

Webinar recording

CELCIS Education Forum

Tackling financial
barriers to education
for children and
young people



November 2024



CELCIS Education Forum November 2024, Tackling financial barriers to education for children and young people

Featuring

Michael Bettencourt, CELCIS

Sarah Spencer, Child Poverty Action Group

Kirsty Campbell, Child Poverty Action Group

Michael Bettencourt

So good morning, everyone, and welcome to our November Education Forum meeting. I'm Michael Bettencourt, I'm an Education Consultant at CELCIS, and it's good to see you all. Welcome back if you've been here before, and a very warm welcome if this is your first meeting. We convene the Education Forum at CELCIS, it's a free, open access network of practitioners and leaders - anyone interested in the education, of care experienced children and young people and their families. I think it's also always useful to know who's in the room, and I really like the diversity of people that we have in our forum. So, this is not an exhaustive list, but just to give you an idea, we've got professionals from local authorities, schools and education providers. We've got people from the third sector, higher education, predominantly folk here from Scotland, but we do get people from wider in the UK and sometimes internationally, we've got representatives from residential services, children's houses. I've probably missed

people. Please accept my apologies if I missed you. We also have a real cross section of people from different levels, from frontline practitioners to senior leaders. So, it's always a good space to get a real good cross-section of people who are interested in this area, and I'm delighted to welcome Sarah and Kirsty from the Child Poverty Action Group, who we will introduce properly in a second. They're going to be talking about the support available to children and families and the actions that professionals, education providers and other services can take towards reducing poverty and the impact of poverty. As I said, we'll meet them properly in a second, but I did just want to give a bit of a context to what it is that they're going to be talking about. Although there are regional variations, poverty in the UK is high, and overall, it's rising. There was a headline that I picked up last week, which I'd like to share with you, 'More than one in three children in poverty as UK deprivation hits a record high. A Study Finds almost a quarter of the UK population are living in poverty, reaching the highest level this century'.

And just to put that into some context for you, I want you to imagine the average classroom in the country of 30 kids. Nine of those 30 children are living in poverty in the average classroom. When we talk about poverty it is important that we recognize this is not solely related to a lack of money or of material goods, but it's also related to access to social, community and relational opportunities, and it's a theme that we've revisited, perhaps not surprisingly, several times in our Education Forum. Education as an area is an area we see these outcomes often, and one of the first places that people are able to identify, intervene, offer support and advice. Education is the universal service where children spend the majority of their time, and it's usually our school and education providers who are at the heart of our communities, and the first people who are able to pick up on and respond to these issues. Before I go on to introduce Sarah and Kirsty. I did do a little bit of research into the Child Poverty Action Group, and I came across this letter that was written to a prime minister in a certain year. And I want you to just hold on to this, and I want you to think about what year was it written in and to which Prime Minister. And I really liked the letter because it describes the spirit of the Child Poverty Action Group. There's a simplicity in the message, and it still continues to be relevant. I'm not going to read the whole letter. It's available on their website if you want to see the whole thing, but I just wanted to share little snippets from it:

"Dear Prime Minister, there is evidence that at least half a million children in this country are in homes where there is hardship due to poverty. They do not belong to a single type of family. The existence of poverty in this country today tends to be overlooked and indeed denied. Poverty affects the health and welfare of growing children. It creates long term social problems. We are sure you are already convinced of the need to support the family and care for the dependent child, but we wish to draw your attention to the special problem of family poverty and to urge that action be taken by the government to alleviate it at the earliest, earliest possible moment, the Child Poverty Action Group has prepared

a memorandum on the matter and has suggested two ways in which assistance might be given to the children of poor families. The signatories of this letter would probably not all agree on the precise details of a scheme for reform. We are agreed, however, that action should be taken to achieve a radical improvement in the standard of living of families in poverty, and wish to bring this memorandum to your attention.”

So that was a letter that was written by the Child Poverty Action Group and its signatories. And I just wanted you to think about what year was it written in, and to which Prime Minister was it addressed? And I'm sure the answer is going to emerge through today's session. I'm now absolutely delighted to welcome Kirsty and Sarah they're going to be talking about tackling financial barriers to education for children and young people. Kirsty Campbell is the Cost of the School Day Voice Participation Officer and Sarah Spencer is the Cost of the School Day Project Manager in Scotland. They work to strengthen public commitment to end child poverty. In this forum meeting, they're going to share learning from the ongoing Cost of the School Day work with schools, local authorities, children and young people. Sarah and Kirsty are going to talk about, amongst other things, child poverty in Scotland, the current picture and key challenges, the impact of poverty on children's rights to education and their readiness to learn. Poverty related stigma for children and their parents and carers. What children and young people say should change. Calls to the government, local authorities and schools, income maximization and poverty aware communication in schools and Cost of the School Day resources, they're going to point us to their toolkit and various bits on their website that you can access. I haven't done them justice in that list, they are going to talk about it much more eloquently than I just did, and I'm delighted to hand over to Sarah and Kirsty.

Sarah Spencer



Today's session

- Child poverty – current picture
- Impact of poverty on learning, participation and wellbeing at school
- Poverty stigma for children and families
- What children and young people say we need to change
- Poverty aware communication and income maximisation
- Helpful resources



Hi everyone. Thanks so much for that introduction, Michael, so yep, I'm Sarah Spencer. I'm here with my colleague, Kirsty Campbell. And Kirsty and I both work on the Cost of the School Day project at Child Poverty Action Group, or CPAG, as lots of people refer to us as. So, we work with young people, with schools, local authorities and with Scottish Government, we look at financial barriers to children's participation, to their learning, to their wellbeing at school, and what can be done about it, how we can overcome some of those barriers. The financial challenges facing families are probably something that many of you are really, really familiar with in the settings you work in. So today, we're keen to share some learning from our work, particularly the voices of children and parents on this topic and highlight some practical actions that can help to reduce costs, to boost incomes and support children and families on low incomes. So, we'll be looking at child poverty and the kind of current picture around that, the impact of poverty in school, including the impact of poverty stigma, which is a kind of strong theme coming through from children and from parents. Focus in on what children and young people say about all of this, what they think needs to change. And talk a wee bit about what families say is important when it comes to poverty, aware communication at school. And I'll also talk a tiny bit about the importance of income maximization, and then leave you with a link to lots of useful resources.

I think child poverty is a problem that can feel huge, and it can feel really overwhelming. And I think the helpful thing is focusing on, what can you do and what can you influence in your role? Because none of us are... It's literally our job. We work in an organisation dedicated to ending child poverty, but none of us are going to be ending poverty tomorrow, single handedly, but in your settings and with the children and the families that you're working with, what can you be aware of and what can you do?

Child poverty

- Not having enough resources to meet household needs and participate in society
- Almost 1 in 4 children in Scotland are in poverty – 24%, 240,000
- 70% of children in poverty are in a household where someone works
- Rates vary but poverty exists everywhere in Scotland
- Rates higher amongst some families – lone parent, larger, disabled, mothers <25, children <1, minority ethnic



So, Michael's touched on some of this, but I thought useful to just go back to the very basics. At the moment, we've got almost a quarter of all our children and

young people in Scotland living in poverty, that means living in families with not enough resources to meet basic household needs and take part in society. Because poverty is about two things (it's about lots of things), but two of the things it's about is about not enough money in your pocket. It's about pounds and pence, but also it's about how that can limit your participation in the world. And poverty is, of course, a relative concept. It's to do with what you have in relation to others. It's been a difficult, to say the least, few years - COVID, with all of the financial stresses that that created, then cost of living crisis, and both of those things were especially difficult for families that were already living on lower incomes. They affected everyone, but especially difficult for those families.

We are in this ridiculous situation where over two thirds of children living in poverty are in households where parents are working and still not able to make ends meet, and poverty looks really different across Scotland. I'm in Glasgow right now, got about a third of children in poverty here, Kirsty is up in Moray. That's around about 24 maybe some of you on the call are from areas like East Renfrewshire or Shetland or Aberdeenshire, places like that that are a wee bit lower, closer to 14% or 16%. Wherever you are, though, in Scotland poverty exists, and it's likely to be an issue for you in your settings. It doesn't affect everyone equally. It's probably important to say child poverty rates are much higher amongst particular families, and you can see the six groups named on the slide there where the risk of poverty is far greater. If we're remembering, the National Child poverty rate is 24%, for families with a disabled member it's 27%, for lone parent families and larger families, it's 38% so that's just gives you a wee bit of an idea of the higher risk rates for some families, and it's really complicated. Poverty is dynamic. People move in and out. People don't fit neatly into one box. You can belong to many of those groups and others. Care experienced people being one of those, of course, but general awareness that these characteristics are linked to higher risk can be useful in terms of being aware and being able to be alert to opportunities to identify trigger moments for information or advice or support to families. You know, if someone's going through a separation or divorce, if there is a new baby in the family, an illness in the family, all of these things can add to the risk of experiencing poverty.

What causes child poverty?

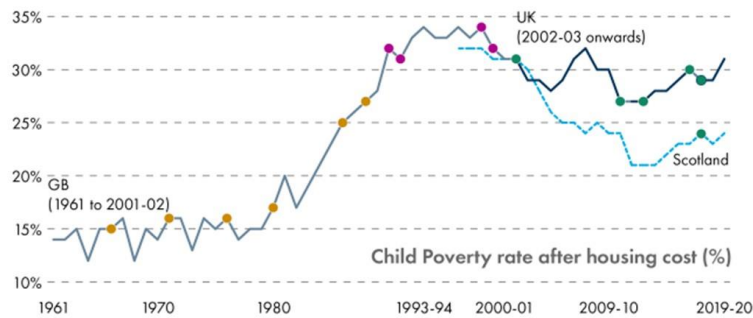


There's lots of beliefs out there about why people are in poverty. I'm sure we could come up with lots of them, but a lot of the quite stigmatizing things that are out there aren't based in evidence. We know what causes poverty. It's about not enough income first and foremost, and that's not enough income, firstly, from employment. As I've said, even when parents are in employment, work doesn't always pay, and since 2006 there's been a 60% rise in the number of people moving repeatedly between work and unemployment. There's too many insecure, low paid jobs out there. So not enough income from employment is the first cause of child poverty. The second one is not enough income from Social Security benefits. Social Security - the key word is security. It's meant to be a safety net there for all of us, if we need it, you know, lose our jobs, have an illness, have to take on caring responsibilities, the list goes on. But that net has become really, really holey. In recent years, since 2010 we've had about 40 billion taken from the annual social security budget through things you'll have heard of, the two child limit, bedroom tax, the benefit cap, and currently a couple with two children on out of work benefits can only cover 48% of costs for all of the things that their family would need, all of the things we know a family needs to pay for. So that's an enormous shortfall. There's also one for families on minimum wage. There's still not enough money coming in there, but for families on Social Security benefits, that's a huge shortfall. It means difficult decisions have to be made about what you spend money on, what you cut corners on. Social Security should be a lifeline for people, and at the moment, it's failing a lot of people who need it.

So not enough income from employment, not enough from Social Security, and while there is not enough money coming into a household, there is far too much having to go out. The high cost of living, all of the things that we know have been happening in recent years around fuel costs, rising food costs, there's too much having to go out. So these are the things that are driving child poverty, and that means that these are the things that need to be tackled and addressed if we want to reduce child poverty, and schools and their partners can help to put significant sums of money in family pockets by supporting access to financial

help and removing or reducing costs where possible at school, can help to cut those household costs and reduce pressure on family budgets and reduce the stress of having to think about another difficult cost for families.

Poverty isn't inevitable



CHILD POVERTY IN SCOTLAND SINCE THE 1960S - SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT INFORMATION CENTRE



All of this matters, for lots and lots of reasons, but primarily because of the impact it all has on the children and families that you're working with. The reason we should never accept child poverty as just one of those things that's been around forever, what you're going to do? Is the really damaging impact it has on every aspect of a child's life, education, health, family life, home, housing. There's no part of a child's life that is going to be improved by living on a low income. And for parents and carers, there's that psychological toll that it takes, the worry about where money is coming from, lack of security you feel in your home and your life when you don't know how you're going to be able to cover costs, the guilt that comes from not being able to provide everything that your family needs. Parents describe that as feeling relentless, and, you know, weighing them down. And all of that isn't inevitable. It's not somehow natural.

You can see from the graph on the screen there, this is child poverty rates in the UK, between 1961 and up to 2020, there, and you can see how that changes over the years. Child poverty rates respond to policy. They respond to the decisions made by governments about what and who to invest in. So you can see pre 1980 child poverty rates around about, you know, around about 15%. 1980 and 1990s huge rise in child poverty rates in the UK. You can see a big drop in the early 2000s. That was when there was a real focus on reducing child poverty from New Labour who introduced tax credits that led to a big drop in child poverty, and you can see it rising again from 2010 onwards, largely due to cuts to the social security budget that I mentioned previously. So, poverty does feel overwhelming and huge and grim and terrible, and it is, but I find this graph kind of strangely hopeful. It shows that things can change, and they can improve if the right decisions are made. That's enough on the big picture. I'm going to hand over to Kirsty now.

Kirsty Campbell

Hi folks. Yeah, thank you, Sarah. So as Sarah says, poverty is not inevitable, and if we're really to understand and approach it as a human rights issue, poverty is actually something that can be addressed and eradicated.

Children's rights

- ff** My right to education means I should receive an education regardless of my home issues or situation. (Secondary pupil)
- ff** Means I am able to learn without any problems. (Primary pupil)
- ff** Our right to education means we can take part in all learning like school trips and fun activities. (Primary pupil)
- ff** I know that they are trying to make sure everybody in Scotland has children's rights, but poverty can mean it's harder. (Secondary pupil)



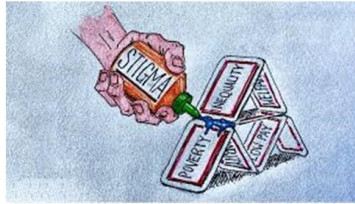
We know poverty has a detrimental impact on children's rights, so some of the children that we've spoken with make really, really clear links that low income, not having enough or having all the resources or the funds to take part in a full school life impacts on their right to education. And we know education itself is just one of the important stepping stones for breaking free from some of the restraints of poverty, but that's only when a young person can really fully take part in everything that school has to offer. And as Sarah said, in fact, poverty has an impact across all children's rights. It can affect the safety and security of growing up in a warm home, having enough nutritious food to help young people grow to be healthy, to be able to learn, and having all those resources to be able to actually take part in fun events, leisure events, being able to have the same experiences as their friends, it just it has a devastating impact on what a young person's life can look like. I popped a few quotes on the slide, and this is some of the things that we hear from children and young people. They are very aware that there's a lot of work to ensure children's rights are embedded. But as the young person at the very bottom of the slide says, but poverty can mean it's actually much harder for young people.

Impact of Stigma

ff There is still stigma and people get embarrassed; we need to stop that. (Secondary pupil)

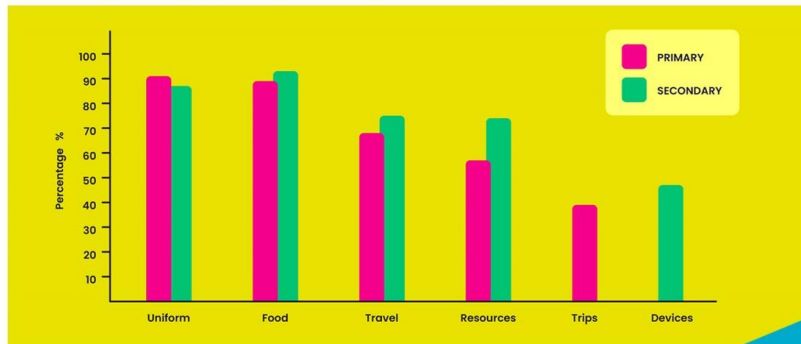
ff It could mean you feel shame and not be able to cope with stuff and could be bullied. (Primary pupil)

ff I try really hard for it not to show to the other kids that my son is from a low-income family by making sure he takes part and contributes to everything. (Parent)



I've also put on here a couple of quotes from young people. So, whilst young people can clearly tell us about the impact of low income, school costs, their right to education, they're also extremely aware of the really unhelpful attitudes that surround poverty. So, Sarah has covered those root causes of poverty and how these are structural and poverty is policy responsive, but where there's a lack of awareness about the causes of poverty, and this can lead to really unhelpful attitudes. It can lead to blaming individuals, blaming families, stigma, stigmatization, and also really hinder that progress to address poverty. And again, this is something we've been talking a lot with children and young people, and when we explored this with them, children and young people were reporting real pressures and worries if they are highlighted as not being able to afford aspects of the school day. People tell us that they can feel different and ashamed if they can't take part in the same activities, they fear standing out from their peers. And pupils also report feeling really embarrassed or worried if they don't have the right uniform, if they can't provide a monetary donation for a charity day at school, if they're the only young person left in a classroom whilst everyone else goes on a school trip, if they don't have the right equipment to take part in a lesson. There's also that fear of being punished if they're not prepared properly, and poverty stigma can ultimately mean that some young people are much less likely to ask for support. However, again, young people are very passionate about tackling this. And lots of young people that we've spoken to, they talk about the importance of actually talking more about poverty and equity in our schools, and how we actually really need to be talking about this if we want to address the stigma around it. And I know Sarah's going to talk a little bit more deeply about how we talk to parents about this, but yes, we do also hear from parents who are so conscious that they want their young people to have a good experience at school, that they themselves are sometimes putting themselves in further money worries as they try their best to keep up with school costs, trying to make sure that their young person doesn't stand out and trying to make sure that their young person doesn't miss out on their time at school.

What young people say about problem costs



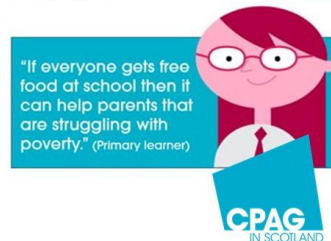
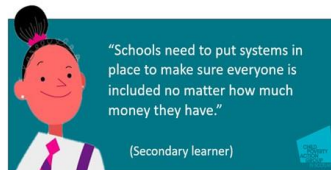
Cost of the School Day Big Question report and film – views on readiness to learn, top costs, food, and school trips. 5394 children and young people responding across Scotland



So in the spirit of Article 12 of the UNCRC, and making sure that we hear from children and young people, At its core, tackling the cost of school day really has to be about asking children and young people about their experiences at school, and that's their experiences, but also their thoughts on how we can shape both school actions to reduce costs and national policy. So we wanted to understand from young people which school costs caused the most worry. So through our big question activity and survey, we heard from over 5,000 pupils, ranging from p5, to s6 about top problem, costs, what they said they needed to feel ready to learn. We heard about the importance of food at school, the ability to take part in school trips, and also their big ideas about what can be done to make sure that everyone can take part in learning no matter how much money their family have. I popped a graph up, a wee bar chart, on the screen there from our big question, film and report. So uniform, food, travel, trips, devices and resources are voted the biggest problem costs, and these are the ones that just come up time and time and time again. Many, many schools know about this, and they do an awful lot of work to try and minimize these barriers. And there has been some big strides, sort of nationally to help reduce those costs. So whether that's schools using their pupil equity funding, there's funding to cover curriculum charges. So many young people who historically took part in home economics or tech were often asked to pay additional charges to be able to take part in that subject. These have now been removed. Extension of free school meals is a really important policy, increasing school clothing allowances and also the introduction of a free bus travel. These are all things that children say are really helpful. But the challenges still exist, and that is really because there's unacceptably high levels of child poverty still in this country.

Ready to learn – practical school level actions

1. Everything we need to learn in the classroom and at home
2. Food throughout the school day
3. Help to go on trips
4. Everybody learn about poverty and equity
5. Help families claim financial entitlements
6. Kind adults that listen to us
7. Safe and quiet spaces in school
8. Named person families/pupils can go to for help
9. Tell everyone about support available.



Through our big question, though, there are lots of things that children say that they need to be able to feel ready to learn. Many of them are things that we consider to be actually really very basic, so that is a good night's sleep in a warm bed, having the right uniform, having hot food in the morning, being able to go home to a warm house. And there's those really sort of big calls from children and young people that child poverty is an issue that needs to be urgently addressed, and low-income families need to get more help, but they also have some really practical asks for their schools. I've popped some of them on the slide here. So, some of the recommendations from children and young people is about information. Where do they go for help in school, talking more openly about poverty, what this can look like, what this means, having just approachable, nice adults in school who can help with these things. And young people also spoke about telling everybody about what help and support is out there, so to not make assumptions about families - that actually everybody needs to know what help there is. And lots of asks from children and young people around families being helped to claim and to know about the right entitlements. And then amongst that, there are also calls about making sure that there's food throughout the school day. Young people, very strongly, and quite a lot of the time, will tell you that they just can't learn if they've not eaten. And having everything in the classroom available to them at hand to be able to learn was also really, really important. It's not particularly interesting when I tell you about it. So what I want to do is actually show you a wee clip from our big question film.

This is some of our young people presenting on the findings of the big question. But we're also giving you some of their big ideas and asks and what they think should happen to reduce costs and make sure everyone can take part.

VIDEO

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3oywx-YpID4>

"In the big question we got the chance to come up with some big Cost of the School day ideas.

There were too many big ideas to put in this but the most common ones were about food, uniforms, fundraising and school trips. Here are just a few:

Make school meals free for everyone, don't make students worry about the Cost of the School Day or stuff going on in school.

Make sure that no family is left embarrassed by not being able to buy things. Give the families money for school.

I think they should make sure that every child is taken care of money wise. Supply them with stationery, uniform, food etc.

Communicate with students and tell them that if there is a problem then the school will always be there to support them.

Talk about poverty more and how it affects people.

There are lots of young people affected by poverty in our society. Nearly a quarter of children in all of Scotland are in families who live on low incomes.

Grown-ups need to find a way to make things better for children and young people who are facing problems.

Why do we need to do this? Because poverty has a really bad effect on children's lives and can continue to affect them as they grow up.

These are the main things we want the government to do:

Makes sure free school meals are offered to everyone so that no one goes hungry at school.

Give more direct support to families to afford school costs.

Give more funding for school trips.

Let's make sure all children and young people have devices.

Listen to and involve children and young people in making decisions.

These are the main things we want our schools to do:

Provide the resources we need to learn.

Help us be able to take part in school trips and anything else that might be difficult for money reasons.

Create happy and safe schools, where we feel included, welcomed, respected and listened to.

Make sure there are kind adults who we can speak to about money worries or anything else.

Make sure that nobody is hungry at school and offer help in a way that isn't embarrassing.

Tell everyone about the support we can get for food, trips, uniform and anything else – it will help if anyone ever needs it.

We think we all need to talk more about poverty and equity.”

Kirsty Campbell

Reducing costs, boosting incomes, supporting families

The image displays a grid of ideas for reducing school costs and supporting families. The ideas are presented in blue boxes with white text:

- Reviewing uniform policies
- Breakfast clubs and free snacks
- Take what you need trolleys
- Device lending schemes
- Supporting families with entitlements
- Low cost and free fun events
- Donation only charity days
- Prom/Halloween swap shops
- Clear yearly cost calendar for families
- Free clubs with equipment
- PEF subsidising school trip costs

To the right is a graphic titled "COST OF THE SCHOOL DAY - IDEAS BANK". It features six categories with corresponding images:

- Awareness, values and ethics (Image: colorful pencils)
- Entitlements and financial support (Image: hand holding a pen)
- School uniform (Image: colorful fabric)
- Consulting and planning (Image: hallway)
- Eating at school (Image: girl eating)
- PEF subsidising school trip costs (Image: colorful balloons)

The CPAG IN SCOTLAND logo is visible in the bottom right corner of the graphic.

So, I think the young people say it a lot better than I can. We think it's really important that we continue to promote and spread what children and young people are saying about what would help. And in the video, there's those asks around, extending free school meals, much more support for families to afford costs, making sure that there's more support so young people can take part in school trips, access to devices, and having everything they need to learn. And again, that importance that we're also always talking about it and telling people what there is out there that can support them. And we know that there's actually lots of things already happening in schools to mitigate cost worries. It's just not maybe always consistent across the country. I've popped just some of the things that we see, and you can also have a wee look in our Cost of the School Day ideas bank, and that's a great resource, where we've gathered together lots of different practice and lots of different things that are happening in schools across Scotland to reduce those costs, to make sure that young people are not missing out. So that can be things from a take what you need trolley. We've seen this through a lot of secondary schools where young people are not worried if they don't have pens or pencils or if they don't have access to a calculator. We're seeing lots of schools working with their children and young people to review their uniform policy making sure that affordability and accessibility is at its core

We are seeing lots of schools also working with their pupils around pre-loved uniform, pre-loved prom outfits, pre-loved Halloween outfits, making it really part of their sort of school eco ethos, again, trying to remove those costs that are sometimes... There's lots of extra costs about taking part in school things, lots of work around donation days, making sure that charity events are not putting pressure on families. Schools reviewing their non uniform days, trying to make sure that these maybe sometimes only happen once a term, so children and families don't feel under pressure when it comes to dressing up at school. Lots of schools doing lots of work around free food, free snacks, universal breakfast clubs so anyone can get something to eat in the morning. We found children young people say when it's open to everyone, it's much less embarrassing. It just becomes something that anyone can take part in. We're always looking to add to practice in our ideas bank. And there's maybe something that happens within your setting, or something that you know about that's really supportive for care experienced young people at school. So, we'd be delighted to hear from you around that. But of course, lots of these things are really, really great, all these things that are happening in school are great, but it's only really going to make a difference to families and pupils if they know about it and if they can access it in a non-stigmatizing and friendly way. So, children themselves say that it's important we talk about these things, but also it's really important how we tell our families about the support available for school costs. So, I'm going to hand back to Sarah, who's going to talk to you a bit about some of the things parents say are useful when communicating about costs and supports. Thank you. Sarah,

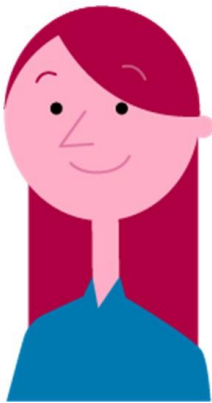
Sarah Spencer

Why is it important to talk about costs and money?	
<p>"I was uncomfortable asking for help."</p> <p>"It's not easy talking about money problems."</p> <p>"Guilt, embarrassment, shame."</p> <p>"It was embarrassing to admit that I was struggling!"</p> <p>"It's just degrading."</p> <p>"I felt ashamed that I couldn't provide for my kids."</p> <p>"Felt judged."</p> <p>"Embarrassed as an affluent school and area."</p> <p>"I was worried my child would find out and that people would make fun of them."</p>	 <p>"It's the way they talk to you, you don't feel embarrassed or small."</p> <p>"The headteacher is really approachable and makes it seem normal and okay."</p> <p>"Made me feel at ease for asking and sorted out my problem for me."</p> <p>"I have applied for the new Scottish Child Payment recently due to information I received through school emails."</p> <p>"I feel less embarrassed about financial worries. I am so grateful for this simple but powerful thing: I feel we are not alone."</p>  

Thanks, Kirsty. So yeah, it's important to think about what can stop people accessing support and how we approach that. We did a bit of research a couple of years ago with parents on their experiences of approaching their schools with money worries or cost concerns, and you can see on the slide some of the really

common responses that there were: being worried about being judged, feeling guilty or ashamed, concerned that your child's going to be singled out, not knowing who to speak to, not feeling like it's going to be a useful experience, and that fear of judgment is obviously closely linked to poverty, stigma, and it can mean parents don't raise concerns when things are difficult or there's something unaffordable. It can mean that help isn't taken up, the help that is there. We heard loads of positive experiences too, as well though, you can see those on the slide on the right-hand side. And I think you can see from these the hugely powerful role that there is there for schools in helping to link families up with information they would benefit from. And sometimes that is just about approaches as well. You know the first quote there, it's the way they talk to you. You don't feel embarrassed or small. That's a huge thing.

Advice from parents and carers



- Create poverty aware school communities
- Show leadership and take action
- Communicate about costs and money
- Offer confidential and supportive conversations



"Never heard anything about financial support for parents. My guess is that they assume we don't need it. Which is the wrong assumption."
(Parent)



[Talking about costs and money at school - advice from parents and carers | CPAG](#)

There are loads more information from that parents research in our talking about costs and money resource. Parents told us that they want to see in their schools. They want to see poverty aware school communities where everyone understands poverty and knows the impact that dead small costs can have on budgets. They want to see leadership and action with their schools, you know, using an affordability lens for everything planned, providing lengthy notice periods, lots and lots of different advice there on how schools can help to reduce costs. And the parents say that the more that is done in this area, the more it helps to take pressure off, and the more confident they feel to get in touch with concerns. They spoke about communication about costs and money, sharing information with everyone so that nobody misses it, because there can be assumptions about who is and isn't in poverty. Universal, straightforward communication to everyone was what families recommended. So, lots more information on that in the resource. There's a link on the slides, and we can send that round as well. And you know, one thing clear from it, families were wanting their schools to be talking about costs and money.

Cost of the School Day policies/statements

West Calder High School
Cost of The School Day Statement
August 2024

At West Calder High School, we aim to identify and address financial barriers to participation and learning for families and young people. By working in partnership, we will ensure that we maximise opportunities for our young people to succeed. Our "West Calder Cares" Anti Poverty Strategy seeks to support our most vulnerable young people and their families by reducing the cost of the school day and removing barriers to participation.

Getting Dressed For School

- The WCHS school uniform is designed to provide a variety of low cost, inclusive, accessible options for every young person.
- The school operates a pre-loved uniform service. Families can access this service confidentially throughout the year.
- Staff support eligible families in the application process for School Clothing Grants.
- A school online uniform shop has been created containing all uniform items however parents are also free to purchase any of the items from other retailers.
- School blazers are provided free of charge to all pupils who receive a clothing grant and also to other families identified as requiring financial support.
- Any shorts/jogging trousers and a plain t-shirt are acceptable for PE lessons
- PE kit is provided for pupils who require it.
- The "Wellbeing Collaborative" Team work with families to ensure that young people have all the school clothing they require.

Travelling to School

- The school supports families in applying for free school transport
- Transport to Hillhead College, other schools and all work/recreational placements is funded by the school as required.
- The school mini bus is used wherever possible to minimise transport costs for external activities/trips.
- School supports all pupils to apply for free bus travel
- Where necessary with parental/carer consent and transport is a barrier, we will travel to a venue local to the pupil.

Dunning Primary School

COST OF THE SCHOOL DAY IN DPS

Welcome to our school's COST OF THE SCHOOL DAY webpage.
Parents, staff and pupils helped make decisions about how we can keep the cost of the school day as reasonable as possible.
Included on this page are links to benefits and welfare initiatives for parents and carers as well as information on free school meals, uniform and trips.

UNIFORM

Our uniform includes accessible colours available in supermarkets and online shops.
Logo branded items are OPTIONAL and can be ordered online.
[Please click on the link to take you to our online uniform shop.](#)
Our parent group runs a successful pre-loved shop with uniform items at very low cost.

FUNDRAISING

After consultation with parents, staff and pupils, we have taken the decision to focus on one School Fund activity each year (our Christmas Show) with funds raised benefiting pupils in the school and one Charity Event (chosen by our Pupil Council) where donation is optional and discreetly collected on ParentPay.



One way of sharing that kind of information is through a Cost of the School Day, policy or statement or a section of the school website, which more and more schools are doing. You can see a couple of examples there. And the existence of those sort of things, kind of signal that these issues matter to your school and that you're aware of financial challenges. It can set out support that's available in whole range of areas. It can signpost to financial entitlements, tell people who to contact how they'll help. It kind of sets expectations for parents. That kind of clear communication can really help with the problem of people sometimes not knowing what help is available when, actually there is help there.

Universal communication – avoiding assumptions

The Cost of the School Day Information Booklet

Contents

- Uniform Items and Clothing Donations
- Resources Support
- WiFi Support
- Hardship Fund
- FISO support
- Free School Meals and Clothing Grant
- Under 22 Free Bus Travel (NEC Cards)
- Duke of Edinburgh Support
- Period Equity
- Say Yes to the Hillhead Dress
- Contact Information

"The main purpose is to bring all of the supports available together, in the one place, to make it easier for everyone. It's an opportunity to support families from the very start." (Hillhead High School)



This is a nice example of many from Hillhead High School in Glasgow, and it's a Cost of the School Day information booklet included in their S1 enrolment pack, so that's got information on free school meals, clothing grants, Support officers, free school activities and lots and lots of other things. And having that enrolment pack had two purposes, it sets out all the support available in the school in one place for everyone, and it tells families it's a key priority for the school, and it's something that that you can talk to the school about. In the ideas bank, there's

loads and loads of different examples like this of communication from schools to parents.

Referral pathways to welfare rights services

“Providing pathways to money and welfare rights advice from education settings can help prevent child poverty or mitigate its effects, and from a setting that most families with children engage with.”
Public Health Scotland

- Financial gain for families
- Increased take up of educational entitlements
- Reduced burden on schools



[Referral pathways to money advice in education settings - briefing | CPAG](#)



I won't go into detail on this because it's quite big, but I did want to just draw your attention to steps beyond that signposting. Establishing referral pathways to welfare rights and money advice services. That's something that's happening in lots of different areas, and some of the benefits are really significant financial gains for families who aren't claiming everything they're entitled to - increased uptake of things like free school meals - and also a reduced burden on school staff by creating that pathway to an expert advisor that can help families, because that's not a role that many teachers signed up for when you're planning to become a teacher. So, there's lots of benefits to these processes. It's kind of a step beyond just giving someone a phone number and hoping they'll phone it. There's lots of different approaches across Scotland, and here is [a link to a briefing](#) that can give lots more information on that if you are interested in it.

So that's a really effective approach in boosting family incomes. Another really effective approach on all of this is involving your children and young people in looking at the Cost of the School Day. And I'll let Kirsty tell you a bit about that before we finish.

Kirsty Campbell

Cost of the School Day Voice Network



- Network of learner voice groups P5 –S6
- Young people leading on poverty awareness, equity and tackling costs at school
- Influence poverty and education policy by having say on important issues that affect them and their schools.
- Co-produce resources that help other schools and young people
- Join the network!



Yeah, absolutely. Thank you. So, as we sort of previously said, children's and young people's voices and experiences are really crucial when we want to think about what happens in our schools, what happens in our local authorities, but also influencing national policy on poverty and education. So, over the last, probably about 18 months now, we've set up our Cost of the School Day Voice Network. This is a network for pupils in schools who are interested in raising awareness of poverty, looking at what equity looks like in their schools, coming together and looking at how they want to tackle problem costs at school. Through our network, we meet up on a termly basis with children and young people online, but we also host a leaders meeting so those leaders that are supporting the groups in schools can come along and share practice. But I think one of the biggest and most important parts of this network is actually children and young people are giving each other ideas and advice and information about what they're doing in school. So, for example, last week, I heard from a school in Highland that I'd heard a great piece of work from a school in West Lothian, where they were looking at making sure their Christmas fair was tokens only, so every young person was given tokens and could take part in the various things happening in their school fair. Young people felt this was a really great way to make sure that nobody's highlighted, nobody's embarrassed if they don't have money, and everybody takes part. So, we're extremely keen to continue to make sure that children or young people are able to shape some of these actions in schools, and to also share across our network what they're doing to reduce costs, raise awareness, how they consult with other young people about it as well.

You might be in settings where you maybe have young people who might be interested in being part of this. So please do feel free to have a look and join up. It just takes one sort of committed adult to make sure a group meets a couple of times a year to look at reducing costs. We're also really keen to make sure that

not only are young people talking about this in their schools, but also young people are feeding into that national policy work.

Voice network – national influencing



"I think that free school meals take the financial pressure off of families, so we ask if the government could give more money to schools to help with free school meals for everyone." (S1, North Ayrshire)



So we are really pleased, actually, over the last 12 months, with how the network has really taken up the call and the challenge when it comes to speaking to some of the people in power. We've had young people from Ardrossan Academy in North Ayrshire and Newton Primary School speaking really passionately at a round table event around the expansion of free school meals, and really putting the case across around that. We've had young people from Camperdown primary in Dundee and Holyrood secondary in Glasgow, who've helped to look at the uniform guidance which is there and put in place to support schools to really think about affordability when they're setting their uniform policies. And we've also had young people attend pre-election events asking politicians really hard and really difficult questions. There was an amazing young man from Trinity high school who asked politicians what they were going to do to end child poverty, and how they were going to make sure schools are adequately supported to reduce all the costs and all the pressures that families face. So, I don't think we got quite a clear answer about it, but it's really great to see children and young people sort of taking that up nationally, and that's something that we want to continue to encourage in our network. So you may be working with young people who are really keen to get involved with that. We're really happy to support young people with that. So yeah, [I'll think we'll pop a link in the chat as well around the voice network](#). I'll just hand you back to Sarah to finish off

Sarah Spencer



Thank you!

Get in touch with the team:

costoftheschoolday@cpagscotland.org.uk

Toolkit, eLearning, Ideas Bank and more:

cpag.org.uk/cost-of-the-school-day

THE COST OF
THE SCHOOL DAY



So thank you for listening, everyone. Think we might have gone slightly over time, but we've got lots to see. I Hope some of it was useful for you, and there'll be time in a wee second to discuss the implications of all of this in your breakout rooms. But for now, I'll just close with [our team email address there](#). If there's any way we can be useful, or if you want to have a chat about any of this, please do get in touch. We are really happy to do that. And also lots of the resources that we spoke about today, and lots more as well - kind of an E-learning course, [Cost of the School Day Toolkit](#) and a million other bits and bobs are all just [available on our website at that address](#) there. So thank you very much everyone.

Michael Bettencourt

Thank you so much Sarah and Kirsty. I'm sure everyone agrees that was such a thorough, informative and practical session. Those were the notes that I wrote down as I was listening to it. Sarah, you started off by saying that you wanted to focus on what we can do, and that ran all the way through your presentation. So, it was so useful to get a historical concept, some of the complexity and dynamic nature of poverty, concepts around security, the impact on not just on education, but other outcomes of young people. A good catch on it could be seen as being overwhelming, but that you're hopeful. And I think the whole presentation was hopeful by your constant calls for the steps that can be taken. It was great to hear from young people and parents, to hear about stigma, and then lovely ending with the work that you've got young people doing with the network. I am going to ask if anybody's got any questions, please feel free to put your cameras on now.

Joan, please go ahead.

Hi, I'm Joan McDonald. I'm from the North East Health Improvement Team, with our work, we have been involved in delivering the Cost of School Day with educational establishments. Initially, we had quite a big uptake, obviously with interest, but latterly, the interest and obviously, because of the constraints that schools have around kind of freeing teachers up to be involved in any kind of training has been really challenging, so we're really trying to think of different ways of how we can still get them to be involved. Because, as what you said earlier, we know that there are schools out there that are really good at it, and it's part of everything they do. And there's other ones that kind of struggle a wee bit. And then there's certain times of the year, particularly around about Christmas time, but it seems to fall off the radar. And you do see this ask for a lot more money and donations from families, which, sometimes I think I whether it is just this time of the year or just sometimes it does kind of slip off a radar. So be interesting to catch up you guys, just to see you know if there are any kind of thoughts and hints and how we can try and make sure we are still involved in as much of the schools as we can. Those that are maybe not as engaging or as engaged in this Cost of the School Day would be really helpful. So, I've got taking a note of your contact. You've probably been in links with a couple of my colleagues previously, but it'd be good to just catch up to pick your brains around that. So, thank you. It was really good.

Sarah Spencer

Brilliant. Yeah, please do brilliant. Thanks.

Michael Bettencourt

Sarah Kirsty, any observations on that? The current context for schools, the financial tightness for schools, and the difficulties of freeing up teachers any thoughts around what Joan had to say,

Sarah Spencer

Just that, yeah, absolutely. That's really familiar, and we hear that in lots of different areas. So you're not alone with that. And in terms of professional learning sort of opportunities, and less take up on that. An option would be the Cost of the School Day E-learning course, which can be done in someone's own time, it's useful doing it together, so you can have that kind of discussion together. But it's something that doesn't mean people have to come out of school to go through some things. So that's one option. But we would be really, really happy to chat with you. Thank you.

Kirsty Campbell

I was also just going to add in Sarah as well. I think sometimes when we talk about involving children and young people that can feel like a huge piece of work for a school, but actually, there's so much brilliant learner voice going on in school already. So, whether you have like a rights respecting schools group, health and well-being group, because ultimately, Cost of the School Day is also about sort of well-being. It can fit into lots of different places. So, although we have Cost of the School Day pupil groups, many of them are sort of made up from existing well-being and equality inclusion groups. So again, trying not to reinvent the wheel, this is something that can be embedded in something that's maybe already there as well.

Joan McDonald

I know that some of the schools we've spoken to are looking at under the ethos of child protection. But again, I don't know whether that's appropriate because we know that children living in poverty isn't always a child protection issue, so I think it's maybe hard to differentiate what they are, but I know that some are still covering it, but under that kind of ethos. So yeah, thank you. Thanks.

Michael Bettencourt

Fiona. Could I ask you to come in if you want to?

Fiona Robertson

Yeah, I'm Fiona Robertson, I'm with The Promise Scotland, I am Promise Delivery Partner, my substantive post however, as you might imagine, as in community learning and development. So it kind of strikes me around about and having worked with managing workers in schools, obviously, in terms of schools having capacity to know everything that's going on in their communities and to provide that support, I just wondered if there is potentially a link around about CLD teams (Community Learning and Development teams) within areas who could be doing that mapping exercise for a number of schools, because the community resource will cover catchment areas, rather than just individual schools, and rather than every individual school trying to come up with their own template. I just wondered if that was something that was already happening or potential to be happening?

Sarah Spencer

Yeah. I think that's crucial. I think the role of CLD (Community Learning and Development) and lots of other partners, like the Welfare Rights teams that mentioned a wee bit earlier on, I think that's all crucial, because I think, and this follows on from the last point of schools being under so much pressure you know, budgetary and staffing wise, you know, oh, my goodness, now I need to find out about supports in the community. And the Scottish child payment and, like all of these different things. And I think the point, all of the funding for attainment, the Scottish attainment challenge and associated funding that was always meant to be about schools working with their partners and everyone working in partnership, and where that happens, that's working in partnership to kind of, you know, tackle poverty and improve outcomes for children affected by poverty. That was the idea. And where that happens. That's brilliant, but quite often it's kind of this mammoth task dumped on schools, and they're expected to do it on their own. And actually, what you're saying about the role of CLD teams in working with schools on that, I think that's really crucial, although that also needs to be resourced appropriately as well, which, which doesn't always happen. So yes, yes, would be my answer to that. Kirsty, have you got anything to add?

Kirsty Campbell

Just a solid yes as well. Yeah, partnerships are crucial, absolutely. And I think schools where they've made all those links in the community as well, and again, as Sarah talked about, like, really vigorously communicating that and doing that in a sort of friendly, non-stigmatizing way is really, really essential. Yeah,

Michael Bettencourt

I'm happy to take one more comment or question reflection before we go into our breakout rooms.

We are going to split into two groups now, one group with Sarah, one with Kirsty. The lucky people are going to be in the room with me and Kirsty. Sorry, Sarah, you've got Craig. I'm allowed to say that - I'm only joking.

We have got some questions that Michelle is going to pop into the chat now, she will also put them into the rooms and I'll hand over to Michelle, she'll do that magical thing that she'll do, and in a moment, you should all disappear and appear in a room, if for any reason it doesn't work. Come out of the meeting, come back in and Michelle will do our best to allocate you to the right place.

Breakout session

Welcome back everyone. I do sometimes think it's a good sign when you get dragged back in the room, in mid-conversation, because it means there's some energy happening or something that needs to be pursued. So, it sounds like Kirsty and Rachel that you might need to have a conversation, which is part of what the Forum is all about. It would be really helpful, in the last few minutes to just get some feedback from those two groups. We've just had discussions separately, and it would be good to hear what the other groups were talking about. So, Sarah, Kirsty, Craig, I'm going to invite you, if it's okay, just to give me some takeaways. We haven't got time for the whole discussion. It's two or three takeaways. So, I'll give you a little bit of a pause so you can gather your thoughts and put your reflections together. Is there anybody who would like to start? Feel free to put your cameras on as we are getting feedback.

Kirsty Campbell

I'm happy to feedback from our group, if you like Michael, I did also write down people's names, so I may be mildly bullying and then call your name out, but there was a really interesting conversation, so Beth from Enquire (Scottish advice service for additional support for learning) raised about the language that we use with parents. So, if we're wanting to support families to know about all the different entitlements, making sure that that language is non-stigmatizing. So, parents are not going to want to come to a session about parents in poverty, but actually parents might come to a session where it's learning about all the money that you need or your rights and entitlements, etc. And I think that was sort of echoed across the entire group - the importance of how we pitch that to parents, and that's non-stigmatizing. It's about supporting their human rights, supporting children's rights. And often we will use the word poverty here, and we need to keep that in the back of our minds, but it's not always what we're going to use when we're talking with parents. And also some really useful stuff about kinship carers, and thinking about some of the really difficult forms that kinship carers might have to fill out for financial support, and how services can be supporting those families to do that. And I know there was probably a lot more Michael, but I'll let other people pop in.

Michael Bettencourt

I think it covered everything. I think the only thing I would add was something about psychological pressure that can be on people, in addition to the practical pressures, the psychological pressure that can come with, I guess, the intersectionality, it's good to get that word in of poverty and meeting the needs of children with additional needs and additional psychological pressure. Sarah, could I come to you for some thoughts or observations on what you discussed in your group?

Sarah Spencer

Yeah, I think Craig, you were taking notes, so you might have picked up bits that I hadn't.

Craig McCreadie, CELCIS

Yeah, I'm very, very happy to share a few thoughts. I'll try and keep this relatively discreet, Michael, but I can provide kind of deeper written samples. So fascinating discussion, really, really interesting discussion. And one of the things that I observed was the diversity of roles in our group, like this huge array, like with no two people were operating in the same space, a huge, incredible diversity of roles. So that was really interesting to observe from the get-go. Some really interesting... So, you see intersectionality, I'll talk about the paradox, Michael, if that's all right. So, we had a panel member who talked about experiencing the difficulty or the challenge that arises where finance that exists within a family setting might be channelled in a way that isn't beneficial to everybody but recognizing that actually that represents quite a small number. There was a really important point made later on in the conversation that brought me back to that, which was the common and unfair correlation between poverty and neglect, that they are directly linked, and they are directly indexed. And the importance of challenging that, and just as a personal aside, that took me to the place of trauma in that conversation, and the link between trauma and poverty as distinct from neglect and poverty. And there was some really beautiful reflections about the importance of engaging with families relationally, and also within that challenging any assumptions that we might hold about the way that we're doing things being the right or the best way to do it, just make to kind of testing our assumptions that we're getting this right in terms of how resources are being distributed or people are being communicated with, and to build on that, there was a nice example talking about stuff that fell out of all the experiences that we had during COVID, the complexity of communicating diverse offers and entitlements to a really dispersed group, depending on where you are in the country. Yeah, and just some really nice examples of how resources are making quite discrete positive differences at local levels. We heard some examples about how young people are being engaged through Rights Respecting Schools and that kind of thing. A really interesting conversation. Thanks to everybody.

Michael Bettencourt

Thank you. Craig, Sarah, is there anything you wanted to add?

Sarah Spencer

No, that's that covered at all. Amazing. Thanks, Craig for taking notes.

Michael Bettencourt

We're coming up towards the end of the session, so it's over to anyone else for any reflections. I've noted in there that people have asked for contact details, and Kirsty and Sarah have very kindly shared their contact details and are happy for people to contact them directly. Any final thoughts and reflections before I bring the session to a close?

Okay, thank you for that. Thank you so much. Kirsty and Sarah. That was such an interesting, deep and I wrote those words and I'll just repeat them. It was thorough, informative, but most of all, practical. I loved your hopeful message of this concept that this is something that can seem overwhelming, but there are lots of practical things that you can do. So thank you for that session. Thank you to my CELCIS colleagues for the backup. They do the hard work so that I can just roll up. Craig, Michelle and Amy in the background. We hope to have another forum meeting early next year, possibly February, time that is to be confirmed. Apologies that this one was rescheduled because it was meant to happen earlier on, and thank you for coming along and sharing. All of the information will be available on the website, and the access to the PowerPoint, the information and a note from the meeting will go out to you. Thank you so much, and I look forward to seeing you again in the new year.

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