

# Case Study: Barrhead Youth Work Transitions Project: A Whole Family Approach

Post-COVID, Barrhead High School identified a growing number of young people struggling with attendance, engagement, and emotional readiness to learn. Many faced complex barriers linked to poverty, low confidence, family stress, and the cost-of-living crisis.

The headteacher recognised that attendance was a foundational issue, without consistent presence, no other interventions could take hold. The school sought to address this early, starting with transitions from primary to secondary. They enlisted the support of youth work to work with young people and families to support this transition.

The school and the families involved valued the way the youth worker offered support. The approach was rooted in trust, care, and flexibility, taking time to listen without judgement and to respond to each family's unique situation. By being proactive and relational rather than procedural, the youth worker could spot early signs of stress or disengagement and step in quickly with the right kind of support. Families described feeling "heard for the first time," which built the confidence to ask for support before things reached crisis point.



Unlike traditional attendance interventions, youth work focused on relationships before outcomes: meeting families at home, in the community, or wherever they felt comfortable. This non-judgemental stance helped to rebuild trust between families and the school, laying the foundation for long-term engagement.

# Approach

Within the local authority there were previously home school support workers who had a focus on attendance. This service was reduced due to funding, which left a significant gap. The school used PEF funding to work with FARE Scotland who employed a dedicated youth worker, embedded within Barrhead High and its feeder primary schools to build trust and continuity with families before young people entered S1 and the youth worker partnered with the school to analyse health and wellbeing data across P7 pupils. The youth worker then met 80 primary 7 pupils and their families and, together with the school, identified 29 families who would benefit from enhanced transition support. Using a community-based, non-judgemental whole-family model, the youth worker:

- Built relationships with pupils and families ahead of transition, discussing practical and emotional barriers to participation.
- Co-created support plans with families, including help with routines, confidence-building, clothing, and food insecurity.
- Worked in partnership with local services (financial inclusion, food banks) to provide wraparound support.
- Led enhanced summer transition activities to develop social connections, ease anxiety, and familiarise families with the school environment.
- During the first term, ongoing one-to-one and small-group work sustained those connections, offering a consistent point of contact across school, home, and community.

“When a family was exhausted from daily battles to get their child to school, the youth worker became their steady hand, helping with parental skills, building confidence, making morning calls, finding clothes, food, and hope. Through care and creativity, they turned struggle into stability and helped families and young people remove barriers and gain trust”.

-Secondary School Lead



“The change has been incredible. Pupils come to school happier, families feel understood, and trust has grown. The youth worker helped break down barriers, from money worries to confidence, so real learning and hope could begin again.”

- Headteacher



# Impact

“By creating space for families to talk openly, you start to see and hear things which you didn’t realise were creating barriers in the first place. One of the parents was bringing up their family alone and didn’t want their child to leave them after Covid. I had to build their trust but also help alleviate their worries and show that the young person really did need to go to school for their own benefit.”

-Youth Worker



The targeted youth work approach demonstrated that early, relationship-based intervention can tackle barriers to participation holistically, improving readiness to learn, attendance, and family wellbeing.

Using the SHANARRI Wellbeing Indicators with the young people at the start of the programme, middle and end:

## CONFIDENCE

**89%**

of young people were more confident about starting high school

## ATTENDANCE

**82.76%**

improvement in attendance in term 1 compared to previous year



“I liked it because it was a fun time... being with friends. My attendance has got a lot better after I joined.”

-Young Person, S1



“I just want to thank you for your time and our chats when things were a little tough. I really appreciate it.”

-Parent



“I liked getting out of the house and having fun in school without the BORING work!”

-Young Person, S1



## Example activities

- *Creating breakfast clubs.*
- *Cooking workshops in the afternoon in order to take food home.*
- *Providing the 'Wee Bursary' for clothing for families experiencing financial hardship.*
- *Making instant referrals to other support services where additional support needs were identified; for example, to financial inclusion officers and holding financial inclusion workshops to be able to sit with families throughout the process for support and confidence.*
- *Offering family calls in the morning and helping get young people to school.*
- *Organising visits to the primary and secondary schools for young people and families to alleviate concerns.*
- *Continued support with the young people and families once they transitioned to high school in S1*



"I feel that his confidence has grown a lot since he started last year."  
-Parent



## Summary

The Barrhead model demonstrates that youth work is uniquely positioned to deliver an effective whole-family approach that strengthens wellbeing, improves engagement in learning, and supports more consistent school attendance. Youth workers are skilled at building authentic, trusting relationships - not only with young people but with the families around them - allowing them to understand and address the real barriers that prevent participation. Their ability to be responsive and flexible means support can be tailored directly to the young person's needs while also supporting the wider family.

By working with young people to build confidence, resilience, and skills as learners, and by engaging families in a supportive, non-judgemental way, youth work bridges the gap between home, community, and school. Crucially, by intervening before transition and sustaining support across settings, the Barrhead Project created a smoother, more inclusive and stable pathway into secondary education; something traditional services alone may not have been able to achieve with the same impact.