

YOUR. PLACE | YOUR POINT

Evaluation of Participants, Aug 2025

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Background

In early September 2024, a Participatory Budgeting (PB) process enabled the distribution of £30,000 of Whole Family Wellbeing funding in the community of Merkinch and South Kessock. *A list of the projects that received funding and amounts can be found at Appendix 1.*

The projects have been developed and delivered in the community over the past 12 months.







An evaluation of the PB process was carried out by the Scottish Community development Centre. *A copy of this report can be found at Appendix 2.*

Interim reports were written and submitted to the Whole Family Wellbeing Project by each of the projects in May 2025. *A copy of these reports can be found at Appendix 3.*

This report seeks to set out more information about the impact of the projects on children and young people, on organisations and on the wider community.

Objectives

Young people set 6 priority statements for change which shaped the Participatory Budgeting funding criteria.

-  Increase the number of trusted and safe adults supporting children and young people in the community.
-  Create safe spaces and things to do
-  Improve existing spaces for children and young people in the community
-  Create opportunities for children and young people to make decisions and lead youth led projects
-  Learning opportunities in informal environments
-  A focus on prevention rather than crisis intervention

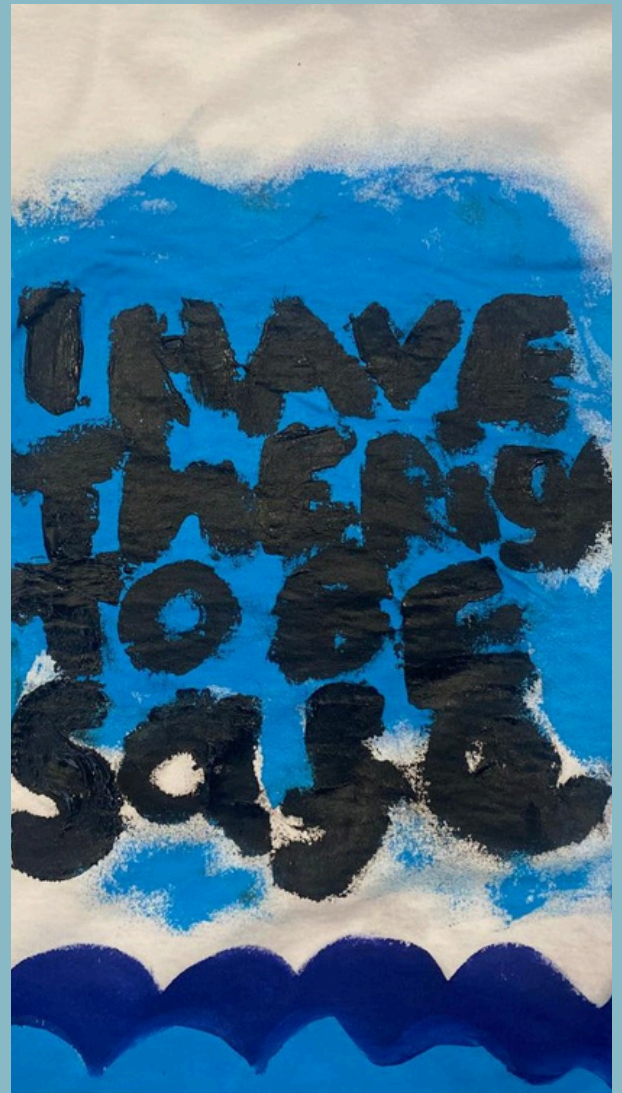
Methodology

Clair Wallace from Youth Highland visited all the projects and spoke separately to staff and volunteers leading the activities and participants who took part in the project activities. The evaluation is based on National Standards and the six priority statements for change which were set by young people as part of a Community Action Group youth engagement process which shaped the PB funding criteria. Evaluative conversations included questions about project purpose and aims, organisational resource and sustainability, levels of engagement and participation, successes and challenges and impact (on individuals, organisations and the wider community). A copy of the questions for organisations can be found at Appendix 4. A copy of questions for participants can be found at Appendix 5.

Findings: Organisations

Conversations with staff sought to be supportive with a focus on what difference the funding meant organisationally. Questions tried to better understand the challenges and opportunities facing organisations working with children and young people in the community.

Staff from 7 of the projects participated in the evaluation process. This is all of the projects that received funding and delivered. The eighth project 'Merkinch Primary Positive Community Relationship HUB' did not go ahead due to project funding stopping and key members of staff being made redundant.



#1 Participation

Existing projects were more likely to involve young people or community members in the development of the project proposal. They were more likely to be able to evidence high levels of participation within the delivery of the projects. Established relationships between children and young people are important in ensuring meaningful participation and shared power in decision making within projects.

Projects run by local people (Merkinch Football club, The Clay Studio, TLC) have high levels of engagement. They are trusted by local people.

Where projects sought to deliver new activities or opportunities uptake was slower and smaller numbers participated, with the exception of TLC's tots group which was well attended throughout the timeframe of the project and is keen to continue due to demand.

Most projects (4 out of 7) included young people in the design and delivery of the project once it was running. This meant that young people got to make choices and decisions about the programme of activities or led in the delivery of activities with other young people.

Projects which had staff and venue (core costs) covered are able to maintain contact with children, young people and families. It is harder for organisations to maintain ongoing contact if the organisations core funding is not stable (this meant that the Clay Studio who have experienced significant financial insecurity during the timeframe of the project have stopped delivery of some projects which threatens ongoing contact with some of the young people they work with).

A copy of results from questions relating to youth participation can be found at Appendix 6

#2 Successes

Existing organisations told us that the project has allowed them to increase the number of sessions that they deliver. They have all seen an increase in the number of people participating in their activities and groups during the project timeframe. Activities have had a positive impact on individual young people's lives.

Examples of feedback that demonstrates this include:

We have provided
safe spaces to
learn and socialise

Young people participating in
targeted sessions (with
CAMHS) have started
engaging with mainstream /
preventative programme of
activities'

Young people have
new skills / awareness
of their community

Developing the
confidence of local
people through
trying new things'

So ... what happens
next?

*More detailed
information about the
numbers of young
people engaging can be
found at Appendix 7*

#3 Challenges

A number of the organisations thought that overall there is less going on in the community.

Local groups thought that it was challenging trying to work in partnership with and alongside statutory services and within strict statutory requirements. It was felt that these do not always meet the needs of local people and communities.

There is less support
for a declining
number of
community led
initiatives

What is the plan if
opportunities keep
declining?

It is difficult to
maintain community
activity without
ongoing financial
support

Timescale was restricting
– needs to be a longer
term timescale to enable
relationships to be built
and measurable change to
be delivered

Working in
partnership with
existing systems can
be challenging

#4 Impact

All organisations felt that the project had enabled individuals to gain significant positive impact through engagement with their projects. They felt sustained activity and funding is necessary to ensure more long term and measurable benefits for the community.

The project is enabling increased referrals / signposting between organisations.

Connection with wider family groups

Individuals have gained confidence and new skills

Young people becoming leaders / volunteers

More detailed information about the perceived change the projects enabled can be found at Appendix 8

#5 Future Hopes

Many of the organisations we spoke with gave similar feedback regarding their hopes for the future. These included consistent core funding for key groups, positive partnerships, a focus on prevention and community wealth building through work which encourages and enables community empowerment.

A safe space for children and young people was viewed by all partners as essential in meeting the needs of families, children and young people in the community. Most organisations saw this as something that has been asked for by local children and young people and needs acting on as a priority. Most organisations are positive about the prospect of setting this up and running it as a multi agency community led initiative with shared responsibility and with a focus on youth voice and human rights.

Better
partnerships

Youth
Empowerment

Increased
support for
community led
activities

More consistent
long term funding
for established
groups

Less crisis in
the
community

Positive
sustainable
pathways – local
jobs / leisure

For the
community to
have increased
independence

CYP to grow
up feeling
safe / loved

Increased skills
and incomes in
households

There were a number of other common themes in the discussions with organisations.

All organisations had opinions about funding criteria, amounts of funding available and also the timescale for the projects.

There was understanding in all organisations that important work in the community was struggling to survive and a wish for community led activity to be valued and meaningfully supported.

Most organisations felt that there was a need for more consistency and ongoing funding support for activities for families, children and young people in Merkinch and South Kessock.

There was also recognition that real change takes time, and that there is a need for longer timescales for projects in order to enable meaningful work and lasting change.

A lack of a clear strategy for children and young people is seen as making sustainable progress difficult to plan or achieve locally.

Consistent core funding

Bigger pockets of cash are required by some organisations

In future the amount should be more

Relationships need to be built and maintained in the community

There needs to be a rolling programme of funding

Findings: Participants

Conversations with families, children and young people were interactive and fun. *A full list of the questions for participants can be found at Appendix 5*

Participants from 6 of the projects took part in evaluation conversations. We were unable to meet with families who took part in the Sure Start and Family Centre project.

#1 What did you do?

‘We have done activities with 5 workers over a few sessions. They took us out of school for 7 weeks at 1pm until 5pm. They have done different things with us. We were excited and looked forward to going out every week’

‘We get support from people who run the group’

‘We have fun’

‘We come along with our babies and toddlers. They play. We meet other mums’

‘Football provides something to do in Merkinch – there isn’t much to do for boys’

‘Our families get involved and care about what we care about’

‘Role models are important here - they make us feel confident’

‘People care about this club’

#2 What were the Best Bits?

'All of it'

'Street League Competitions'

'Having somewhere close to home we can come and be with our mates'

'Trying new stuff'

'FREEDOM!'

'Seeing Blue the dog'

'Being creative'

'Getting out of school'

'Climbing Wall'

'Tots try different toys that we don't have at home'

'It is special time - we look forward to coming every week'

'There is something for everyone'

#3 What difference did it make?

‘No more boredom’

‘Meeting new friends’

‘If it wasn’t here I’d just be stuck on the sofa’

‘Gives us the opportunity to learn new things, be creative and express themselves’

‘Its lots of fun. I love doing new things, I always walk away feeling accomplished’

‘Saw new places and learned about things to do nearby that I didn’t know about’

‘New skills’

‘It gets us out’

‘I feel less isolated’

‘It provides me a safe space with my younger child. My older child has ASN and we can chill out here and have an escape from an otherwise quite chaotic life’

#4 What would you change?

‘It should be open at all times so we can access it when we want’

'We need our own space'

'On longer and more often'

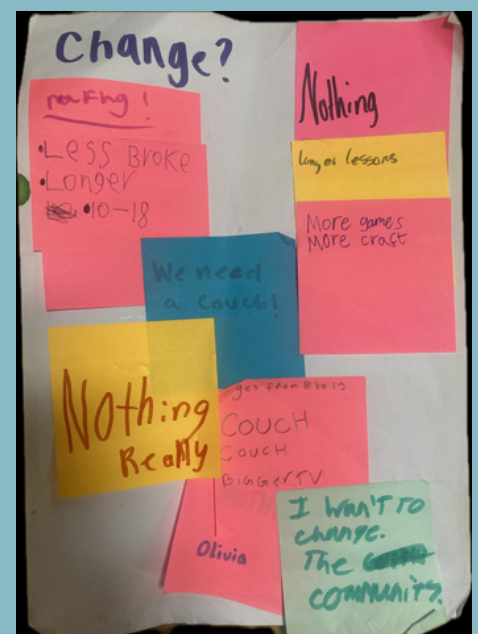
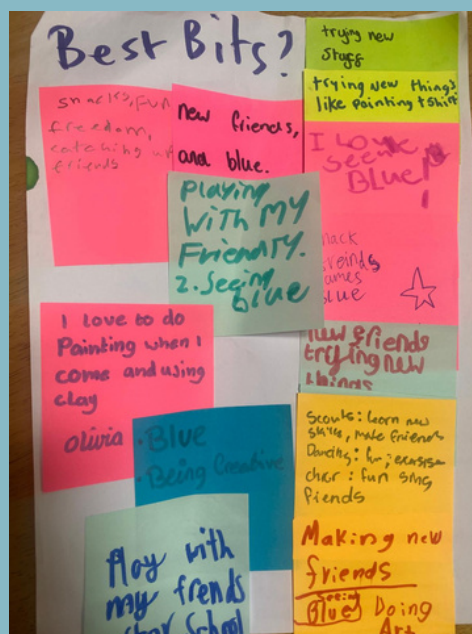
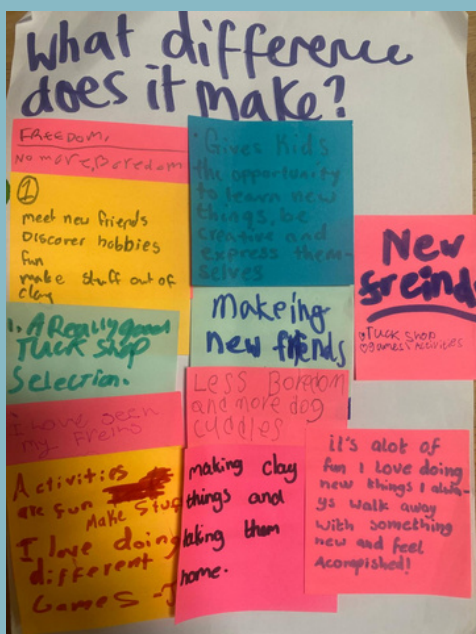
'I wouldn't change anything'

‘Less broke’

‘Maybe give people more choice about taking part or not’

'It would be nice to have an outdoor space'

'It would be good if it ran through the holidays'



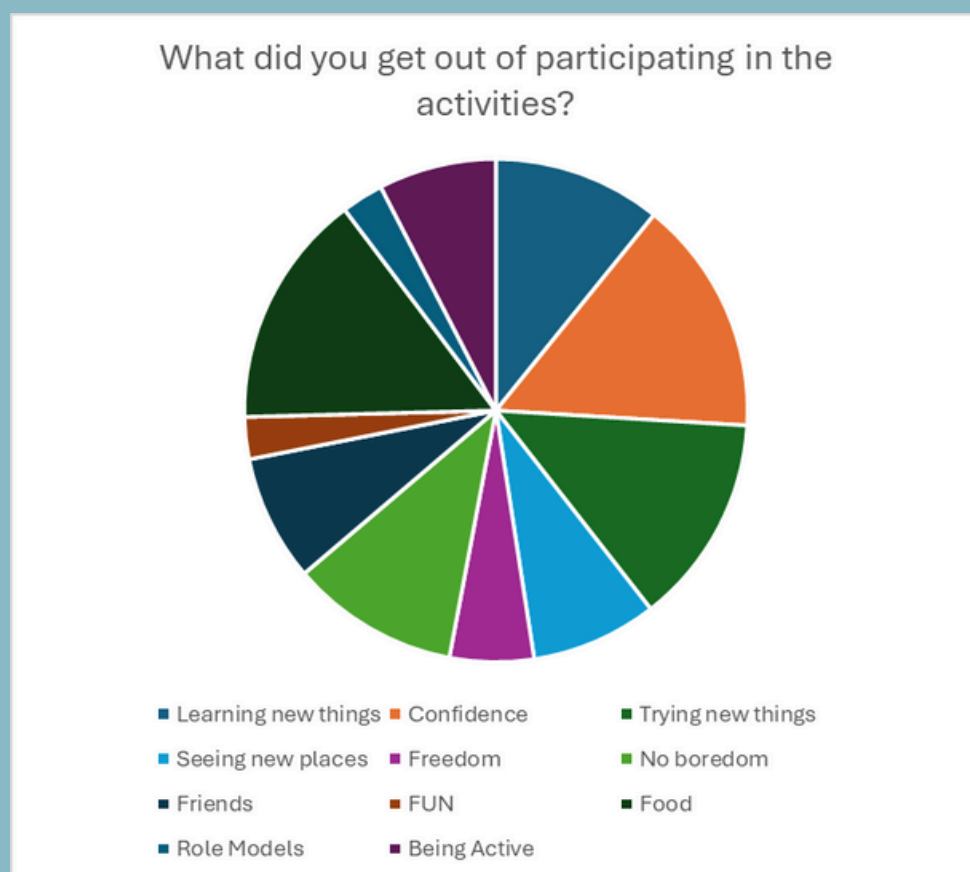
#5 Walking Evaluation

Young people also took part in a walking evaluation. We asked questions and noted down whether young people walked to the sections of the room marked 'yes', 'maybe' and 'don't know'. Questions were shaped around the 6 priority statements which were set by young people through the CAG consultation process and which were identified as priority outcomes in the PB application process.

From this we can tell that all young people felt able to make choices and listened to by adults when they took part in the funded activities. Most young people felt that they have relationships with adults that they trust and feel safe with and feel part of a group or team.

Less young people felt that taking part improved their behaviour and there was mixed opinion as to whether or not there is more to do in Merkinch as a result of the project.

A breakdown of all the results of the walking evaluation can be found at Appendix 9



Observations

- All the projects were successful in delivering positive outcomes with children, families and young people. All of the projects delivered key identified outcomes as defined by young people in the 6 project priority statements.
- New projects suit being funded using a PB approach. PB enables innovation and trying out new things.
- PB funded projects are a good way to encourage and support delivery of collaborative projects and enable organisations in the community to get to know each other and work in partnership.
- Where activities are run by local people (including mums and dads) children and young people are more likely to engage and continue to engage in the activities. Young people feel safe being led by adults with similar lived experience and 'belonging'.
- Established community run (voluntary and community led) organisations and activity programmes in Merkinch and South Kessock do not have core funding and struggle to survive.
- Community run organisations have very positive and established trusting relationships with local people. These relationships are important in reducing crisis in the community – providing locally run facilities, providing jobs for local people and encouraging local participation in decision making and leadership.
- PB should enhance delivery of existing organisations and activities. There are a number of key community led organisations in the Merkinch and South Kessock area that require core funding. This process would have been better carried out in a more equal funding landscape – where voluntary and statutory organisations share funding pressures. Instead the process highlighted the imbalance and inequality of the current financial landscape in children and youth services. PB does not suit being spent in areas and organisations which require basic core costs to be covered. This is particularly important in communities experiencing multiple deprivation.
- It is not possible to shape and deliver new projects in such a short timeframe. Where members of staff needed to be recruited and partnership agreements needed to be put in place the project timescale was not long enough to then develop trusting relationships with new participants. Timescales need to be significantly longer if measurable change is to be delivered.
- There is a lack of a clear plan for children, families and young peoples services in Merkinch and South Kessock. 6 priorities and the Whole Family Wellbeing pillars were used to frame this project but there is no clear strategy which sets out where we are now, where we seek to get to and how we will get there enabling meaningful improvement for children, families and young people in the community.

Recommendations

An assessment of current provision needs to be carried out to identify and measure the impact of services and activities on individual and community life. The assessment needs to measure cost against outcomes.

- An impact assessment should be carried out to better understand the work that is taking place in Merkinch and South Kessock with children, families and young people. The impact assessment should seek to understand funding, staffing, competence and with a focus on ascertaining best value for services in delivering positive outcomes in the community and in peoples lives . This should be carried out by a neutral party and include the measure of qualitative and quantitative data.
- As a result of findings there should be a funding strategy for children and young peoples work to ensure that spending is based on delivering positive outcomes for best value.

Local people (including young people) need to be involved in the development and delivery of a local strategy for children, young people and families. The strategy should set out improvement priorities and actions and clearly define who should lead in delivering actions.

- Increased collaboration and partnership between organisations working in the Merkinch and South Kessock area should be supported and could be funded through future PB initiatives.
- There needs to be increased work to include local people and organisations in local planning. The local CAG group should be made up of at least 50% local people and should include representation of young people.
- It is important that PB supports the development of new ideas and innovation for all partners. It should not be used to fund core running costs of organisaitions who are not seen as equal by statutory partners.
- Community run organisations should be recognised as key partners in enabling increased community engagement and working towards sustainable communities. To build wealth in communities local groups need to be included and invested in.
- There should be investment in training and skills development to increase the skills, knowledge and competence of all partners (statutory and voluntary sector).

Young people, children, families and partners should be involved in visioning and planning of a local multi agency led children and young peoples centre.

- Local people and young people should be supported to work together to develop a shared plan for a children and young peoples centre and a co-delivered activity and learning programme for the community.
- The centre should be set up as a community run organisation and will require a funding strategy and a plan for sustainability.
- Such an ambitious project will require sustainable professional leadership and resource.

Appendices

Appendix 1

A list of the projects funded by My Place My Point Funding 2024 - 2025

| Name of Project | Funding Awarded |
|---|-----------------|
| Aban Outdoor – Pathways to Outdoor Activities | £3,000 |
| Merkinch Football Academy | £5,000 |
| Merkinch Positive Community Relationships HUB | £2,000 |
| New Start Highland and Inverness Family Centre – Team Cuisine | £4,988 |
| TLC Inverness – Community Engagement | £5,000 |
| The Clay Studio – Youth Club | £4,700 |
| The Clay Studio – Youth Cafe | £4,970.96 |
| The Clay Studio – After School Club placements | £1,403.56 |

Appendix 2

A report evaluating the process of Participatory Budgeting in Merkinch and South Kessock, carried out by SCDC

scdc

scottish
community
development
centre

‘Your Place, Your Point’ - Participatory Budgeting Evaluation

November 2024

Supporting best practice in community development

‘Your Place, Your Point’ - Participatory Budgeting, Inverness

Background

Local and national partners have worked together to develop a Participatory Budgeting (PB) process called ‘Your Place, Your Point’. The process used some of Highland Council’s share of the Scottish Government’s ‘Whole Family Wellbeing Fund’. This PB project aimed to improve local democracy, ensuring that communities are more engaged with decision-making to improve safety and wellbeing for young people. In advance of the PB process, the Scottish Government contributed separate funding towards the participation of young people, supported by Youth Highland.

Youth Highland worked with children and young people in the area to understand how they felt about where they live. A wide consultation was carried out which saw nearly 500 children and young people participate and share their views about a range of topics. Through this, they expressed what they need in their community and six themes were identified. The themes all work towards ensuring that ‘we grow up loved, safe and respected so that we realise our full potential’ (Scottish Government’s National Performance Framework). The six themes were taken up by the ‘Your Place, Your Point’ PB process.

Partners in the PB process included Highland Community Planning Partnership, Highland Third Sector Interface, Youth Highland, Scottish Community Development Centre (SCDC) and Police Scotland. Partners came together to develop a PB process based on these six themes developed by children and young people. There was a budget of over £40,000, with £30,000 of this being made available for the community to realise the aspirations of children and young people in Merkinch & South Kessock. More information about the project can be found on the [Police Scotland Engagement Hub](#).

Evaluation

This evaluation looked at the ‘Your Place, Your Point’ PB process through the experience of local partners including representatives from organisations that were awarded funds through PB and non-funded projects. The focus of the evaluation is to determine what worked and what needs attention for future PB processes.

The PB process ran over Spring, Summer and Autumn 2024 and recruited a steering group made up of local people from the community to help make decisions about the PB approach. The steering group included representatives from statutory and voluntary sector organisations.

The PB process received 11 applications for funding. The PB steering group agreed that all of these met the criteria and that they would go forward to the public vote. The public vote ran from **27 August online** and culminated with an in-person community voting day on **7 September** in Merkinch Community Centre.

130 people voted in the process across all 11 projects (100 online and 30 in person). The initial budget of £30k was increased to £31,063.32 to accommodate all projects which received the strongest support from residents. The eight funded projects are outlined below:

- Youth Club - £4,700.80
- Holiday Clubs - £2,000.00
- Merkinch Football Academy - £5,000.00
- Youth Café - £4,970.96
- Pathways to Outdoor Activities - £3,000.00
- Community Engagement - £5,000.00
- After School Placements - £1,403.56
- Team Cuisine Cooking Classes - £4,988.00.

Following the voting process, Paul Nelis from Scottish Community Development Centre (SCDC) led an evaluation of 'Your Place, Your Point'. The evaluation took the form of a group discussion and individual interviews with a broad range of representatives from;

- Community groups who were involved in the steering group (some of which also received funding),
- Groups who were not involved in the steering group and submitted a project idea for the community vote and were successful,
- Groups who were unsuccessful in receiving funding based on the public vote, and
- A young person who was involved in developing the original themes and uses some of the local services.

All of those involved in the evaluation reported that they welcomed the injection of more money to help them to achieve their objectives locally for young people. While community groups in Merkinch & South Kessock look for core funding, the new PB funding will help bolster and develop services to young people for the next couple of months.

The evaluation framework for the discussions was based on the seven National Standards for Community Engagement which have been modified for participatory budgeting. These are set out below:

Inclusion - How well did the PB process involve the people and organisations that might want to participate in the PB process?

Inclusion - How well did the PB process involve the people and organisations that might want to participate in the PB process?

- Young people were consulted extensively in advance of the PB process to create six statements/themes that impact on their lives. Through Youth Highland's support there was a good engagement process with young people. Youth Highland and local partners supported young people to have their say and participated in creating resources which gave young people a voice in the PB process and highlighted key areas for investment.
- While there was good participation in the steering group, there was some difficulty getting a diverse PB steering group together to make decisions. The process may have benefited from wider community involvement and more time to build the capacity of the group.
- Evaluation participants indicated that there could have been more effort to include young people more directly in the PB process. There are good examples of PB led by young people across Scotland.

Support - How good was the PB process at identifying and overcoming any barriers to participation?

- Community groups who were involved in the voting process supported young people to vote online.
- Participants in the evaluation suggested that any future PB process should consider ways ensure larger numbers vote in the process. The steering group should consider different ways of voting e.g. using ballot boxes within the schools and community venues and allocating more time to engage the community and explain the PB process.
- Some respondents said that the online process was too wordy and may have put some voters off.
- Young people were involved in the initial meeting for the PB process but dropped away in subsequent meetings. More support should have been introduced to support young people to be involved in the actual PB process. Young people could have had a significant contribution in producing resources to explain PB and increase community voting.

Planning - How clear was the purpose for the PB process?

- There was a clear drive from the start to have the community involved in decision making regarding the PB process.
- The six themes for young people were made available in the marketing and on the website.
- The actual application process was straight forward and easy to complete. Evaluation participants stated that the easy to complete application form was very welcome as they are often completing numerous complicated funding forms.
- The respondents to the evaluation raised questions as to how clear it was for the community – not everyone understood the youth focus of the PB process.
- Those on the steering group felt that they put in a lot of time in planning the process. It might have been easier to have non applicants to the fund on the steering group.
- The Steering group as a whole wanted to get the money out the door to community groups which meant that the timescales were very tight for the whole PB process. Evaluation participants noted that more time could have been used to develop marketing materials and encourage more people to vote.

- **Working Together** - How well did partners work together to achieve the aims of the PB process?
- It was positive that a steering group made up of statutory sector and comm/vol sector colleagues was brought together to develop the PB process. The group met on several occasions to determine the scope and breadth of the process. Evaluation participants said that they felt that their views were taken on board from the start, and they felt able to comment and make changes to the PB process.
- The steering group worked well but some partners felt they had put in a lot of time in to develop the PB process and submit a project idea.
- Steering group partners found the use of Basecamp (project and team planning software) too difficult to navigate and indicated that direct emails would have been better.

Methods - How good were the PB methods of engagement?

- Overall, the process of offering participants two options to vote either online or in person was a good approach which is considered good practice to widen participation. The in-person voting event gave groups and individuals an opportunity to speak with each other and the wider community got to see who is providing services to children and young people in Merkinch & South Kessock.
- More could have been done to improve the turnout on the day through better advertising or tying the vote to another community event where larger numbers of people might have been sure to attend e.g. a gala day or other community events.
- The website offered a good opportunity to get wider participation and increased votes, however some people commented that the Police Scotland website and registration process may have been a deterrent locally and that the site itself was wordy and difficult to navigate.

Communication - How good was the communication with the people, organisations and communities involved in the PB process?

- There was good communication overall about the aims and ambitions of the funding and this was communicated well within the Steering group. Written materials and videos set out the priorities identified by children and young people and the PB process.
- A number of Steering group members found Basecamp overly complex and so some messages were missed.
- The evaluation group felt that the advertising to the wider community was a bit rushed and that the wider community were not fully engaged. Much of this stems from the Steering groups decision to speed up the process.
- The group advised that the successful projects now need to fill in the lengthy toolkit for the Family Wellbeing Programme which was not communicated in advance.

Impact – What was the immediate impact of the PB process and what has been learned to improve future PB processes?

- The funding for PB was a good outcome and will have a positive impact for young people. Groups indicated that the application process and PB in general is a positive approach to funding much needed activities and involving the community in decision making. Many in the evaluation group indicated that they would like to participate again in the future.
- There was a collective feeling that PB should be an add on (on an annual basis) to core funding which participants reflected is badly needed in Merkinch and South Kessock.
- The overall PB process would have benefited from more time to properly involve partners and the wider community.
- While children and young people will undoubtedly benefit from the funding from 'Your Place, Your Point', future PB processes should seek to involve them in more ways, as PB is recognised as a good opportunity to build their skills, knowledge and confidence.

Next steps

- PB should be introduced on an annual basis to target specific issues/community groups in Merkinch & South Kessock.
- PB should complement core funding rather than being the sole funding mechanism for community groups.
- Any future Steering group should allocate more time to develop the process and may benefit from having members who are not also submitting applications/funding ideas.
- There should be additional support for the steering group so that less heard voices can participate in the planning process. Support for these groups/representatives could come from the community and voluntary sector where appropriate.
- 'Your Place, Your Point' has developed very good materials including the user friendly application form, mixed method of voting (inperson and online) and effective branding which can be developed further and used going forward.
- The next phase of PB should consider additional ways of voting including the use of ballot boxes in community venues and a neutral website for online voting.
- Effective long-term evaluation e.g. 6 months to a year should be developed to measure the impact of the use of the money in the community. Young people should be supported to be involved in this process.

SCDC

SCDC is recognised by Scottish Government as the lead agency for Community Development in Scotland.

More information on SCDC's background and expertise is available here www.scdc.org.uk

A full evaluation of the PB process was carried out by the Scottish Community Development Centre (Appendix 2).

The 8 funded projects

An overview of the aims and outcomes of each funded project can be found by following the links in the table below.

| NAME OF PROJECT | FUNDING AWARDED |
|--|-----------------|
| ABAN OUTDOORS - PATHWAYS TO OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES | £3000.00 |
| MERKINCH FOOTBALL ACADEMY | £5000.000 |
| MERKINCH PRIMARY POSITIVE COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS HUB | £2000.00 |
| NEW START HIGHLAND AND INVERNESS FAMILY CENTRE - TEAM CUISINE COOKERY SESSIONS | £4988.00 |
| TLC INVERNESS - COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT | £5000.00 |
| THE CLAY STUDIO YOUTH CLUB | £4700.80 |
| THE CLAY STUDIO YOUTH CAFE | £4970.96 |
| THE CLAY STUDIO AFTER SCHOOL PLACEMENTS | £1403.56 |

6-month updates from funded projects (April 2025)

Aban Outdoor Ltd – Pathways to Outdoor Activities

As stated in the application we identified a need for more outdoor opportunities for children in Merkinch Primary School in partnership with our Trustee, Nichola. Since getting the funding we have met with the headteacher, Jillian, and P7 class teacher, Megan, to come up with a programme of activities as a wraparound to their Loch Eil residential.

Firstly, we identified the importance of Àban staff building trusting relationships with the P7 children, and also the P7 children feeling confident about going on their trip to Loch Eil. To do this a member of Àban staff joined the class in school for the day in February to get to know the children and plan a series of preparation activities. Following this, two staff worked with the whole P7 class over two school days doing activities in the school grounds such as teambuilding, rope challenges and games the children had come up with themselves. There was a focus on positive relationships, working together, communication and resilience. The sessions finished with fire building in kelly kettles and making hot chocolate. Some highlights included the enthusiasm for going to Loch Eil following the sessions, a couple of boys who teachers were unsure about joining due to behaviour or anxiety were able to build up to being present for the whole second session with support and one pupil who was unable to go to Loch Eil commented how great it was she could at least join in with this bit, making some of the experience accessible to her.

Following the two preparatory sessions, an Àban member of staff joined the school at their Loch Eil residential, supporting students, further building relationships and helping to select 7 students who would take part in the more in depth Pathway to the Outdoors programme after Loch Eil. These are students who perhaps struggle in the classroom environment yet thrived in the outdoors and with a bit more support would be likely to pursue these activities further given the opportunity.

At the time of writing, we are about to start the 8 week pathway to the outdoors programme with these 7 pupils. This will include a variety of activities that the pupils will then be able to go on to do with Àban through the youth clubs when they transition to S1.

| DATE | ACTIVITY |
|-----------------------------|------------------------|
| TUES 22 ND APRIL | BUSHCRAFT TEAMBUILDING |
| TUES 29 TH APRIL | BUSHCRAFT TEAMBUILDING |
| TUES 6 TH MAY | WALKING / EXPLORING |
| TUES 13 TH MAY | WALKING / EXPLORING |

Merkinch Football Academy

With our successful bid for £5,000 funding we have continued to provide free football training and games in a safe environment with qualified coaches from Merkinch Football Academy along with support from Inverness Caledonian Thistle Community Development Trust.

Secondary School

We continue to provide regular training every Wednesday evening 6-9pm at Merkinch Primary School Astro. Our numbers have grown however to over 60 young people and we have entered an additional under-17 team into the Inverness Street League to partner our other under-17 team. We also have entered a under-15 team into the Street League which begins on Monday 21st April and each team plays at least once a week, but on most occasions twice a week.

The extra team incurs an additional £500 registration league fee and the purchase of a new kit for the team at the cost of another £500.

Our whole Street League season costs a total £2000 so the funding from "Your Place, Your Point" came at the right time.

Under 15 player, Sebastian Manning, said " I am delighted to play my first season in Inverness Street League and in our new kit. Thank you Your Place...Your Point "

Under 17 player Joseph Stewart, "This is my third year in Street League and I am enjoying my football and training very much and getting great support from our coaches "

Primary School

MFA (Merkinch Football Academy) continue to provide football coaching to Merkinch Primary School on Saturday mornings whilst coaching the pupils every second Saturday at Football Festivals among other schools of similar ages. We enter in P2/3, P4/5 and P6/7 categories and the children are fully kitted out in football kit supplied by the MFA.

We have girls in our Primary football sessions but unfortunately have not secured enough in our Secondary sessions so we have asked Caledonian Thistle F.C. Girls Development Team to advise and support us next school year to generate some interest.

Mentoring and After School Support

As there are a number of secondary pupils on the verge of leaving school this fits in nicely with Peter Corbett's other job with Merkinch Partnership where he can offer support directly to these youngsters to a positive destination.

Merkinch Primary Positive Community Relationships Hub

Update pending

New Start Highland and Inverness Family Centre – Team Cuisine Cookery Sessions

Location: Family Centre – Inverness, Telford Road, Inverness, IV3 8HY

What was requested?

Each course will be held in The Family Centre, in the heart of Merkinch, and will run for 6 weeks. It will involve up to 4 families participating for around 3 hours over consecutive weeks, 26 families in total. The courses will run after school time, and if convenient, during school holidays.

The total project duration will be around 10 months. Our cooking instructor will assist participants develop new cooking skills, prepare a variety of recipes and dishes, learn about how to batch cook, buy on a budget, cut down on waste, and enjoy a family meal at the conclusion of each session. Participants will have the opportunity to earn a food hygiene certificate and receive a kitchen pack (e.g., pots, pans, utensils, cutlery).

Each family will have the opportunity to discuss their preferences, suggest new recipes, and take an active role in shaping how our project is delivered. Our project shall create a safe space for children and young people whilst providing activities designed to stimulate enjoyment, education and fun for all the family.

What happened next?

New Start staff – Freya / Family centre staff – Jennifer

After consultation with families and looking at staff availability from both New Start and Highland Council it was agreed that we would run start the group in November 2024.

5 sessions were offered to 4 families (6 children and 4 adults) Families with children from P6 and P7 the reasoning behind this was due to the children/young people being slightly older for the first group.

1 adult and 1 child were able to attend for 2 out of the 5 sessions
Other families invited did not attend.

What we made

- Vegetable soup and home-made bread rolls
- Pancakes, with fresh fruit

At the end of the session each participant was asked:

What did you think about the group?

- I found the group very informative, fascinating.
- Supportive of trying something new and nerve wracking
- Comfortable
- Enjoyable

What would you like in future weeks?

- I would like to learn to make pizza
- Pancakes
- Waffles
- Healthy desserts

Review and learning from first group

Learning - Although families were extremely keen and interested in coming along to the group, they were unable to commit to every week due to personal and life events.

Recipes were too detailed and lengthy, children lost interest very quickly. Hard to keep their attention. Chat with cooking instructor about simplifying the recipes and not as detailed. We need to be able to have recipes which parents and children will try at home. Following weeks we much easier to follow and simplified.

Changes – Moving forward, it was agreed that the nursery families would be offered the cooking group as they were in daily contact with the centre and staff could encourage them to come along. The previous families were identified through the school and were known to the family centre previously.

Feedback from these families stated that they would love to come along but issues in their own life had prevented them from coming along.

The day and time were to be changed for the next group to start earlier and agreed to have a shorter session.

Cooking recipes that were simple and quick.

Second group – February – March 2025

New Start staff – Freya / Family centre staff – Kirsty and Jackie

6 weeks offered. 5 Families were invited (7 children and 5 adults)

All the families attended but not every week, each week there was an average of 3 children and 2 adults.

We tried a variety of recipes - pizza, crispy cakes, tomato soup, pitta pockets, pancakes, and apple donuts. We found out quickly that the children managed and responded better to shorter 'non cook' recipes as it was harder to capture the attention of the 2-year-olds while waiting for something to cook. The children managed really well with chopping fruit and vegetables and mixing, they practiced and developed these skills as the groups went on.

The children very quickly adopted the routines we had with handwashing and putting on aprons. We had paper chef hats for the children to colour in/personalise and wear whilst cooking to fully immerse themselves in the role in the kitchen. We encouraged parents to cook with and alongside their children rather than separately so this could be enjoyed together. What we did find was that some of the parents did not have basic cooking skills themselves and would really benefit from some adult only sessions to develop the basic skills that could then be passed on to their children with confidence.

We found that to grasp the children's attention it was helpful to have a story and sing some nursery rhymes at the end to help regulate everyone after such an exciting activity. Some of the families reported that they had tried the recipes at home such as the easy 'no yeast pizza' and would feel confident enough to try some of the easy healthy snack 'donut apples' at home. Lots of the children tried new foods at the group that they wouldn't usually eat at home. The group was ever changing and adapting to individuals' needs and feedback from families.

Learning from the group

- The children were very tired after a busy day at nursery.
- Feedback from the parents were that they would love to learn more and to perhaps try cooking with the children not at the group as it was hard to concentrate on everything.
- Adapted the sessions to cope with the children's age and stage.
- Introduced a story time and other activities to keep the children interested.

Feedback from families

- Loved the group
- Enjoyed it
- Fun
- Would like to learn to cook more its harder with the children here.
- Tried some of the recipes at home with the children.

Changes for future groups

- Different time as after nursery and school children are too tired
- Changes to the format of the group as requested by the families, parents/carers to be offered 4-5 sessions of cooking to learn cooking skills, gain confidence and to be able to do the activities at home.
- For 2-3 weeks invite the children in to cook with their parents/carers
- In the original application it was highlighted that adults would get the opportunity to gain a food hygiene qualification, but this has not been able to progress this.

TLC Inverness – Community Engagement

50% of the funding received went to general running costs and as a contribution to the Trinity Tots toddler's groups and the other 50% we have held back and ring-fenced to help kick-start Teen Time when we manage to secure further funding.

Trinity Tots

Due to the success of Baby Bliss and following feedback from parents we developed Trinity Tots. A Toddler Learn and Play Group was one of our future plans and we are delighted it is up and running. Trinity Tots welcomes pre-school children of all ages. We have created a safe space for babies in a cozy room off the main hall with a Baby Gate providing protection from toddlers on trikes etc.

Over the last few months this group has grown exponentially and we now have 63 children registered with us. As a result we have had to spread the morning over two halls giving more space to play before snack and song time.

Many of our Toddlers started with us at just 6 weeks old attending Baby Bliss and we are delighted they have continued to connect by attending Trinity Tots. We recently had a Graduation morning as some of our children have moved to two year old nursery.



"Trinity Tots is the best place you can find for your baby through developmental stage up to pre-school. From the beginning to the end of the session it is amazing and the volunteers give all their heart to supporting babies, toddlers and parents" Anetta (Mum)

"Very lovely and friendly group. The volunteers are very friendly and caring, I feel part of the family. My girls get to socialise with others their age and Mummies get to socialise too. My Twins Love Trinity Tots!" Monika (Mum)

"The thing I like most about Trinity Tots is the volunteers are very welcoming and kind. Not only running the group but offering a listening ear and support or encouragement when needed. I benefit from coming along as my boy who can be quite clingy is comfortable and will play and I get some personal space for a period of time" Siobhan (Mum)

"Trinity Tots is an amazing place to witness the growth in both parents and toddlers. Parents who come in shy start chatting to us and other parents forming wonderful friendships that go beyond Trinity Tots. It has been a privilege to volunteer. I feel like a winner as I have made new friends and my days volunteering with TLC Inverness have given me purpose" Lorna (Volunteer)

"I love seeing the shy children beginning to interact with other children. It's great to see the mums and dads making friends and perhaps sharing hopes and concerns." Penny (Volunteer)

"I really enjoy being a volunteer at Trinity Tots and other TLC Inverness groups. As a Mum with grown-up children it's wonderful to see young Mums and Dads sitting together and playing with their children, sharing concerns and supporting each other. Seeing the children having fun always brings a smile to my face" Diane (Volunteer)



TEEN TIME

- Warm Space for Teenagers
- Friday Afternoon Lunch & Life Skills
- Trinity Life Hub, Huntly Place, Inverness

Teen Time remains in our future plans however it requires much more funding for us to run this group effectively.

We have had some one off fun afternoons and keep connections open with young folk who would benefit. In preparation we have supported Trinity Life repairing the hall floors and one of the halls will soon be equipped for badminton.



Some of our Teenagers have enjoyed coming along to help at the SuperHeroes Holiday Club. Most of them came along while in Primary School and have now returned to wear a helpers T-Shirt, encouraging the younger children. The P7s are now getting excited to come back, wearing a Blue (previously purple) T-Shirt and helping.

The Clay Studio: Youth Club

Youth club has been run by The Clay Studio in Madras Hall on a Wednesday night for 3 years. We offer two sessions, one for juniors (P4 – P7) followed by a seniors session (S1 – S4).

Youth club offers a safe space for young people to come together, have fun, socialise and take part in a wide range of activities and learning opportunities with support from a team of known local workers and volunteers.

More recently youth club has supported some of the senior members take on a leadership role at the youth club. These young people have taken part in training and are involved in setting up, clearing up and planning for future youth work programmes, activities and trips.

Every week there are different sessions run by youth workers and young leaders including crafts, baking, games and tuck shop. Young leaders help sign other young people in and sell tuck.

A large number of young people have worked towards their saltire awards for helping volunteer at youth club.

Trips have run in partnership with ABAN Outdoors during half term holidays where young people participated in bushcraft, team building and nature walks.

We usually see about 20 – 25 young people on a Wednesday night at youth club. Numbers at senior club have increased significantly over the past year.

Case Study

A number of young people attend the senior youth club who identify as members of the LGBTQ+ community. Youth club is a safe space for them where they can access support and advice and opportunities to other opportunities that might interest them.

The Clay Studio has been working with LGBT Youth Scotland and working towards gaining an LGBT Charter mark in partnership with young people.

This work is important. LGBTQ+ young people are more likely to experience poor mental health as a result of feeling marginalised or isolated. Youth club has offered them a place and people that they are able to talk to and get advice and support from without judgement.

The Clay Studio: Youth Café



The youth café was a new initiative which the funding enabled us to try out with young people who had told us wanted more safe spaces to go and access to food and safe trusted adults on a Friday afternoon when schools were shut.

Sessions ran every week on Fridays after schools finished at 1pm between the term times starting end of the October holidays.

Young people were instrumental in preparing and serving chosen dishes which included soups, toasties, milkshakes and a main meal each week. Decisions about what food to prepare were made at the beginning of the project during a planning stage.

Young people designed a logo, came up with a name made posters and flyers to advertise the café.

Some young people became more involved than others taking a leadership role within the project and gained skills in cooking and serving customers which will be lifelong skills used in further employment opportunities.

Numbers of young people attending café sessions were low (usually between 4 and 8 in a session) but with increased support and time we think the café could attract more children and young people and provide a safe space, cheap wholesome food and a place to meet with and support one another on a Friday afternoon.

Case Study

One young man in particular really engaged in the project and was supported to learn skills in preparing food and cooking. He attends other groups and activities at the Clay Studio and sometimes struggles to build and maintain positive relationships with his peers which leads to some challenges occasionally.

This project gave him the opportunity to build stronger relationships in small groups with his peers and to be supported closely by staff.

He took up the opportunity to take part in young leaders training with Youth Highland which has enabled him to think about himself in a different way and help others.

Whilst he still displays some challenging behaviours at times, this role has enabled him to gain self-confidence and recognise his potential. He still really enjoys cooking at youth club sessions.

The Clay Studio: After school placements and training

The Clay Studio delivers after school club sessions where we work with the young people on a chosen theme every term. This project our theme was 'Around the World'.



After school club worked on an 'Around the World' theme. Everyone chose a country and made a flag, a landmark and a plate of food from that country. We had an exhibition at Madras Hall to show all the work and celebrate what we had learned and done. We support young people at after school club to work towards Youth Achievement Awards.

Facts!

Italy is very famous for
Its national animal is a wolf
-The national dish is...

Training

Funding allowed us to pay for places on Introduction to Youth Work, Young Leaders and CLD training courses with Youth Highland.

Professional training and development is important to our team of staff and volunteers. By offering opportunities to learn in fun and engaging ways our staff and volunteers and young leaders get to enjoy and gain from learning... and our practice gets better.



| | |
|----------------------------|----------|
| TUES 20 TH MAY | CYCLING |
| TUES 27 TH MAY | CYCLING |
| TUES 3 RD JUNE | CLIMBING |
| TUES 10 TH JUNE | CLIMBING |

The sessions will focus on enjoying nature, building positive relationships and resilience. Pupils will have the opportunity to gain a Highlife Highland Hi5 Award through the programme as well.

For safeguarding reasons, we don't have any photos of the school grounds sessions, but we have included some pictures of the pupils at Loch Eil, and we will take plenty of pictures of the upcoming sessions with the targeted 7 pupils.

We will be using the Hi5 Award logbooks to form part of the final evaluation.

Appendix 3

A report of the projects progress at August 2025

Your Place Your Point 2024 / 25 – Interim Progress Report – April 2025

Acting on the voices of children and young people through participatory budgeting in Merkinch and South Kessock.

Overview

Your Place Your Point 2024 / 25 is a participatory budgeting (PB) initiative in the Merkinch and South Kessock community on Inverness. It was developed, supported and overseen by the Community Action Group (CAG) in that community and funded by the Highland Whole Family Wellbeing Programme. The process was facilitated by core partnership of representatives from five organisations - Highland Third Sector Interface (HTSI), Police Scotland (PS), Youth Highland (YH), the Scottish Community Development Centre (SCDC) and the Highland Whole Family Wellbeing Programme (WFWP).

The initiative aimed to support positive action to fulfil some 'asks' which had been articulated by over 400 young people in the community through a consultation led by Youth Highland in the course of 2022 and 2023 (Appendix 1). These asks were presented to the Merkinch / South Kessock CAG in November 2023 and there was a strong sense of the importance of taking some action to address them. CAG members wanted to demonstrate that they were listening to and acting on the voices of the young people in the community.

More information about the priorities identified by the young people can be read here and seen in the video made by a group of young participants from The Clay Studio here:
<https://youtu.be/uaf7uLkZPKg>

£30,000 in funding was secured from the Highland WFWP funding to support this in January 2024, and PB was agreed to be an appropriate way for decisions to be made about the allocation of this funding to address the asks articulated by the young people through the consultation.

The five core partners drafted a partnership agreement and began preparatory work in March 2024. In June 2024 a steering group was recruited from the local community to guide and shape the project and ensure its fit with the local community. The project was promoted in different ways in the community over the summer and applications opened on the 15th of July, with proposals invited up to a maximum of £5000 each. After the closing date of 12th August, applications were scrutinised initially by the steering group (stage 1) and those which were successful at this stage went on to the public vote (stage 2).

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Appendix 4

List of Questions for organisations

| | |
|---|--|
| Name of Organisation | |
| Status of organisation | |
| Sector | |
| Organisational purpose | |
| Rough annual expenditure | |
| How much of this is covered by annual core funding? | |

| | |
|---|--|
| How much was your organisation awarded through Your Place Your Point? | |
| Tell me about the project that was funded. What did it seek to achieve? What were the project outcomes? | |
| Many children / young people / families were you able to work with? | |
| Have you maintained contact with any of the people you worked with? | |
| Did young people help create the project idea? | |
| Were young people included in the delivery of the project outcomes? | |
| What were the main challenges you faced during the project? | |
| What do you consider the main successes of the project? | |
| Do you feel that the funding has helped make any significant changes for your organisation? | |
| Do you think the funding has enabled any significant / lasting changes for the young people / families you work with? | |
| Do you think the project has made any significant changes for the community? | |

| |
|--|
| What are your hopes for the future of children and young peoples work in Merkinch and South Kessock? |
| Would you change anything about this project if you could turn back time? Why? |

Appendix 5

Questions for participants

| | |
|---|--|
| Name of Project | |
| Tell me about the project in your own words | |
| What were the best bits? | |
| What difference did the project make? | |
| What would you change about the project? | |
| What other things would you like to try? | |

Walking evaluation (based on 6 priority outcomes set by young people)

| Statement | Yes | Maybe | No |
|--|-----|-------|----|
| There are adults that I trust and feel safe | | | |
| I have been able to make choices about | | | |
| I have tried new ways to play and learn | | | |
| Adults have listened to me | | | |
| I feel like part of a group / team | | | |
| My voice matters and I am heard | | | |
| I have learned new things | | | |
| Taking part has improved my | | | |
| There are more things to do in Merkinch than | | | |

Appendix 6

Youth Participation

Did young people help create the project idea?



In 5 out of the 7 projects young people (or in one case parents) were involved in creating the project idea.

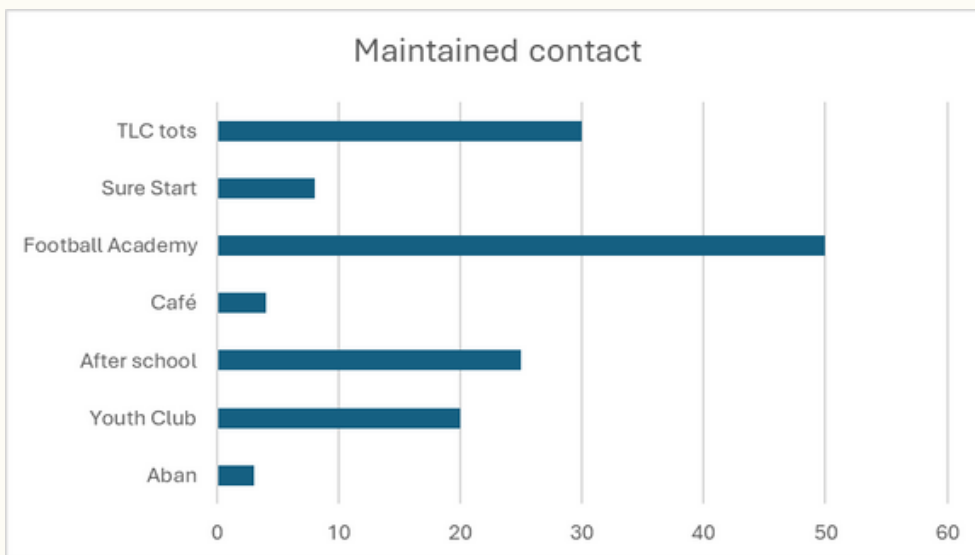
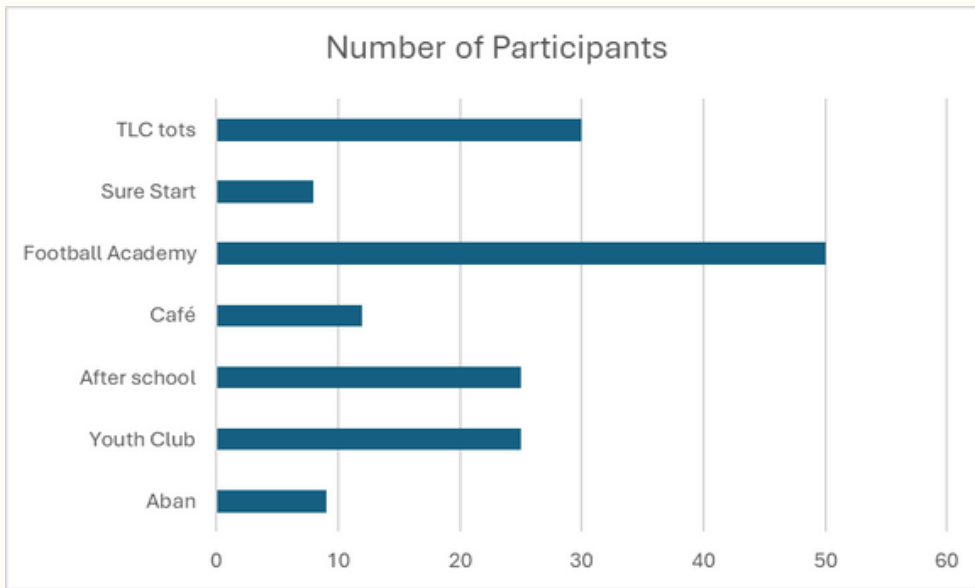
Were young people involved in the delivery of the project



In 4 out of the 7 projects young people were involved in decision making and delivery of activities in the project.

Appendix 7

Number of participants



Appendix 8
How has the project affected change?

Organisational Change?



- Organisational change? Yes
- Organisational change? No

Individual Change?



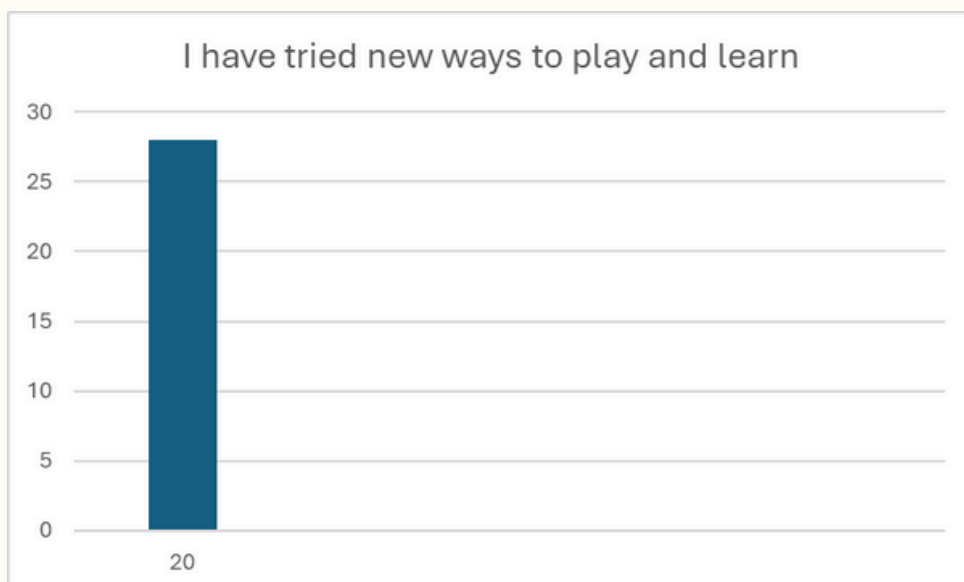
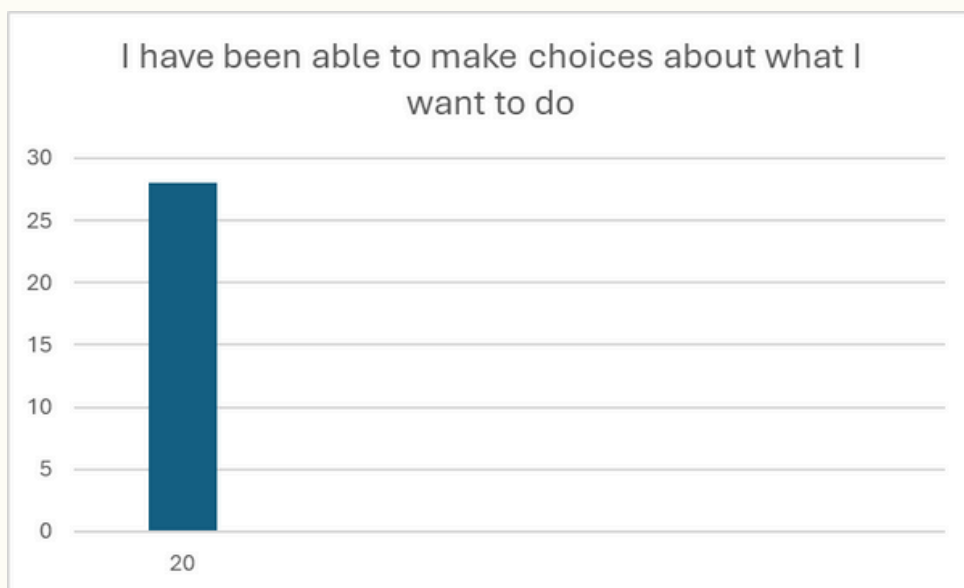
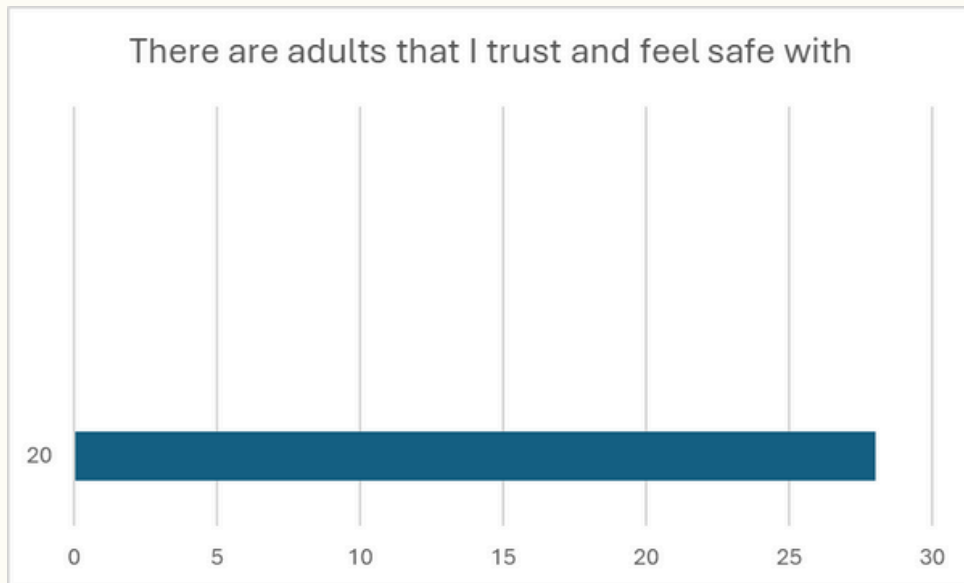
- Individual change? Yes
- Individual change? No

Community Change?



- Yes
- No

Appendix 9
Answers to participants walking evaluation questions



Adults have listened to me



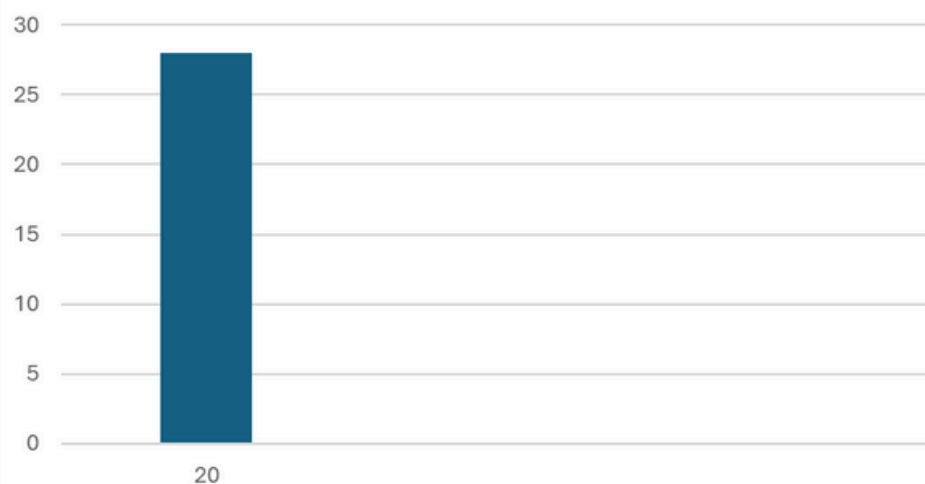
I feel like part of a group / team



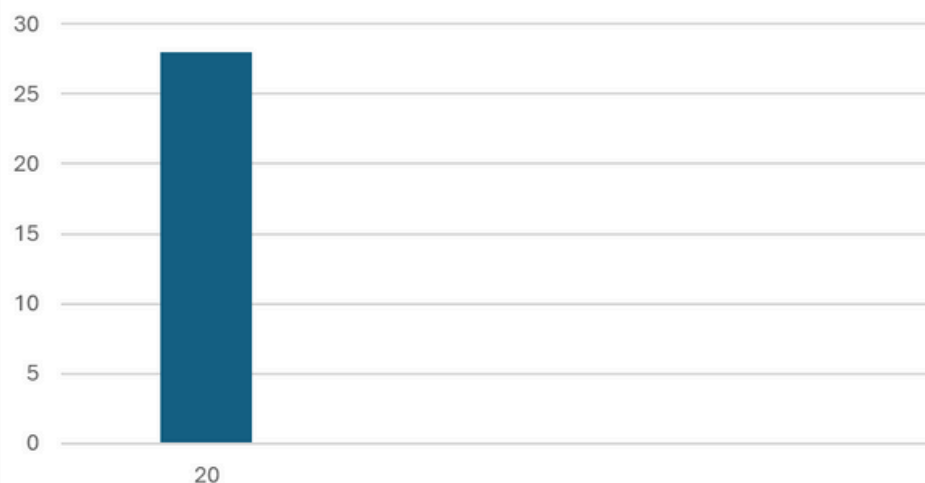
My voice matters and I am heard



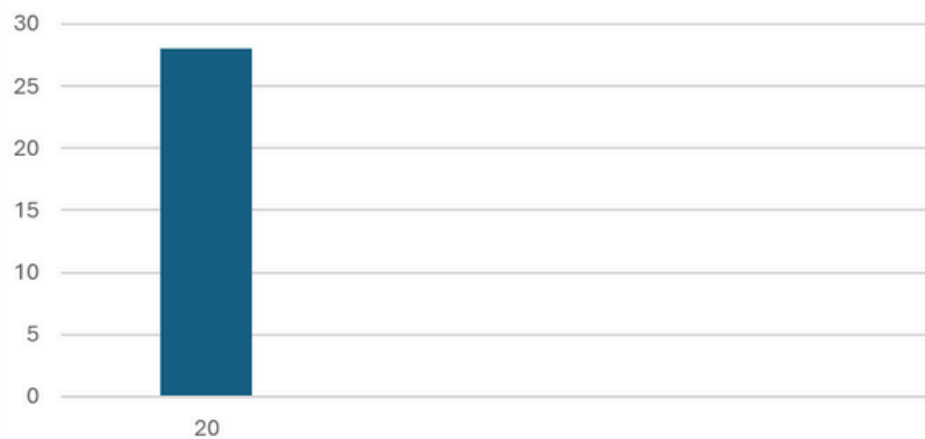
I have learned new things



Taking part has improved my behaviour



There are more things to do in Merkinch than last year



Appendix 8

What did participants get out of taking part?

