

Our future. Now

Supporting a generation of young people to flourish.

Year six
Interim Report
April - September 2024

INSPIRING SCOTLAND

We are particularly concerned about child poverty and the education system which is struggling to meet the needs of young people.

The challenges facing the young people supported through Our Future Now (OFN) over the past 6 months have increased. Many are still affected by the pandemic, and are now living in deeper levels of poverty as a result of the cost of living crisis. The fund is operating at full capacity with 1052 more young people supported this year compared to the same reporting period last year.

According to the most reliable statistics available, there are approximately 240,000 young people in Scotland aged 16 – 24 years old that are not economically active. The reasons are many and complex however, this presents a significant opportunity to support young people who risk becoming a net cost to become net contributors; thereby helping them to fulfill their potential. This would boost growth, improve the lives of individuals and communities and reduce child poverty in future generations. This is particularly important given the current economic challenges that we are facing.

Our Future Now is targeting these young people, supporting them through a process of personal growth, acquiring skills and qualifications and progressing into work. Now in its 6th year of operation, OFN has successfully supported over 15,000 young people on the margins of society to be involved, included and cherished. Young people tell us that this has a transformational impact on their life chances.

Over the past 6 months over 3,700 young people have been supported, 1800 of whom have already secured a positive destination. Looking forward to the next 6 months and to the remaining 4 years of OFN, we expect the need to increase further.

We are particularly concerned about the damaging effects of child poverty and the education system which is struggling to meet the needs of many of the young people that we support. These issues are having a profound effect on their chances of succeeding and if they are not addressed, will result in disadvantage that can last throughout their lives.

Throughout this Year 6 interim report we highlight how we are addressing these issues through OFN, alongside the impact that has been achieved over the past 6 months. We also make clear the need to maintain momentum and scale our work making the best use of the resources that are generously provided by our investors. We thank you for your support and are certain that the situation for young people in Scotland that are facing the greatest challenges, is significantly better because of your investment in them.



Celia Tennant
Chief Executive



“I am loving college. I’m doing so well at getting the bus too. I honestly never thought that this was something that I would be able to do.

I’m amazed at how well I’m doing. I’m so much more confident and miles happier now that I have made my first official friend. None of that would have been possible without the support that I have had.”



Young person supported by RUTS

Impact April-September 2024

The 12 ventures that comprise the OFN portfolio are all different but their approach is the same; providing personalised support to young people through a trusted Key Worker based on their individual circumstances and aspirations. The support is holistic and although the ultimate aim is to enable young people to become economically active, it is necessary to provide what they need across all areas of their lives.

3,753

young people supported

across

26

Scottish local authorities

58%

Young people supported were aged 16-17 years old



Young person supported by Move On



“I wanted to give up so many times but my Key Worker somehow was able to convince me to just keep moving forward.

When I look back now I can see that all those small steps eventually built up and I got stronger. I’ve learned to not give up on myself. I’ve got a job now and I like having a daily routine. Sometimes I can’t believe it when I see myself in my work gear!”

12,539

Soft Outcomes

Including increased resilience, wellbeing and personal responsibility

5,167

Progression Milestones

Including qualifications, work placements and mentoring

1,817

Employability Outcomes

Including entering further/higher education and securing employment including Apprenticeships

Although the Fund KPIs are designed to track progression, in reality the pathway to success is not linear. The trusted relationship with the Key Worker is vital in ensuring that young people do not give up when they experience setbacks and helping them believe that the challenges that they face can be overcome.

Realising potential

Not enough Scottish young people are active contributors to the economy.

Our Future Now is targeting the large, relatively unknown cohort of young people that are ‘inactive’, as well as those that are officially unemployed. If this group became contributors it would have a significant positive impact on our economy and society.

There is a need to get as many young people as possible contributing to the economy and society if we are to thrive as a nation.

Given the current economic situation this is now an urgent requirement and would result in the growth and improvement that Scotland desperately needs.

Of the 554,200 young people aged 16 – 24 years old in Scotland, 312,000 are in employment and 34,900 are unemployed. The remaining 206,600 are described as ‘economically inactive’.

In simple terms, the definition of inactive is not seeking work. The reasons why young people are not seeking work are varied and include:

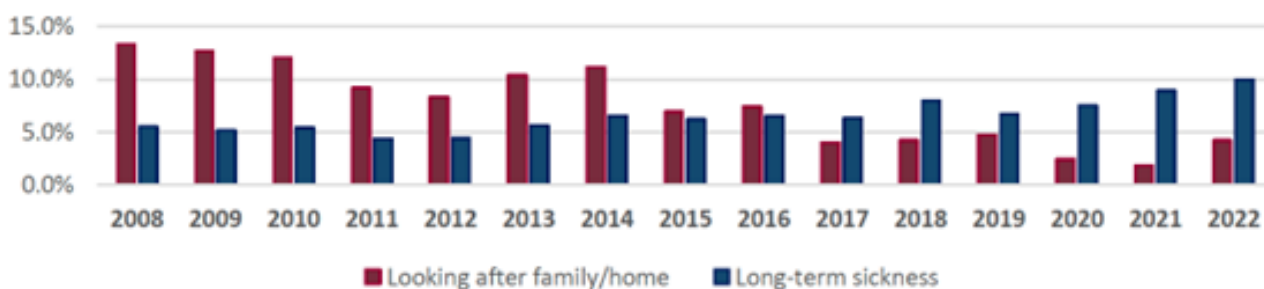
- Health – Physical and mental illness, disability

- Location – Lack of opportunities (particularly in rural areas)
- Personal Experiences – Feelings of discouragement from available opportunities, lack of confidence and work experience
- Support and Financial Difficulties – Lack of emotional and financial support to enter employment

There is a lack of data on the prevalence of inactivity by specific reason and on the characteristics of the young people however, the graph below shows the change in prevalence of ‘looking after family/home’ compared to ‘long-term sickness’.

This trend is concerning and based on our own data and experience over this period, the increase in long-term sickness is likely to be attributable to mental health.

Increase in long-term sickness over time



Economic inactivity of young people aged 16-24: Definition, reasons and potential future focus'. Scottish Government, August 2023

Inactive young people have always been a focus of Our Future Now as this cohort includes some of Scotland's most vulnerable young people that the Fund is designed to support.

These young people need the holistic, patient support that is provided through OFN and many thousands have made the transition from being a net cost to a net contributor as a result. This potential must be unlocked through increased activity in this area. It is a huge opportunity that can transform the lives of individual young people and wider society and OFN is a proven approach that can achieve this.

51%

of young people supported through OFN during the last quarter, reported mental health as the primary issue that was holding them back.



“I never believed that my son could work because of his learning disabilities. His Key Worker helped me see that I had written this off unnecessarily. I was scared and wanted him to stay at home so that I could protect him. But the Key Worker gave us both the confidence and support we needed. They worked with the employer and he has a job and it has been so good for him.”

Fund Focus

Although the young people supported through OFN have multiple complex challenges, over the past 6 months our data is indicating that the education system and child poverty continue to be the areas of greatest concern. And they are related. It is well known that young people living in poverty do less well in education.

This puts them at a distinct disadvantage and the Covid 19 pandemic made this worse. The OFN portfolio has been responsive and has further developed their expertise to meet the increasing need to support young people with regards to education where it is not working for them, and child poverty where they are suffering the wide ranging impacts of living in households under constant financial pressure.

Education

The Centre for Social Justice reported that the number of children who are missing fifty per cent or more of their school time has increased by 72 per cent from pre-pandemic levels ('Where Have All the Children Gone? The school absence crisis sweeping Scottish Schools' August 2024).

These are the children who are absent from school more than they are present. This appears to be a legacy of the Covid-19 lockdown but after four years the problem has got consistently worse.

74%

found school challenging

90%

had a typical attendance rate of 60-80% (the equivalent of missing 1 – 2 days every week).

Of the young people supported through OFN during the last six months who disclosed when they 'shut off' from school, 82% had done so before the end of S2. But 88% officially left between S4 – S6.

This suggests that young people are registered at school but for a long period are not engaged and developing. This will not be reflected in statistics and therefore could mask the scale of the problem. It is fair to assume that the mental health of young people who are officially 'at school' but not engaged, will be adversely affected.

2%

Only 2% had an attendance rate of 100% which is the target for all young people in Scottish schools

68%

had disengaged from learning before leaving age (prior to the end of S4), 72% of whom had shut off from school before the end of S1.

Young People's needs are not being met

Our data on the reasons why school is not working for the young people that we support are somewhat different to the reasons that are often reported in mainstream media such as a 'behaviour emergency' and 'aggression epidemic' which places responsibility on young people.

Only 2% of OFN young people that disclosed the reasons why they found school challenging, cited violence, and only 16% reported bullying. Alongside mental health, the issues are in fact linked to lack of belief in themselves and unsupportive relationships with adults at school and at home.

During the reporting period, Inspiring Scotland has engaged with Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People, Nicola Killean. The OFN portfolio met with her to share their expertise and experience of working with young people who are not attending, achieving and/or attaining.

Collaboration will be ongoing to inform the Commissioner's important work in advancing *"the change that young people desperately need....with too many children and young people's needs not being met in our current system."*

Reasons why young people found school challenging:

74%

Lack of confidence in own ability

41%

Pupil/teacher relationship

38%

Lack of support/encouragement at home

Filling this gap through the trusted, consistent relationship with a Key Worker is fundamental to the success of OFN. This form of support is focused entirely on the best interests of the young person.

The Key Worker gives the young person the confidence and backing to navigate and manage the issues in their lives, many of which are unlikely to change; advocating for them with their families, teachers, employers and enabling them to develop the resilience that they need to succeed.

Literacy and numeracy being reported as a barrier increased from 24% during the first 6 months of last year to 33% for the same period this year.

How Our Future Now is responding

OFN is responding in a range of ways depending on the individual circumstances of each young person by:

Supporting young people to re-engage with school on a **flexible, personalised timetable** and providing **wrap around support**

Providing **learning and qualifications off site** in partnership with schools

Providing learning and qualifications **independent from schools**

“*My self-esteem and mental health was at rock bottom at school. By S2 I had given up and I became disruptive. When I met my Key Worker, she listened and helped me. I am on a part time timetable and doing great. She’s shown me how to communicate with my teachers respectfully and I’m sitting my exams this year. I still need her help but I think I can do this.*”



Young people supported by Hot Chocolate Trust

“I felt misunderstood and worthless at school. I dreaded going – it made me feel sick every day. The support that I have now received has made me realise that I am not stupid and that I can achieve qualifications, something that I was told, and believed, would not be possible.”

“Things were so difficult at home that going to school felt impossible. I was worried all the time. My Key Worker helped me to find ways to manage what was happening at home. I was able to talk about how bad it was. I’m not going back to school but I am doing qualifications with my Key Worker’s support.”



Young People supported by Action for Children

Child Poverty

Child poverty is having a profound effect on the young people supported through OFN and their families. This issue is at the heart of Scottish Government's Programme for Government reflecting the urgency with which it must be addressed. Improvement requires a collaborative approach and OFN is committed to maintaining and where possible, expanding the contribution that has been made over the past six years.



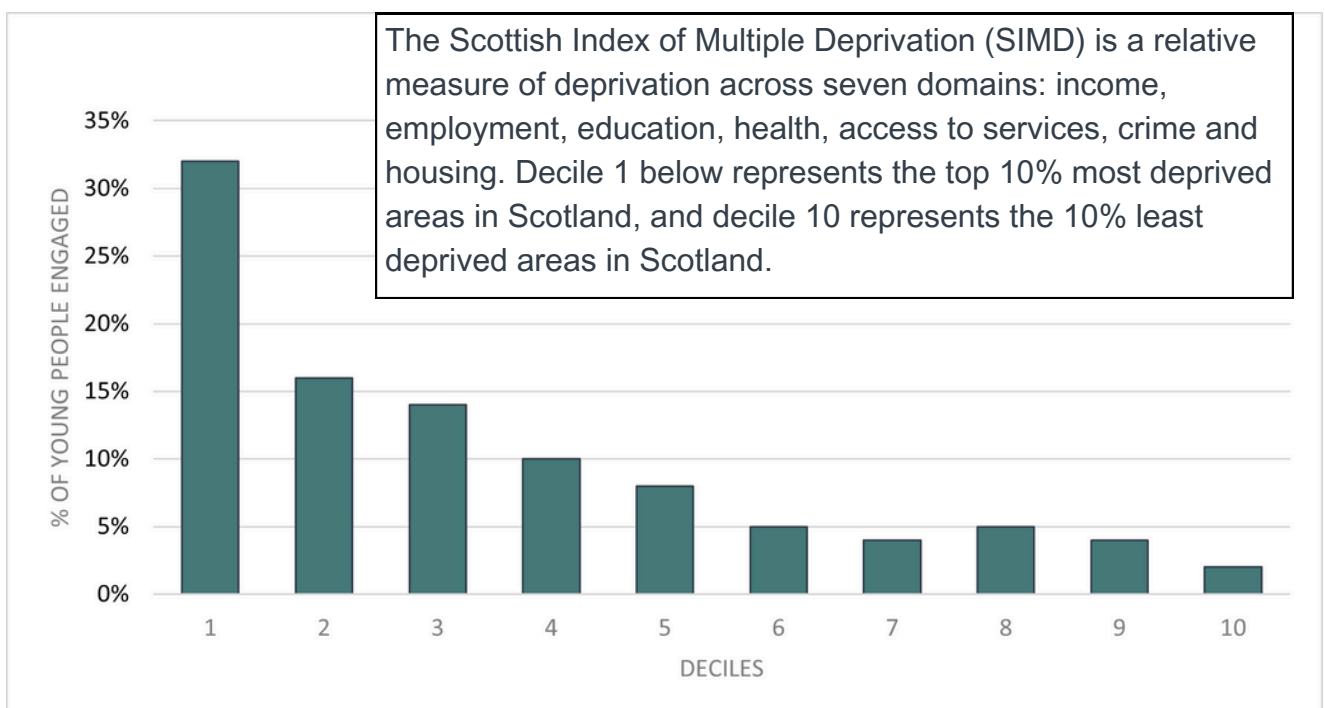
24% of children live in Poverty in Scotland

At 24%, the national child poverty rate is unacceptable. 75% of young people supported through OFN fall within the age group definition of child poverty (0 – 17 years old). In the most disadvantaged communities, child poverty rates are significantly higher than the national average. Over the past 6 months 62% of young people engaged through OFN live in the top 30% most deprived areas in Scotland.

70%

children in poverty live in working families

62% of young people engaged through OFN live in the top 30% most deprived areas in Scotland, as shown in the graph below.



Increasing income

The Scottish Government's flagship policy response has been significant investment in the Child Payment. It is widely accepted that putting more money in people's pocket makes a difference and is an effective response however, it is believed that this should be showing a positive impact in the data. This is not the case and the reasons for this are not clear. The data for 2023/24 will be published in 2025 and it is hoped that this will show improvement. However, it is expected that the relative poverty interim target of 18% will not have been achieved.

Whole family support

It is therefore vital to provide holistic support alongside the increase in income (through the Child Payment) to enable people to change and improve their circumstances by upskilling and getting into work. With 70% of children in poverty living in working families, this has to be fair, adequate work. The financial burden of the Child Payment on the state is substantial, and we must make efforts in the prevention space to address the cause and reduce the need to treat the symptoms.

The role of the key worker

OFN support is provided to young people in their homes and communities. The Key Worker being independent and therefore not an authority figure enables them to build trust and work with parents and carers to address the complex family issues which are often the root causes of young people's inability to progress.

Generational unemployment and benefit dependency can be deeply rooted in family culture and the Key Worker has to work to address and change this, if the cycle is to be broken. Protecting household income is a priority as young people going into work can result in this reducing.

Through whole family support, this can be managed and the effects mitigated, whilst building an understanding of the importance of a young person being able to do what is right for them. This can have a positive ripple effect on parents, carers and siblings and their willingness and confidence to consider how they can become economically active.



Young person supported by Action for Children with their Key Worker

How Our Future Now is responding

OFN is tackling child poverty including the root causes by:



Working with young people who are disengaged and economically inactive to get them into **good quality, fair work** and therefore **raising household income in the short term.**



Ensuring that young people do not need (qualify for) the Child Payment for their own children, making them **net contributors in the long term, breaking the cycle of generational child poverty.**



Supporting young people holistically including whole **family support to remove barriers in the home that are stopping young people progressing** and changing attitudes that can result in wider, positive impact.



Young person supported by Calman Trust

“The teachers told me that I was wasting my time being registered at school and that I should leave because I don’t go very much. My mum has said that I need to stay on because she cannot afford to lose her Child Benefit which will happen if I leave. I feel stuck, my mum is already struggling with money and it makes her anxious. I don’t want to make that worse. My Key Worker talked to my mum and the school with me and I’m now going to school 2 days a week and doing an employability programme the rest of the time. I’m getting good experience and my mum hasn’t lost the money.”

“When the washing machine broke my mum was crying. She was washing our clothes in the bath. I told my Key Worker and she talked to my mum and got us a new washing machine with a crisis grant. She also found out about other money we could get and my mum seems better.

“I don’t miss college when my mum is feeling better, she doesn’t need my help to look after my wee sister as much. And I don’t feel as worried leaving her on her own.”

We continue to highlight all of the issues facing young people supported through Our Future Now with Scottish Government. Our longstanding partnership enables us to give voice to the young people supported by sharing the reality of life for them in relation to poverty, education, mental health, experience of the care system, caring responsibilities and unstable housing ensuring that a deeper understanding is provided which goes beyond the statistics. This informs policy and helps to ensure that the system is responsive to the dynamic and complex challenges that young people are facing.

A long term commitment

Our Future Now is the largest, third sector collaborative and long-term investment programme in Scotland – made possible by investment from the Scottish Government, private philanthropists, corporate foundations and charitable trusts.

A report on the full year 2024/25 (year 6 of 10) will be published in early summer 2025. In the meantime more information about the impact achieved during the first five year of Our Future Now can be found in the [OFN Midpoint Report](#) which was launched by the First Minister of Scotland, Mr John Swinney and Minister for Higher and Further Education, Graeme Dey in August this year.



The launch of OFN mid point report at Move On's FARE Share Warehouse

The fund is open to new investors on a rolling basis for contributions at all levels and this is vital to our success.

If you would like to get involved, please get in touch with Inspiring Scotland to find out more.

OFN data in this report is gathered through The Matrix, which is Inspiring Scotland's bespoke data information system. Key Workers across the OFN portfolio record information about young people anonymously as it is disclosed. The total number of young people recorded on The Matrix for the reporting period was 3,753. The sample size will vary from data point to data point however the majority of young people supported disclose this information.

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