

**VOLUNTEERING**

**MATTERS**



**Family Supporters Edinburgh**  
**Annual Report**  
**1 April 2025- 31 March 2026**

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# Foreword

## Family Supporters Edinburgh

During 2025/26, we supported 50 families and established 42 new mentoring relationships across the City of Edinburgh, connecting parents with trained volunteers who provide consistent social, practical, and emotional support. This early, relational intervention helps reduce risk, build resilience, and create the conditions for sustainable change.

Our work is shaped by the voices and experiences of the people we support. Families are active participants in defining their goals, while volunteers play a key role in co-designing and strengthening the service. Alongside this, we have expanded our reach through partnership working, improved access for underrepresented groups, and strengthened our volunteer programme to ensure high-quality, responsive support.

We are grateful to our funders for their continued support, which enables us to deliver flexible, person-centred support at the point it is most needed. This report demonstrates the impact of that investment—not only in improved outcomes for families, but in increased confidence, connection, and long-term stability.

Together, we are helping families move from crisis towards a more secure and hopeful future.

Arlaine Barbour  
Project Manager - Family Supporters Edinburgh



As a parent, I am extremely grateful to Family Supporters Edinburgh for the support I received. The trusting relationship I built with my volunteer helped me feel safe, listened to, and supported during a very difficult time, and it has made a lasting, positive difference to my confidence and wellbeing.- Family Member

# Our Impact in 2025-2026

## Housing & Finance:

- 73%** improvement in living standards
- 64%** improvement in housing stability
- 64%** improvement in access to housing & financial support
- 45%** improvement in financial independent

## Education, Training, & Employment:

- 55%** improvement in school engagement and behaviour
- 55%** improvement in parental confidence in supporting education
- 64%** Accessed further opportunities such as volunteering, learning, and community activities

## Health & Wellbeing:

- 82%** improvement in mental health and wellbeing
- 73%** improvement in self-care, routines, & home environment
- 55%** improvement in healthier lifestyle choices
- 64%** improvement in access to health services
- 36%** improvement in equality and accessibility

\*Most families demonstrated clear progress, with over 70% improving in key areas such as mental health, self-care, and living standards, and consistent improvements across housing, education, and access to support. \*

# Our Partnerships

Partnerships are a vital part of how we support families holistically. Working alongside other organisations allows us to extend the impact of our work, offering tailored support to meet families needs beyond our direct support.

This year we worked with Volunteer Edinburgh, Volunteer Scotland and The Scottish Mentoring Network to strengthen our volunteer programme and share best practice. Partnerships with universities, colleges and the DWP support us to engage a diverse, multicultural volunteer base, including New Scots, creating pathways into volunteering and employability.

Our links with services such as the Money Advice Shop, Home Energy Scotland, EVOC, One Parent Families Scotland, Equal Futures, Home-Start, Children First, VOCAL, Women's Aid, Health All Round, The Salvation Army and Cash for Kids ensure families can access specialist financial, wellbeing and practical support, including emergency and seasonal assistance.



**Heriot-Watt  
Volunteer Recruitment Fair**



**Edinburgh College  
Career Networking Event**



# Events with our Partnerships



Space @  
Broomhouse  
Street Party



Young Carers  
Marketplace of  
Support Event



Whole Family  
Equality  
Project  
Celebration



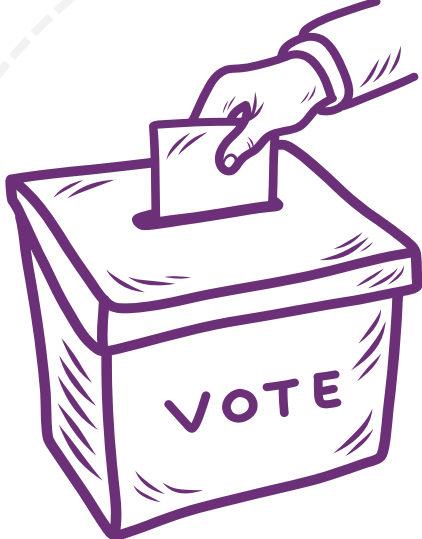
# Raising Awareness of our work



## Leith Chooses Voting Day



Family Supporters was a part of Leith Chooses Voting Day in an aim to raise awareness about the work that FSE does and encourage voters to vote for our organisation.



# Events with our Partnerships



Volunteer  
Edinburgh  
Fair



◆ EDINBURGH ◆  
THE CITY OF EDINBURGH COUNCIL

volunteer  
edinburgh

NHS  
Lothian

Volunteer  
Scotland

EVOC  
EDUCATIONAL VOLUNTEERISM  
.ORG.UK  
DEVELOPMENT  
EDUCATIONAL

the promise  
scotland

THE  
SALVATION  
ARMY

Edinburgh Leisure

Children 1st  
SCOTLAND'S NATIONAL CHILDREN'S CHARITY

EDINBURGH  
YOUNG  
CARERS

Health  
in mind

vocal

# The Promise

Family Supporters Edinburgh's approach is aligned with The Promise Scotland and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), focusing on keeping children safely within their families wherever possible through relational, trauma-informed support.

Our model is based on whole family support, recognising that a child's wellbeing is directly linked to the wellbeing of their wider family system. We consider the full context of families' lives, including parenting pressures, mental health, poverty, housing, and isolation, and respond in a joined-up, practical and emotional way.

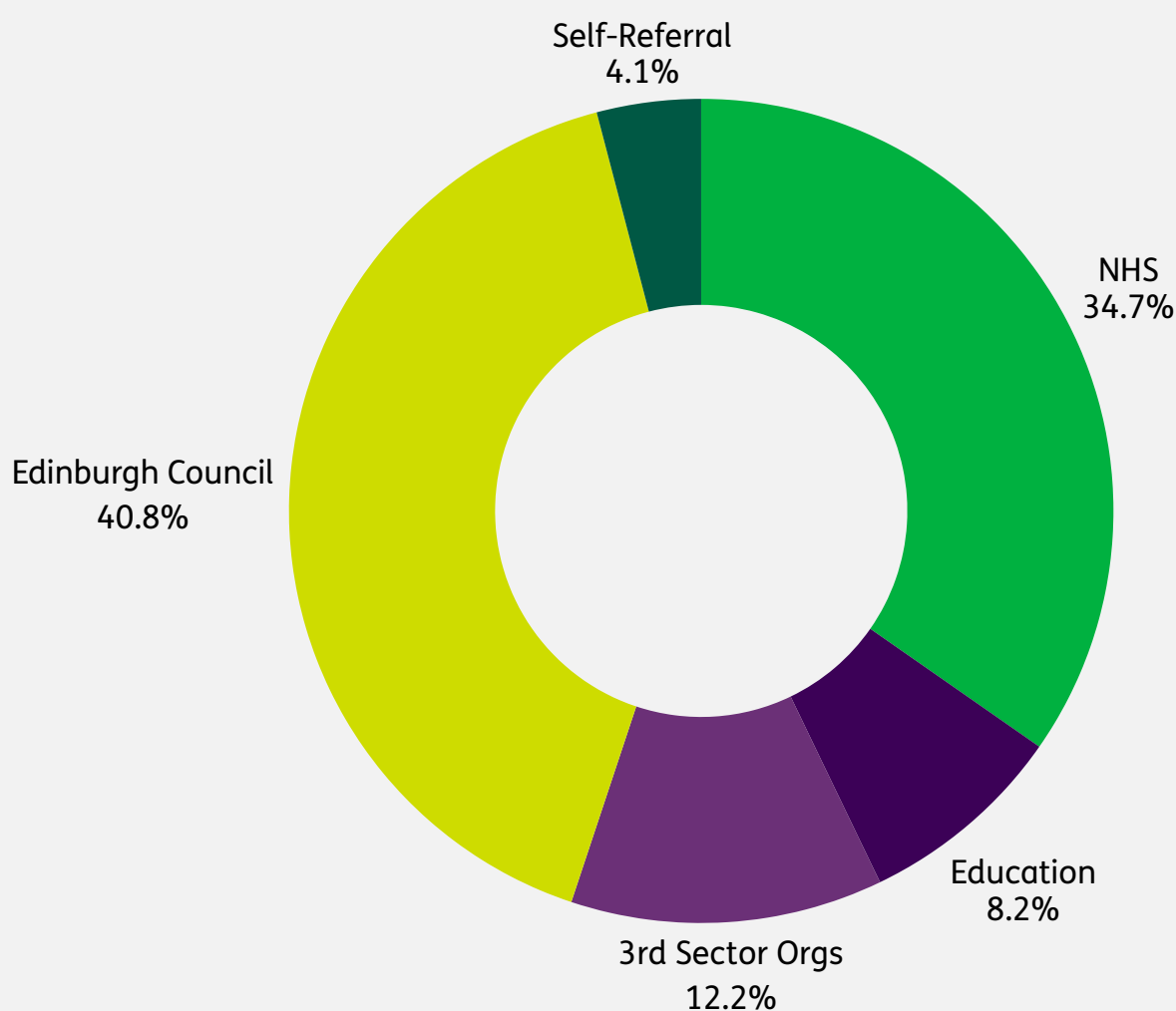
Through trusted relationships and flexible, early intervention, we help families strengthen routines, reduce isolation, improve confidence, and access the right services at the right time. This reduces escalation into crisis and supports safer, more stable home environments where children can thrive.

**We are committed to United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)**



# Our Referrals 2025-2026

## 47 Referrals



This year, City of Edinburgh Council continues to be our highest contributing referrer. This year we created a new partnership with the Kinship team, and have seen a spike in referrals from that department.

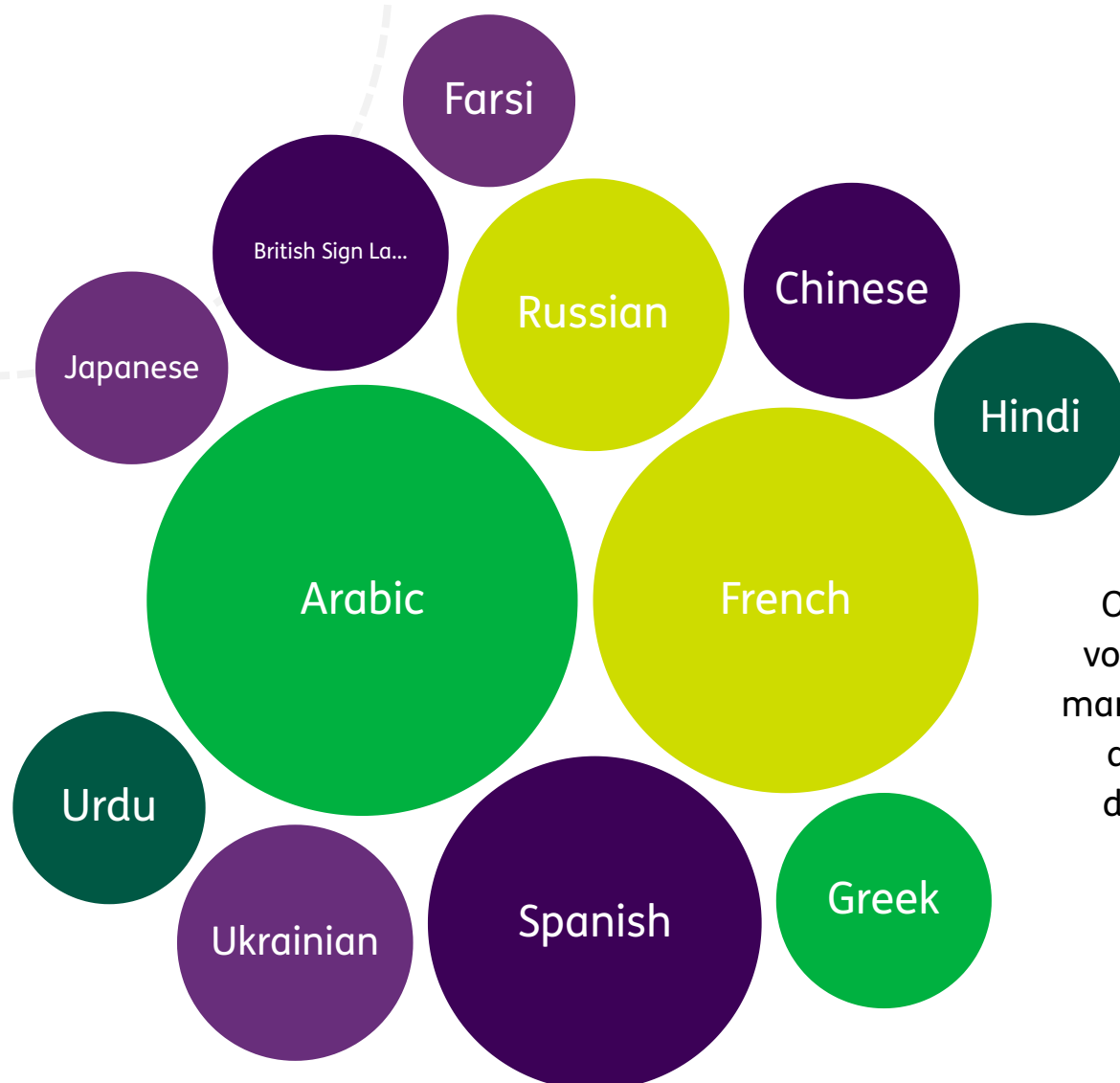
We have also created new partnerships with Gracemount High and Broughton Primary as well as seen an increase in self-referrals from last year.

# Our Volunteers 2025-2026

This year we managed to train 39 volunteers, an increase from last year.



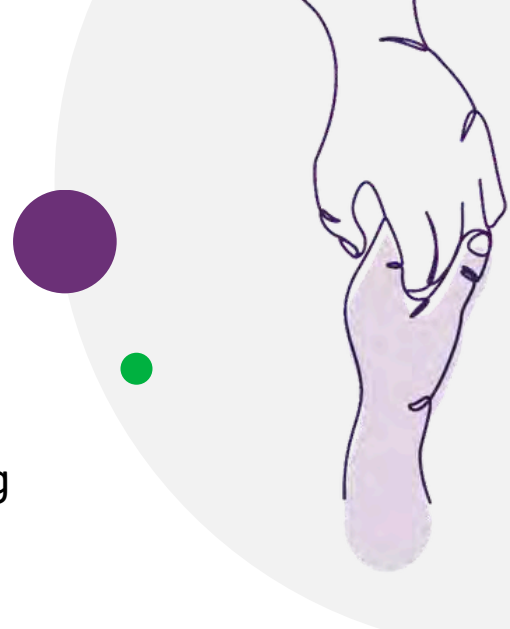
Our volunteers have found us through Volunteer Scotland, Volunteer Edinburgh, our Volunteering Matters Website, Facebook, as well as an increase in new volunteers from our new collaboration with DWP Stakeholders



Our diverse team of volunteers come from many different countries and speak up to 12 different languages between them

# Volunteer Training

We recruit local people to become volunteers, ensuring they are fully equipped to become a unique source of support to each family, and have a good understanding of support available, networks, and services.



Here's what our volunteers have to say...



“It was entirely relevant, gave us every opportunity to ask questions in a non-judgmental environment, and the various scenarios were helpful.”

“I feel like it was perfect, it was all very engaging and informative.”



# Volunteer Training

“Morag and Arlaine, they are fully supportive and very informative! It was so inspiring and interesting, I can’t wait to progress with my volunteering.”

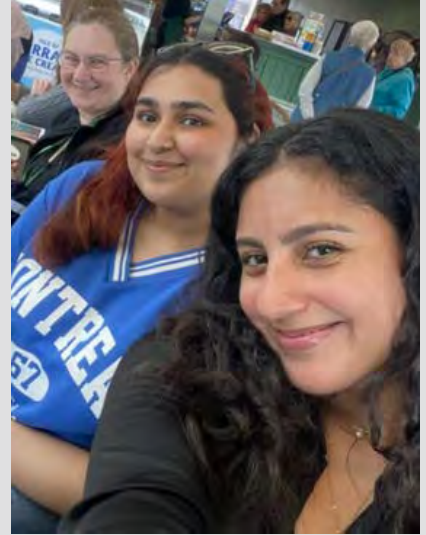


“Morag & Alex were very good. There was loads of questions asked & answered.”

“The training today was amazing! The materials provided were more than engaging! The activities and group tasks kept me extremely interested and focused the whole time.”



# Celebrations with our Volunteers



We celebrated National Volunteer's Week by having lunch at Four Square Park Cafe with just some of the people who make this project possible



# Volunteer Voices



I started with FSE just over 6 months ago. I was matched with my first family and it was an amazing experience to see them grow and work together. Sometimes there was challenges within the family dynamic but as a team we worked to understand the issue and find solutions to them. We managed to arrange a meeting with the school and work towards better outcomes for the children and help the family to feel supported and valued.

One of the highlights was visiting the Zoo and Edinburgh Castle with the family. Seeing them enjoying themselves and seeing the love and bond they shared with one another was special.

Starting out with FSE I received excellent training and was supported throughout my match. My thoughts and reflections on sessions with families were listened to and taken seriously. We worked together to get the best outcome for the family we worked with.

The team are amazing and super friendly and willing to help and support in any way they can. I look forward to continuing with FSE and supporting our next family. I know I'll be supported every step and know that I can continue to learn and develop as a volunteer.



**Thomas**

# Family Voices



“

I connected with Family Supporters at a very difficult time in my life, when I was new here. They supported me and introduced me to Anfisa, who became a close and trusted volunteer and friend. They were always kind to me and my children, and their care- including New Year's gifts for my children- helped us feel welcomed, accepted, and not alone.

- FSE Family

”

“

Our volunteer Lottie was fab and always so willing to help. She was very kind and patient and generous with her time. Nothing was too much of a problem and she was really flexible with meeting us in lots of different places around Edinburgh! A very good experience, thank you.

- FSE Family

”



## Case Study - Maria and Fatima

When Maria was first matched with a volunteer, she was overwhelmed. A mother of three daughters, Maria was managing her own mental health challenges while coping with increasingly difficult behaviour at home. She felt isolated, exhausted, and unsure where to turn. This story shows how consistent, community-based volunteer support can strengthen family resilience, improve wellbeing, and reduce the risk of crisis.

### The Challenge

Two major concerns were identified early in the match:

- Maria's emotional wellbeing was deteriorating, leaving her exhausted and unsupported.
- Her eldest daughter's challenging behaviour was escalating, including school refusal, late nights, and conflict at home.

Maria believed negative peer influence, particularly through mobile phone use, was a key factor. She felt she had no reliable support network to help navigate these challenges.

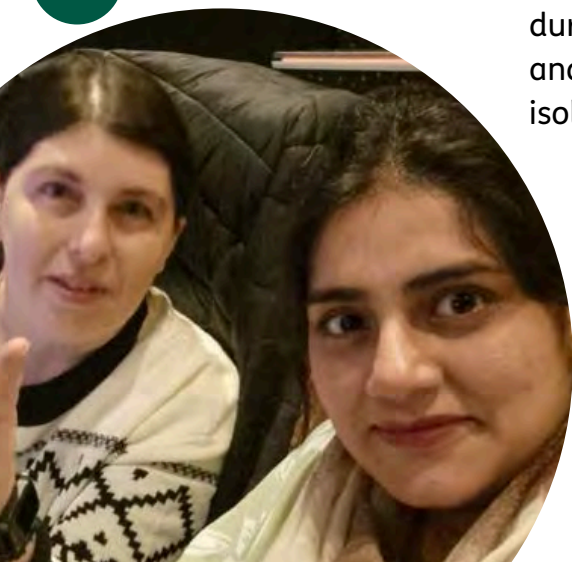
### Support Provided

Weekly meetings with a volunteer became a consistent and trusted space. They met in local community settings such as cafés, parks, and community centres, helping Maria feel safe and able to speak openly.

Over time, the volunteer introduced practical parenting strategies and emotional support. Maria began to:

- Rebuild trust with her daughters
- Respond calmly rather than reacting emotionally
- Prioritise connection and communication over conflict

When serious concerns emerged about Maria's middle daughter's mental health, the volunteer's support became even more vital. The volunteer provided emotional support during moments of crisis, encouraged professional support, and helped Maria make safer decisions while feeling less isolated.



**I never felt alone during this journey.**  
-Maria

## Quantitative Impact

Outcomes were measured using a self-reported scale where:

- |                                 |  |
|---------------------------------|--|
| 1= No support needed            | 4= Reasonable amount of support needed |
| 2= Low level of support needed  | 5= Quite a lot of support needed       |
| 3= Some level of support needed | 6= A lot of support is needed          |

Maria's family reported substantial improvement in key areas between the start and end of the match:



### School Life and Behaviour

Improved from 6 to 1  
(A lot of support needed to no support needed)



### Mental Health

Improved from 6 to 1  
(A lot of support needed to no support needed)



### Self-care and Nurturing

Improved from 6 to 1  
(A lot of support needed to no support needed)



### Equality and Accessibility

Improved from 5 to 1  
(Quite a lot of support needed to no support needed)



Overall Education, Training and Employment needs improved from an average of 4 to 2 (Reasonable amount of support needed to low level support needed)

\*\*\*Housing and financial stability remained strong throughout the match (scores stayed at 1), indicating these needs were already stable and no support was needed.\*\*\*

## Impact

Across the 12 assessed areas, there has been significant positive progress, with 9 areas (75%) showing clear improvement, reflected by reductions in scores to the lowest level of need (1). The remaining areas demonstrate stability at low levels of need.

Overall the data indicates substantial and sustained improvement particularly across housing stability, education engagement, wellbeing and access to support services.

“

As a volunteer at Family Supporters it was a wonderful experience. It was always a relaxed and happy feeling to see positive change in a vulnerable family as a result of my efforts. Not only was the volunteering beneficial for families in need, but it also had a positive impact on my own personal development. I never felt alone at Family Supporters, as I always received guidance whenever I felt unsure. I truly enjoyed my volunteering - it was challenging, yet satisfying at the same time.

-Fatima

## Case Study - Theresa and Kate

This family is a single mum and her two sons, aged 9 and 11, who recently returned to Edinburgh after a difficult period of separation, housing change, and significant family disruption. The transition back into mum's care, alongside ongoing health concerns and emotional strain, left the family struggling to settle and rebuild stability.

### The Challenge

While the children were living locally again and beginning to reconnect with friends, concerns quickly emerged about their wellbeing. The older boy became increasingly withdrawn and spent long periods in his bedroom, disengaging from everyday life. He stopped attending school regularly, began struggling with his mental health, lost his appetite, and lost weight. Attending medical appointments became increasingly difficult for him, often triggering distress and anxiety linked to previous experiences. His younger brother's attendance at school also began to decline as routines broke down at home.


Theresa was doing her best to manage alone, but described feeling exhausted, overwhelmed, and constantly worried that she was not managing to meet both children's needs. She felt isolated and unsure where to turn as problems across health, education, and emotional wellbeing began to build.

### Support Provided

Through Family Supporters Edinburgh, the family were matched with Kate, a volunteer mentor who offered consistent, non-judgemental support. For the mum, having someone regularly walk alongside her became a turning point—someone to talk things through with, to help her feel less alone, and to support her in taking small but important steps forward.

Over time, this relationship helped her rebuild confidence in her parenting role. She began attending meetings she previously felt unable to face, started engaging more actively with services, and found herself able to advocate for her children in a way she had struggled with before.

For the older child, progress was gradual but meaningful. With steady encouragement and reduced pressure, he began to re-engage in small ways—accepting support to attend appointments, showing more interest in routine, and slowly reconnecting with plans around education. At home, the atmosphere began to feel less tense and more settled.



“ I feel less alone and more able to cope day to day  
-Theresa

## Quantitative Impact

Outcomes were measured using a self-reported scale where:

1= No support needed

2= Low level of support needed

3= Some level of support needed

4= Reasonable amount of support needed

5= Quite a lot of support needed

6= A lot of support is needed

Theresa's family reported substantial improvement in key areas between the start and end of the match:



**School Life and Behaviour**  
Improved from 3 to 1  
(Some level of support to no support needed)



**Mental Health**  
Improved from 2 to 1  
(Low level of support to no support needed)



**Access to Health Support**  
Improved from 5 to 1  
(Quite a lot of support to no support needed)



**Equality and Accessibility**  
Improved from 5 to 1  
(Quite a lot of support to no support needed)



**Access to Housing & Finance**  
Improved from 5 to 1  
(Quite a lot of support to no support needed)

## Impact

There was significant positive progress across nearly all assessed areas. Of the twelve areas, nine showed a 100% improvement, with scores reducing to the lowest level of need (1).

Overall, the data indicates substantial and sustained improvements in the family's circumstances, particularly in areas related to housing, education, wellbeing, and access to support services.



I have been volunteering for over 17 years, I absolutely love doing it. Volunteering gives me a purpose but it also helps me to gain new skills and confidence in every experience. This particular volunteering role has been helpful because it allows me to support, share tools and empower individuals so they can help improve their own lives. This makes me happy knowing I can help make a difference.

-Kate

# Referrer **Voices**

The family had more opportunities to get out and socialise with other parents. Mum felt less isolated and included. For the child, it was a great opportunity to socialise with peers and experience different environments. I was kept updated about the family I referred to this project via email. This was super helpful to be aware how the support was progressing and how the family was getting on. Lovely, supportive staff, straightforward referral process, good communication

-Anna (Family Support Co-ordinator)

The process is smooth and easy to do. The organisation are prompt in acknowledging the referral and always get back in touch to let me know that the family are in contact with the service which is great to get this feedback. Some families have benefited in having someone supportive on activities with the children to allow them out as a family. Others have benefited from someone talk to and support them in organising/completing forms or general wellbeing.

-Toni (South East Locality Co-Ordinator)

I think the mother in the family has benefitted from having someone independent to talk to. This in turn has had a very positive impact on the rest of the family because mum can be more circumspect. I was pleased the volunteer manager got in touch to share info, it can be difficult to get round everyone in a team so them reaching out was really helpful.

-Heather (Children and Families Social Worker)

# Volunteer Steering Group

Our volunteers continue to shape our service through their participation in our Steering Group, and we have welcomed two new volunteers this year to this space. We continue to see their amazing creativity and personal insights identify where we can improve, and how we can best support them with a fulfilling and rewarding experience, so that they in turn be a positive role model for the families they support.

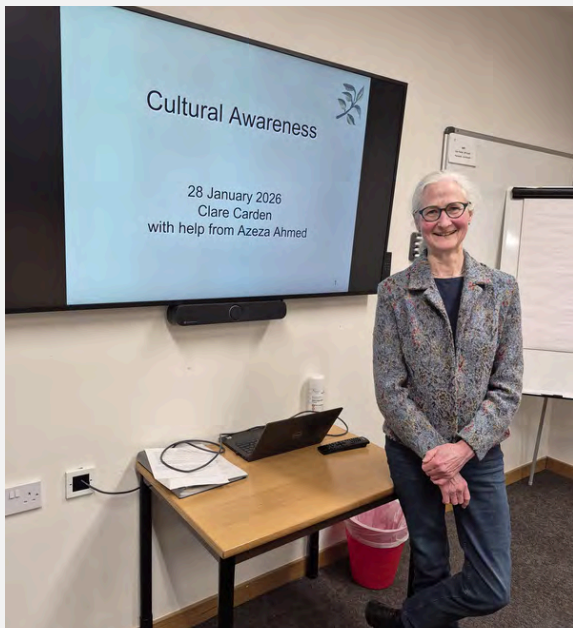


In August one of our Steering Group members led an Online Support Session where volunteers were encouraged to reflect, share their experiences and challenges and support one another. We all found this uplifting listening to each others insights and offering compassionate support.

We continue to progress our Action Plan and some recent examples include providing Volunteers with VM Identity cards, developing short 'Spotlight Summary' stories, and presenting volunteers with Certificates of Recognition at our social events.

In the pipeline, we look forward to running an online Volunteer Refresher Session and developing new volunteer roles for ad-hoc activities.

# Cultural Awareness Session



A volunteer, Clare, who currently supports one of our New Scots families, and has herself over 7 years experience of volunteering with Syrian refugee families, identified we all have very limited understanding of the cultural challenges families face. Clare offered to develop and deliver a Cultural Awareness session for our staff and volunteers with the aim of enabling them to help New Scots families so they can feel valued members of society, be confident to stand on their own two feet and enjoy life here more quickly.

We piloted this session in-person with 9 staff and volunteers attending. We were all mesmerised by Clare's passion and enthusiasm. She showed us examples of our cultural differences, the false assumptions we make about concepts we expect are widely understood, and the challenges with understanding our day to day language. 98% agreed the session was very much enjoyed.



- How I approach and communicate with anyone who is a New Scot
- I'll have a different outlook and think from someone else's perspective
- This was a great awareness session. This will be so applicable when supporting volunteers
- If am meeting with people from other cultures to be more mindful about interactions

Ways we said we will apply our learning

# Challenges we have faced and emerging trends

This year, we have received a large number of referrals of children with Additional Support Needs (ASN) who often face long waits for diagnosis, leaving parents without guidance or support. In line with this, we have also received an increase of volunteers who have experience with neurodiversity, whether it be due to family experience, or due to courses that they have taken. We offer a Dropbox space with resources and links to help the volunteer when matched to a family with ASN.

We have seen a trend of Kinship carers managing multiple children with complex needs, bereavement, and mental health challenges, requiring consistent, patient, trauma-informed support. This is completely new from last year and have found these referrals to be very rewarding and have established familiarity with the referrer.

Some challenges that we've seen this year include communication challenges when translators are needed or literacy/English is limited. We have seen a rise in New Scots family and one family comes to mind where communication is especially hard. Thankfully, the volunteer can translate with an app and has a friend that also helps with translation.

As well, male volunteers are sometimes unable to match with families due to sensitive domestic abuse cases, limiting available volunteer capacity. In return we have offered sessions like the Steering Group as an alternative for the volunteers to still be involved in the project before getting matched.

# Our Family Outings



Our family outings have included trips to Edinburgh Zoo, Edinburgh Castle, Go Ape, Soft Play, Cinema and Blair Drummond Safari Park



# Next Steps

- ✓ Volunteer engagement while awaiting matches
- ✓ Measuring volunteer impact
- ✓ Positive transitions

## Volunteer Engagement While Awaiting Matches

Volunteers are now actively involved in training, resource development, community projects, and peer reflective sessions. This keeps volunteers engaged, builds confidence and skills, and ensures they are prepared for future family matches.

## Measuring Volunteer Impact

We are now capturing both qualitative and quantitative outcomes for volunteers, including confidence, skills, cultural awareness, and practical experience—insights we were previously unable to record.

## Positive Transitions

Support now focuses not just on achieving specific outcomes but on what families need next, including informal social and emotional support so as to not undo all the progress both family and volunteer have done together.



# Building a better future for everyone

Volunteering Matters is a registered charity in England and Wales no. 291222 and in Scotland no. SC039171. Volunteering Matters is a company limited by guarantee no. 1435877.