

A photograph of a middle-aged man with curly grey hair, smiling broadly. He is wearing a maroon zip-up jacket over a light blue collared shirt. A circular badge on his left chest reads 'FACE MASK EXEMPT'. The background is a solid red color.

ANNUAL 2021 REVIEW

INSIDE

1

Section one is all about the people we support and our staff, and how we have all been there for each other in the past year

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Section two is all about The Action Group and what we have done in the past year

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Section three is all about our finances and funding

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to our 2021 Annual Review.

We are delighted to bring you another packed review, filled with stories and updates of what has been happening in The Action Group over the past year.

On the next few pages, you will find a statement from our CEO, Linda Tuthill, and our Chair of the Board, Stephen Oliver, followed by a report on the review of social care.

Thank you - and enjoy!

2021

LINDA TUTHILL
CEO

Whenever I am asked to write my piece for the annual review I feel the pressure to say just the right words. This year I just want to say thank you.

We made it, thanks to you. To everyone we support, their families and all my colleagues, thank you. Your individual efforts and collective energy got us through the hardest of years. In every little thing and every big thing, you did, every kindness and every brave act, you went above and beyond: you made the difference for someone, and to The Action Group. You should feel proud.

So, no wonder we have made **There for each other** as our theme for 2021. Even with fear, anxiety, and limitations on our lives, I saw the most compassionate and creative support happen over the past year. We were there for each other.

We will always be about real time human relationships. This was so vital last year through the bravery of our key worker colleagues who delivered support to everyone. Digital also helped to bring us together, so we were connected while apart, and we will continue to support, train, and provide tech, so that everyone can be involved in this digital journey.

With greater digital connections more people can be involved in shaping their Action Group. The pandemic is still with us and it continues to be challenging for us all. Here at The Action group we are trying our very best individually and collectively to keep trying to be there for you all as best we can.

Enjoy our Annual review.



THE ACTION GROUP

CHAIR'S REPORT



“When life gives you a lemon, make lemonade!”

This one sentence reply was said to me by my old boss many years ago after I had spent 10 minutes explaining why the project he had given me was under resourced and going to be late. It was a chastening experience and I walked out with my tail between my legs.

I am not going to pretend that dealing with the challenges of the COVID pandemic is like my small project, but the lesson is the same. This generation defining event has turned everyone's life upside down causing fear, anxiety, disruption and, for some, sadly illness and lost lives. This is the context we in The Action Group have operated within during the last year.

We finished 2019 as a financially strong organisation investing in new technology and our staff planning to deliver improved services for many of the people we support. When the first lockdown happened, all this had to be rethought. It was clear that our first, and some may say only, responsibility was to guide the people we support through the myriad of changing infection restrictions to keep them and our staff safe. This happened overnight and has changed almost on a weekly basis ever since. A year on how has The Action Group responded. Simply put, this charity has shown itself to be adaptable, capable, and pragmatic in ways that we could not imagine a few years earlier.

We were adaptable in adjusting support plans to meet restrictions and new risk assessment within the first few weeks. In producing clear Covid infection-control guidelines for staff on a weekly basis. Utilising new communication methods to keep in touch with those at home and feeling isolated from their friends. This would not have been enough if our staff had not shown their capability to learn new information, apply new skills and seek solutions to the daily problems they faced. This led to some roles evolving and the entire head office team working from home. This too would not have been enough without a pragmatic, no blame approach to dealing with the difficulties encountered every day.

In my annual report it is my custom to highlight some of the achievements made over the year. This annual review will detail many of them and I am proud of them all. But the proudest achievement has been the way The Action Group has risen to the challenge the pandemic brought for the people we care about with energy and courage. Whilst we may still have more difficulties to face, I can assure you we are able to cope with whatever is thrown at us and will come back stronger. We have proven we are adaptable, capable, pragmatic but most importantly, **there for each other.**

I would like to thank all the members of the Board for their work over the year but especially Linda Tuthill and her wonderful staff.

Stephen Oliver

THE ACTION GROUP

THE INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF ADULT SOCIAL CARE IN SCOTLAND

(DEREK FEELEY: FEB 2020)

“The pandemic has shown us more starkly than ever before just how much our care services matter, the Review’s report provides us with a basis for significantly improving those services and, of course, is a vital first step towards the creation of a National Care Service.” (First Minister)

It would be easy to say, it is just another review, another lot of words on paper with great aspirations for change. There have been so many before that have not actually changed the status quo, the vested interests and under funding of social care. More importantly the lack of real investment to ensure that people with Learning disabilities and other support needs, can be full citizens, through work opportunities, income levels, full human rights, and equality in all aspects of life.

BUT, life is different now. We have been in a pandemic world for over a year. The world has changed for the worse: inequality; mental health impact etc. But maybe something has shifted in the status quo, in Government and the public’s minds and now **everyone** can see that a poorly resourced, undervalued social care system, with some parts with an eye on profit, hurts everyone: those it supports and employs, the NHS, the country and the economy. The social care sector through the efforts of its poorly paid staff, kept people alive and out of hospital despite most of the money that was given by Govt for covid relief for organisations not reaching them.

“Pessimism of the intellect and optimism of the Will” (Gramsci)

I choose to be optimistic in my “will”, that I, everyone in The Action Group, the sector, the public and politicians can pull together to make the Review a reality. Better paid, trained and valued staff, lead to better outcomes for people, with support needs. A human rights approach stops families having to beg for what is an entitlement. A new Care system, strategically integrated with the NHS, will not be perfect, just as our NHS is not perfect, but it cannot be worse than the system we have now. The review makes 53 recommendations including:

- An end to some aspects of care charging
- A National care service, with nationally agreed funding and priorities
- Less competition and more partnership
- Adoption of science-based improvement methods
- The ability to learn from success and failure, scale-up and spread good practice.
- Nurturing and strengthening the social care workforce
- Better support for unpaid carers



THE ACTION GROUP

THE INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF ADULT SOCIAL CARE IN SCOTLAND

(DEREK FEELEY: FEB 2020)

OLD THINKING	NEW THINKING
Social care support is a burden on society	Social care support is an investment
Managing need	Enabling rights and capabilities
Available in a crisis	Preventative and anticipatory
Competition and markets	Collaboration
Transactions	Relationships
A place for services (e.g. a care home)	A vehicle for supporting independent living
Variable	Consistent and fair

We have achieved much for and with those we support, to make life and opportunities better, but we know that more can be achieved, if are funded properly and beyond year-to-year budgeting and allowed to work in a way we know brings the best results. The Review sees this as New Thinking. **We know it as the way we work because it works.** The current system has “old thinking” as its Prevailing narrative and context, which helped no on, especially those we support.

If we want things to change to, we need to be willing to push to make the Review a reality. As Derek Feeley says in the review:

If not now, when? If not this way, how? And if not us -who

Easy Read Review



Short Film



Short Film (BSL)



THE ACTION GROUP

1211

IN HOUSING AND
COMMUNITY
SUPPORT

159

IN CHILDREN AND
ADULT TRANSITION
SERVICES

WE SUPPORT

2224

PEOPLE

206

IN REAL JOBS
EMPLOYMENT
SERVICE

648

IN ADVICE
SERVICES

**I enjoy getting support from
The Action Group. They are
flexible, friendly, and fun.**

FROM 2021 EVALUATION



THE ACTION GROUP

SECTION ONE

[HTTPS://YOUTU.BE/UWGZVUEODFY](https://youtu.be/uwgzvUEodfy)

OUR PEOPLE

PEOPLE WE SUPPORT
& OUR STAFF



HOUSING AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT SERVICES (HACSS)

1211

PEOPLE

120

FALKIRK

839

EDINBURGH

97

EAST LoTHIAN

86

WEST LoTHIAN

69

MIDLoTHIAN

BEN - HACSS FALKIRK

T H E R E F O R T H E A N I M A L S



I work on a farm and there's health and safety. We clean the chickens and stop the chickens trying to escape. We feed the animals. I feed the donkeys on a Wednesday. I like the donkeys best. The farm is good, I like it.

CHILDREN AND ADULTS IN TRANSITION SERVICES

159

YOUNG PEOPLE

39

EDINBURGH

23

EAST LoTHIAN

33

FALKIRK

64

MIDLoTHIAN

EVIE - HACSS EDINBURGH

GETTING OUT



Evie is making the most of the changes that Covid has brought over the past year and is spending as much time outdoors, in the fresh air, as possible! Evie was able to meet up with her sister outside for a coffee, after lockdown during the summer and was also still able to do some of her usual activities, like visiting the Edinburgh Botanical Gardens at Christmas. There have been plenty of challenges, coffees, and a lot of hand washing, but Evie has shown us all how to appreciate each day outside come rain or shine.

EVALUATIONS

LISTENING TO THE PEOPLE WE SUPPORT

92%

FEEL LISTENED TO

93%

ARE HAPPY OR VERY HAPPY WITH THE SERVICE THEY GET FROM THE ACTION GROUP

94%

SAID STAFF TREAT THEM FAIRLY

579

PEOPLE RESPONDED

86%

FEEL THEY ARE SUPPORTED TO DO WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO THEM

81%

WERE SUPPORTED TO TRY NEW THINGS

96%

SAID STAFF MAKE THEM FEEL SAFE

89%

SAID STAFF HELPED THEM UNDERSTAND THE LOCKDOWN

STEVEN - HACSS FALKIRK

T H E R E F O R T H E A N I M A L S



I think the farm is a good place to get confidence working with animals and it's also good work experience to do different jobs like doing maintenance and animal welfare plus it's a good place to come up and spend time with the animals. I don't have a favourite job, I like doing everything and doing jobs others can't like heavy lifting.

Ben and Steven working at Muiravonside Farm



**The Action Group is the best place I've
ever worked for in terms of aims and
values, workplace community and respect**

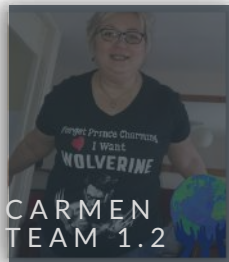
STAFF SURVEY

TEAM MANAGERS



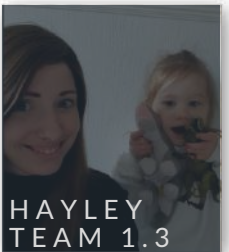
Katelyn loves concerts, festivals and generally having fun. Katelyn studied health and social care at college whilst working in retail. She joined The Action Group as a support worker in 2013. She became an Assistant Team Manager in 2016 and a Team Manager in 2018. She has always liked being around and helping people so a career in social care is perfect.

In most companies – people are told what to do and how to do it. This is not the case here. As managers we all work differently and have the freedom to do so.



Carmen loves watching movies and is a huge X-Men fan. Back in Romania Carmen spent time working with young people from Romanian orphanages. She then trained and worked as a social worker. Carmen visited Edinburgh 2014 and fell in love. 2 years later she moved to the UK. In November 2018 she joined The Action Group as a Team Manager.

I have worked in other charities in the UK, at The Action Group the Training opportunities are fantastic. People here are always trying to do their best for others. Whether it is a happy situation or not. We are also really passionate about involving the people we support in how we work. This is so important to me.



Hayley is a big dinosaur fan and delighted that her 2-year old daughter Imogen-Grace is also into Dinosaurs. Prior to working at The Action Group Hayley was an Assistant Manager at an Edinburgh night club. She had studied health and social care and started training to be a nurse, but very quickly realised this wasn't for her. Working on a ward was too much about tasks and bed numbers and not enough about the people. She started working at The Action Group in 2013 as a support worker. Hayley has worked in 4 different teams as a support worker, Assistant Team Manager and became a team Manager in 2017.

Working at The Action Group is so diverse. Every day is different. One minute you can be doing some admin working on the weekly service report, the next you are on the phone to other professionals from police, social work or mental health services.

INVOLVEMENT

GAYLE FORSYTH
USER INVOLVEMENT OFFICER

The people supported by The Action Group have always been at the heart of all that we do. My role was created to further improve the involvement of the people we support in shaping their services and The Action Group, as well as influencing policy and communities too. Through consultation, working to the The Charter for Involvement standards, evaluation feedback and by linking with the Assembly, and The National Involvement Network etc. people can know their rights and have their say.

We have been working on some of the different areas that people can evaluate, check and make change happen, by asking what is going well, what could be better and how best we can make the changes that are needed. This has included working in partnership to:

- Establish speaking up groups in all geographical areas of The Action Group
- Update the yearly evaluation survey to make it more accessible
- Using people's lived experience to inform the development of new keyworker training
- Increasing Easy Read policies and Information
- Piloting the new ACCESS software system with some people we support

I have also been working with the people we support, to help inform policy making to reflect changes brought about by Covid-19. For example, the Finance policy - how staff can support people with their money as Covid-19 has changed the way we pay for things. Especially looking at Digital money and buying online safely. This helps people decide more clearly how they want staff to help with their money.

Through Community Jobs Scotland, a new colleague with support needs will join me soon and I am excited to work with them, as we make sure everyone in The Action Group has their say on what matters to them and in making TAG even better.

DIGITAL FESTIVAL

In October, we hosted our first ever Digital Festival, for the people we support and their families and friends, plus all our staff.

It was a fantastic event. Click the button to watch.



GAVIN - HACCS EDINBURGH

GARDENING



Gavin has been there for his friend during lockdown.

I have been doing work in my friend's garden. I have a job working in my church garden, I cleared it out and redesigned it. I learned so much about gardening that I am now self employed and in the process of starting up my own garden maintenance service.

ACTIVITIES

THERE FOR EACH OTHER, DIGITALLY

The activities website launched on the 18th of January and has since become an important hub to a lot of people! It has provided lots of fun and engaging activities and events for both the people we support and staff.

It has also provided people with the opportunity to come together to celebrate big events such as LGBT History month and World Autism Awareness day.

The website has been a platform on which we could still host important events such as the Super Wow awards and TAG Factor, so that everyone could still enjoy some normality and feel connected, even when we are apart.

2650 people visited the Activities website between January and April 2021



SUMAR

TRAINING



I am a late-diagnosed autistic client who also now volunteers for The Action Group.

Because I want to be a professional autism educator—my employment advisor arranged for me to collaborate with Liz Taylor developing autism training courses and co-delivering them. It is vital that we have the input from those who have lived experience. It changes the whole perspective of the training materials and engages people in a more dynamic way. I am thrilled to be a part of changing the current narrative around autism, and Liz is finding the lived experience perspective vital to providing accurate and autism-affirming information.

This is the first course I have been on with somebody who has real-world experience and I think it had an amazing impact on my own engagement with the course and appreciation of autism, and helped challenge my preconceptions and accept the reasons for these misconceptions. I appreciated being able to ask questions and get Sumar's insight. Her passion and knowledge was apparent and Sumar was very clear and articulate and brought a great energy to the session.

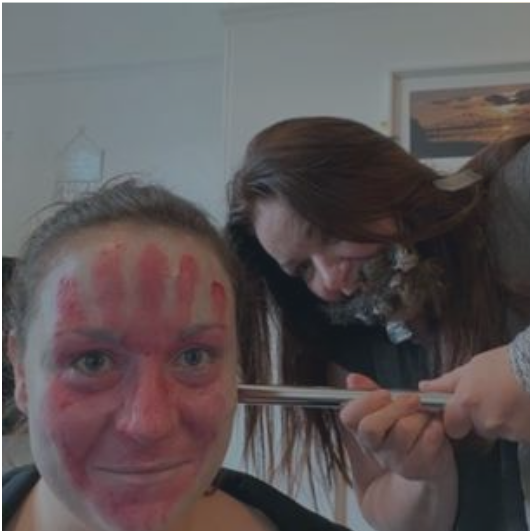
STAFF MEMBER TRAINING FEEDBACK

CAMERON - HACSS

MOVIE RE-ENACTMENTS

During this pandemic, the people who live at Cameron, have not been able to do their normal everyday activities which affected them, like us all, in a negative way. The staff team and those who live at Cameron were always thinking of different ideas and ways to keep everyone engaged and entertained, through Lockdowns and restrictions due to Covid.

Kelly and Emma thought up this great idea of trying to re-enact some well known movies. The people we support and our staff rose to the challenge! We think you will agree that the re-enactments were excellent and provided much needed fun and laughter during this difficult time. Can you guess the films?



CHRIS - REAL JOBS

PREPARATION FOR WORK



Chris has been working with the Recovery Fund Project, which helps people gain work experience and qualifications to search for new careers during the pandemic. Chris previously worked in hospitality but was made redundant due to Covid. He had aspirations to work in retail.

Together with his Employment Advisor Steven, they found a course through an online organisation called Alison which offers both free and paid courses. Chris chose the course Retail: Management, Merchandising and Distribution. The course took 3 weeks and on his first attempt, Chris passed, scoring an excellent 80%.

Chris has now received his first ever qualification, which is industry recognised, and has completed his time in the Recovery Fund Project. Chris has returned to Real Jobs to begin looking for positions to start his new career in retail.

AARON - FALKIRK

VOLUNTEERING



My name is Aaron. I am 21 yrs old and I have been volunteering at Newparks Farm in Muiravonside country park for nearly 4 years.

I love my job because it keeps me fit! I like telling visitors the names of the animals and how I look after them. My favourite animals are the donkeys. Birch is my favourite donkey as he likes to give me cuddles and he makes me happy. I also like the hens. They come to the gate to meet me when I go to feed them and collect their eggs.

I have gained confidence around the animals on the farm and enjoy looking after them every week. My support workers help me to be able to do the job I love, they help keep me safe and teach me the importance of following the rules on health and safety.

My least favourite part is the winter, when it's cold, wet and sometimes snowing but I know it's important to keep the animals safe, warm, and dry by cleaning out the stables.

Aaron won a Super WOW award this year, for his dedication to his voluntary job on the farm. His support worker said:

He is so enthusiastic and willing to do a good job and most of all he keeps people's spirits up and makes people happy

MUSSELBURGH

Rory and Daniel have always lived at home and only ever been away from home when on respite. Murray has been living in shared accommodation for a few years but was ready for a change.

Over the Summer, even in a pandemic, with restrictions, we did everything we could to start to get to know Daniel, Rory and Murray, and to support them to get to know each other. After months and months of conversations, planning, meetings and getting to know the young men, the decision was made to move in late December/Early January. Unfortunately, we went into the second lockdown before all three could move in, so only Rory and Daniel managed to get into their new home before Christmas. Finally, on Easter Monday Murray finally moved into his new home with Rory and Daniel, which was fantastic. We wish you all the best in your new home!

It shows that even in a pandemic, anything is possible.



**Seeing the three young men move into
Musselburgh together, develop a
friendship and establish themselves is
something very special to see**

EMMA FOLEY - TEAM MANAGER

SENIOR MANAGERS

WHO HAS BEEN THERE FOR YOU?



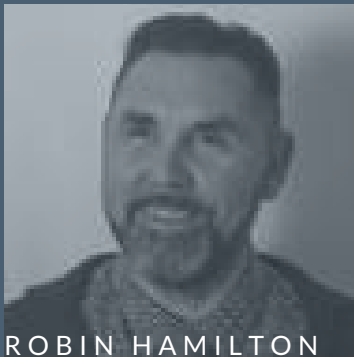
DANNY HAYWARD
DEPUTY CEO

Throughout the last year my two boys have kept me going and we have been through highs and low. But mainly we got some time together which we would never have had, we laughed a lot and had some adventures. *"It never hurts to keep looking for the sunshine"* Winnie the Pooh.

My family and especially my dog Sasha, we go out every morning for fresh air, this gave me a little me time to clear my head and plan the day ahead. This was especially welcome at the height of restrictions when you couldn't really leave home at all!



SUSAN SYMONDS
HEAD OF FINANCE



ROBIN HAMILTON
HEAD OF SERVICES

This may sound a bit corny but having a meeting with my peer group every Tuesday throughout lockdown has meant that I have had a place that feels OK to talk about the difficulties of lockdown and being able to just have a chat has helped.

At work, my team, senior management colleagues, and wider professional networks have all kept me going throughout the past year. Outside work, I'm fortunate to have a husband and son who've provided love, inspiration, and a continuous stream of Pokemon/Minecraft trivia.



SUSI O'BRIEN
HEAD OF HUMAN RESOURCES

DEVELOPMENT MANAGERS

WHO HAS BEEN THERE FOR YOU?

Our Development Managers (DM) are responsible for looking after all our Team Managers (TM), ensuring services are being delivered well, and always working towards developing and improving everything that we do for those we support. We asked them, who has been there for you this past year?



LOUISE WHITELOCK

The TM's I manage, Angie, Paisley, Emma & Amanda have all been there for me. Their positivity, can-do attitude and eagerness to get things done has kept me going throughout the last year. As Jen is fond of saying: team work really does make the dream work.

My colleagues in the DM team, and the people I manage. Knowing that we were all in this together, doing everything we can to help each other and the people we support.



LISA WILLIAMSON



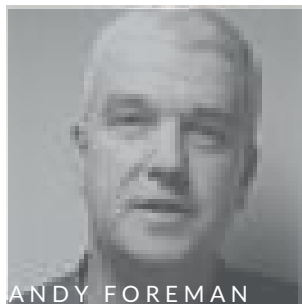
CLARE COYLE

Having our Family WhatsApp group when we have not been able to see each other has been great. Our initial weekly (now monthly) family quiz nights and of course all the funny jokes, gifs and family photos when things have been tough has managed to keep us this side of sane!

For me it hasn't been the cliché 'call me if you need me'... personally, I would never call. It's about holding space for difficult and emotional conversations. Naming the hard stuff - not just glossing over it. People have been there for me this year. Now I know what that feels like - I know what to do for others.



JENNIFER DOW



ANDY FOREMAN

Everyone at The Action Group for just being there.

What kept me getting up every morning? Being inspired by staff, managers and the people we support that showed creative ways to keep going in difficult times, and my family. Thankful for digital technology that helped me keep connected.



LINDA MATTHEW

**Great place to work, senior
management genuinely live
the values and care about
staff**

STAFF SURVEY

EVALUATIONS

LISTENING TO OUR STAFF

91%

ARE HAPPY
WORKING AT THE
ACTION GROUP

88%

WOULD
RECOMMEND US AS AN
EMPLOYER

80%

FEEL VALUED FOR
THE WORK THEY
HAVE DONE
THROUGHOUT THE
PANDEMIC

196

PEOPLE RESPONDED

93%

FELT WE
COMMUNICATED
WELL WITH THEM
THROUGHOUT THE
PANDEMIC

97%

FEEL THEY GET
THE CORRECT
TRAINING FOR
THEIR ROLE

95%

FEEL SAFE AT
WORK

GROUPS

SUPPORTING EACH OTHER TOGETHER

The Groups throughout lockdown have had a massive positive impact for their members. People have been able to get together in a Covid safe way to maintain their vital social interactions. Youth groups, children's playschemes, summer Leisure Schemes, Girls groups etc. digital and real time: Being there for each other has really helped.

By helping lift members spirits in these tough times, supporting each other, and helping everyone's mental health, while still keeping safe. This has been a huge benefit to families too. We all had a ball coming up with all the activities we could do together in the groups.



The people supported by team 1.11 have kept up their work on their allotment, growing fruit and vegetables.

Through the pandemic, they have only been able to go one at a time, but they are hoping to get back together for social meets soon (and take more photos, like this one, taken before the pandemic started!)

SECTION TWO

SECTION 2 // TWO

THE ACTION GROUP

OUR BOARD

THE MEMBERS OF OUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS



ADVICE

THERE TO SUPPORT PEOPLE WITH WELFARE, BENEFITS AND HOUSING

The Advice service looks pretty different to how it looked in June 2020. With thanks to funds from the Scottish Government and The Action Group itself, we have run new digital projects (helping over 200 people to get digital devices and supporting them to use them), and we've provided emergency well-being support, getting essentials to people to help them cope through lockdown, and provided a listening ear to combat anxiety and isolation.

We've changed how we advise, support and represent people - changing from home visits and face-to-face meetings to phone calls and video calls. This change has worked well for most people, but has been difficult for others. We will bring face to face meetings back in a Covid secure way, when it is safe to do this.



Work and manner were absolutely outstanding and exemplary. I have rarely, if ever, felt I was in better hands.

FROM 2021 EVALUATION

ADVICE SUPPORT

648

PEOPLE

406

EDINBURGH

59

EAST LoTHIAN

13

FALKIRK

151

WEST LoTHIAN

17

MIDLoTHIAN

**Thank you for this service and please
please please continue to provide help
and support. I feel like I was helped to
complete the form with dignity not
despair.**

FROM 2021 EVALUATION

ADVICE - PARTNERSHIP

There are more positive changes as we join a consortium with VOCAL, EDG and Fair, called Parents Carewell. Working closely together, we will support Carers from the earliest stages of their caring journey and throughout their lives. We want to make sure that Carers have the information and support they need at every stage.

Some things however, haven't changed: We remain humbled by Carers and people with support needs for how they have coped and how they support others during incredibly difficult times. We remain committed to doing all we can to support them.

The way we provide our services had to change but the difference it made to people's lives did not. Who knows what the following year will throw at us but the Advice service will be there for people no matter what.



Your service helped to prevent homelessness and hospital admission, it has helped me to gain benefit I am entitled to which has helped me keep my home.

FROM 2021 EVALUATION

COMMUNICATIONS

Hi! I have worked in The Action Group for about 5 years. For four years I was working directly with services and speaking with staff as their Business Support Officer. I started my new role as Communications Officer in June 2020 which from the beginning was a very interesting challenge.

In the middle of a pandemic communication is a priority every day; not only do we have a duty to keep our staff safe but to also keep the people we support safe and well informed.

Since I came into the job, I have been working alongside Gayle Forsyth, our Involvement Officer, making sure all the material that we produce with and for the people we support is accessible. This year we made the Evaluation Survey much more accessible, and we are grateful for supported people's help in doing this. Each section had an information video, and each question was in an easy read format with an audio option. As a result, more people took part, which was brilliant!

Each project has been a collective improvement process and for me, it has been an absolute joy to create new, improved and accessible paperwork, communications and Information for everyone.

JOHANNA MR
COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER

THE ACTION GROUP

HR

TALES FROM HUMAN RESOURCES

At the time of The Action Group's last annual review, the HR team had just about settled into working from home rather than being based in Norton Park. We'd started using remote interviews, and set up improvised systems to turn all of our old paper trails into online ones. Meetings happened on Teams video, motivational memes were shared, and homeschooled children occasionally interrupted our working days.

WHAT'S HAPPENED SINCE

A whole year has gone by and we are proud to be still working entirely virtually. By eliminating physical contact within internal departments like HR, The Action Group has reduced the risk of Covid spreading between different teams and wider locations. This has helped to keep both our colleagues and the people who use our services safe.

The daily business of supporting The Action Group's people resources continues however. Here are some of the things we've been up to:

RECRUITMENT

Since spring 2020, Our online recruitment processes have increased throughout the organisation, bringing around two hundred new people into The Action Group's workforce. HR and managers within services have worked closely together to find the very best candidates, and as of spring 2021 our overall vacancy numbers are at their lowest in anyone's memory. The pandemic has highlighted the importance of social care across Scotland, and many of our new workers are discovering what a rewarding career it can offer. We hope this continues....

SYSTEMS

The HR team have been working hard to develop our online data systems and processes, making them faster, accurate, and more efficient. This allows us to spend more time responding to queries and supporting services.

ADVICE AND SUPPORT

Alongside the regular support that HR provide to managers on matters such as wellbeing, conduct and performance, the last year has brought us unique employment and data protection law issues relating to absence, vaccines, masks, Covid testing, home working, and annual leave. Keeping up with the pace of change and ensuring that The Action Group follows a consistently ethical path through these new circumstances has taken much effort and dedication from members of the HR team.

BEING THERE FOR EACH OTHER

Sitting at your computer in your slippers at home can be nice, but we all miss face-to-face chat. Our team have kept in touch with one another, and with colleagues in other departments as much as we can. Events such as the Staff Conference, TAG Talks and the Super Wow Awards have been very much enjoyed, and we've also had our own virtual HR team events such as afternoon tea and quiz at Christmas, and a games afternoon this spring. Two of the team – Pilar Sanmartin and Davina Battistelli – have completed their CIPD level 5 qualifications this year and we are all very proud of them.

So here's to the rest of 2021, and whatever further adventures it will bring...!



ROCKING THE REMOTE WORKING

Sabina Nonnis joined The Action Group as a HR Analyst in September 2020. Her arrival was a real event as she was our very first employee to be recruited, inducted, and trained 100% online! We caught up with her to find out what it's been like.

Hi Sabina! Tell us a bit about yourself and how you ended up working for The Action Group.

Hello, I am originally from Sardinia but have spent the past 8 years in Scotland. I love long chats with friends over a nice cup of coffee, walks in nature, and travelling. Reading is my biggest passion. I have a background in Psychology. After taking a break from studying to work as a Support Worker, I decided to pursue a career in HR. I did my master's degree in Human Resources, and was looking for my first HR role and saw a vacancy at The Action Group. I immediately felt it was exactly what I was looking for; a place that not only would allow me to develop as a professional but that most importantly reflected my personal values. I applied, attended my interview online, and was extremely happy to be offered the role!

What do you do in your role as a HR Analyst?

I provide support with recruitment; processing applications, arranging interviews and making provisional offers. I also process employee information, prepare contracts, and ensure all contractual changes are processed and sent to the Payroll team. I also make staff ID badges.

How easy has it been to get to know your colleagues?

Everyone has taken the time to have chats with me via email, phone, chats, and Teams. This has helped me to feel more connected and to get to know everyone.

What has been the best bit of working for The Action Group so far?

For me, it's the people I work with. Everyone in my team and elsewhere in the organisation is always friendly, helpful and available to provide help and support.

Any downsides?

At the moment I would say that the only downside is that I still haven't met anyone in person. I am looking forward to when this can happen!



HEALTH & SAFETY

THERE FOR OUR HEALTH, AND SAFETY

Like many others in the organisation, I have become a Mental Health First Aider since June last year. Like First Aiders, we are trained to assist or spot when someone is in trouble or in the case of mental health struggling to cope. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a growing mental health crisis in Scotland with one in four adults experiencing mental illness each year.

As an organisation we participated in many national and international health and wellbeing awareness dates - Time to Talk (encouraging staff to talk about mental health), national stress awareness day and world mental health day. This allowed us to share information across the organisation about ways to gain support or how to support good mental health.

Health and safety is vital for the safety of our staff and the people we support, especially in a pandemic. The Learning Management training platform, ACCESS, Digital forms, Covid packs and Teams have all helped Health and Safety information be more accessible and real time. We will keep building on our successes, so that everyone is as healthy and safe as possible.

SECTION 2 // TWELVE



THE ACTION GROUP

HEALTH & SAFETY

Making sure those we support and their staff are as safe as possible from Covid, has been a vital part of my work this last year.

I have worked with many colleagues to ensure staff have PPE, are wearing the correct PPE (for a particular task or situation) and teams have sufficient stock. A massive thank you to the staff who made this happen over the last 12 months. You know who you are! In all weathers, wearing their ice grips when needed, they have collected and delivered the PPE throughout Edinburgh and the Lothians.

I've carried out many audits – Fire Risk Assessments, Covid-19 property inspections, Lone Working Risk assessments, DSE assessments etc. throughout the past 12 months. Unlike in years gone by, these have been done virtually but it allows me to see and speak to a few familiar faces and some new ones too! Doing these highlights to me what a wonderful and special organisation The Action Group really is. Some of us have grown beards, some have had to shave them off in order to wear fitted masks but we've met these last 12 months head on and adapted to each hurdle presented to us.

Whatever happens in 2021, I am confident that our organisation will continue to be a safe place thanks to everyone's hard work.

KEITH FRICKER
HEALTH AND SAFETY



REAL JOBS

TRAINING THROUGH A PANDEMIC

The team successfully delivered taster training sessions funded by Scottish Union of Supported Employment which is leading the PSP Project towards reducing the disability employment gap. Educating employers about how to employ people with support needs, the Laws around this and the major benefits to them, as Employers, is vital.

Real Jobs engaged with a total of 26 employers from across Scotland and delivered training to 66 attendees so far. More dates are planned and engaging with even more new employers remains the goal.

Additionally, the training delivery contributed to supporting one of our clients, Sumar, to achieve a self-employment (part time) outcome as a Lived Experience Consultant. Her input and commitment have been invaluable, giving a very important lived experience perspective on employing a person with a support need.

Sumar does not just have a great knowledge of how autism affects herself, but a much wider knowledge of the autistic world and is committed to sharing this knowledge as widely as possible. Sumar has developed her presentation skills and made connections with a variety of employers to support her beyond Disability Employment Training delivery with Real Jobs.

Read more about Sumar's experiences on page 25.



**I feel very supported by Real Jobs,
it's a relief to know that I can ask for
help or even advice, it's good to
know that you're not alone and it
gives you more hope of finding a job
that fits you.**

LISA - REAL JOBS CLIENT

REAL JOBS SUPPORTED

206

PEOPLE AT WORK

10

PEOPLE WERE
SUPPORTED TO
GAIN FULL TIME
JOBS

7

PEOPLE WERE
SUPPORTED TO
GAIN PART TIME
JOBS

4

PEOPLE WERE
SUPPORTED TO
PROGRESS WITHIN
THEIR CURRENT
JOBS

9

PEOPLE WERE
SUPPORTED TO
KEEP THEIR JOBS
WHEN THEY WERE
AT RISK

NOT ONLY ARE WE SUPPORTING PEOPLE WITH EXTRA
BARRIERS TO GETTING INTO WORK, BUT THIS WAS ALSO
DURING A PANDEMIC.

**Real Jobs made it easier to
communicate to my work
about my mental health
and well-being overall**

ANDY - REAL JOBS CLIENT

HOUSING

THERE FOR YOUR HOUSING NEEDS

Val has received Housing support , in her own tenancy, for 8 years.

Val mentioned that she was struggling with the stairs to her flat (which was on the second floor of a tenement building). She said that her mobility was becoming an issue for her due to the pain she was experiencing.

A referral to the Action Group Housing Team for a house move was made by Val and her team for a ground level home or a building with a lift. Val also explained that she would love a bath in the new place as this would help her relax and hopefully relieve some of the pain she was in.

An ideal new home was found for Val during the lockdown months last year and she moved into her new home in July 2020. Since the move Val has said that she loves having the lift as she can carry her shopping to the flat much more easily. Val likes the fact that she does not have too far to walk to get to the shops and that the bus stop into town is nearby too, which is great for visiting her family. Val enjoys having a bath and confirmed that it really does help her to relax and ease the pain she has. Val told us her new neighbours are friendly and the building is quiet ,and she is very happy there.

Peoples' homes being right for them, is such a crucial part of people's lives. They don't say "Home is where the heart is " for nothing. We all know, like Val what a difference the right place to live makes to our own lives. By being There for the people we support every day and by keeping our eyes and ears open, we can spot signs early, that a move might be needed and we can open up conversations about this. Where someone lives can have such an impact on their wellbeing.

The Housing Service works hard to find as many Housing options as possible for those who feel they need a move to their new home.

**I could not thank The Action Group
enough for supporting me all these
years. The Action Group
employees are wonderful people.**

VAL - PERSON RECEIVING SUPPORT

QUALITY

THERE TO IMPROVE OUR SERVICES

IMPROVING PERSONAL SUPPORT PLANS

Last year, the Quality Team launched the updated Personal Support Plan, which the people we supported helped to shape. We trained over 300 staff. This was done online, on video meetings. Thank you to all the staff for your patience, engagement, and your great questions.

86% of staff said they intend to make positive changes to the way that they work after the session

POSITIVE BEHAVIOUR SUPPORT (PBS)

We work in partnership with teams from across the entire organisation, and have so far co-developed personalised PBS working practices for 13 people we support. PBS is a positive, collaborative way of working which focuses on reducing restrictive practice whilst supporting people during stressful situations. PBS ensures people receive the type of support they want, in a way that works for them. The people we support are as fully involved as they wish in co-creating and reviewing their own PBS plans.

The people we support are at the heart of all we do. Here's a few words from Craig, who completed his PSP this year:



Our Quality Officer has helped with risk assessments and PSPs, they have been an enormous help to our team

STAFF MEMBER FEEDBACK

PBS

POSITIVE BEHAVIOUR SUPPORT

Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) is regarded as a best practice approach for people with additional support needs who express distress through their behaviour.

However, it is not something that applies only to people who display distressed behaviour – it can be applied to most of us. This is because PBS is entrenched with values of equality, happiness and supporting people to live rich lives. Values that are aligned with those of The Action Group. When people express distress through their behaviour – they tend to have lives that could be better. Things may not be working well for them and they may not be as happy as they want or could be.

PBS focuses on supporting the person to live a good life and be happy and this can often reduce behaviours of concern.

Around 18 months ago David and his team were experiencing some challenges. Things were getting really hard and David's life was getting smaller and less rich. Instead of focusing on the challenges David was experiencing, his team focused on supporting David to have a good life.

They started thinking about what David's interests were: he liked horses and being outdoors, he enjoyed listening to radio, looking things up on the internet and looking at pictures of things he was interested in. Instead of focusing on making behaviours stop, David's team supported David to do things they thought he would enjoy. They supported David to have the life he wanted, including some new things or things he hadn't done in a long time.

Now it is important to know that this didn't make all of David's challenges disappear – change can take time. We all have difficulties in our life that we are trying to fix and people we support are no different.

However, David is having more positive experiences in his life with his support workers, and his support workers with him. This is what positive behaviour support is all about.



SECTION THREE

THE ACTION GROUP

OUR FINANCES

WHERE WE GET OUR MONEY AND HOW IT IS SPENT



SECTION 3 // ONE

THE ACTION GROUP

FINANCE

THERE FOR US ALL

Last year we were preparing to be working at home for maybe 8 weeks, then it turned into 12 weeks, well here we are a year down the line still mostly working from home.

In finance we quickly adapted to our new 'normal' and organised ourselves to ensure we continued to look after the needs of services, supported people and the staff. We missed our chats and the camaraderie of being in the office together as our team is perhaps one of only a few teams that is permanently in the office.

Because we couldn't see each other in the office anymore, we organised a weekly coffee break over Teams to see each other and talk so we didn't feel so far removed from each other.

One of our team had a big birthday during the last year, Linda (she allowed me to say this!) turned 60, and our planned celebrations were thwarted by yet another change in restrictions, but we managed to arranged gifts and a celebratory walk along the beach to present them, all socially distanced and within the rules.

Finance have been and will be there at anytime for staff and the people we support, be it ordering goods and services to improve homeworking, bright up a sleepover room or helping to make life a little bit more bearable in lockdown via ordering Digital devices etc. as part of our various Well Being projects. We are on hand to answer questions with payroll queries, solving problems any way we can.

Finance can only function with the help of everyone in the organisation and over the past year its been vital that we all kept in touch and helped each other to do our jobs.

SUSAN SYMONDS
HEAD OF FINANCE



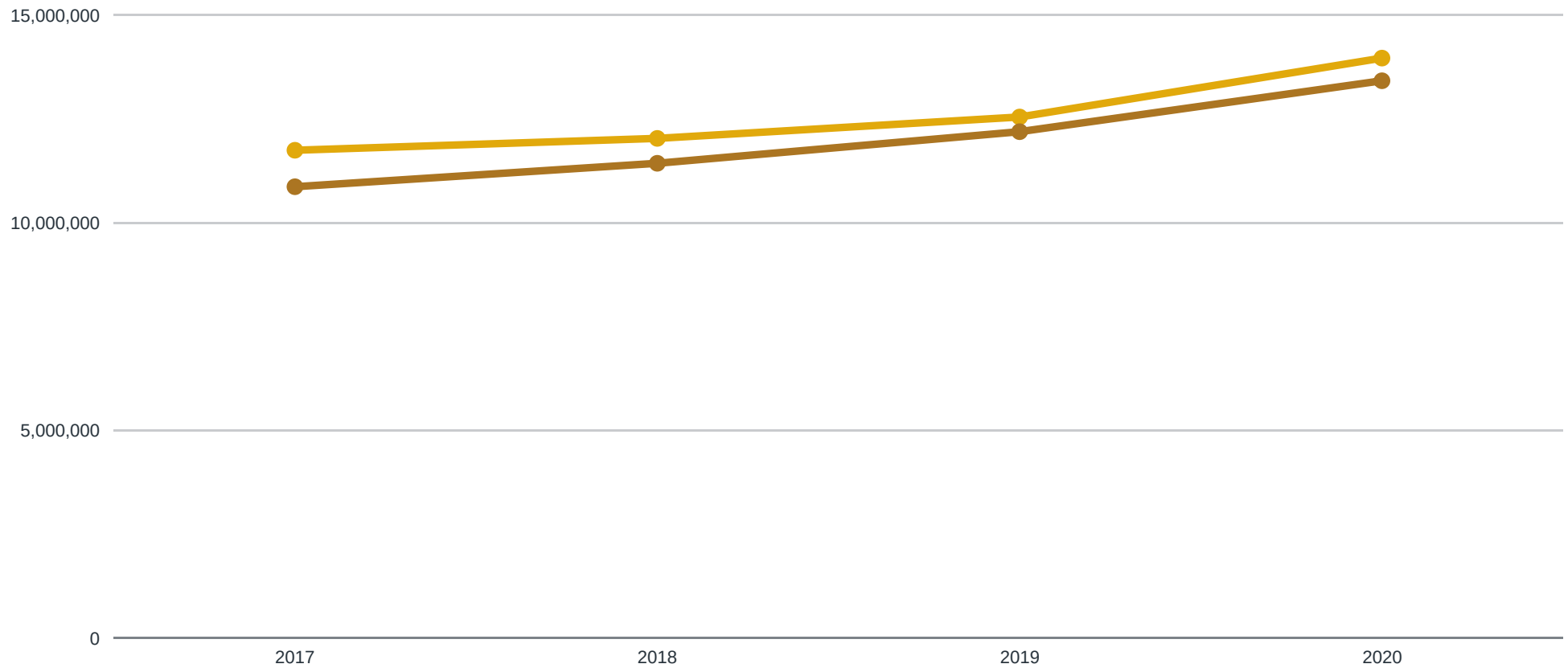


**I feel very privileged to work
for The Action Group**

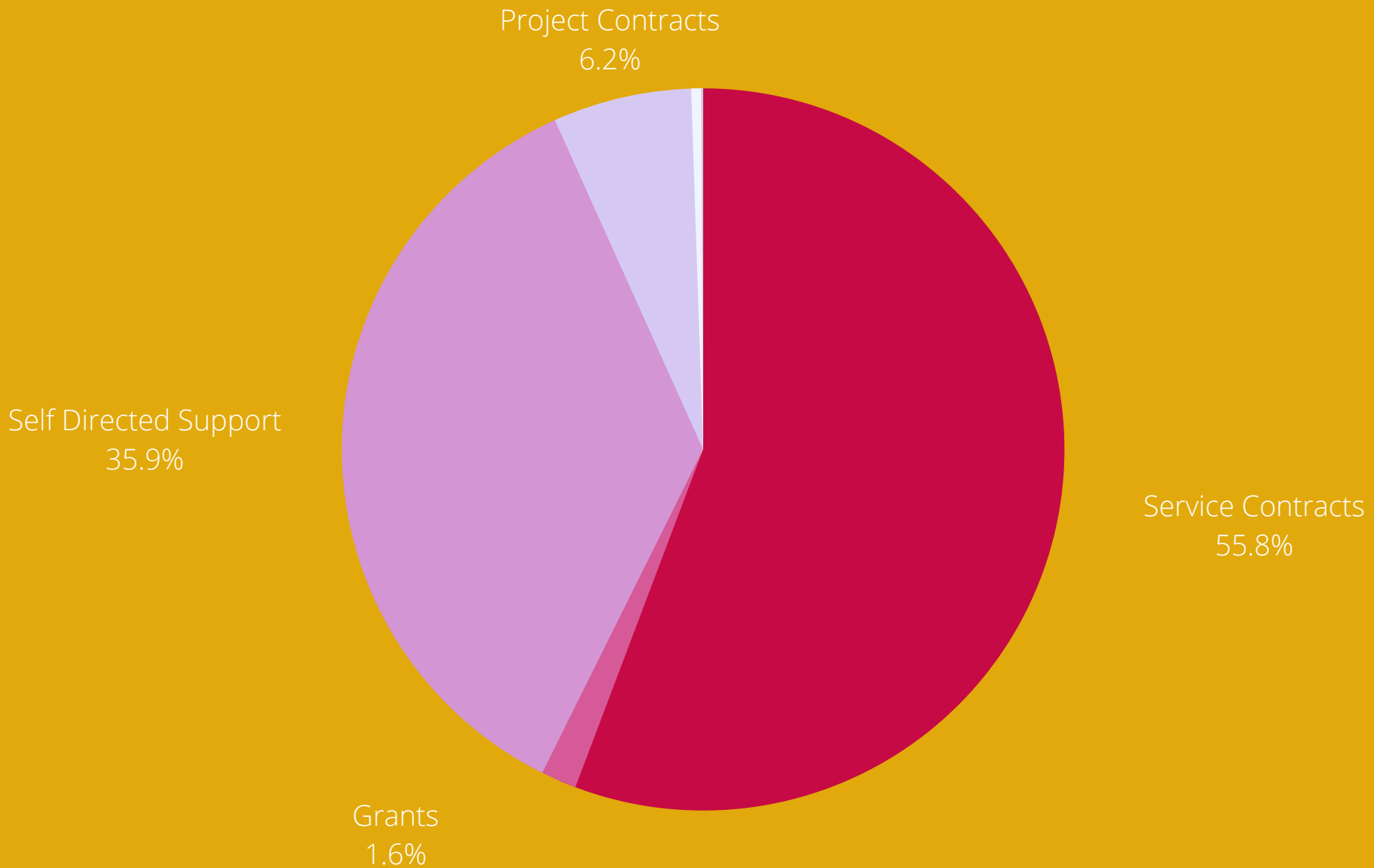
STAFF SURVEY

FINANCE

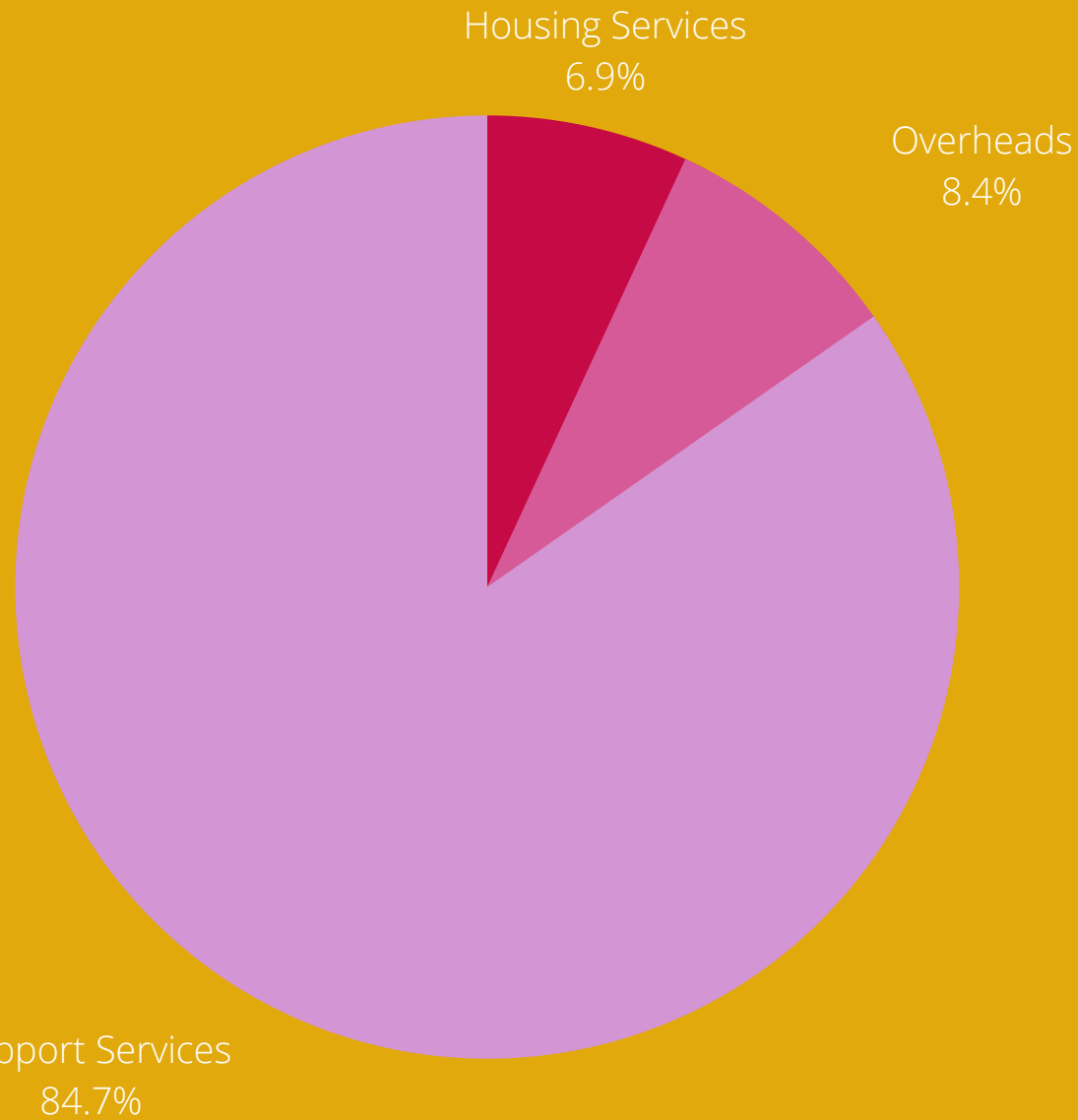
INCOME EXPENDITURE



Income - £13,966,856



Expenditure - £13,421,175



FUNDERS

A huge thank you to all of our funders



• EDINBURGH •
THE CITY OF EDINBURGH COUNCIL



Falkirk Council



The Baily Thomas
Charitable Fund



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Very special thanks to our cover star, Angus MacDonald

THE ACTION GROUP



INVESTORS IN PEOPLE™

We invest in people Platinum

THE ACTION GROUP

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