

# HELP

(Argyll and Bute)  
Ltd



## Impact Evaluation Housing, Employment, Health & Well Being Service

Report by David Strathearn June 2016





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## INTRODUCTION

HELP is now at the start of its third year of an initial three-year Big Lottery grant delivering its employment and health and well-being service. This initiative links employability, life skills and health improvement activities and is designed to help young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and those coming out of care to sustain a tenancy, enter employment and become active members of their local community.

HELP monitors the performance of this project closely, using individual level outcomes information gathered using the Better Futures Framework\*. Service users are also asked regularly, through surveys, what they consider to be in the impact of the service on them. Although HELP uses these and other source material to monitor its own performance, it was believed to be important to have an element of independent evaluation. For this reason a consultant has been employed to collate and review existing data, as well as carry out some primary research into the impact of the range of activities and support on service users and on the numerous organisations that work in partnership with HELP.

This report draws together evidence on how the project has helped to improve the lives of the young people being supported and how other organisations have benefited from and contributed to the success of the service so far. It is anticipated that this knowledge will be used to inform the forthcoming year's activities and to shape future plans and funding bids.



*\*Better Futures is a web-based outcomes monitoring system organised around five goals: Accommodation, Health, Safety and Security, Social and Economic Wellbeing and Employment. Within these goals sit 20 aspects of life that a person may need support with. This system enables an individual to define personal outcomes and measure distance travelled towards or away from them.*



## SERVICE OVERVIEW

The table below is based on several years of initial assessment data and gives a broad picture of the circumstances that people are in when the first engage with HELP.

100%	Homeless or in threat of homelessness
90 %	No formal qualifications
90%	Lack of work experience
80 %	Literacy or numeracy issues
80 %	History of substance misuse
70 %	Have had involvement with criminal justice system
70 %	Not employed or in education
25 %	Care leavers
20 %	Lone parents
10 %	Mental health issues

HELP is commissioned by the local authority to provide Housing Support to address homelessness or the risk of homelessness. The employability and health and well-being service is funded by the Big Lottery and enables it to extend the range of ways that service users can be equipped and supported in life. These elements of the service are very much interlinked and the staff take a holistic approach to support in the belief, based on the organisation's evidence and observations, that improving the health, well-being and employment prospects of a person will have a positive impact on their chances of a sustaining a tenancy. Conversely, having a stable tenancy will have a beneficial effect on the health and well-being and employability of that person.

HELP supports around 140 people at any given time. Most people will access more than one aspect of the service. By definition, the holistic approach addresses multiple areas of need and want. However, some people may only use specific aspects of the support available, depending on their individual circumstances. So, whilst there is structure to activities and support, people do not necessarily follow a linear pathway though an entire programme. The percentage of the total service user group accessing each of the service 'elements' is as follows:

Health and Wellbeing	35 %
Employability	33 %
Housing Support	98 %

There are a number of connected elements to the service. Much of the activity is geared towards building skills, confidence, health and the capabilities of young people who have experienced homelessness and or who have lived/are living through difficult or challenging circumstances.

Prevention and early intervention are critical aspects of the work being carried out by HELP. The service therefore works closely with Dunoon Grammar School to support young people who have been identified as likely to struggle without support to engage with mainstream options when they leave school. The service also provides drop in advice and guidance sessions to all schools pupils.



## ACTIVITIES

The range of activities being delivered is, in the main, as proposed in the original Lottery bid; with minor variations created as the project has responded to demand and opportunities. The current range of activities is as follows:

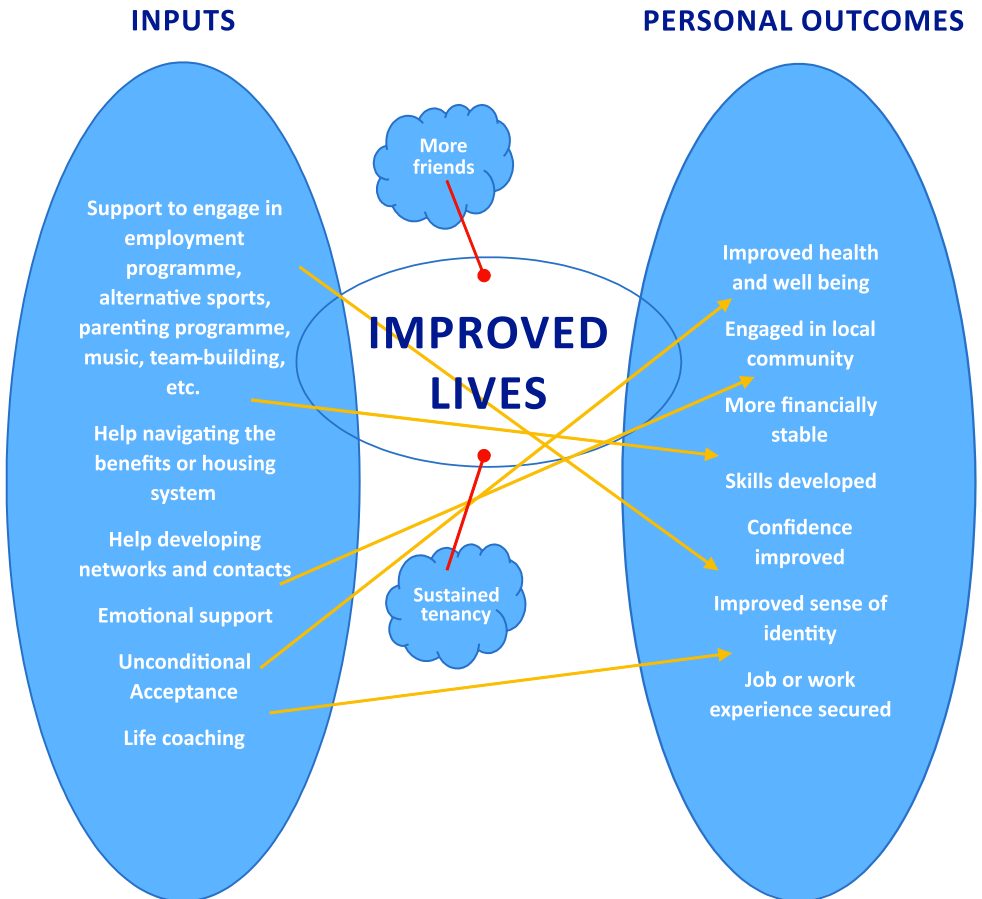
<b>Project 'Element'</b>	<b>Activities</b>
Employment Programme	Employability skills learning sessions Foundation training (Health and Safety, Moving and Handling, etc.) Confidence Building sessions Environmental Project – practical skills and community engagement Jobs Fair – Networking and job-finding opportunities Residential Weekend – Team building, Fun and reward
Parenting Skills	Fun and interaction – trips to the beach and gardens, etc. Reading together (Book Bug) Health Care (oral care, first aid) Speech and language therapist Swimming
Football	Local Football tournament Participation in Homeless World Cup
Alternative Sports	Basketball Tennis Club Yoga (Rothesay) Golf
Healthy Eating	Cooking Shopping and Budgeting
Music	Cowal Community Orchestra Sessional Music Workshops
Photography	'My Community' - themed photography My Story - Visual Life Books
Life Coaching	Team Building Problem solving
School Partnership	Contributing to alternative revision timetable sessions for pupils taking very few formal exams School Drop In information and advice sessions 'Day release' /part-timetable vocational qualifications
HELP Drop In	Practical and emotional support

This extensive range of activities is organised by two full-time Co-ordinators and is also supported part-time by one of the housing support team members.



## OUTCOMES MODEL

HELP is totally focussed on helping young people achieve personal outcomes through a wide and diverse range of activities. The cause and effect between any single input and an outcome is never straightforward. It is the combination of supports and activities that tend to help people grow and develop. A sustained tenancy, for example, may well be a feature of an improved life brought about because several other personal outcomes have been achieved. This is illustrated in the model below.





## METHODOLOGY

The evaluation report has been organised under two broad headings, Performance and Impact.

The Performance section looks at organisational achievements, evidence of performance generated by HELP itself and the results of external evaluation by the Care Inspectorate and Investors in People.

The Impact Section uses the results from a series of semi-structured interviews with service users and partner organisations to identify key themes relating to the difference the project has made to these groups of people respectively.

An assessment of the nature and range of partnerships and networks has been carried out to show the wider impact or 'community footprint' of the service.



## PERFORMANCE

Whilst this report focusses on how the young people perceive the impact of the support they receive along with the input from and consequences for partner organisations, it is useful to also look at the standards of performance. The following sources of evidence were reviewed in order to develop a picture of how HELP is performing as an organisation:

### Care Inspectorate Results

HELP is registered with the Care Inspectorate as a provider of Housing Support. The most recent Care Inspectorate report (25 March 2015) rates the Support, Staffing and Management all as 'Excellent'(6/6) and states, "The service continues to improve the quality of provision for young people through proactive evaluation of opportunities."



### Investors in People

HELP became an Investors in People organisation in 2001 and achieved Investors in People Gold in 2010. The organisation was successful in retaining the award in 2013 and aims to keep it when re-assessed in 2016.



The Business Improvement Report, compiled by Mary Leishman on behalf of Investors in People Scotland (27 May 2013), describes a positive culture in HELP; with emphasis on learning and development, good management and leadership and a well-developed strategy for corporate social responsibility.

Comments in the report show how the staff believe in the ethos of the organisation and are themselves supported in ways which telegraph into their approach to supporting young people. "I am listened to and given the opportunity to do different things", is a quote from a staff member, but could have easily come from a service user. Mary states that, "The Company has a culture of openness and trust." These are attributes that service users commented on in the interviews carried out for this evaluation (see below).

A whole team approach is encouraged in HELP and this also comes across in the Investors in People report. Nearly all the quotes from staff describe how they do things as a team rather than individually; for example, "We take daily decisions regarding our service users in the areas of health, custody and legal decisions.

It is likely that the support for staff and learning culture, coupled with HELP's Living Wage accreditation, all account for the high retention rate of 50% of staff having been with the organisation for over ten years.



### Investors in Young People

This was awarded to HELP in 2015 mainly because of the organisation's achievements in providing young people with work opportunities. These are brought about in many different ways, but the case described below is fairly typical of the support being provided and the resulting outcome.

A young man 'C' came to HELP initially because he was homeless and was getting into difficulties. He had no direction. His initial contact was through the Drop In where he started looking for jobs. He was then supported in making applications and to participate in the Employment Programme.

Whilst on the Programme he was successful in completing a National Certificate in Construction at college. Afterwards HELP continued to support C to make job applications, which led to him getting a job in the hospitality industry, away from the area, where he gained experience and grew in confidence.

On his return to the area he accessed a First Aid at work course through HELP and received further support, which has led to him working for a company providing First Aid at events and getting a job at a local hotel.



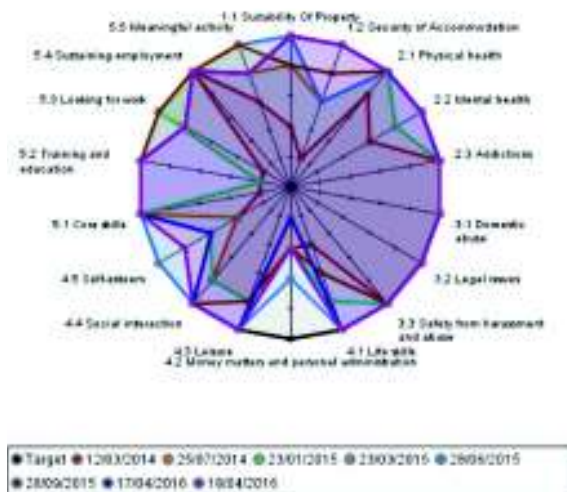
### Better Futures

Better Futures can be used to monitor outcomes on an individual basis. Data from the system can also be aggregated in order to analyse trends in support requirements for individuals or groups of people over time.

When a person first engages with HELP they set targets against a number of outcome areas. They also determine with one of the workers the level of support they need in each of these areas at that time, setting a 'Baseline'. At appropriate intervals, the progress against these desired outcomes is reviewed. The outcomes wheel on the following page is a graphical representation of the progress one young person has made as recorded by the Better Futures system.

A matrix scoring guide is used for each of the outcome areas. All outcomes are scored between zero and four, with zero indicating that no support is required and a score of four indicating a very high level of support. For example, for 'Suitability of Property' a score of 4 would indicate a crisis situation where the person is perhaps sleeping rough and 0 would indicate that the person was in good quality permanent accommodation.





In this particular young person's case, support was required in a number of areas and good progress can be seen over the two years or so of engagement with HELP.

Having a means of showing the person how they are doing is very important, as it provides a focus for discussion.

It is often easy for them to focus on areas that may not be progressing as they might have hoped and this tool enables people to see and be reminded of areas of achievement.



### HELP Service User Surveys

For the past two years HELP has conducted an online survey with the people it supports. Below, some of the main findings from the most recent survey (conducted in February 2016) have been set against baseline data, i.e. the average status of people when they first engage with HELP.

Base Line Position	Service Users Polled February 2016
93% Unemployed	86.96% felt they were involved in meaningful activity
70% Felt 'aimless' and 31% described themselves as having low self-esteem	97.01% felt they were more motivated since becoming involved with HELP and 95.56% felt more involved in their local community as a result of engaging in volunteer opportunities
43% Had no or few skills needed for employment	97.01% felt they had improved their employability skills and, therefore, felt more confident

These figures represent aggregated averages and they are not a perfect 'before and 'after' comparison. Nevertheless, they do indicate a shift in the perception of young people and provide evidence of the skills that develop once they engage in the employability programme.

## **Service User Interviews**

Twelve people were interviewed for this evaluation. This sample represents 8.5% of the total number of young people currently being supported by the project. Half of the group interviewed had been with HELP between one and two years. Three people had been involved for less than one year and three had been using the service for between three and five years.

Three people in Bute were interviewed via Skype and nine in Dunoon were interviewed in person.

An equal number of young men and women were interviewed. This is not actually reflective of the current gender split amongst the overall group of service users, which has more women (68%) than men (32%). The predominance of young women accessing the service represents a shift in recent times, but for the purposes of this evaluation, it was helpful to interview equal numbers of both sexes.

The interviews were informal, but included a set of questions, asked over the course of a half-hour discussion.

Most people were engaged in all or most parts of the programme. A few, however, were using specific elements. For example, one person's initial engagement was through the football and this led him to access help with employment skills. Another young person, still at school, but requiring support to secure accommodation, is accessing the music tuition and has taken part in two residential weekends. One young man who is 'job ready' has been getting help to navigate the new Universal Credit system.

Nearly all the young people interviewed had either received support to secure accommodation and or were receiving ongoing support to maintain their tenancy. A couple of people were not yet at the stage of needing support with housing, but felt they would in the future.

## What difference has HELP made to you?

The 'differences made' fall into two broad categories. Around two thirds of the young people spoke about how they have received practical help to apply for a job or college or to acquire certificates. Seven of the 12 mentioned specifically the importance of building or improving their CV.

*"I had a CV before. They helped me improve it. CV's are supposed to be two or three pages – my old CV ran to seven pages!"*

Nearly all of the young people also spoke about the emotional or personal development support that they receive. Improved confidence was mentioned a few times and was attributed to the taking part in activities and meeting other people.

*"On the second residential there was a workshop that helped me develop my self-confidence".*

The importance of meeting others came out strongly as a theme. It was noticeable how many of the young people considered themselves as shy and how they had previously been quite isolated.

*"I'm generally a quiet person, but I'm coming out of my shell – I've made good friends here."*

A difference for some was that there was always someone there to listen, support and even cajole on occasion. This is a theme that emerged even more strongly when people were later asked about what is different about the way that HELP provides them with support.

Being more motivated by the activities was also brought up by different people. One example being:

*"I've got into the Homeless World Cup through HELP. It gives you something to work towards, an ambition to focus on."*

Being able to cope better with quite specific issues also featured in a few conversations. For example:

*"HELP has helped with my ADHD and this helps my concentration." Or: "Taking part in music helps me de-stress. Music helps me focus – I'm easily distracted."*

All of the interviewees recognised something that had changed for them and one was particularly candid in his response:

*"Before I started I was a bit of a nuisance in the community!"*

**Why do you think HELP has made a difference to these things and is the support you have received from HELP different from other organisations and agencies that you have received support and assistance from?**

Some strong themes emerged from this pair of connected questions. A sense of comfort, inclusion and security that came from knowing that someone was 'there' for them was key amongst the reasons why people thought HELP is able to make a difference. Comments like the following were made by all the interviewees:

*"They have patience and understanding for People."*

*"They are always there, even if you feel you don't want or need them – they are still there."*

*"They don't give up on you."*

*"They make you feel comfortable and I trust everyone in here."*

A few people said that the busy programme and the positive encouragement to participate were the reasons why HELP made a difference to them.

*"By being there for you – I wouldn't say 'harassing you', but they will push you to the limits."*

*"The Employment Group is still fun and so people want to come back to it. It doesn't feel 'task orientated'."*

The young people interviewed regarded their relationship with Social Work, the Job Centre and statutory services quite differently to the one that they have with HELP.

*"They understand more and make you feel like they are listening to you. You're not just another person to be processed."*

*"They are inviting and friendly – Professional, but not 'sit-in-front-of-the-desk' professional."*

**If HELP hadn't been there to support you or provide information, what difference do you think that would have made to you?**

This was a difficult question for some of the interviewees. Those who were able to answer were thoughtful and open with their responses. Some of the statements were very powerful. Critically, most recognised some or other significant impact that HELP had had on them.

*"If HELP hadn't been there I wouldn't have had the confidence to go out of the door. I used to self-harm and the Mental Health Team were not particularly helpful. But HELP gave me coping mechanisms."*

*"I'd probably be on the streets or living at home with my mum. Mum pressurised me to get my own place. I might have had financial trouble, debt and family problems."*

*"I would have been homeless at 16."*

*"Sitting in my room playing Call of Duty."*

*"I'd probably be back in Glasgow..... (long pause) in bad circumstances. It's been life - changing."*

Everyone was given a chance to add anything they wanted to the conversation. In general this yielded praise for the team. A couple of people also described how they saw the service as 'family'. This was a something that had been brought up by a number of people in response to the earlier questions. Perhaps for quite a few of the young people, a sense of connection and belonging has been lacking in their lives and HELP's unconditional positive regard translates into an association with HELP as family. As one person put it:

*"They include you and don't judge."*

Finally, each person was asked to use one word to describe HELP or their experience of the organisation. This presented several of the interviewees with quite a challenge. However, after due consideration, each person came up with a word (albeit stretching the definition of one word on a couple of occasions). Here is what they said:



### Community Footprint

This illustration shows the range of organisations that HELP works alongside, grouped around the main area of engagement, although the boundaries are blurred, as support or intervention in one area often has an impact elsewhere.





## PARTNER INTERVIEWS

From this extensive network, people from five key partners were interviewed to get an understanding of the impact that HELP is having on their organisational objectives, as well as gaining an appreciation of how they see HELP impacting on the young people that they have mutual responsibility for. All the people interviewed have had involvement with HELP for at least three years.

### **Fyne Homes Housing Association – Teresa Shields, Head of Housing Services**

HELP supports a number of young people in Fyne Homes' properties. The two organisations come together and may even go head to head where there are issues surrounding tenancies, for example arrears. HELP is there first and foremost to advocate on behalf of the young people, but Fyne Homes consider it beneficial to all to know that any decisions are tested and fair and that young people are provided independent support and advice in relation to their tenancy.

Teresa believes that HELP has a huge impact on tenancy sustainment and has witnessed poorer sustainment levels in other areas where there is no such similar support for young people.

*"If HELP had not been there we would have lots more arrears and lots more abandonments"*

Another impact has been the improved relationships that HELP is able to broker between Fyne Homes and its tenants. For example, where there is a lack of engagement with the Association, HELP can become involved because they are trusted by the young people to act in their interest.

Although Teresa's primary responsibility is getting in rents and managing around 1500 properties, she values the holistic approach taken by HELP – appreciating that it is about getting all the other things in life (money, work, etc.) stable that helps sustain a tenancy.

Teresa described a really good relationship between Fyne Homes and HELP and other partners and how the Association has been able to give something back by giving HELP access to training opportunities.

*"There is good partnership working here and it has become more settled over time. It is about working with people."*

### **Dunoon Grammar School – David Mitchell, Head Teacher**

The school and HELP come together for a variety of reasons.

- To identify early and work with youngsters who are at risk of leaving school without a positive destination. This ties in with Cowal Employability Partnership that is hosted at the school and involves a strong partnership of between 12 and 13 people from various organisations.
- To support a child who may require more intensive work whilst at school, i.e. on a joint placement between the school and HELP.
- For HELP to provide input into the school's exam leave programme, especially for young people who are taking very few or no formal exams.
- For HELP to provide input to the school's lunch-time Drop In where young people can go and speak to people about the future and other issues.

David sees the main impact of HELP's support as being on confidence and outlook. Referring to a pupil who had been on a part-timetable programme he said:

*"It helps to increase confidence levels massively. I have seen a young man come back a much more 'rounded' person."*

David reflected on how opportunities for work experience in Cowal and Bute early in life are more limited than in the past. He believes that if HELP were not there would be a huge impact locally and not just on what the school does jointly with HELP.

*"It would be ideal if we did not need services like HELP, but that is the real world that we live in."*

### **Argyll and Bute Adult Learning - Rhona Grant, Adult Education Worker**

The relationship with HELP centres principally on formally delivering SVQ's. There has been a long history of joint work to prepare young people for employment, but in the past it wasn't as structured as it has become with the resources afforded by the Lottery funding.

*"HELP provides a sustained approach and it feels like we have a proper programme."*

Rhona believes that HELP has impacted in a number of ways in relation to her own organisations objectives:

- Adult Learning gains access to and the trust of young people through HELP.

*"I secured funding for driving lessons and I went through HELP to recruit people to the driving programme. This allowed young people to come to us who wouldn't have naturally accessed Adult Education."*

- HELP can identify skills and knowledge gaps that young people have, doing the ground work on behalf of Adult Education.
- HELP provides a conduit for feedback from young people to Adult Learning and other organisations involved in the Cowal Employability Partnership. This helps with the strategic development of services associated with 16+ Opportunities for All.
- HELP's funding ultimately enhances the capacity Adult Learning because, as more SVQ's are attained, Adult Learning is eligible for more funding.

Rhona thought that there were four main areas where HELP is making a difference to the people that it supports. These being because it:

- Invests time in hard to engage and socially excluded youngsters.
- Has become recognised and trusted as the first 'port of call' for people who don't know where they are going.
- Gets employers on board and breaks down barriers of perception in a small place where some young people and or their families have poor reputations.
- Keeps people living in the community and preventing them from drifting away.

*"Without HELP we wouldn't see as many people coming through our door"*



## **Job Centre Plus – Billy Walker, Employment and Partnership Manager and Lorna Aitkin, Employer and Partnership Manager Support**

Billy and Lorna described a two way relationship that has matured and developed over the past two years or so. Job Centre Plus has key role in ensuring that claimants are meeting their commitments to find work or engage in activities that will lead to employment. HELP is working with young people who are claimants and so there is opportunity for mutual support and disagreement between the organisations.

*"It is an open and trusting relationship. We will not always agree and have crossed swords on occasions, but we have a very visible relationship – HELP comes into Job Centre Plus and vice versa."*

One of the most tangible ways in which the partnership is working is the willingness of Job Centre Plus to adjust signing on times when a claimant is working with HELP, because it is known and understood that engagement meets the requirements of the Claimant Commitment and HELP will advise Job Centre Plus if it is not.

Billy and Lorna regarded the ability of HELP to provide Job Centre Plus with a realistic understanding of people's abilities as being highly important, because this enables them to put achievable Claimant Commitments in place.

*"It is not in our or the claimant's interests to have things fail."*

Being responsive, welcoming and engaged in the community were the reasons that Billy and Lorna felt HELP was making a difference to the young people it supports. Above all, there was a strong sense of shared goals even though their organisational drivers may differ.

*"It doesn't matter who helps the young person into work, it is the outcome that counts. ....HELP has become an enabler for Job Centre Plus."*

## **Youth Services – Alan Robertson, Youth Worker**

Alan works in schools, facilitates youth forums and has a responsibility for general youth development in the area. The relationship with HELP that Alan described was very much two way, with HELP being able to use Alan as a Youth Worker and Council premises as a resource. At the same time Youth Services is able to link people into HELP, as part of their individual Activity Agreements. These are informal 'contracts' aimed at providing structure to a young person's engagement with Youth Services. Alan also uses his personal skills as a juggler and magician to run confidence and team building sessions for HELP.

The impact of all this is well described by Alan:

*"It helps break down the barriers between the young people and other people or service i.e. encourages social interaction. Helps young people develop confidence and spread their wings. But all that understates it - it is changing lives!!"*

The importance of social interaction was highlighted in example given by Alan in which a young man would not even leave his house at first, but once gently introduced to HELP he became involved in a range of activities within the service.

Speaking of respective organisational objectives it was clear that they are closely aligned:

*"We have similar (target) outcomes, in as much as it is about supporting people. The overlap comes in our activity agreements and this allows us to move young people forward to get skills through the employment programme."*

Each person from a partner organisation had been asked what they felt would be the impact if HELP was not there and all had in one way or another said that it would have a negative impact. However, Alan's observation was particularly interesting:

*"It might not get noticed as much as you think because these are shy or socially excluded young people who would become 'invisible' with no one to support and advocate for them."*



## ONE WORD

In the same way that each young person interviewed was asked for one word that describes HELP or their relationship with HELP, so was each representative of the partner organisations. Here is what they said:



## JOBS & CAREERS FAIR

Evidence of community involvement can be seen in HELP's involvement each year in a Jobs Fair, aimed at everyone from primary seven age group upwards. It does so as part of the Cowal Employability Partnership, which incorporates Dunoon Grammar School, the Opportunities for All Team, Job Centre Plus, Skills Development Scotland and Adult Learning. The most recent fair took place in March 2016 and impact figures are not yet available. However, the feedback from the DWP in 2015 was that the unemployment register has dropped 7% as a direct result of running the Fair.



## SHARING KNOWLEDGE

HELP has been able to share learning and knowledge gained in recent years. In part, this is due to having the additional capacity brought about by Lottery funding. Knowledge sharing is evident in the way that Dunoon Grammar School has adopted elements of the HELP Employability Programme. Another example of knowledge sharing can be found further afield whereby HELP Manager, Janet Mackellar is providing the Board of Western Isles Foyer with advice and support to help its staff gain appropriate SVQ's and meet SSSC accreditation requirements.



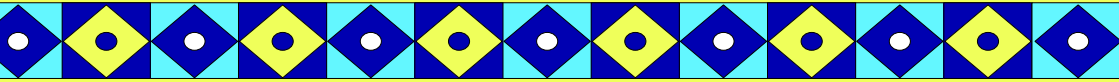
## CONCLUSION

The main impact on the young people themselves comes through the practical help and emotional support that they receive. These terms are often used in leaflets as things people can expect from a service. The interviews with service users revealed quite clearly what is important to them, and it is having someone who is there for them and that they can trust. They get that from HELP. The young people get access to a wide range of activities that, although structured, are enjoyable and accessible. The impact of this is to bring about purpose and direction in lives that have often been chaotic. There was good evidence to support this conclusion from both the 'in house' materials such as the Better Futures records and service user surveys and from the conversations with the young people and representatives from the partner organisations.

The interviews with service users revealed a relationship with HELP that is warm and shows a lot of personal regard by staff for service users and vice versa. There is a danger of the relationship becoming overly paternalistic, but the leadership at HELP is aware of this sensitive boundary.

The partner organisations interviewed were very positive about the impact HELP has on their own objectives, the young people and the wider community. For some, HELP provides a non-threatening and trusted connection to young people and so improves access, communication and understanding.

HELP is part of a wide network of partners and Argyll and Bute should be proud of the work of the Cowal Employability Partnership. HELP is actively connected with other community partners, from the church, to environmental projects, to the local library. These are not simply names on a page, but relationships that involve action, activity and make a difference. The impact of this is to help young people to develop a sense of belonging. It was noticeable from the service user interviews how shy and isolated some of the young people described themselves; so anything that shifts this has to be a good thing. The flip side of this community engagement is a changing perception by community partners of the young people. If this leads to jobs being secured, tenancies retained and young people feeling that they can remain in the area if they wish, then HELP has done its job.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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- Job Centre Plus - Billy Walker and Lorna Aitken
- Argyll and Bute Youth Services - Alan Robertson

Finally, thanks go to all the staff at HELP for sharing information and responding to requests for even more of it!

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