



PRE-LOVED SCHOOL UNIFORM PROJECT

End of project report

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- **Introduction and overview**

I would like to give my overview of the project as a way of introducing you to this report. I have been involved with the project for it's start. Initially in an advisory capacity to help Fergus Walker and his team make contacts into the wider community and to offer advice on possible external funding sources if or when that might be needed. The idea behind the project was sound, and based on feedback from parents, schools and support workers.

The initial work involved setting up meetings to look at what was happening and if there was an appetite for taking forward the project. We quickly found allies and supporters for the project and examples of where things were happening and happening well. Helensburgh Baptist Church had a very strong scheme that has been running successfully for many years, and they agreed to support us in talking about what they do as an inspiration to others. We also got a huge amount of support from Mags Todd who works with Young Carers who helped us tag into the schools' network and many great third sector contacts. Both these contacts helped us reach out wide and far to schools throughout the council area to firstly ask what they were doing and to offer support to help them do it better.

Many schools responded positively and had great ideas of what would help them step up their offer, this was mostly small simple things that were easy to provide. Some of the others were interested an inspired by what was happening in Helensburgh and asked for support to help develop something along similar lines but tailored to their area.

Fergus and Lorna worked with the groups to develop and take forward these ideas.

- A similar church-based scheme was supported to develop in Oban and the surrounding area and a new project based around working with a social enterprise was supported in and around the Campbelltown area.
- Cowal and Bute were also interested in developing schemes but based in the schools and there was separate interest from community groups to also develop a scheme.

The first year of the project focused on successfully getting these schemes up and running and responding to individual requests from schools and their small requests for support. It became clear that there was a real need, that was being partially being met but there was an appetite to do more. We relooked at the initial plan for the funding and reallocated the funding to allow additional resources to be used to reach out to areas that has been slow to respond. The funding reallocation was approved and we set about freeing up some of my workload to allow a stronger response to target the work.

The second year of the project allowed us to refocus on two fronts

- revisiting the schools and projects to check on the progress
- and to target the areas where there had been little or no response.

Again, some challenging issues raised that we were able to help support and strengthen what was happening on the ground.

- In some areas this meant face to face meeting in the schools, this led to a clearer understanding of how schools work and the schools understanding of how flexible the funding could be to help meet the needs they were identifying.
- In some places the intervention was around supporting introductions between third sector volunteers and the dedicated teachers to find ways to work together supporting mutually beneficial outcomes they both wanted to achieve.
- With some schools the way we had been communicating had not been successful, individual cold calls and subsequent face to face meetings to explain the project were needed to get the project idea understood and benefits to the school identified.
- With the new resource in staff time, we could also start to attend wider sector meeting to promote what had been happening and what we were still trying to achieve. This publicising and promotion of the project helped get introductions to the right connections within individual schools that help get to areas previously unresponsive.

The new method of connecting with schools raised some interesting issues that had not been understood when envisioning the project and the timeline.

- Working with schools and term timetabling made progress on developing new ideas seem relatively slow and even glacial in comparison to how quickly working on similar ideas with third sector groups is.
- The kind of funding that schools are usually developing these ideas with is really small, raised from coffee morning, sponsorship events or small surpluses in school budgets. This often meant the size of the ideas that were being considered was equally small and often more meaningful changes were not considered as always out of reach in terms of costs.

It became clear that, although they are all schools, they run and function in very different ways. Small schools where everyone is involved in everything, schools where the school secretary is the key driver of these kind of extracurricular activities and other schools where the headmaster is firmly in charge of this kind of development.

Understanding the way that a particular school works is key to being able engage in a meaningful way and develop individual solutions for each school. A common response, that came back from nearly all the schools we were working with, was around poverty and the issues facing parents being able to send their children to school properly equipped was quite well hidden and an issue they were keen to try and support.

While putting in place some simple measures to help there was a belief that was much more widespread than they could easily identify. This led us to try and reach out to other agencies and other third sector groups who work with vulnerable children and families to see if they might be able to identify needs that were previously missed. This did turn out to be the case with some heart-rending stories of the kind of issues some children and families are facing. We were able to offer a lot of small funding amounts that allowed our partners to make a huge difference to the young people's lives.

This meant the project started to use the funding we had allocated in a more meaningful way. A key factor in allocating the funding was to keep the application process simple and flexible. We offered support to the schools and organisations on the ground. Funding them to meet the needs they were able to articulate. Due to the nature of the funding being claimed retrospectively and the end of the claim period looming we decided to make payment upon receipt, which mean we could only offer to refund the expenditure after the fact, this worked well.

The initial emailed request for support based on need could be approved on what was needed and the group were then able to make the purchase in whatever way gave them the best value and claim back the amount that had been spent. It was important to have a process that was flexible and able to refund the expenditure quickly as many groups, including the schools only had access to small pots of funds that were needed for other kinds of spending. We had a lot of positive feedback of how helpful people found the simplicity and speed of processing the requests helped them respond to immediate needs.

The project has achieved many of the goal we envisaged and many more that developed during the project in a positive and meaningful way. It also highlighted that more work is needed to keep this momentum moving forward. Much of the work and schemes that are now running will continue into the future, but the work has shown that with a little support and encouragement much more could be achieved.

The case for a further program of support to build better links into the community, to work closer with other support agencies and third sector groups could bring significant change to young peoples lives. There are also many interesting ideas from schools and young people about how the program could be expanded and those ideas shared between schools. The change would not need major funding but more targeted support in the form of small amounts of funding and staff resource to help focus and develop the existing interest and build on skills that are already in place.

- **Why the project was set up and what has been achieved**

The project was set up to focus on the reuse of good quality preloved school uniform and the recycling of uniforms that are no longer fit for purpose. Working with schools, community groups,

and parent councils across all seven of our main settlements to support Eco-friendly reuse school uniform schemes that cover school uniform for Early Learning Centres, Nurseries Primary and Secondary Schools linked to each school cluster. We investigated and promoted the taking donations of uniform from parents and pupils, ways to launder them and methods of redistributing them as and when they are required.

Whilst the focus of the project to highlight and promote recycling and reuse, we were aware that the project would also raise issues around affordability and instances of poverty, and we put in place measures to help mitigate the cost of the school day.

We had hoped that secondary school pupils would get the opportunity to develop social enterprise opportunities.

Many of the initial thoughts, ideas and ambitions for the project have been achieved. We have been acutely aware of the limited length of this funding and were keen to not create dependencies that would leave a gap when the project finished and were keen to support interventions that offered a chance of sustainability and legacy after the project concluded.

The project has reached out to all schools in Argyll and Bute with most now running some version of a pre-loved school uniform project that is self-sustaining and will continue to exist and serve the needs of parents and pupils going forward.

It was clear from the start the one size would not fit all schools, but there were many examples of great practice that have been highlighted and adapted to meet local needs. New links with third sector groups and schools have been made and continue to develop. Equipment and resources provided have allowed schools to run their own schemes better and to offer additional support that would have been much more difficult to get off the ground without the intervention. The project has facilitated the exchange of ideas between schools and external groups further supporting the sustainability of the schemes.

- **Detail of initial brief**

Setup costs of £5,000 per area was met by the Council however there was no longer term funding available to sustain such a project. Funding of £70,000 per annum, £140,000 in total was secured to help to sustain the project for the medium term until March 2025. We envisaged this money would be split with £10,000 provided in each area to create employment opportunities within the community groups supporting the project and help to develop social entrepreneurship within schools.

The project was seeking to contribute to Scotland's mission to reach net zero emissions by 2045. It was also seeking to support families to reduce the cost of the school day, thereby assisting them in reducing clothing costs and alleviating poverty at the same time.

It had been hoped that schools and pupils would be able to develop projects working with social enterprise and entrepreneurship creating jobs opportunities and retaining skills of young people in our area.

We had set initial targets around numbers of people supported to gain employment and numbers of people in employment, including self-employment, following the support. We did have some successes around these outputs, but the numbers of people supported to gain and in employment are fewer than initially envisaged.

The project first envisaged that there would be a need to employ people to manage and run some of the recycling ideas we envisaged. As the project grew and evolved this only happened in one area involving a local social enterprise. We created 1 new post and supported the retention of two other. We originally had created a further 2 part-time posts for a second social enterprise but unfortunately that business was not viable, and the tasks were brought in house with the original social enterprise. This allowed them to secure the employment of two existing posts within the organisation. We have supported their efforts to develop and build a sustainable business model that allows these positions to be retained going forward.

All the other areas where we developed similar schemes have been staffed by volunteers and delivered by third sector organisations. Two areas are managed by church groups recruiting new volunteers to help manage the expanded volunteering roles created by the project.

Two more are managed by extension projects tied to local food banks. This has led to a recruitment of and an increase in numbers of volunteers with these organisations. The projects involvement has also supported an increase in volunteers through engaging with parent councils who are supporting imaginative and innovative ways to promote the re-use project such as pop-up shops during the summer break, swap shop days at the end of term and young enterprise upcycling projects for prom dresses /end of year school dance wear.

It would be fair to claim that the project has created, more than an additional 16 volunteer positions through the work of the project. These are not full time but need a substantial commitment from volunteers on a regular basis and especially at peak times throughout the year.

- **How the brief changed and developed based on need**

Over the course of the project it became evident that there were a wide variety of local responses to recycling school uniform some had a simple lost property storage bin that was supplemented by school funds to help individual pupils, others had a long running scheme delivered by a local group that match donations to need and served a wide area covering many schools.

We initially reached out to schools highlighting good practice and showing examples that people could learn from. We offered funding to support the development of anything that would allow

schools to develop and expand what was already in place or add to their current offer. This approach was successful, with many schools keen and interested to do more, schools were thankful for the support to make it happen.

It quickly became apparent that schools were not interested in developing a one size fits all solution and were looking for a bespoke set up, tailored to their individual circumstances. We collected examples of good ideas and tried to arrange meetings with the individual teachers that supported this work in school and offer support to develop the ideas they were interested in. This was successful and the attention to individual needs was welcomed and taken forward allowing schools to grow sustainable projects they felt were within their ability to manage.

The financial asks were relatively small, and it was more about highlighting good practice and innovative ideas, most needed only a small amount of funding support to enhance what there were already doing.

- **End of first year successes and gaps plan to take the project forward and meet the gaps**

Towards the end of the first year, we had some notable successes but were noticing gaps in take up, by area and by school size. Schools in Mid Argyll had been slow to respond, and we were finding difficulty in pinning down the right person in individual schools. There was also a lack of uptake from the small very rural and island schools.

Noticing these gaps in our ability to reach out successfully we looked at ways to intensify contact with these areas. The current staffing /administration of the scheme did not have enough resource to step up the program of contacting schools. We looked at the budget allocation and redirected the budget to allow up to divert some staffing for other teams to take forward this more intense contact with the harder to engage with schools. An agreement to divert some existing staff resources was agreed and put in place. This allowed us to spend time visiting individual schools, and to reach out to third sector groups as well as revisit existing arrangement checking in on their progress to date.

- **Final year of project**

The final year of the project had a slow start as it became difficult to free up the staff resources we had anticipated would be needed. The term time nature of the school year was difficult to manage and lots of lessons were learned about identifying windows of time in school programs when it is best to reach out. The start of new terms are to be avoided as schools are pushed to allocate resources while they manage the new intake and change of years. There is more time towards the end of term, but you are then on the countdown to break up, so lots of issues to manage when reaching out.

The new set up did allow for more time with individual schools and it became evident that face to face meeting in the schools were a much better way to get positive movement forward, MS Teams meetings were difficult for teacher to commit to attend as their time in school time tabling often had to change at short notice. Turning up allowed a much fuller discussion and gave the teachers flexibility to respond to emergencies and unplanned needs during to visit. It also made it much easier to understand the particular needs of the school and see at first hand some of the issues they were facing. (I had a lot of school dinners to get through, often a good place to sit down and discuss ideas at school lunch supervision).

Face to face discussion brought up many issues that the project was able to offer support with; one school had particular storage issues around their wet weather gear and a simple solution of asking a joiner to build welly storage racks onto the existing coat rails was a fast and cheap solution to their problem and being there allowed us to identify quickly and come up with a bespoke solution that met that school's particular needs that might not have come about without the face to face visit. This also led schools to engage in the project more readily as they quickly saw there were options to help with specific problems, they faced rather than the generic way we had been presenting the project.

We were not able to visit every school, but we were creating a buzz within the school networks, I was surprised how much time it took to get our message across to schools, their grapevine does not spread as quickly as working in the wider third sector and schools' ability to grasp opportunities and make changes is much more cautious.

This way of contacting the schools was bringing forward a wider range of requests and broadening the understanding of school uniform and our flexibility in what could be supported increased the amount and range of request coming forward. This led to us realigning the budget heading to match the kind of requests and needs being identified. We were aware that the poverty issues we envisaged and budget allocations we had made were not being fully taken up and in discussions with the schools we understood that much of this need is hidden and while schools do see instances and are able to offer some support, we might need to find another way to address those hidden needs.

We reached out to agencies and third sector partners who work with families in need and asked if we could offer them any support to meet needs, they have encountered working with the individuals who were facing difficulties with school uniform issues. This support was well received and brought to light a wide variety of needs across the spectrum. This identified a lot of individuals who miss out on existing support offerings. It wasn't a large amount of money, but small amounts of funding support to people was making a huge difference in their lives and the children's ability to attend and engage fully in school in ways that allows them not to feel marginalised or stigmatised.

- **Feedback from schools and third sector groups**

From one of the third sector group running a uniform bank from the village hall after getting a grant for a washer/dryer

"It's full steam ahead on the uniform scheme here. I am hoping to tie in swap sessions with our Repair Cafe bookings, which happen six times a year. I've already got some school parents signed up as helpers."

With some funding to add additional outdoor clothing and footwear

"This proposal will help us reduce barriers for young people accessing school and outdoor learning in Islay High School. We have a current system, using lost property and second-hand waterproofs and wellies that we have acquired over the years, which help us support young people with financial need but also others with additional support needs, caring responsibilities and challenges in their daily life that make it difficult for them to have their own school uniform or outdoor wear. The outdoor wear helps some of our more vulnerable students access whole-school outdoor learning such as our 3-day Learning Adventure and our Eco club, but also courses such as Rural Skills, Construction and John Muir Award."

Our social work colleagues helped identify individuals who had particularly difficult circumstances that needed support

*"S**** is currently living with her Aunt & Uncle due to CSO and is under kinship. Due to S****'s age she is growing quickly out of her old clothes/shoes. To ensure S**** keeps up attendance at school can I please request a small clothing grant."*

"I have a 15-year-old boy who has recently returned to live with his mum. His placement with his dad broke down and he returned to his mum with very little belongings including school clothes. His attendance is currently very poor, and I was hoping to be able to support the family and provide some new clothing for him. Both his mum and her partner are not in employment and in receipt of state benefits."

"My colleague and myself work with a family in Cowal, a 13-year-old girl, an 8-year-old girl, a 6-year-old boy and a 3-year-old girl. They are a single parent family now as their father is in prison. They are often left with no extra money to purchase school uniform, shoes, jackets etc after they have paid for the basic essentials and bills."

Young Carers seem to be a group that has particular issues they tend to hide difficulties at home and don't come forward asking for help because of fear of the consequences, support workers commented

"These items have really helped many of our Young Carers and it has also helped us identify how needed they were. We have identified many more Young Carers who could be supported with some outerwear and school resources"

"This funding has really helped some of our families and has taken off slight pressure from families making these purchases from limited finances."

Schools have commented on particular needs they have seen

"I wanted to bring to your attention the needs of a number of children across our school in terms of their overall presentation and comfort. There are children who are attending school without coats or are seen out in the community without wellies or warm clothing. Additionally, there is a lack of spare clothing for children in case of accidents, particularly in the younger years."

"If we can address these needs to ensure the well-being and dignity of all our students by supplying them with clothing as and when they need that would be amazing."

"I am proposing the establishment of storage space for each class to store spare clothing and necessary items. That is why I requested storage trunks/container. This would reduce the impact of asking for support on the child if access to spare clothing is in the classroom."

"I am writing to you to request funding for a project that will directly support our pupils who are living in deprivation. The purpose of this funding is to provide outdoor and physical education clothing to ensure that all our children, regardless of their personal circumstances, have the opportunity to engage in outdoor learning and physical activities with dignity and confidence."

"We are a very outdoors nursery with the beach and woods on our doorstep, so we require the use of waterproofs all year round. This impacts many of our children as some parents cannot afford them."

We are very much mindful of the cost of the school day and ensuring that we break down financial barriers to education. As a school, our ethos is that all children should have access to vital equipment and resources, no matter financial status and there is 'universal access' to promote equity.

"The clothing requested would support not only curriculum work during the day but extra-curricular sessions in the form of after school clubs and community events- Grounds days/sports etc."

"We often find that our families struggle to supply good quality, effective outdoor wear that keeps children warm, clean and dry. We have a high proportion of families in need in our school, having 67% of our children either qualifying for free school meals, being care experienced or being from larger families."

"Asking parents to supply fit for purpose outdoor wear is a pressure, as is the demand of laundering items when the children return home with muddy clothes. In addition, school providing outdoor wear centrally ensures health and wellbeing of our children as well as their equity."

- **Issues raised lessons learned**

There have been many lessons learnt from working on this project

- **How best to access schools, -**

- *Schools work in a very different way to most other community groups or council departments. Stuck to a ridged timetable that is marked by bell ringing period times and constant changes to*

staffing to manage keeping the education day running to timetable. Their attention is often fleeting for activities not part of the core timetable, not by lack of interest or enthusiasm more due to the structure of the school day. Online meetings and external engagement is much more difficult. Face to face discussions with follow up notes of the meetings seem to have a much better chance to taking ideas forward.

- **How schools function in a different way to groups and organisation out with the school set up –**
 - *It was evident that schools have little engagement with their local community other than through Parent Councils (PC). It might help to have wider representation on the PCs or support for teachers to be involved with third sector groups who have something to offer schools*
- **How a little money can make large changes –**
 - *We initially only needed to meet very small simple requests for funding, schools do have some small locally raised funding they can rely on, but this is not consistent over all schools and often schools with the most need are the least able to raise funding from donations. Having a small central fund that could be manage requests would seem a better way to level the playing field when allocating resources.*
- **How little schools engage with the wider community –**
 - *It is not clear if it's an issue of time or lack of knowledge, but strong partnerships are rare and most engagement seems superficial with both parties not taking advantage of what could be achieved by working together. There is a clear role for experience support workers to help build better partnerships between these sectors.*
- **How little additional funding is being applied for or used to enhance learning –**
 - *As part of the engagement we found there was clearly many misunderstandings of what is available in terms of external funding and what is allowed to be applied for. There was interest in taking up some of the licenced resources that are available, but little take up of the opportunity, conversely schools were indicating the lack of funds that prevent them from taking forward ideas and initiatives they would like to pursue. There is a clear opportunity to promote, with some additional support, the development of funding applications directly from schools and through Parent Councils. Many of the ideas schools had indicated an interest in, were needing relatively small funding awards to make big changes for the schools involved. A lack of time and knowledge seem to be the main issue.*
- **How difficult it is for outside groups to engage with schools –**
 - *Schools do have a duty of care for the children and the rules that are in place are not easily understood by people outside of the school structure. This often makes it feel like there is resistance/ reluctance to accept offers of support and often to even open lines of communication to find areas of common understanding.*

- **How improvement ideas outside of normal class work depends on the good will of particular teachers to go above and beyond.**
 - *Teachers are under incredible pressure to deliver the curriculum and anything outwith seems to have to be on a voluntary basis, while understandable this view could be a little short sighted as investment in extra circular activities does often lead to improvements on more core activities.*
- **How much hidden poverty is out there –**
 - *It was clear from the project that once we reached out to partners to help identify needs many more heart-rending requests came forward showing how many young people were struggling against terrible odds to attend and feel they could fit in at school.*
 - *Tales of young carers who are scared to come forward about how they struggle because of worries that might force a change at home that might break up the family unit.*
 - *Single parents who are going through relationship break downs that make them resistant to apply for support in case this might affect custody negotiations.*
 - *Young people who have had a sequence of unfortunate events happen to the living circumstances that leave them with little if any financial support.*
 - *These and many more instances indicate the need for some easily accessed funding to offer support in times of great need. It was clear this fund should be available widely, as many of the children in need are quite adept at hiding those needs from teachers and their peers.*
- **When looking at support that is already in place lots of people fall through the gaps.**
 - *It was clear from the number and kinds of requests that were made there are needs that are not being met. It would be helpful to investigate if there are changes that could be made to existing funding opportunities and their application requirements that might meet some of the requests identified, conversely it is clear there is a level of need that needs funded and there could be opportunities to make a case for external funding to meet those needs.*
- **How much change even small amounts of funding can make –**
 - *A lot of poverty experienced by children and young people is hidden from school and teachers that can be easily missed or misunderstood due to worries about stigma or consequences of coming forward.*
- **How isolated schools are from each other,**
 - *There seemed to be more signs of competition rather than cooperation (issues of school reputation often being seen as more important than asking for help/ being seen as needing support)*

- **Feedback from schools**

A call round to all schools involved with the project was undertaken at the end of the project. We have listed some of the responses to aid understanding of how the project has been received.

Three key concerns came up multiple times in the discussions respondents highlighted,

- **Hidden Poverty:** People felt there is significant hidden poverty in areas that are perceived as affluent. There was a general understanding that Schools need to support parents in asking for help with this issue. There were a variety of suggestions of how this might be supported that would reduce issues of stigma and preserve dignity.
- **Outdoor Clothing:** A major gap exists in the provision of outdoor clothing, the curriculum pushes for more outdoor learning, but generally this expense falls back on parents. Schools have limited funding options such as using Pupil Equity Funding monies this is not a viable solution, and many parents will continue to struggle with providing suitable outdoor ware.
- **Uniform Grants and Pre-Loved Items:** Schools acknowledge the school uniform grants but feedback showed that this is helpful but for many not enough to meet their ongoing needs. The development of the pre-loved uniform schemes do help make those grant go further, but people felt there is a need for some intervention/ support in addition to uniform grants and pre-loved items, targeting parents on low incomes.

Respondents indicated the Pre-Loved School Uniform project has been beneficial in aiding parents in need to access pre-loved uniforms, especially where resources were sought to support general uniform schemes. Special thanks was highlighted for the support given to helping establish reuse of outdoor clothing schemes with primary and younger children for outdoor learning. Teachers reported that having appropriate clothing readily available made it easier to conduct outdoor lessons.

Some of the benefits of the project were repeated on multiple calls. With three benefits commonly expressed.

- **Ease of Outdoor Learning:** Schools appreciated having a stock of outdoor clothing on-site, which enabled a longer, more enriched learning experience. It also helped prepare learners better for outdoor activities.
- **Support for Parents:** The project took pressure off parents by providing funding for necessary clothing, which complemented funds from Pupil Equity Funding used to buy new clothing and shoes.
- **Inclusivity:** The project supported all pupils to participate in outdoor activities without drama, ensuring that children were adequately clothed for outdoor education classes.

Other feedback highlighted.

- The wealth of current school good practice in recycling and uniform re-use across the whole of Argyll and Bute.
- That the project has brought focus on and supported the existing Uniform Recycling schemes run by the community for and with their local schools.
- The project has made it easier for schools to facilitate outdoor activities, which is especially beneficial for children moving here from urban areas (un-used to outdoor activities).
- It supports many families experiencing hidden poverty, providing much-needed assistance appreciated by parents. The provision of outdoor wear has enabled all children to participate in activities without worrying about appropriate clothing, enhancing their focus on learning.

Overall, it was felt the project has made a substantial positive impact on the school community, particularly in supporting outdoor education and addressing hidden poverty.

• Recommendations

There is a series of recommendation that have come from this report. The recommendations report will be taken forward and actioned by Revenue and Benefits Officers and progress will be reported in due course.

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Funded by
UK Government