

# Aberlour

Championing the Right to Family Support

Briefing for MSPs

13<sup>th</sup> January 2022



# Championing the Right to Family Support

## Scottish Parliamentary Debate

### Key Messages

1. The UNCRC insists that children and their families have a right to help and support when they need it – guaranteeing holistic family support for all families who need extra help is the best way to fulfil that right.
2. Scotland must **#KeepThePromise** and prioritise the resourcing, development and delivery of universally accessible holistic family support – including practical, emotional and financial support – for all families in Scotland who need extra help.
3. The Covid-19 pandemic has created ever greater need amongst many more families across Scotland who need extra help and support – if we don't ensure families can recover from the pandemic, then Scotland won't recover.
4. The provision of holistic family support is crucial in helping to combat the impact of child poverty – ensuring families have an adequate household income is a central element of holistic family support.

### About Aberlour

Aberlour is Scotland's largest, solely Scottish children's charity. We work with vulnerable, disadvantaged and marginalised children, young people and families throughout Scotland, providing services and support in communities around the country. We help to overcome significant challenges, including the impact of drugs and alcohol on family life, growing up in and leaving care, poor mental health, childhood adversity and trauma, living with a disability, and the impact of poverty and disadvantage. We aim to provide help and support at the earliest opportunity to prevent problems becoming intractable or spiralling out of control. We are committed to **#KeepThePromise** and to the incorporation of the UNCRC.

### What is holistic family support?

Holistic, whole family support is an approach to working with families that ensures a combination of practical, emotional and financial support available to all families who need extra help. It is relationship focused, flexible and aims to address the, often multiple, challenges families face in a coherent and connected way that improves family wellbeing. It recognises that families are the experts in their own lives and ensures families can exercise agency over their own care and support. It understands that families' needs will change over time and at times families will need less, albeit consistent, support than at others.

Holistic family support is a vital element of our commitment to early intervention and prevention. It means working with families at home and in the community, getting in early and responding to families' needs before the point of crisis. It is relational, accessible and easy to access – with no wrong door to getting help. It is where agencies and professionals work in partnership across all areas and disciplines, consistent from one local area to another, to provide help and support on families' terms enabling them to thrive.

## A right to family support

Scotland has committed to the incorporation of [the UNCRC](#). The UNCRC insists that children and their families should get the help and support they need so children can grow up at home, and that this is best for all but a small number of children. This provides a legal duty to make sure all families get help and support when needed. For some families this will mean targeted and intensive support. For other families it will be less so.

The UNCRC is clear that it is incumbent on the state to provide parents with the help they need to bring up their children, where they may struggle to do so on their own due to the challenges in their lives. This right to family support must be recognised on an equal footing as children's right to health and education services. With incorporation of the UNCRC our national approach to the provision of family support must reflect that obligation.

Children and young people's human rights realised through incorporation of the UNCRC must be the foundation of any approach to delivering holistic family support consistently for families across Scotland. This means that services must be led and shaped by the experiences of families themselves, ensuring the voices of those who rely on services are elevated and amplified in a way that can influence and determine what support looks like for them.

## #KeepThePromise for families across Scotland

[The Promise](#) received cross party support for its recommendations to be implemented in full. Improving how Scotland cares for its most disadvantaged, vulnerable and marginalised children, young people and families requires transformational change. That begins with making sure families get the help they need to keep families together and to help them to thrive.

The Promise outlined how Scotland must support families to help them stay together:

**“Scotland already has a clear commitment to early intervention and prevention. That commitment is best realised through proper, holistic support for families. There must be a significant upscale in universal family support services”**<sup>1</sup>. The [10 key principles of intensive family support](#) outlined in The Promise offers a clear and coherent guide to what family support should like.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.carereview.scot/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/The-Promise.pdf>

Currently, The Promise is the key policy driver within children and family services. There is a clear and collective commitment and renewed resolve from all those who have a concern for the care and support of children, young people and families to **#KeepThePromise**.

The Promise presents the best opportunity yet to help us get closer to our national ambition of Scotland being the best place in the World to grow up. The provision of holistic, whole family support is a vital part of how we achieve that.

## **Supporting families to recover from Covid-19**

A consistent and effective national response to supporting families who need help and support is a vital part of our national effort as we recover from the impact of Covid-19. Many families needing extra help and support before the pandemic are struggling even more now. For many, the issues and challenges in their lives have intensified and worsened.

There are also many additional families affected by the pandemic needing help and support who have never needed it before. Those who have encountered challenges and experienced adversity as a result of the impact of Covid-19 on their individual or family circumstances. If we don't help families to recover from the pandemic, then Scotland will not recover.

In delivering holistic family support we must also see greater effort towards reaching all families and communities. This must include those who it has been well evidenced have been disproportionately affected and marginalised by the pandemic, such as: BME families; families living with a disability; and families living in poverty.

The commitment by the Scottish Government to a £500m investment in a Whole Family Wellbeing Fund<sup>2</sup> is welcome, as well as the further commitment to 5% of all future health and social care spend to be targeted at whole family support measures. This scale of investment is a good starting point to enable the development and delivery of holistic family support services consistently across Scotland. However, this must be followed up with a commitment to continued investment in what we know – and what families tell us – works, and a move away from and disinvestment in those measures which don't.

## **Tackling child poverty through holistic family support**

More than 1 in 4 children in Scotland are growing up in poverty<sup>3</sup>. Families living in poverty are disproportionately more likely to require additional help and support, often as a result of issues which are a consequence of or exacerbated by the impact of poverty. Tackling child poverty and mitigating the impact of disadvantage for many families must be

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/news/keeping-families-together/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/collections/child-poverty-statistics/>

recognised as a central part of the purpose of family support and a vital part of our ambition to combat and reduce child poverty in Scotland.

Not only through responding to the impact of poverty, but ensuring families have an adequate household income to prevent against families living in poverty, is a vital part of how we better support families. Any offer of holistic family support must include financial support for those families who are struggling to keep their head above water. The doubling of the Scottish Child Payment from £10 to £20 per child per week for low income families will make a huge difference for many, helping to boost family incomes and will lift thousands more children out of poverty. We must continue to use all available levers and mechanisms at our disposal to make sure all families have an adequate income.

However, the impact of poverty on many families is far reaching and many families will continue to need extra help and support to support family wellbeing. At Aberlour, families tell us they are desperate and in despair due to everything they have gone through in the last eighteen months. They are stressed and worried about their finances and about plunging further into debt, and what that means for their children's future. They are worried about their children's mental health and how they will keep up at school. Increasingly, families tell us their children are missing out life experiences, that they don't have adequate clothing, that they aren't sure where the next meal is coming from and they are afraid to put the heating on.

In order to respond appropriately and effectively to such inequalities, family support services need to understand how such inequalities impact upon children and families to begin with. Family support services can play a role not only in mitigating, but also helping to prevent against the, often multiple and intersecting, inequalities faced by vulnerable and disadvantaged children, young people and families. Guaranteeing holistic family support for all families across Scotland who need extra help is the best way we can fulfil the right of families to get the help and support they need and to enable them to thrive.

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