



# 'How to' Guide

## Parenting Projects

**The keys to life  
Development Fund**



## The Keys to Life Development Fund

In 2015, the Scottish Government funded fourteen innovative projects that aimed to make a positive difference in the lives of people with learning disabilities. They wanted to know what new ideas worked, and which successful ideas could be replicated elsewhere. This document is a practical guide for anyone interested in replicating one of these projects. It tells you what the projects did, their outcomes, how much they cost, and what steps are crucial to their success. These projects were funded under the Parenting theme of The keys to life Development Fund. If you would like to find out more information about parenting then please visit [sclid.org.uk](http://sclid.org.uk) and search for 'commissioned reports'.

## Parenting Projects

There were five projects funded under the Parenting theme. The table below shows the organisation, the project and the contact details for the organisation should you wish to find out any more information from the project directly.

| <b>Organisation</b>                  | <b>Project Name</b>                             | <b>Contact name</b>        | <b>Email address</b>                               |
|--------------------------------------|---|----------------------------|--|
| Aberlour Child Care Trust & NHS Fife | Fife and South Ayrshire Knowledge Exchange      | David Barr<br>Alan Roberts | david.barr@aberlour.org.uk<br>alan.roberts@nhs.net |
| Bright Light                         | Relationship Counselling                        | Julie Hogg Weld            | jhoggweld@cclothian.org.uk                         |
| East Ayrshire Advocacy Services      | Peer Support of Parents                         | Irene Clark                | irene@eaas.org.uk                                  |
| Mellow Parenting                     | Parenting Support and Capacity Building at Home | Bev Read                   | bev.read@firsthand-lothian.org.uk                  |
| Firsthand Lothian                    | Securing the future                             | Rachel Tainsh              | rachel@mellowparenting.org                         |

# East Ayrshire Advocacy Services

## Peer support for parents

East Ayrshire Advocacy Services (EAAS) is a registered charity which provides a free, independent Advocacy Service enabling local people with a range of support needs to be heard.

## What the project did

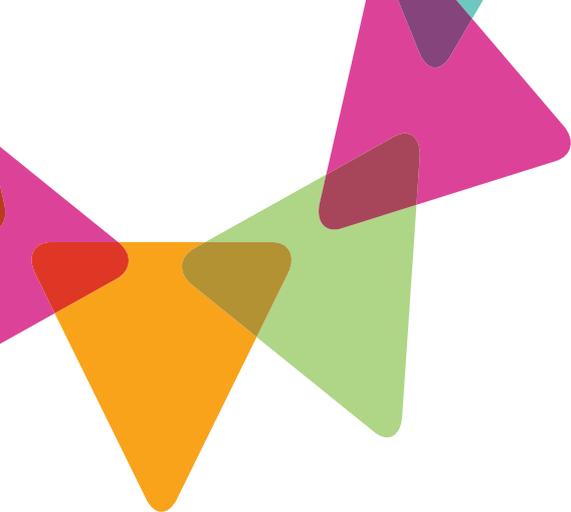
Many parents with learning disabilities find themselves socially isolated. The aim of the project was to establish peer support groups for parents with learning disabilities across East Ayrshire. Many parents with learning disabilities have had poor experiences of being parented themselves. However, peers tend to share similar experiences and are well placed to provide meaningful and trusted support.

## Outcomes from the project

The outcomes achieved by East Ayrshire Advocacy Services were:

- Parents enabled to access a wider information network through their peers
- Improved parent confidence with their children, friends, family and services
- Improved parent skills with their children, friends, family and services
- Improved parent relationships with their children, friends, family and services
- The content of the groups was led by the parents, enabling choice and control.





**“The group has been great, I can talk to people about things, and it’s been good to be able to talk to people.”**

## **What did the project need to succeed?**

The flexibility of staff and the preparation by staff enabled this project to succeed. There was an initial audit of what services were out there in East Ayrshire for parents with learning disabilities so that they knew where the service provision gaps were.

A strong partnership with NHS Ayrshire & Arran and the Health & Social Care Partnership were critical to the success of the project; they were part of the planning before the application was submitted and this gave the project a strong base to work from.

A closed Facebook group was used to great success in this project. This has created a safe space online for the group and allowed the organisation to easily keep in contact with the group.

## **What would they change if they did it again?**

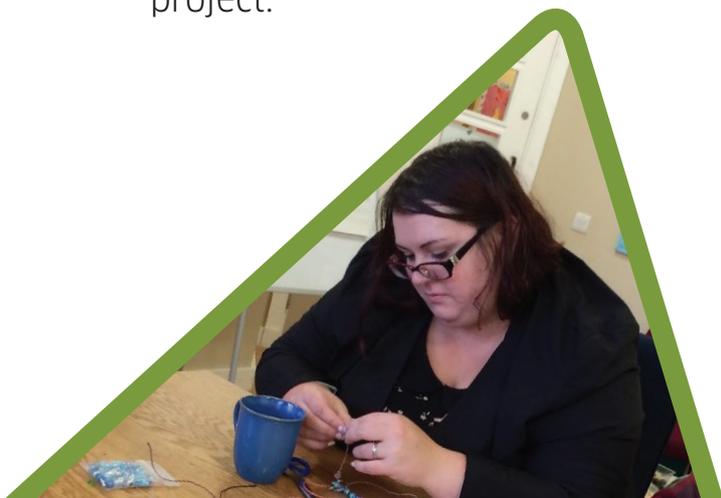
A delay in the funding held up the start of the project and then knocked the project into the school holidays. This made it harder to contact families at the outset. Ideally timings would not have clashed with school holidays.

Childcare has been difficult for the group to obtain and they had to rely on Early Learning Centres to help with this. A bid was put in for a crèche to help alleviate this strain.

The project suffered from staffing issues. They would ensure there was more back up for the post if they did it again.

## Top five recommendations for running a similar project

1. Preparation is key to the success of this type of project; knowing what service provision is already out there and what is missing allows you to hone in on what you provide.
2. The use of a closed Facebook group enabled the group to have a safe space on line and helped foster a sense of community within the group.
3. A strong partnership with local organisations, such as the Health Board and other Council services, allowed for the project to start from a strong base.
4. Flexible and creative staff are needed to gain the trust of the group.
5. Engendering choice and control within the group is vital to running this type of project.



**“I was lost without the group last week, I want it to be on.”**

## Financial costs of the project

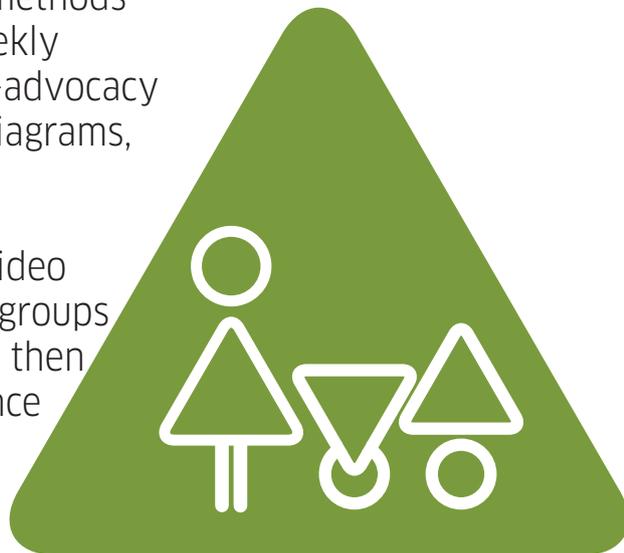
A breakdown of the costs of the project is shown in the table below. The majority of funding was used for staff costs. One new post was created from this funding. There was no additional funding used for this project.

|                    | <b>Total spend</b> |
|--------------------|--------------------|
| Capital costs      | £ -                |
| Office Expenditure | £513.97            |
| Staff costs        | £20,174.52         |
| Volunteer costs    | £-                 |
| Otehr costs        | £3,410.45          |
| <b>Total cost</b>  | <b>£24,098.94</b>  |

## How the outcomes were evidenced

East Ayrshire Advocacy Services used a variety of methods to evidence their outcomes. The groups filled in weekly evaluation forms that tracked their confidence, self-advocacy and health. The evaluation forms included: spider diagrams, a traffic lights system and a smiley face visual aid.

Some of the parents volunteered to take part in a video interview discussing how they found the parenting groups and their experience with advocacy. This video was then shown at East Ayrshire Advocacy Services' conference on Loneliness and Isolation.



# Firsthand Lothian



## Parenting Support and Capacity Building at Home

Firsthand Lothian exists to support disadvantaged families and children with disabilities to achieve their full potential. They work with: families with children with disabilities; disadvantaged, vulnerable and isolated families; and young people with disabilities.

### What the project did

Firsthand Lothian matched a skilled worker with parents with learning disabilities and their families to support them and help them to develop their parenting skills. They wanted to address not just the needs of the parents but also the educational, social, emotional and developmental needs of the children, including children with disabilities.

They worked with five families; eight parents and eleven children in total. They took a holistic approach to working with the families and took their lead from the parents. They built on the skills, attributes and capabilities of each individual parent, using a non-judgemental and strength based approach, and tailored their delivery accordingly. They covered all aspects of family life and parenting and encouraged parents to engage with other services as appropriate to their needs.

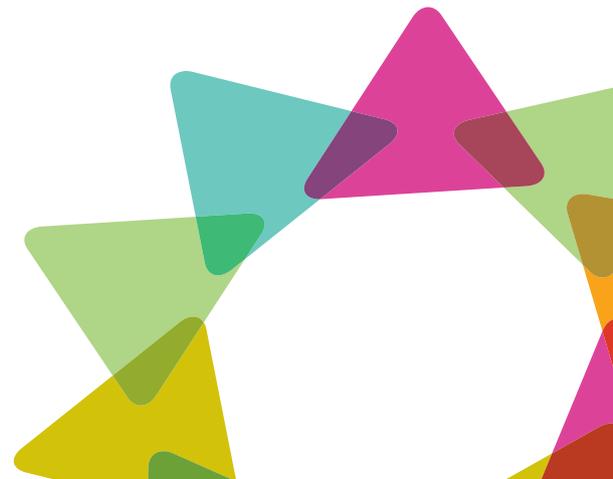
## Outcomes from the project

This flexible support offered to whole families achieved the following outcomes:

- Parents feel more confident in their parenting role, for example using touch with their children
- Parents have improved relationships with their children, for example one set of parents can now have their children visit them in their own home
- Increased unsupervised contact time for two parents
- Parents and children have developed stronger bonds and attachments with each other
- Parents and families feel more connected to their local community
- Reduced number of crisis interventions required by social work department when weekly parenting support provided
- Reduced parental stress levels
- Parents have improved understanding of correspondence from and meetings with other professionals
- Parents are prepared and supported and able to contribute to planning and school meetings.

## Additional impact

- An easyread feedback form was developed and introduced by a Firsthand worker and used by Social Work Assistants with parents for supervised contact sessions
- As a result of the positive outcomes achieved by this project, funding has been secured from social work to enable ongoing support and input for one family for a further six months.





**“I never really used to look at him. But I think my eye contact has got better with him.”**

## **What did the project need to succeed?**

The flexibility of staff members was vital to the success of this project; the ability to fit in with the lifestyles of children, parents and family units made this project possible. This flexibility allowed Firsthand to check in with families every week which helped to reduce issues elsewhere in the lives of the families.

An in-depth local knowledge coupled with a local presence meant that they knew the third sector and what relevant activities, classes and resources were already available. Additionally, strong partnership working with advocacy workers, Local Area Coordinators and local social work services allowed this project to thrive.

As Firsthand were separate from social work, they were able to develop a level of trust in the relationship as the parents realised that they had a single agenda of supporting the family.

## What would they change if they did it again?

Firsthand did not expect the level of contact between parents and their children to be so limited, so they would plan for more support time to allow the parents and children to get to know each other more if they ran this project again. Furthermore, they did not expect the relationship with kinship carers to be so strained. In one case there was a break in the support offered by Firsthand due to objections from kinship carers.

Firsthand would try to approach the role in a more informal fashion, for example by providing support in settings with soft play for the children earlier in the process. This helped to establish Firsthand as being separate from social work.

**“I’m always nice and calm when I’m speaking to them.”**

## Top five recommendations for running a similar project

- 1.** Take time to build a positive relationship with parents so that it is clear and understood by everyone involved that the worker is there to support the parents in their parenting role.
- 2.** Be flexible and fit in with the parents and their lifestyle i.e. when they see their child(ren), when works best for them i.e. be able to increase and decrease input as and when appropriate or required.
- 3.** Maintain continuity, even through major changes in family life e.g. the family or foster carer moves house. Be flexible enough to change times of sessions to cope with this. It is very important that the worker stays constant if at all possible. A consistency of approach helps build relationships and trust

4. Use a variety of feedback strategies such as photos and video appropriately during sessions - but subtly so as not to distract from the session. Use these visual records with the parent afterwards to look back on the session; what they did well and the response to build confidence and build on good practice and development. Use simple Easyread formats for setting goals and areas of development and keep checking level of understanding.
5. Have patience; it will take time. Small achievements are worth celebrating and if it doesn't go well in a session be aware that other things are going on for people which may be stressful and have an impact on the sessions.

## Financial costs of the project

A breakdown of the costs of the project is shown in the table below. The majority of funding was used for staff costs. There was no additional funding used for this project.

|                    |                   |
|--------------------|-------------------|
| Capital costs      | £ -               |
| Office Expenditure | £4,693.00         |
| Staff costs        | £17,751.00        |
| Volunteer costs    | £ -               |
| Other costs        | £2,410.00         |
| <b>Total</b>       | <b>£24,854.00</b> |



**“At the beginning I was scared to make a mistake - but I take it in my stride now. I enjoy cuddling and tickling him now. I found it difficult at the start.”**

## How the outcomes were evidenced

Firsthand completed evaluation forms with the families they worked with:

- Half of the parents said that they had changed the way they spoke to their children
- Half of the parents felt they had an improved awareness of body language
- 86% of parents answered ‘Yes’ to the question ‘Are you more confident when using touch with your child?’

# Mellow Parenting



## Parenting Support and Capacity Building at Home

Mellow Parenting is a Scottish organisation who research, develop and implement evidenced based Parenting Programmes.

### What the project did

The project created a new accessible programme for parents with learning disabilities to support them to gain the skills to cope with the changes in parenting needed as their babies change into toddlers. The programme also helps them learn how to access support to parent their toddlers. The new programme is called Mellow Futures Toddlers.

To achieve this they:

- Created a new steering group of parents with a learning disability
- Carried out a scoping and mapping exercise with parents to determine the content of the Mellow Futures Toddlers programme
- Developed and piloted new materials and activities including sourcing relevant evaluation measures
- Developed and completed the programme manuals for both facilitators and mentors.

## Outcomes from the project

This work was different from other Development Fund projects. While other projects aimed to achieve positive outcomes for people with learning disabilities, the end result of this work was a series of outputs which could subsequently be used by others to achieve positive outcomes for parents. Mellow Parenting produced the following outputs:

- A new accessible programme for parents with learning disabilities and their toddlers, evidence-based and piloted
- A revised Mellow Futures perinatal programme and Mentors Manual
- Created a cartoon film telling the story of a couple and their child. This film was played at an event at the Scottish Parliament. This helped to raise the profile of the needs of parents with learning disabilities.

The work was underpinned by a steering group that included both professionals and parents to help shape the new Mellow Futures Toddlers programme. This steering group remained active throughout the course of the project and helped to facilitate and create positive partnership working between Mellow Parenting and others.

Equal Say, a partnership organisation in the project, have been successful in getting Big Lottery funding to work with parents with learning disabilities who have toddlers. They will be able to use the Mellow Futures Toddlers programme for this work and Mellow Parenting will support them to evaluate the groups.

## What did the project need to succeed?

Partnership working was critical to the success of this project. The early partnership with Equal Say for the mapping and scoping exercises and the steering and focus groups was especially helpful.

Because of delays in receiving the funding the life of the project was shortened from 24 months to 18 months. The fact that Mellow Parenting already had a procedure to follow for this type of work meant that they were able to recalibrate their timescales more successfully.

## **What would they change if they did it again?**

Although partnership working has been critical to the success of the project, it has not been without its challenges. Mellow Parenting had hoped to be able to deliver a third pilot group with one of two organisations but due to circumstances outwith their control and changes in the wider landscape of service provision this was not able to happen.

They found that parents with learning disabilities who have toddlers are often busy with different appointments and established routines. It took more time than anticipated to build trusting relationships with them due to their previous experience of professional involvement and concerns that their children might be removed from them.

## **Top five recommendations for running a similar project**

- 1.** Make sure you have plenty of time to build relationships and make practical arrangements with parents before starting groups.
- 2.** It is worth doing an analysis to find out how parents structure their week and what is the best setting to run a group in e.g. if the child is already at nursery could the group be run on their premises.



3. The role of the mentor is key in supporting parents and reinforcing messages from the group.
4. Check out what others are doing and don't seek to reinvent the wheel (take note of SCLD best practice in this area).
5. Be realistic about what you can do in the time available.

## Financial costs of the project

A breakdown of the costs of the project is shown in the table below. The majority of funding was used for staff costs. There was no additional funding used for this project.

|                    | <b>Total spend</b> |
|--------------------|--------------------|
| Capital costs      | £ 1,150.00         |
| Office Expenditure | £3,469.92          |
| Staff costs        | £30,135.05         |
| Volunteer costs    | £ 4,782.87         |
| Other costs        | £10,071.80         |
| <b>Total</b>       | <b>£49,609.64</b>  |

## How the outcomes were evidenced

Mellow Parenting created their new programme which is available by contacting them either from the contact details at the start of this document or from their website (<http://www.mellowparenting.org/>). They hosted a dissemination event in Grand Central Hotel, Glasgow in March 2017. They had a graphic facilitator at this event and the final graphic is shown on the opposite page.

The project also commissioned a short video, which can be found at [vimeo.com/185654252](https://vimeo.com/185654252)

# Aberlour and NHS Fife

## Fife and South Ayrshire Knowledge Exchange

Aberlour help parents with learning disabilities in South Ayrshire to provide the best care for their children, ensuring families are supported to stay together.

NHS Fife have developed a model care pathway to support mothers and fathers with a learning disability through the pregnancy journey and for a short period afterwards. This pathway includes the participation of a specialised midwifery service, a voluntary agency (Barnardos) and NHS Fife Adult Learning Disability Service.

## What the project did

The funding was used to support mutual learning from both main and other partner services. This took the form of exchange visits between the two localities. The visits consisted of four staff from South Ayrshire and five from Fife. Representatives from Ayrshire included:

- The Manager of the Aberlour Service
- South Ayrshire Social Work Team Manager
- NHS Ayrshire and Arran Specialist Midwifery Manager
- NHS Ayrshire and Arran Learning Disability Service Research and Information Officer.



Representatives from Fife were:

- Barnardos Parents with Learning Disability Worker
- Fife Council Social Worker
- NHS Fife Health Visitor Team Manager
- NHS Fife Learning Disability Services Planning and Development Manager
- NHS Fife Adult Learning Disability Nurse.

Mutually agreed programmes were set for the visits. These included meetings and discussion with staff from a variety of services and most importantly parents with learning disabilities who had received the services provided by Aberlour and Barnardos.

Following the completion of practice exchange visits, Aberlour and Fife reflected on the key learning points for each site and considered how these could be used to improve and develop practice. This learning was then incorporated in to a programme for a conference held in March 2017.

## **Outcomes from the project**

The outcomes for this project for Aberlour, in South Ayrshire, were:

- Improved experience of collaborative working with all partners, through an improved understanding of parental needs from conception
- Raised awareness locally and nationally of the impact and value delivered through early intervention with parents with learning disabilities
- Reframed public and professional understanding of people with learning disabilities as parents
- Improved the evidence base in support of a range of tools, approaches and practices across both services
- Improved understanding of parents with learning disabilities across Scotland and their potential support needs and how these can be met.

As a consequence of the learning exchange, the following outcomes have been evidenced:

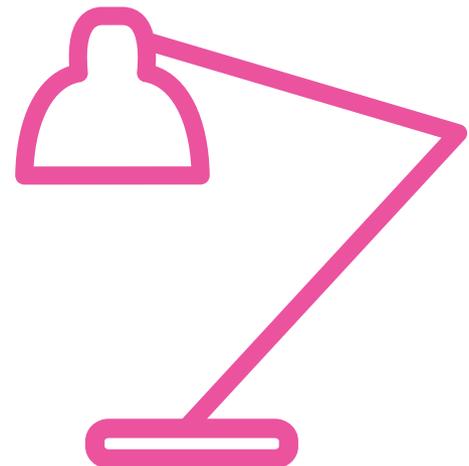
- Increased number of pre-birth referrals
- Earlier identification of mothers with learning disabilities, with referrals established at 20-30 weeks gestation.

And for Fife:

- Further consideration, based on evidence from South Ayrshire, of how services for parents with learning disabilities can be delivered post-natally
- Expansion of their partnership base to develop these post-natal services, especially Early Years Services
- Increased knowledge and use of communication tools to support parents including specific learning disability DVDs and mainstream parenting videos already available on YouTube.

As a consequence of the learning exchange, the following activities are being undertaken:

- Delivering learning disability awareness training to these new partner agencies
- Developing accessible information to support parents to better understand legal processes including Children's Hearings, Child Protection, Fostering and Adoption procedures.



## What did the project need to succeed?

A dynamic relationship between the project partners was vital to the success of this project. Additionally, dynamic partnerships with staff from NHS Ayrshire & Arran and wider partners in Fife were also vital to the project.

Transparency and honesty between the two projects was similarly important. For the exchange to be worthwhile both projects had to be open and 'critical friends' if necessary.

Flexibility was also needed in relation to planning and execution of visits.

## What would they change if they did it again?

- More continuity of staff. It was not always possible to meet the staff again who had visited Fife in the Ayrshire setting, which meant that learning from the visits was impaired
- Widen the pool of staff who visited and consider arranging more than one visit
- Fife Council and NHS Fife are co-terminous which makes partnership arrangements easier. In relation to Ayrshire and Arran Health Board, Aberlour only cover South Ayrshire
- More preparatory work would have been helpful in relation to how the other council areas respond to, and could possibly contribute to, further development of the Aberlour service thereby having richer visits
- Engaging with the other two local authorities in Ayrshire would have allowed them to contribute to, and enrich, the learning exchange.

## Top five recommendations for running a similar project

1. Ensure the partner services have a similar area of interest but have differences in experience and approach. This will lead to richer learning and discussion.
2. Plan the visits well ahead, and allow for contingencies e.g. have a replacement available if someone cannot attend the visit. Be flexible in relation to the programme as items will not follow the time specified.
3. Make sure the participants are well briefed and have a good idea of areas for particular consideration.
4. Be clear on expectations of visitors and others taking part in the visit regarding how they record their views on the visits (for example expect them to keep a journal of the visit).
5. Be clear on how views are shared and how they will lead to clear outcomes.

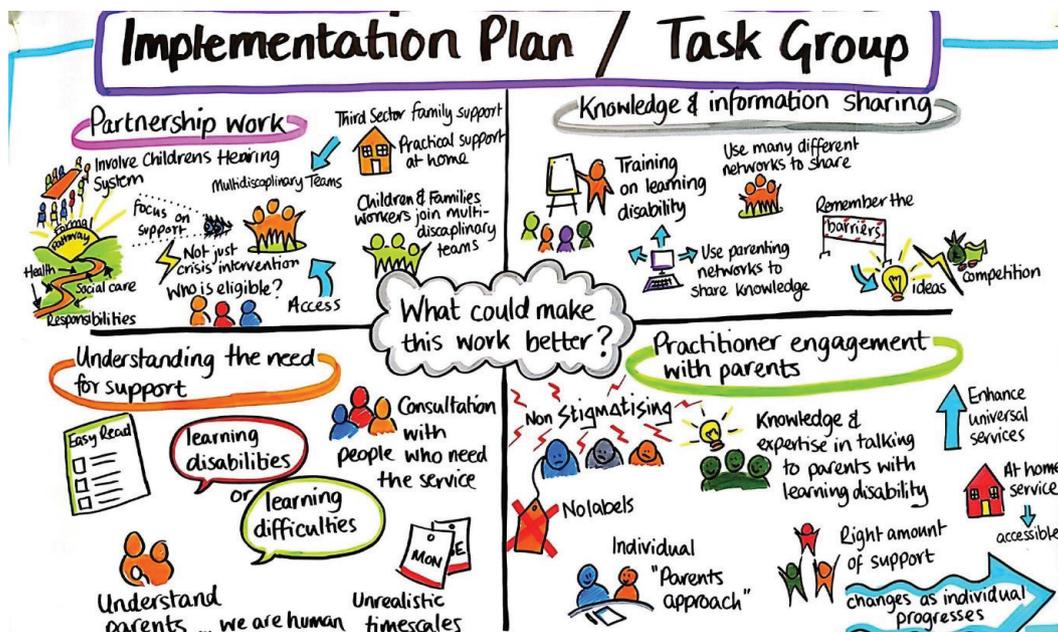
## Financial costs of the project

A breakdown of the costs of the project is shown in the table below. The majority of funding was used to support the exchange visits and deliver the conference. There was no additional funding used for this project.

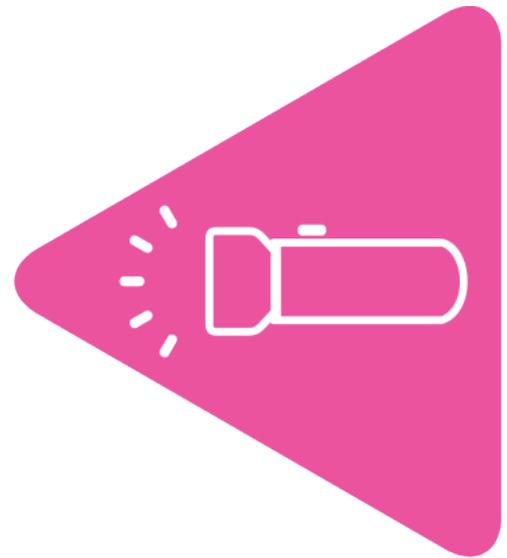
|                    | <b>Total spend</b> |
|--------------------|--------------------|
| Capital costs      | £ -                |
| Office Expenditure | £129.66            |
| Staff costs        | £542.95            |
| Volunteer costs    | £-                 |
| Other costs        | £7,457.67          |
| <b>Total</b>       | <b>£8,130.28</b>   |

## How the outcomes were evidenced

Staff involved in the exchange visits kept a journal of their experiences. Feedback was recorded from parents who took part in the exchange visits. Aberlour and NHS Fife hosted a dissemination event in March 2017. This event showcased the knowledge that had been shared and invited speakers from other key to life Development Fund Parenting projects to speak about their work. The Evaluation from this event is available on the Aberlour website: [www.aberlour.org.uk/](http://www.aberlour.org.uk/)



# Bright Light



## Relationship Counselling

Bright Light provides one to one counselling, couple counselling, family therapy and psychosexual therapy in Edinburgh and across the Lothians. They are a local counselling service at grassroots community level that is open to all.

## What the project did

The aim of the project was to provide innovative counselling support to parents and families with learning disabilities living in Edinburgh and in the Lothians. This support enabled parents with learning disabilities and their children to develop strong lasting relationships where all thrive and cope with the challenges of life. They met their individual and changing needs – people with learning disabilities as a couple within a family unit, people with learning disabilities as parents, and whole families.

Across five different members they had twenty group sessions and twenty-six individual/family sessions.

## Outcomes from the project

The outcomes achieved by Bright Light were:

- Strengthened the supportive relationships around parents with learning disabilities
- Increased empathy, closeness and understanding in relationships
- Reduced difficulties and conflicts in close relationships for parents with learning disabilities
- Improved emotional wellbeing for parents with learning disabilities through offering therapeutic sessions that focus on relationships past and present.

## What did the project need to succeed?

This was the organisation's first foray into working with people with a learning disability and as such the know-how of certain members of staff who had previously worked with people with a learning a disability was crucial to the success of the project. The experience and contacts of the staff who had worked with people with a learning disability allowed them to think creatively and work flexibly to ensure the success of the project.

This flexibility extended beyond specific staff to the entire organisation who had to adapt paperwork and administration to incorporate accessible materials into their protocols.



**“I can talk about social services  
and my kids without being judged  
and not having people think bad of  
me.”**

## What would they change if they did it again?

They would have been more prepared for the changing of materials into accessible formats, which would have helped create a systemic change in the way that they record information. Specifically, all their evaluation material had to be adapted to make sure they could measure the difference that their work was making.

The fact that the organisation previously had had no interaction with people with learning disabilities meant that it was initially difficult to access other organisations within the field. Additionally this also meant that they had to change some of their methods and spend a bit more time outside of the counselling sessions thinking about how to be more inclusive: for example by texting people instead of writing to them, or scheduling time to walk people to the bus stop.

## Financial costs of the project

A breakdown of the costs of the project is shown in the table below. The majority of funding was used for staff costs. There was no additional funding used for this project.

|                    | <b>Total spend</b> |
|--------------------|--------------------|
| Capital costs      | £ -                |
| Office Expenditure | £984.17            |
| Staff costs        | £13,664.17         |
| Volunteer costs    | £-                 |
| Other costs        | £7,865.00          |
| <b>Total</b>       | <b>£22,513.34</b>  |



**“These sessions have helped me know how far I have come. Way more than anyone has ever expected of me.”**

## Top five recommendations for running a similar project

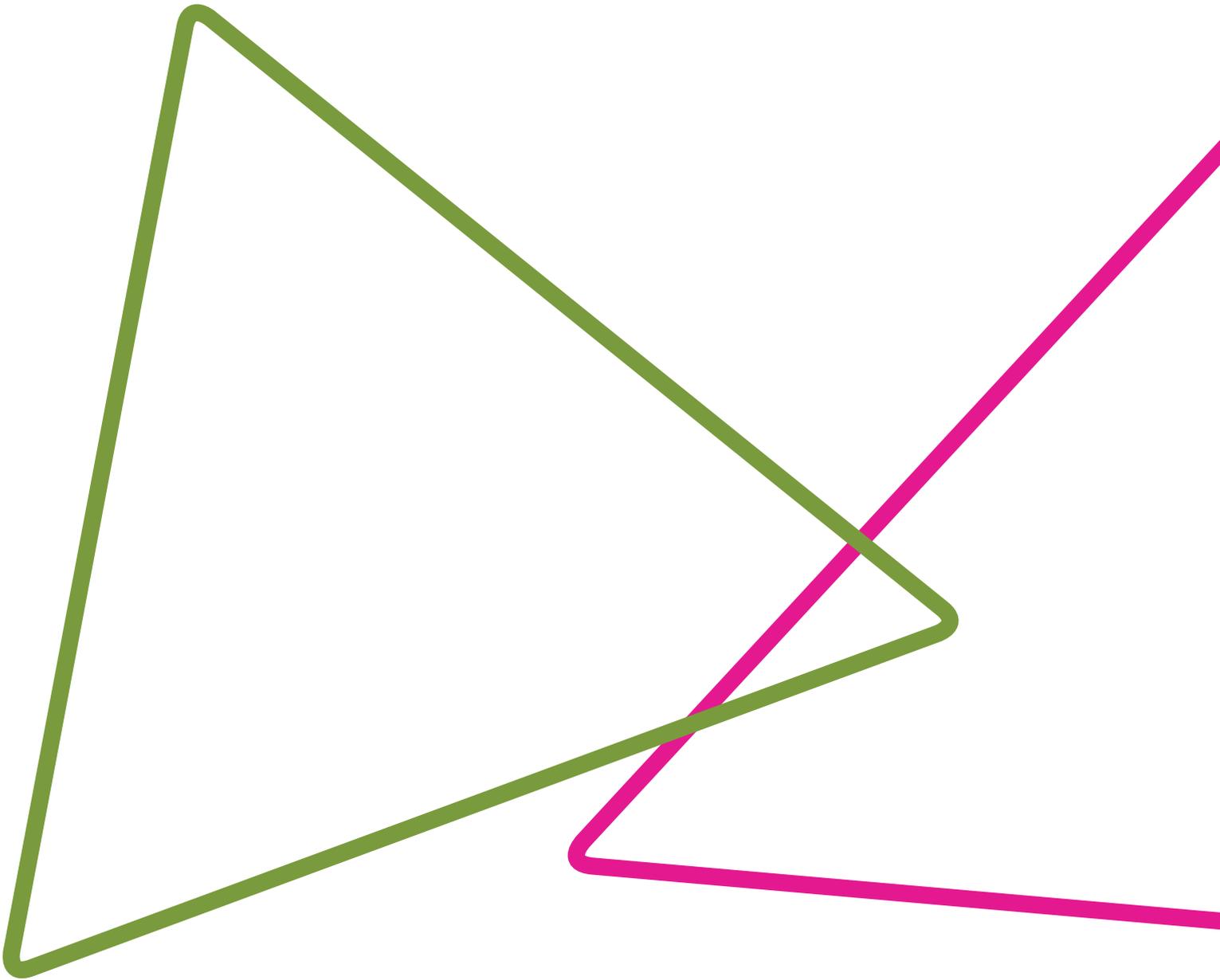
1. Do not underestimate how much time and effort goes into making your evaluation information accessible, so that you are able to capture the evidence you need.
2. Ensure you have the necessary staff and contacts to embark on a project like this if your organisation has not previously worked with people with a learning disability.
3. Work creatively and flexibly to ensure that you are as inclusive in your counselling methods as you can be.
4. Consider that parents might already work with several different agencies and you do not want to add strain to their lives; you need to work considerately to gain a level of trust.
5. You need to build awareness of the work you are doing so that people can feel comfortable about it.

## How the outcomes were evidenced

Bright Light used accessible evaluation forms for every session which were then collated. They also provided a case study of the project for submission to SCLD (as yet unpublished).



**“In other groups I don’t talk as I feel I might be judged.”**



**Produced by Scottish Commisison for Learning Disability, 2017.  
Digital copies available for free download at [sclid.org.uk](http://sclid.org.uk)**