

Looked After Children

Using Bank Staff for Preventative Work

Argyll and Bute Council

Contact for Enquiries

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Argyll and Bute utilised existing resources to keep looked after children in the community. By involving bank staff in intervention and preventative work the number of looked after children have dropped and Argyll & Bute now do less recruitment of staff in this area.

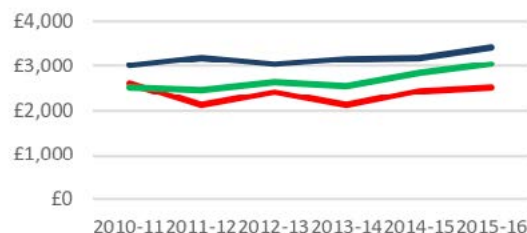
Background

Local authorities have a responsibility to provide support to vulnerable young people, known as 'looked after children'. In recent years the case has been clearly made for early intervention to deliver the best outcomes for children and young people. Being a rural council with limited resources Argyll & Bute had to think outside the box to prevent children from becoming looked after.

The Gross Cost of "Children Looked After" in a Community Setting per Child per Week



The Gross Cost of "Children Looked After" in Residential Based Services per Child per Week



Key Activities

The first step was to set up a consultation with the manager of children's house to develop an early intervention preventative model.

- Have a number of bank staff who are readily available on standby.

- Depending on issue would seek to draw in additional workers for example, young person in through care exiting formal care.
- Made the support part more robust with extra staff enabling provide bespoke support.
- Used staff between 10pm and 3am to alleviate use of police resources to look after child.
- Workers respond to police calls enabling discussion with child to try and prevent in future.
- If crisis i.e family dispute, put in a worker to take the child out for a few hours in order to keep them at home in the long term and alleviate disputes.
- Have invited staff to be part of a child's plan in some situations.

Benefits and Impact

As a result of the early intervention model Argyll & Bute do far less recruitment and have also permanently employed some of the bank staff. The number of children in care in Helensburgh has also dropped. Further benefits include;

- Staff role changed to work nights and do 5 days over seven.
- Alternative to care worker that works in the high school to touch base with children, help take to school etc. Could also use bank staff for this.
- Example of a high offending young person: Asked what would make a difference in his behavior. The young offender expressed that he would like more time with his mum. The Council were able to put some money (£10/20) in to let them spend some time together. As a result the child did not get taken into care and has not been charged in almost a year.

Learning

- A number of bank staff have now moved on to further education so the council is recruiting again. Argyll & Bute is now including questions about responsiveness and ability to be flexible like bank staff to recruitment process.
- Challenge getting buy in from finance teams as transfer of funds from contact and welfare to repay children house staffing was easy as negotiated from the outset, Children's house reclaims the cost. Got finance on board by selling it that it would reduce the number of children going into care. Need to make savings-stops authority from having to pay for external care etc. Rather than pay money for a placement decided to think about how else to use that money.
- It is important to get management buy in for early intervention. It is not tokenistic and needs to be embedded in the practice.
- Foster care provision are challenging in the area as foster carers don't live in the area the child often lives. Children have

to move from town to country etc. Children's houses are not always full all the time, fostering doesn't work with bigger sibling groups. Need to think outside the box.

- There are risks in putting to the side the concept of a child being away from family occasionally but in serious cases children are placed. Are able to return to family sooner now due to the extra bank workers.
- The initiative is done in good will - high quality, flexible and hardworking staff.
- The initiative has worked well as A&B is a rural area, smaller with less external services.