

Shetland's Early Action Programme

Project Progress: Part One

Introduction



Since the Christie Commission reported in 2011, it has been an ambition to transform our complex landscape of services into one where people and support services work hand-in-hand and spend is shifted towards prevention rather than crisis. Since that time, people have come to realise quite how challenging that is. I can now genuinely say that, in Shetland, by working collaboratively across organisations with people and communities, we are finding our way to achieve the priorities identified a decade ago.

The Anchor Project, funded by the Communities Fund since 2018, has enabled us to explore the characteristics and evaluate the impact of an early action approach for children and young people. The Project continues to support this work: in an expanded form, across our school estate (as the Early Action Team); and by putting in place actions to continue to transform the way the organisations interact and support Shetland's residents.

I'm delighted, that, moving forward, we're growing the scope and scale of change: Shetland's Early Action Programme extends the learning from Anchor, across all life stages. It also incorporates The Promise, Community Led Support and Shetland's Emotional Wellbeing and Resilience Project (which includes the national Trauma-Informed training programme). This short document summarises what we've learnt, from the Anchor Project, so far, and sets out the direction of our new Early Action Programme.

The pandemic has demonstrated to us that Shetland's public services, third sector and communities can implement rapid change; things that once seemed impossible were achieved overnight, opening up new opportunities for achieving the kind of change aspired to, when Anchor began. I'm looking forward to seeing the progress we can making in the coming years.

Maggie Sandison, Chair

Through the Anchor Project we listened to the views of families, who highlighted that the current system of support is confusing and difficult to navigate; different parts of the system do not communicate with each other; and families are often 'referred' to various services resulting in them having to speak to multiple people to get the help they need. We want to create a community that holds onto, and supports people until they no longer require it.



This closely aligns to the required culture change demanded by the findings of the Independent Care Review, and the responsibility of The Promise. As Chair of the Education and Families Committee of Shetland Islands Council I am committed, along with my colleagues across the Council, Health & Care, NHS, Police Scotland and Third Sector, to driving the work of change and supporting the necessary shifts in policy, practice and culture required so that every child grows up loved, safe and respected, and able to realise their full potential.

Councillor George Smith, Chair of Shetland Islands Council's Education and Families Committee



Early intervention is one that I am passionate about as it can help change the lives of us all. I am sure we have all been through events and times in our life that we could have benefited from some additional support. We need to create an environment that makes it ok to ask for help, where support is easy to access and tailored to individuals' needs, and we feel heard. It's important we value the role of friends, family and neighbours, and that services are there to support, when required. We need to be mindful it will take time to see results; we need to trust the process and know that early action is the way to achieve better outcomes for all of us!

Councillor Emma Macdonald, Chair of the Integration Joint Board



I am committed to ensuring that early intervention and prevention are priorities for the Board of NHS Shetland, and this is reflected in our recently published Clinical and Care Strategy 2021-2031. The Shetland Early Action Programme focuses on testing new ways of working with people, placing greater emphasis and resources on supporting people to have the knowledge and skills to make their own choices in how they achieve good health and wellbeing. This will, over time, change the relationship that people have with health and care organisations so they are more in control of their own goals, how they are supported and who supports them.

Gary Robinson, Chair of NHS Shetland Board



We are committed to learning from this project to review how we do things, so that we develop a culture of early intervention and providing support at the right time, with the right person so that families are able to reach their full potential. I am excited to see this work grow and develop and along with my colleagues and other partners I am committed to supporting how we can continue to embed early intervention in our work practices going forward.

Lynn Tulloch, Executive Officer, Voluntary Action Shetland

What is Anchor?

Anchor was designed to give families and services the space to try new ways of working together. Over the year before COVID-19, we saw the positive impact that a shift from crisis intervention to early intervention and prevention can have on families and individuals who need support.

The approach the project has taken is quite different, in that we have adopted a model for testing change in an incremental way, including gathering evidence, and sharing good practice and lessons learnt.

The 'test of change' took place at Sound Primary School from 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020. During that time we worked directly with a small number of families identified by the school as needing our help.

The project adapted support through lockdowns and restrictions, to support more families directly and indirectly.

This document is the first in a series that will report on the difference we are making.

“We have supported families who would normally only have support from school services. Families have been able to access practical and emotional support to achieve the best outcomes for themselves. Regular contact with families meant they could offload and problem-solve, and put in place strategies to overcome some of these difficulties.

“Another benefit is that parents were able to work with one service, and were then signposted to other relevant services as appropriate, rather than leaving them to try to work out for themselves who they needed to speak to.

“During the pandemic, families who were often reluctant to ask for help were encouraged to access food parcels and vouchers for local shops. We made sure that parents felt that it was okay to take up the support on offer, which eased family pressures and ultimately improved their quality of life.”

Sandra Summers
Anchor Project Officer



What Anchor has achieved so far

We set out three objectives for Anchor:

1. Facilitate family-led problem solving with those families engaged in the project
2. Record and share learning on barriers and opportunities to family-led project solving and the value of early intervention
3. Demonstrate the potential value of system change and facilitate that change through small incremental changes

In year one, the priority was to make substantial progress against the first and second objectives. By focusing on these, we could create a solid foundation to allow us to make progress on the third objective as the project develops and matures.

In the first year, we set up processes and practices for working with families, and that 'Anchor approach' has been thoroughly welcomed by all those involved. We have seen positive outcomes and impacts for the supported families and, while the number of families supported was relatively small (eight in total), each engagement generated a wealth of information that now supports the overall goal of shifting from crisis intervention to early intervention and prevention.

Our team works with supported individuals to break down the challenges they face as a family unit into individual issues for which specific action can be taken or support sought.

A common feature we've seen is that when an individual engages with Anchor they feel that their situation is out of control. Stress, worry, lack of trust, family conflict and financial difficulties are common.

Through Anchor, people report and display improved confidence, as well as a new perspective on their challenges. Importantly, they have been supported on a journey from feeling overwhelmed to understanding and learning, and finally on to a place where they can take action.

We asked to what extent they might have achieved the positive benefit from the engagement with Anchor if they had chosen a different path. The findings suggest that for the six families evaluated, the benefits experienced through engaging with Anchor were extremely unlikely to have occurred without the team's support.



Having support has been really useful and Anchor has meant we get various bits of help including regular food parcels. We would have managed without it, just, but having the support has made life a lot easier and a lot better.

If you need help, don't sit and struggle – everyone struggles sometime and those are the times you need to ask for help. I'm not the kind of person to ask – it's one of the hardest things I've had to do. But the help has been amazing – I won't always need it but it's something I've needed at this time.

Anchor has been brilliant. It's been fine to have someone to listen to me and not judge – I think that's been the biggest thing. Sandra has also pointed me in the right direction when I've had questions or needed some help.


The support is confidential and private and it's been invaluable. I'd have struggled a lot without Sandra and I'd recommend the support to anyone who is struggling.

I didn't know about Anchor until a friend told me about it. At the time, I felt that I needed to talk to someone so I went to see Lynsey and Sandra and found them really nice and friendly. I talked to them about what I was going through and they listened and gave me advice.

They also helped me get the job I'm in just now by giving me some support with my CV and to fill in the application.


No one should feel scared to ask for help. People are there to listen to you and if you need help, just ask. You can talk about anything – personal problems, help with a CV and job applications etc.





Anchor is a really good thing. I found out about it through Sound School, got in touch with Lynsey and just offloaded everything. She helped me with applying for grants and we get food parcels every second week. I do have money but not much and Lynsey is really good at helping me.


I've already told a couple of people about the support who I know are struggling. Don't be scared to ask for help – I did and it's helped me a lot.



I went to Anchor for help because I was struggling during lockdown. They helped keep me motivated with suggestions for me and my child. Lynsey has always been there when I needed her and I think it's so good to have someone to support you like that.

I'm involved in another community group and through that I've been applying for funding to help supplement the Anchor food parcels with fresh produce, to get help to those who need help, like I did.

It's important that other people who might be struggling know that you're not the first person to go through hardship and you won't be the last. Struggling isn't failure and there's no embarrassment in it. If you need help, please ask.



What we've learnt about early action

“This project has highlighted that partnership working can lead to improved outcomes for families. Parents involved in Anchor have felt supported. Often children can be negatively impacted when their parents are facing challenges and sometimes schools are unaware of the difficulties faced by families. So having us attached to the school meant that we could work together to make a real difference to families on their terms, allowing them to feel empowered to bring about change.

“Families need to feel that their school is a community resource where they can reach out for help, before things escalate and a longer period of intervention is required.”

Sandra Summers
Anchor Project Officer

What has been key throughout this project is:

- The skills and experience of the project officers, including their listening, enquiring and conversational skills, as well as their knowledge of the support system, so they can guide families towards the right services. Project officers are viewed as approachable, supportive, ‘on my side’, independent and non-judgemental.
- Placing the supported individuals at the centre of the problem-solving process, helping them build their confidence, gain a new perspective and a sense of control over issues.
- The individual is supported along a pathway that begins with the development of a trusted relationship and moves on to disentangling the issues, awareness raising, identifying potential action and then taking action to improve conditions for them and their family.



At Sound Primary School, we work in partnership with Anchor to ensure that families who experience a range of challenges get the right support to bring about positive outcomes. Since April 2019, the team have worked closely with 13 families and a proportion of those continue to receive support.

Support from Anchor can be both practical and emotional. The financial support that families have been able to access has been particularly beneficial. The Anchor Team have helped raise parental awareness of various grants and benefits that they may be entitled to, including free school meals. Between August 2020 and March 2021, there has been a 50% increase in the uptake of free school meals at Sound Primary School. Anchor also supports families with regular access to food parcels. Working in partnership with Anchor has also improved outcomes for families by improving the health and wellbeing of our learners and their families, promoting confidence in our parents to approach the school and supporting parenting skills.

The Anchor Team provide many different aspects of support to our families depending on their need. Our families are able to get in contact with members of the Anchor Team and know that they will be listened to and signposted to the support that they need. The relationships that have been built are based on trust and respect. Positive relationships is one of the strongest aspects of the project and families have shared that they have felt they've had a friend to go to in the Anchor Team.

Sound Primary School staff know that they have someone that they can go to as well when looking for advice and information to help them better support families within our school community. The Anchor Team have helped us with training around child protection, worked closely with us to share knowledge and increase our confidence in supporting our families and fostered strong links with our parent council. The Anchor Team are part of our school community and as such are visible; supporting us at school events and helping us to share information about early action across the wider school community.

Ann-Marie Angus
Head Teacher – Sound Primary School



What we've learnt about system change

Anchor has also made progress in influencing system change, including seeing stakeholder organisations prioritise the development of softer skills to better support families, showing willingness to move towards more family-led approaches and shifts in attitude towards more open partnership working.

Our hope is that learning will lead to system change that puts families at the centre of decision-making and directs resources towards early action rather than crisis management.

The key features of Anchor that will make it easier to affect system change include:

- The seniority of individuals and the organisations represented on the Project Board. The Board is a vital component in Anchor's ability to inform and influence system change.
- The willingness of Anchor to engage with and learn from other service providers.
- A commitment to active research supporting continuous improvement in how the project is delivered.



I have been a serving police officer for over 29 years and have spent most of my service involved in criminal investigations and public protection enquiries. I have seen first hand the impact abuse, addiction, poverty and deprivation can have on families, often it can be inter-generational, continuing through families when they're not able to help themselves or aren't given the support they need at the right time.

I have learned the need to intervene and support when families are willing to accept, and where they've identified for themselves that they need help. If we can prevent issues from developing and help to make families stronger, that is a far better situation than help coming too late when a family or individual is at significant risk of harm.

Working closely with key partner agencies in Shetland has provided an opportunity to share professional knowledge and years of experience, which has allowed partners to find a shared vision for improvement, refocusing efforts to early intervention and prevention, ensuring our shared resources are used effectively and recognising a need to look at new ways to deliver services across the Shetland Partnership.

As a senior member of that partnership, and chair of many of the strategic groups, I could also see a number of these groups working on their own on similar outcomes, and that we could better focus efforts by co-ordinating what we're doing in Shetland to improve things for families and individuals.

I was delighted to become lead for the Anchor Project and built up the Board from there, populating it with like-minded people who bought into my initial ideas and who were able to share in developing the vision. Our Board took an agile, flexible approach to leading the project – allowing the people on the ground to explore the best ways of working, with senior leaders very much taking a step back. This is a very different way of delivering services – but it has worked.

Anchor has gone from strength to strength and the Board has decided to move to a model of early action based on the evidence gathered since the project began.

This is about giving people the best start or best go at life. It's about the small things like supporting families to apply for additional funding they didn't know they were eligible for, which helps to ease anxiety – and those things matter. Rather than imposing service at a later time or when people are at risk, this is about supporting families by taking early action.

Lindsay Tulloch QPM
Superintendent (Partnerships & Prevention)
Highlands & Islands Division – Police Scotland



Next steps

Senior management from Shetland Islands Council, the Integration Joint Board, NHS Shetland, Police Scotland and Voluntary Action Shetland participated in workshops at the end of 2020 to develop a new 'Vision for Change' (overleaf) for what the system of support should look and feel like for Shetland's residents when life becomes more challenging.

The aim is to shift towards early intervention and prevention, with a subsequent reduction in crisis intervention.

The following strategic outcomes have been set:

- Shetland's residents access early support
- Shetland's residents receive strength-based support
- Shetland's residents find no door is the wrong door when seeking support

The role and remit of the Anchor Project Board has also been expanded in line with the new vision.

It has become the Early Action Programme Board, with a number of research and enabler projects, all designed to shift support to earlier intervention, across all life stages: research projects include Anchor and Trauma-Informed Practice; enablers include workforce capability, technology, communications, measuring impact and alignment of change.

For further information, please contact:

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Vision for change

- The support available to individuals in Shetland is **enabling and kind**.
- When Shetland's residents encounter difficult to overcome challenges, **early interaction** with potential support is the norm.
- **Friends and family** play a vital and widely recognised role in the provision of support.
- Where support from services is sought, the presumption is that support will be delivered in a **local community-based setting** that creates a comfortable environment for the individual.
- The support system works with an individual using a **strengths-based approach** and targets improvement in an individual's confidence and capacity to act.
- The organisations providing support services operate under a **no door is the wrong door** policy.
- The **individual is listened to**. What an individual says they need is listened to and the whole household is considered.
- The **value of time** spent with an individual to build a trusting relationship is recognised as a good investment by service providers. Engaging in simple practical helpful actions can be transformative.
- The individual receives **tailored and flexible support** that meets their needs and is matched to their capacity to act.
- The individual experiences a **seamless transition** from touch point interactions to, where appropriate, working with more specialist services on issues at the core of experienced challenges.
- **Professionals and support workers have a wide knowledge base**, supported by learning on the job, the sharing of best-practice, and good relationships between services.



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