

Highland Children's Forum

ANNUAL REPORT 2013 2014

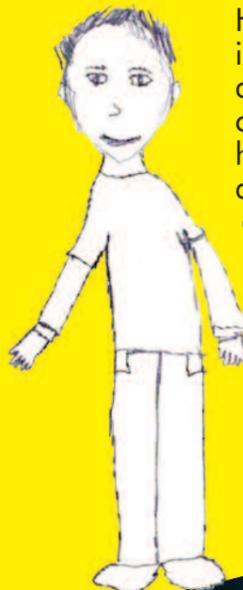
Full details of the Forum's activities, constitution and financing can be obtained from it's website:

www.highlandchildrensforum.org

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New Start Highland Offices
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IV3 8DU

Scottish Charity SC031945

Representing Children and Young People in Need in Highland



Highland Children's Forum is a parent carer founded and led charity that is committed to working to have the voice of children and young people with additional support needs of all kinds heard and appropriately acted on by those who design and deliver services.

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Foreword

2013-14 has been another year of high activity and change for the Forum. Isabel Paterson retired as Chair of the Committee in December 2013 and I picked up the role again having previously held this post in 2010-11.

Isabel has served for eleven and a half years on the Committee most of which was spent as Vice Chair or Chair and her passion and commitment helped to establish the Forum as a valued route for children and young people with additional support needs to have their voice heard.

She brought huge insight into the role through being a parent carer. This alongside her experience as a worker for PAMIS allowed her to have a very wide view of the Forum's mission and to maintain both the intensely personal focus on improving outcomes for individuals with the vision to see the work in a strategic framework. She left the Management Committee with a good representation of parent/carers and partner organisations.

We were sorry to say goodbye to Celia Baxter, the Children's Consultation Lead [CCL], who retired last year. Tracy Anderson took up the role in August 2013. Since then as well as starting on a major consultation she has undertaken a post graduate level course at Edinburgh University "Involving Children and Young People in Research and Consultation" examining techniques for ethical and meaningful research with children - evidence of the Forum's continued commitment to having enthusiastic and well trained people facilitating the voice of children and young people.

This report shows the breadth of the Forum's consultations and lobbying. Looking back at my foreword in 2010-11 the Forum was already expressing concern about services being reduced and what impact that would have on children and young people and there is some small indication that these worries are being appreciated and responded to. We also had said we would look at how the integration of services affects transitions and we plan to return to this work in the coming year.

None of the Forum's work would be possible without the support of the membership, the Committee Members, our staff and our funders Highland Council and grant giving trusts. Thank you all for your commitment to the voice of children and young people.

FRANCES NIXSEAMAN
CHAIR

IN 2013/14 THE FORUM'S MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE REVISED THE VISION, MISSION AND AMBITION:

Vision

That children and young people facing challenges are given opportunities to talk about their lives and that their views are listened to, respected and acted upon.

Mission

To enable children and young people facing challenges to have their voices heard. To represent them by influencing positive change in policy and practice which leads to better outcomes.

Ambition

Children and young people facing challenges are actively engaged in influencing service design, delivery and development.

HIGHLAND CHILDREN'S FORUM COMMITTEE

During the year the following members served on the Forum's Management Committee:

Isabel Paterson
Chair to December 2013

Frances Nixseaman
Chair from January 2014

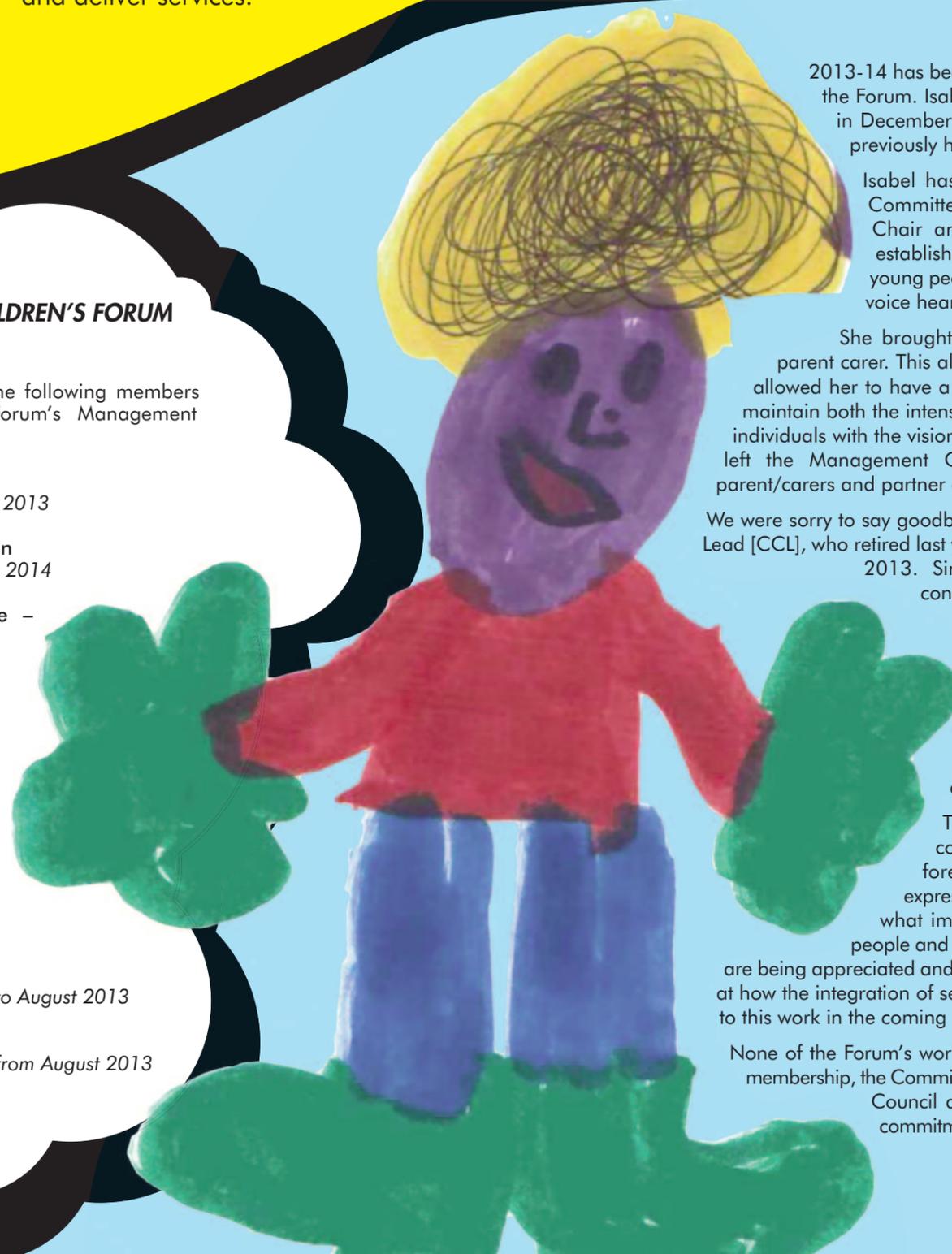
Rebecca Huxtable –
Smith
Treasurer

Angela Harrison
Anne Watmough
Christian Maclean
Clare Dyker
Isobel Grigor
Mark Goodwill
Tyrone Betts

STAFF
Calum Munro
Policy Lead

Celia Baxter
Consultation Lead to August 2013

Tracy Anderson
Consultation Lead from August 2013



LISTENING TO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

"BEING A PART NOT APART"

JUNE 2013 HCF INCLUSION REPORT

The Forum was delighted to publish its latest report which revisits the topic of Inclusion. An extensive consultation with over 500 children and young people plus parents and service providers giving an overview of experiences in an urban, a rural and super sparse areas of Highland. It highlights good practice and serious challenges for all those who seek to deliver better outcomes and equitable services for children and young people in Highland. The report was presented to the Adult and Children's Services Committee (ACSC) of Highland Council by its author Celia Baxter and was widely discussed by Committee members.

It will now inform the For Highland Children's 4 Service Planning Process and has been taken to the Additional Support Needs Review currently in progress in Highland Council. The Chair of the ACSC agreed to take the report to the Council's Technical Services Committee because of the problems caused to inclusion by poor rural transport - an issue raised in previous Forum reports.

'My Child Services Worker (CSW) used to ask me how things were going but she's left now. I trusted her; she listened to me when I needed to talk. She helped me when Granny died and helped me sort out a dispute with a friend. No-one asks me now and that makes me feel a little bit not noticed'

(Lucy, 11)

EVALUATION OF THE DIGIT PROJECT

The Head of Education asked the Forum to undertake an evaluation of the Digit project which has been running in Dornoch, Invergordon, Golspie and St Duthus schools for 4 years. This proved to be a difficult piece of work as there were a number of issues making communication, and identification of participants difficult

The evaluation was delivered at the end of the reporting year. The report shows the potential benefits of a scheme such as DIGIT but also the challenges around delivering it with programming, staffing and resources. The DIGIT programme has obviously benefitted from the commitment of extremely dedicated Pupil Support Assistants who have "gone the extra mile" for the young people who they seek to support.

DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC HEALTH ANNUAL REPORT

The Forum undertook consultations with young people with additional needs in support of the DoPH Annual Report.

PLAY HIGHLAND

The CCL assisted in facilitating activities at the Play Highland Seminar and the Forum maintains its interest in the work to take forward the Highland Play Strategy.

'Lego Club helped me feel more relaxed because no-one called me names in there'

(David, 8)

CHILD'S PLAN REVIEW CONSULTATION

The Forum was asked to undertake a major consultation in support of the Scottish Government's examination of how the Child's Plan process works in Highland. The consultation involved detailed conversations with children, young people and their parents and carers from 30 families from three diverse Associated School Groups areas - Inverness Royal Academy, Portree High School and Tain Royal Academy - to get their perspective on the process and this testimony will become a formal report to the Government's review.

The Consultation Lead is now deeply engaged in the final consultations for this report. Getting the project underway was an extremely challenging process with considerable delays within services centred on their understanding of the intention of the project and the identification of families to take part. These difficulties resulted in a very late start to the project and resulted in considerable additional work by the Consultation Lead to attempt to regain the lost time.

The Consultation Lead gained access to a wide range of children with diverse challenges and widely ranging experiences of engagement with the Child's Plan process. The testimony achieved so far is very rich and the Forum is excited by the prospect of delivering a very meaningful insight into service users' experience of the Child Plan process.

The Forum is aiming to deliver the approved first draft to the Council by 1st August 2014.

AUTISM - EXPERIENCES OF TRANSITION INTO ADULT SERVICES FOR INVERNESS DISTRICT PARTNERSHIPS

The CCL is also working on a project to gather the views of young people in Inverness with Autism on their transition into adult services. She is working with a range of partner organisations such as HIAS, AARGH and Autism Initiatives to gather the testimony. This report has been requested by the two Inverness District Partnerships with a view to showing them what improvements service users want in the area.

'I think some of my teachers have misunderstood me sometimes. I always seem to get the blame for things but no-one gives me a chance to explain, they never have the time to listen to me properly.'

(Daniel, 11)

SPEAKING WITH POLICY MAKERS

REPRESENTATION

The key role of the Forum is to take the testimony of children and young people to the adults who control their services and futures and to change systems so that the views of children and young people are automatically sought at the earliest point of all service planning and change.

The Forum's reports and direct testimony from members are used to attempt to influence Councillors and service leaders at committees and on working parties. The Forum maintains its visibility through regular briefings to politicians and service managers. It builds partnerships with other Third Sector organisations to increase the influence of the young people's voice.

DISABILITY AWARENESS CURRICULUM FOR EXCELLENCE PACK

The Forum was delighted to learn that Highland Youth Voice (HYV) had adopted the disability awareness pack developed by young people from the Forum's Festival of Politics award winning group and was actively campaigning to have it put into use in all Highland Schools.

'I go to the Young Carers group. When we're there we talk about relationships and feelings. The staff there really listen to me and make me feel a lot better about things. I would really miss them if I had to stop going.'

(Sarah, 12)

COLLECTIVE ADVOCACY

The Forum has taken a range of members' concerns to politicians and service leaders. These have included issues about the engagement of children and young people with additional support needs in Child Protection Investigations and making the recruitment of the Highland Youth Convenor more inclusive.

LOBBYING ACTIVITY

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT NEEDS FUNDING

The Forum raised the issue of Additional Support Needs funding and the experience of parents at every possible opportunity. At the end of the financial year the Council moved £1m from reserves into the Additional Support Needs budget to cover the continuing shortfall. This welcome money addresses current levels of need and levels of support. Any new demand will place additional requirements on the budget in coming years. The Forum continues to engage with Councillors on the topic.

NATIONAL ISSUES

The Forum's support for the GIRFEC provisions in the Children's Bill resulted in it lobbying Highland MSPs to support

the Bill. The Forum issued a statement in support of the GIRFEC provisions based on the testimony of children, young people and adults given to it in a number of reports over the last few years. The Forum's lobbying materials were "tweeted" across Parliament by the Scottish Government. It has also raised with Ministers the need to appropriately fund Councils so that the ambitions of the Children's Act can be properly delivered.

The Forum has written to Scottish Ministers about the Scottish Parenting Strategy and pointed out the testimony of young parents on the issue in Forum reports.

'Staff listen to me and ask for my views now and again. Because they listen to me they understand my limits; that helps me not to get stressed about things like I used to'

(Michael, 16)

FORUM FUNDING

With the closure of the Scottish Government's Unified Voluntary Sector Fund (UVSF) the Lotland Street Charity Partnership lost its funding for the joint offices in Lotland Street. This represented a loss of just over £19,000 each year to the partnership and resulted in its dissolution.

This loss was cushioned through the generosity of Newstart Highland who has given the Forum office space in their premises. However the loss also impacted on the activity funding of the Forum as nearly £4,000 of the UVSF grant supported the publishing and IT costs of the Forum. The Forum's Committee has pared the budget and continued its freeze on staff salaries. Staff are working on reduced hours - 20 hours per week - and the Committee is scrutinising all budgets to maximise spending from the Service Level Agreement with Highland Council on consultation and associated activity. This has resulted in the Forum not attending meetings of the Scottish Children's Forum or Cross Party Group at Holyrood unless the matters on the agenda have a direct relevance to issues in Highland.



Illustrations and quotations in this Annual Report come from the testimony taken during the consultation on the Child's Plan. All names have been changed to protect contributors.