children and adults he knew. He had a strong bond with his mother, and that is still the case today.

Impact on his place in the wider local community

In terms Robert's life at home, he seems more content and eager to participate in local events. The fact that he has received an excellent holiday opportunity and is happy, will have an impact on the local community. Contented children and young people will strive to obtain their goals, and this positive attitude will permeate throughout the community as a whole.

7.12 Case study 11

Good pictures

The child

Adam is aged seven and a middle child. He has been a carer for his older brother who has learning needs, and for his younger brother who might have ADHD. He is quite independent as his dad used to drink quite heavily, so he was left up to his own devices. Generally, he seemed to be friendly with staff, and was looking forward to the holiday.

The Hopscotch week

At the beginning of the week, Adam got on really well and enjoyed the parks, although he found it difficult to sleep all night. He enjoyed his food, and loved the activities. After getting to know him, I was able to build some trust, and he was able to tell me when he was feeling frightened. We were able to reassure him by staying in his bedroom until 1pm until he fell asleep. Before we gave him his money for the shopping trip, he asked if we had spent his money on drink! He did really well on the activities. At times in the house he would like nothing better than to wind his brothers up in order to get a response. There did not seem to be any way to take him back from this.

Impact on his growth and development

I think that the main thing that changed for Adam was that he was able to get himself to sleep after months of not sleeping properly (his brothers said he found it difficult to get to sleep). By the third night he was able to see 'good pictures' rather than 'bad pictures'. He managed this by either counting sheep or by a little trick concentrating on two raised fingers to help him relax. I think this will help his growth and development. He has learned to be more independent in a good way, and built up relationships with staff who can provide help in the future should he need it.

Impact on his relationship with her parents or carers

I am unsure, as we have not really seen Adam since the Hopscotch holiday. Dad was glad to see him and, hopefully, has been having more contact with mum as she has a new partner and was going to be having a new baby sister.

Impact on his place in the wider local community

Adam has made friends with other young people in the area, so hopefully this will continue. The staff now know the family, so will make sure they get invited to come along to the playscheme and other activities.

7.13 Case study 12

Becoming a leader

The child

Nicole is ten, and lives a very hectic life doing her own thing with no structure or routine to her life. School attendance is poor, but she does attend project activities at least twice a week and has a positive relationship with staff.

The Hopscotch week

At the beginning of the week Nicole was trying to be in charge, and being disruptive in order to get attention. As the week progressed she did this less, and became more of a leader. For example, if other children started to be disruptive, she would remind them that they might miss out on activities. Also she made sure that mud wasn't walked through the house after a forest walk, as she really enjoyed this activity.

Impact on her growth and development

Although Nicole did miss home, she was able to enjoy the time away at Hopscotch. There isn't a lot of structure or attention within her home, and she responded to the routine of eating together and doing activities together in a positive way.

Impact on her relationship with her parents or carers

It's very difficult to comment, as Nicole's parents engaged with workers the least.

Impact on her place in the wider local community

This has been positive as Nicole has a stronger link into a community organisation that she already knew through activities such as swimming. She has a positive relationship with all the project staff.

7.14 Case study 13

Eye contact

The child

Ian is seven years old and comes from an underprivileged chaotic background. He has been bullied at school, and has changed school three times in the past five years.

The Hopscotch week

Ian has undiagnosed additional needs, and during the Hopscotch holiday this was very apparent. He struggled to follow instructions, for example staying seated when eating breakfast. However, although there were challenging moments, there were more positive ones to outweigh the negatives.

Impact on his growth and development

Ian is now more receptive to adults when they are communicating with him. This is a major step forward, as he didn't make eye-contact or verbal contact with staff before. He has been able to make lasting friendships, which is important because he struggled with this before, and he often felt that nobody liked him. He is no longer seen as the 'class clown', as this was his way of getting people to like him. He is more confident in his own character and personality.

Impact on his relationship with her parents or carers

Ian's mother has commented to staff about the change in him since he's been back. She notes that he is more responsive to her, and does what he is asked, whereas before he wouldn't have.

Impact on his place in the wider local community

Ian is a more positive child overall, and tries his best at everything. Moreover, he is more confident, and this shows in every aspect of his life.

7.15 Case study 14

A confident stride

The child

Adele is a shy, quiet child, who does not force herself in any way,

The Hopscotch week

Adele loved the whole trip, and was very keen to be involved with everything that was on offer.

Impact on her growth and development

In my opinion, Adele blossomed in the week. She became very chatty with all staff. She challenged herself more – specifically in the canoeing.

Impact on her relationship with her parents or carers

Adele had never been away from her parents before, so this was a test for both her and them. Both missed each other immensely, but coped well.

Impact on her place in the wider local community

I now see Adele walking to school with a more confident stride, and she is keen to be involved with much more within our project.

8. Discussion

Different organisations, different children

- 8.1 The groups visiting Hopscotch in 2011 tended to fall into one of two categories. Firstly, there were those specialist organisations which worked with highly vulnerable children with complex needs, such as victims of domestic violence, those living with family substance abuse, or where the children had substantial caring responsibilities. Secondly, there were organisations offering a more universal type of community based provision, working in local areas which were often seen as 'deprived'.
- 8.2 Two thirds of the groups cited 'economic' disadvantage as the main reason for selecting children, with over half also saying that family drug and alcohol use or social isolation were key reasons. Over a third gave the fact that the children were young carers as the reason, with a quarter mentioning domestic violence. Clearly, many of these children faced significant obstacles in their lives. In anyone's terms, the odds were stacked against them. The research uncovered many instances where vulnerable children were struggling to make headway in family situations which were very far from ideal.
- 8.3 At the same time, there were children attending a Hopscotch respite break for whom relative poverty was the main reason for their participation. In other regards, they appeared to benefit from stable family backgrounds.
- 8.4 Hopscotch seemed to be able to address the needs of children in both types of group.

The absence of negative comment

- 8.5 It was striking that the overwhelming majority of the research evidence was positive.
- 8.6 This applied to the experience of the Hopscotch week itself. The average rating of Ardvullin as a centre was 9.6 (out of 10). For the organised activities outside Ardvullin, it was 8.7, and for the activities within Ardvullin, it was 8.8. Children and staff comments tended to reinforce this.
- 8.7 The evidence from staff of immediate and longer term positive outcomes for children was also significant. In general terms, while there were a few areas of criticism (and some negative comments about the weather!), the positive eclipsed the negative.
- 8.8 A small number of groups experienced serious difficulties during the week, for example having to send children home as a result of bad behaviour. Even in these cases, the overall effect of the week was seen in a positive light.

The impact on the child and the family

Home and away

8.9 Hopscotch was the first time that most of the children had been away without their parents or family. It was therefore a potentially momentous occasion, and provided fertile ground for seeding new ideas and experiences. For most children this was their first experience of an extended 'sleepover' with their peers. The scope this offered to take advantage of significant new opportunities was recognised by children, parents and staff alike.

Play, space, and freedom

8.10 Many children spoke of the contrast between Hopscotch and their home environment. There was a pervading sense of freedom that was engendered by the rural setting of Ardvullin. This, in turn, allowed the children the space and time to engage in free play which contrasted sharply with what they would be doing at home. For some, the freedom of the wild places became a highly memorable aspect of the week away.

Being a child

8.11 A commonly expressed aspiration – from both parents and staff – was that the Hopscotch participants would find the time and space to 'just be children'. In the event, the opportunity for play did enable the children to re-capture something of what had sometimes been either lost or had never been found. This was often in marked contrast to the home, school, or community environment where some were exposed to negative social pressure, stigma, or bullying.

The power of friendship

8.12 There were many examples of where children had forged new friendships as well as consolidating existing ones. Peer support through friendship emerged as a theme in the research, with children offering practical support when undertaking outdoor activities, being emotionally supportive during times of stress, and generally enjoying the camaraderie of the residential experience.

A shared space

8.13 During their five days at Hopscotch, children encountered a relatively intense form of collective living. This included coming to terms with the demands of domestic duties, participating in group meals, sharing sleeping accommodation, and reaching group consensus on what activities to do. The routine that most groups adopted tended to pay dividends especially for children from more chaotic households. Improvements in social behaviour were also noticeable.

Confidence through activities

8.14 Much of the time at Hopscotch was spent in organised activities. These served to provide a shape to the day, a means of building confidence, an opportunity to develop a sense of teamwork, and a chance to explore the environment, as well as

serving as an introduction to a wide range of new sports and hobbies. They were also the means by which children could overcome fears and challenges. It was no coincidence that it was the activities that were most remembered and commented on by both this year's and previous years' participants.

A mobile-free world

8.15 Ardvullin was characterised by not having most of the things that conventionally occupy the landscape of Scottish children in the 21st century – TV, DVD player, game consoles, and above all the mobile phone. While a few regretted this, the majority were surprised by how little they missed them. This was backed up by staff and parents. It was as if the vacuum created by the lack of 'technology' was more than adequately filled by a powerful blend of enthralling activities and new experiences.

A time to shine

8.16 For many of the children coming on a Hopscotch respite break, they had rarely, if ever, had a chance to excel at anything. Some came from large families where the spotlight rarely fell on them, some had persistently 'failed' at school, some were just shy. Because of the relatively high level of adult support available, Hopscotch offered an opportunity for children to not only try something out for the first time, but in some cases to discover that they were actually good at it.

Glowing faces and gleaming teeth

8.17 Several groups commented on the improvements in physical health of the children in the course of the week. While there were strict limitations on what could be achieved in five days, the combined effect of regular meals, outdoor activities, relatively stable sleeping patterns, and supervised personal hygiene paid dividends.

Respite for all

8.18 For some children, there was a clear intention that Hopscotch would provide a respite break – usually where the child was a young carer or from a particularly troubled family environment. In certain circumstances this was true also in reverse, with the parent benefiting from time without the child and the opportunity to spend time with other siblings.

Role modelling

8.19 The power of positive role modelling was highlighted by staff and parents. Without anyone intentionally setting themselves up as someone to emulate, it was clear that simply having adults performing caring and responsible roles was of value to the children. In some cases, it was especially important to have positive male role models around, for example for children where male domestic violence had been normative behaviour in the family.

Down from the mountain

8.20 The Hopscotch experience was described by several children as the 'best thing they had ever done'. For many others it clearly represented a highly memorable episode. As a significant point in these young lives, Hopscotch seemed also to offer a kind of

turning point or a point of departure. At a practical level, new activities and experiences were tried out, and at a deeper level, new friendships were established and new insights gained. Staff and parents recounted examples of change that were attributable, in part, to the (in some cases, literal) 'mountain top' experience of Hopscotch. Sometimes these provided the stimulus to changed behaviour on return home from the residential.

Treasured memories to savour

- 8.21 There was evidence that Hopscotch engendered strong memories in recent and past participants. Children spoke very fondly of the experience, and staff and parents recounted the children's enthusiastic recall of events. Memories were enshrined in photos, DVDs and scrapbooks. For children for whom there was a greater contrast between life at Hopscotch and life at home, the memories seemed to provide a bulwark against some of the negativity by providing a 'well' of positivity from which to draw.

The impact on the participating organisations

Part of the continuum of care

- 8.22 Many staff recounted how the Hopscotch experience was part of a 'continuum' of support that began before the residential, and continued long after it. This was true for both community based projects which offered universal access services, and for specialist agencies which worked with referrals. The significant dimension was that the residential was part of a process, which was informed by and informed a wider set of interventions. In particular, staff spoke of the informal 'needs assessment' function that Hopscotch provided, allowing them to see children in a physically different environment and an emotionally new light. Other staff described the role that the Hopscotch experience played in assisting children at key transition points such as the move from primary to secondary school. Where Hopscotch was a 'one-off' experience, there was less evidence of lasting impact.

A link to parents and communities

- 8.23 The Hopscotch experience was a key method of establishing relationships and credibility with parents and the local community more generally. Several organisations gave examples of how contact made with parents as part of the preparations for the residential week had led to the formation of relationships with parents which might otherwise have never come about. For organisations where Hopscotch was a regular feature of the organisational landscape, staff talked about how it had helped to establish their credibility with the community as a provider of good quality residential experiences.

Staff and team development

- 8.24 Most organisations spoke of how the Hopscotch week was an exhausting but immensely rewarding time for staff. The drain on energy and patience were invariably outweighed by the effect that the week had in helping to build up the staff team involved. The intensive and shared experience of working together for five days

usually helped to create bonds which were taken back into the organisation's mainstream work. Some organisations had evolved a 'Hopscotch' team that came back year after year. The week was also seen by some managers as a staff development tool, providing opportunities for staff to 'project manage' the residential process from preparation through to delivery, and for fostering links with parents and the community. There were some organisations which consciously used the residential as a junior leadership training opportunity, allowing young volunteers, for example, to begin to take on leadership roles.

A partnership with Hopscotch

- 8.25 Most of the organisations attending Hopscotch in 2011 had a relatively well established relationship with the charity, with over half of them having been at least three times before. Several spoke in terms of a partnership between themselves and Hopscotch. In some cases the name 'Hopscotch' itself had become practically synonymous with their own residential programme. A common theme was the value placed by organisations on the fact that the residential week was, in effect, fully funded, with only minor costs being borne by the organisation itself. Without this level of financial support, and especially in the current financial climate, several organisations were clear that they would not be able to offer a similar quality of residential experience for the children with whom they worked.

A 'fit' with current policy and research?

- 8.26 The priority for Hopscotch and for the organisations taking part in its programme was not primarily to demonstrate compliance with current government policy or to validate recent research findings. What was important for them was that the children taking part had a really good holiday.
- 8.27 That said, it is worth commenting that the research project has shed light on how Hopscotch could make a contribution to current policy debates about children and their welfare. As an organisation which engages with some of the most vulnerable children, and provides the setting for achieving a number of positive outcomes with them, it has insights to inform the policy debate in several areas. These include: the residential experience as part of the 'Getting it right for every child and young person' assessment process; the role of the residential experience in outdoor learning; the residential experience and 'free play' in early intervention.
- 8.28 This has potential implications for Hopscotch as an organisation as well as for the organisations and groups which take part in its programme. How can it legitimately engage in the policy and research debate without compromising its integrity and independence? As public funding becomes increasingly tight, the ability to demonstrate to funders – public and private – that Hopscotch 'fits' current public policy priorities is likely to become increasingly important.

9. Conclusions

Impact on children

- 9.1 There is evidence that the Hopscotch experience impacts on children in two ways.
- 9.2 Firstly, it has an intrinsic value for all children who take part by allowing them time and space to experience the freedom and pleasure of childhood, and by introducing them to the excitement and inspiration of 'wild places'. Guided and facilitated by supportive adults, this has the effect of building the children's confidence, fostering their independence, enabling positive relationships with their peers to be developed, and creating a store of treasured memories. It also impacts positively on their physical health.
- 9.3 Secondly, it can perform an important function as part of a longer term 'therapeutic' process. This is evidenced particularly with children living in vulnerable or challenging family situations. In these cases, Hopscotch provides a setting for offering significant respite, for informally assessing children's needs, and for strengthening relationships with key adults. These functions are often performed in the context of children discovering and demonstrating gifts and talents which were previously hidden. For some, the week can be a significant 'turning point' in their lives.
- 9.4 In either case, the impact is greatest when the residential experience forms part of a 'continuum of care', where the host organisation works with the children in the run up to the week away, and in the weeks and months that follow.

Impact on families

- 9.5 Most families experience the impact of the Hopscotch week through the benefits gained by their children - principally greater self confidence and sense of independence.
- 9.6 For families where there are significant challenges or emotional turbulence, the Hopscotch week can act as a period of respite for both the child and the family.

Impact on participating organisations

- 9.7 For many organisations taking part in the Hopscotch programme, the week away is a high point in the year. It provides an opportunity to broaden the range of provision on offer to children, to develop the skills and competencies of individual staff members, and to strengthen bonds and working relationships within staff teams. It also creates a platform for developing relationships with parents and the local community.
- 9.8 The greatest impact is experienced by organisations when the residential is part of a planned programme of support and interventions, because this is when the greatest impact is experienced by children.

- 9.9 In the current economic climate, where activities such as residentials may be seen as 'pleasant but peripheral', a disproportionately high value is placed on the Hopscotch respite break by organisations who would otherwise be unable to afford a week away.

Impact on Hopscotch

- 9.10 There is immense goodwill and gratitude towards Hopscotch as a charity, especially towards its staff and their role in delivering an effective, challenging, and enjoyable programme. There is scope to capitalise on this in order to build the capacity of the organisation. Participating groups could help provide the 'person power' for short life working groups for particular tasks, for fundraising projects, and for PR and communications. They could also provide a source of volunteers or 'interns' to work on a more extended basis at the office or at Ardvullin.
- 9.11 Hopscotch should also 'not be shy' in publicising its contribution to children's work in Scotland – potentially contributing to policy and practice debate about early intervention, play, outdoor learning, and 'Getting it right for every child and young person' more generally.

Appendices

Groups participating in Hopscotch 2011 programme

The BIG Project
Circle Lanarkshire
Clovenstone Community Centre
Crossroads Youth and Community Association
Drylaw Neighbourhood Centre
East Dunbartonshire Women's Aid
Edinburgh Young Carers
Fersands and Fountain Community Project
Fife Women's Aid
Glasgow Women's Aid
Glenboig Neighbourhood Centre
Haldane Youth Project
Hunters Hall Housing Co-op
Middlefield Community Project
Midlothian Young Carers
Muirhouse Youth Development Group
PEEK
Playbusters
Reidvale Adventure Play Association
Rowanfield School
Sky Project
Spartans Football Academy
Tykes Young Carers
Venchie Young Peoples Project
Waverley Care