

2022-23 Building Brighter Futures

Welcome from our Chair, David Robb

I have been inspired by our 700 staff and 400 volunteers who are committed to delivering our bold and ambitious Being Brave Strategy (2021-2025).

Despite a challenging economy and the cost of living crisis, our staff have striven to improve the lives of children and families across Scotland who are struggling to cope. They have continued to fight against poverty and discrimination and challenged the government to achieve positive change.

As demand increases so too has the growth in our services and income. I am pleased to report that we are able to support more children, young people and families and reach more diverse communities.

Our strong values of Respect, Integrity, Innovation and Challenge are at the heart of everything we do.

These values and our ethos of standing up for what is right in society are reflected everyday by our Chief Executive, SallyAnn Kelly. I was delighted to see this validated through her OBE, awarded in recognition of her and Aberlour's work to support children and families.

The need for Aberlour however has never been greater and we will not rest on our laurels. We will strive to ensure our organisation is sustainable in order to help build brighter futures for even more disadvantaged children, young people and families throughout Scotland.

A word from our CEO, SallyAnn Kelly OBE

This year has been unprecedented for Aberlour. Life has been nothing short of catastrophic for families trapped in poverty.

Our Board, staff and volunteers have stepped up in the face of the cost-of-living emergency. They have been dedicated and determined to help those children, young people and families who need it most.

In the past year I am proud to report that we have:-

- supported more children and families with 1009 families receiving emergency relief grants through our Urgent Assistance Fund.
- increased our income by 19% enabling us to support more children, young people and families.
- grown our services including opening Cowan Grove – the only Mother and Child Recovery House of its kind in the country - and have been awarded the Guardianship Scotland service which supports trafficked children.
- spoken truth to power using our qualitative research to highlight public debt and influence 10 local authorities to cancel families' school meal debt.
- encouraged greater participation and elevated the voices of our young people.

- supported staff offering hybrid working, improved conditions such as pay and pension contributions, and staff wellbeing sessions.
- been awarded Investors in Diversity accreditation.

Thank you to everyone who has supported us this year. Your continued generosity has allowed us to reach more children and families in Scotland most in need.

Our Services

Mother and Child Recovery House

In January 2021 we welcomed Angela Constance, Minister for Drugs Policy, to officially open our Mother and Child Recovery House at Cowan Grove in Dundee. The only one of its kind in Scotland.

Our house provides a safe, nurturing environment to support mums on their drug and alcohol recovery journey while keeping their young children with them.

We look forward to opening a second house later in 2023, continuing our commitment to building brighter futures for families.

Guardianship Scotland

In January we were thrilled to secure funding to deliver Guardianship Scotland in partnership with the Scottish Refugee Council.

Demand for our Guardianship service for unaccompanied asylum seeking and trafficked children has grown rapidly.

In 2021, 152 children were referred to our Guardianship service. In 2022 the number rose to 343 children an increase of more than 120%.

“Having a guardian is hope first, because when you come to the country you don’t know anything, you don’t know the people and you find a person who can help you... she built my life with me.”

Damso*, young person supported by Guardianship Scotland.

Early Intervention

We know that life can be tough for children. Their mental health and wellbeing can impact the whole family.

The best way to support child and family mental health can be through holistic family support.

In the past year we’ve been proud to open new Early Intervention mental health and wellbeing services in Angus, North Ayrshire and Falkirk.

One of our mums said:

“Having routine and structure has helped make our lives easier. We’re a much happier household for it.”

Disability Services

We won a five year contract to continue our Options Ayrshire service enabling us to help more children and young people with learning disabilities, autism or more complex physical needs.

Our service provides short breaks which gives children a chance to enjoy activities and experiences in a 'home from home' environment and families and carers a break from their caring responsibilities.

We also provide support out of school including school holiday activities as well as advice for parents to be better equipped to provide a safe, loving and consistent family environment for their child.

"A big thanks to all the Aberlour staff for the wonderful care they provide for our son and the on-going support they provide for all of us as a family. We really could not have made it this far without you guys."

Parent – Options Ayrshire

The Promise

We remain committed to making real change to reflect the recommendations included in The Promise and are working on initiatives to improve the experience for children in care.

Making Young People's Voices Heard

In 2022 we established The Promise Young Collaborators Project, funded by The Life Changes Trust.

This gave our care experienced young people the chance to explore the meaning of The Promise and how they can help educate other children and young people about it.

Deciding to focus on the importance of voice, and the right for every child to speak and be heard, they created an animation to inspire young people throughout Scotland.

Safe Loving Homes

Children and young people have a fundamental right to live in safe, loving homes.

We're proud to have led the way in reducing the use of physical restraint on children in their own residential houses.

In partnership with Kibble, we have been working with four other organisations using The Scottish Approach to Service Design framework to focus on how we can all better support children when they are distressed.

We aim to understand children's needs better. We are determined to respond to them in a loving, caring way which does not rely on restrictive practice.

Our desire is to fulfil The Promise's ambition to have a restraint free Scotland.

Reaching More Children and Families

Our business development team had a very successful year with tenders and strategic funding applications. This success is testament to the quality of the services we deliver.

Key achievements include:

We were awarded £2.9m for the **Scottish Government's National Guardianship Tender**.

We were successful in our bid to **Cashback for Communities** to provide **Alternative Routes Cashback** youth justice work in Dumfries and Galloway (£480K).

We secured a £3.4m three-year contract to continue to provide our **Options Ayrshire Disability Service**

We established a new **Tayside Mental Health Service** and secured funding to continue to deliver our **Falkirk Community Health and Wellbeing Service** for children and young people (£267K).

We won a tender to continue **Youthpoint Moray** (£1m) and have launched a new **CORRA** funded substance use service designed in partnership with the young people of **Moray**.

Expanding our Promise work – working in partnership with **Highland Council**.

Speaking Truth to Power

2022/23 has been an important year in the development of Aberlour's policy and influencing work.

We challenged political leaders about issues that cause so much hardship for the families we support.

Working with Professor Morag Treanor of Heriot Watt University we undertook public debt research, including school meal debt, council tax and rent arrears.

Our debt research highlighted the issue of the state 'giving with one hand and taking away with the other'; taking benefit deductions from low-income families for public debts they cannot afford.

Professor Treanor "For too many low-income families their income simply is not enough to enable them to afford the basics for themselves and their children, forcing many into debt just to survive."

On the basis of this we sent an open letter to all 32 Scottish Local Authority Chief Executives asking them to write off over £1m school meal debt. This resulted in 10 councils clearing over £410K of school meal debt, benefitting 13,500 children and families.

This was a huge achievement, bringing relief to struggling families and raising Aberlour's profile nationally.

Because of our campaign:

- The Guardian and Scottish Sun covered our research and published our editorials.
- MSPs asked questions in the Scottish Parliament.
- COSLA (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities) created new national guidance for school meal debt.

- 50 third sector organisations signed a letter drafted by Aberlour and The Robertson Trust asking the Scottish Government to pause public debt collection.
- We also invited key stakeholders to attend a public debt national conversation event hosted by Aberlour in March 2023.

Caroline, a parent supported by Aberlour, said... “Debt is a shadow which is hanging over you... I want to get back to not relying on the state... I will not be on benefits forever.”

Championing Rights, Participation and Voice

We are committed to elevating and amplifying the voices of our children, young people and families.

Here are some of the ways in which we realise these ambitions and commitments.

AbJam

We had our first post-pandemic residential AbJam weekend where 50 children, young people and staff came together to talk, learn and have fun at Dalguise, Perthshire.

From planning to delivery and content, AbJam is all about listening and responding to our young people. AbJam supports everyone involved to express themselves in a way that feels safe to them. It builds young people’s skills and confidence to share their views and use their voices.

Rights Detectives

Our young people have been involved in the **Rights Detectives Project**, led by Together Scotland, to develop a new Human Rights Bill.

The project will help further promote, support and protect the rights of people in Scotland, including children and young people.

UNCRC

The rights for children and young people across Scotland must be realised as a matter of urgency.

We have urged the Scottish Government, along with other children’s organisations, to reintroduce a revised UNCRC bill.

Investors in Diversity

We were proud to achieve the Investors in Diversity accreditation, recognising our commitment to fostering equality, diversity and inclusion in the workplace.

The year-long assessment process included surveys and extensive discussions with staff members. Our staff highlighted the positive impact of our inclusive and innovative working environment, promoting open communication, respect and support for all.

“Aberlour is the best place I have ever worked in regard to feeling comfortable in speaking openly without judgement.” Aberlour staff member

Urgent Assistance Fund

In August 2022 our much-needed Urgent Assistance Fund ran out of money.

We had to turn away new applications for families seeking cash grants to pay for basic necessities such as food, children's clothing, bedding and energy costs.

The cost of living crisis continued to push more families who were just surviving into poverty. And as we headed towards winter the outlook was bleak.

To respond to this crisis we took a holistic approach by:

1. Providing immediate emergency relief for families
2. Linking this to longer-term support to help families out of poverty
3. Challenging government to make changes to improve families' circumstances

We decided to run our first ever "Poverty Relief" TV-led fundraising appeal to raise funds for our Urgent Assistance Fund.

We had a target of **£50,000** but raised a fantastic **£470,248** from public donations and trust funds making this our most successful winter campaign.

Funds from the campaign enabled us to...

Reopen the Urgent Assistance Fund within a week.

Provide cash grants directly to 1009 struggling families throughout Scotland over winter and spring.

Grants paid for...

Essentials and we ensured that **100% of donations** went directly to families by absorbing administration costs.

The Last Word

A struggling single mother with two children received a grant:

"When I got the email saying I'd got £400 I burst out crying, I was a mess, in a good way... thank goodness there are charities out there like Aberlour because what would I have done? I genuinely didn't expect that amount but what a relief, that was amazing."