




JUNIOR PATHFINDERS EVALUATION SUMMARY

May 2021




The Beginning of the Junior Pathfinder Journey

Through initial engagement with practitioners in Year 1, a number of people spoke about a very successful and innovative project: Pathfinders.

Pathfinders is an early intervention initiative, run by Youth, Family and Community Learning, which aims to improve outcomes for children and young people who experience barriers to learning in secondary schools in Cambuslang and Rutherglen. Pathfinder staff work with children, their families and the school to support and address issues which are impacting on learning before needs escalate and require statutory intervention.

The **approach** of the secondary schools, or 'senior' pathfinder project, as captured in its initial evaluation, is very much key to its success. The staff work flexibly and creatively with both the child and their family to identify and address issues of concern in their lives. This support is based and delivered through school, and this creates a bridge between education and the child/family. Working in this way enables staff to build trusting and lasting relationships with the child and family, which are valued and supported by the school and school staff.

We know that the children who are most vulnerable to future negative outcomes and wider exclusion often have troubled relationships with education. Research highlights that exclusion is one of the most important predictors of gaining a criminal record in adult life (McAra and McVie, 2010). A study of the pathways leading to offending of 125 young people in Polmont Young Offenders Institution found that at least 80% of the young people had been excluded from school (Smith, Dyer and Connelly 2014), many of whom were first excluded from primary school. Children who are at risk of exclusion from school often have other support needs and are affected by wider social issues including experiencing poverty, having additional support needs or are looked after by the local authority (Scottish Government, 2017).



The Junior Pathfinder Journey, so far...

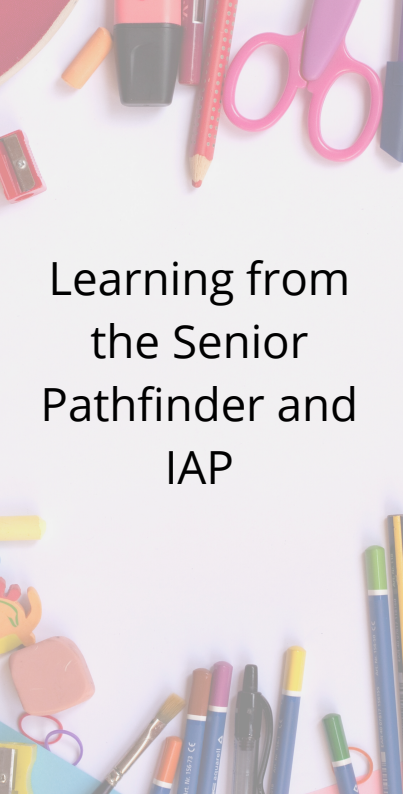
Junior Pathfinders

The combination of the practice wisdom and support for the existing pathfinders initiative, and our understanding of school exclusions and poor educational outcomes for the most marginalised and excluded suggested that a pilot of a Pathfinders initiative in primary school would be worthy of a test of change.

Funding was approved for two 'Junior Pathfinder' posts in two primary schools, identified due to high level of need. Consultation with the two head teachers suggested transition support from P7 to S1, family engagement and building confidence and resilience were all areas which would merit focus under Inclusion as Prevention.

The workers have been in post since Dec 2020, however due to the COVID-19 restrictions were unable to be in the school physically until March 2021. During this time the workers have been developing relationships with children and families online or via telephone. Whilst the pandemic has made the need for the support more apparent, restrictions make it difficult to build relationships as quickly. Despite this, the school staff have been approachable and supportive, and have begun making 'referrals' to the workers and asking for their input. The approach of the worker and the culture of the school will to some extent shape the approach to the work undertaken.

In both primary schools P5, 6 and 7 will receive support from the Junior Pathfinders, including whole class activities, smaller group programmes and via 1:1 support to children identified by the school as requiring additional support. Activities include: nurture groups, 'Mind Buzz' programme, a girls group, a P7 legacy project, and parents coffee morning. The junior pathfinders have been in contact with parents to provide information about the service and to offer support and opportunities to engage, this has been well received. Junior Pathfinders were conscious of the the short length of their post (around 6 months) and spoke of the need to be impactful and provide quality support during this time.



Learning from the Senior Pathfinder and IAP

Pathfinders and IAP

Children and parents involved in the 'Senior' Pathfinders project were asked by the IAP evaluator to describe what they valued about the support and how this benefited them- this was overwhelmingly positive.

Parents summarised the benefits/role of pathfinders as:

A 'positive influence'

To increase confidence, motivation, and wellbeing of child and family

To provide information and support (practical & emotional) based on listening and understanding

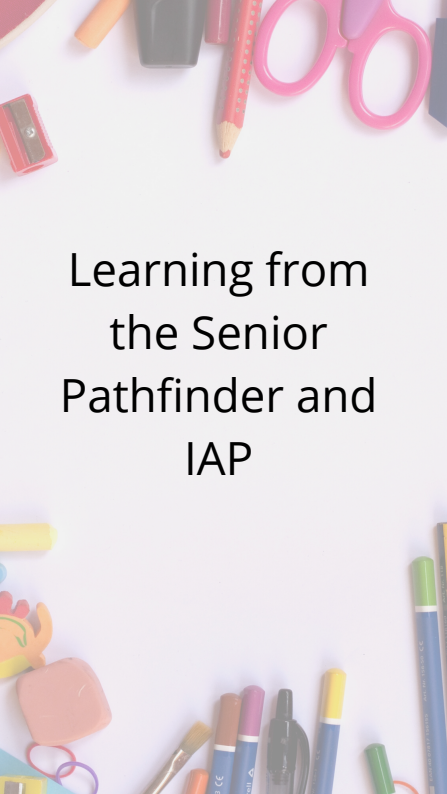
To broker relationships between child and family, and child/family and school

Supportive in the broadest sense of being there, acting and doing, consistently and proactively.

The children told us it was good to have someone who listened to them and that they trusted, that wasn't a parent or school staff but [they] could talk to both them, and teachers and parents. The young people also suggested linking children [from the primary school] in with the pathfinders at secondary school to help with transitions.

When it was suggested to them that pathfinders could be applied to a younger, primary school age group the parents who responded suggested that having a caring and trusting relationship with an adult separate to school and family could help children grow in confidence and resilience, help identify needs and support earlier, which could smooth transitions to secondary school.

The children who responded felt that a junior pathfinder could provide 'a person who listens', someone who could help', and 'someone who makes them feel safe'.



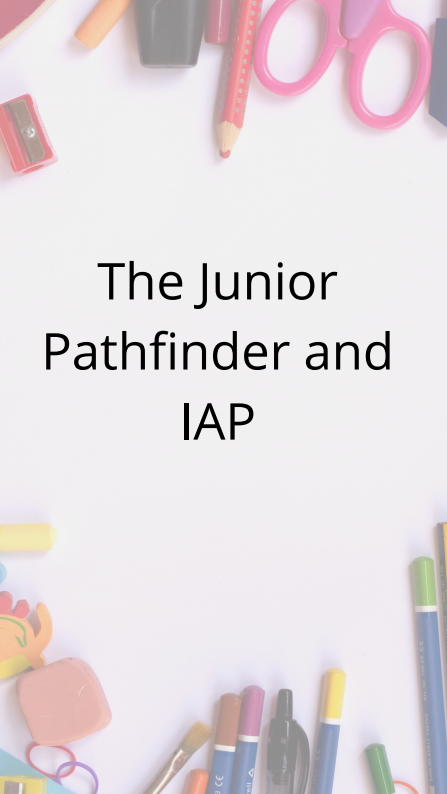
Learning from the Senior Pathfinder and IAP

The parent/carer view of pathfinder

Pathfinders have been such a great relief for me and my family, they have really helped our son and we have seen a difference in him since dealing with them. We really appreciate the work they do. "

"The unique approach taken by the team, the reassurance and dedication is something that needs to be used as an example of best practice. They understand the needs of the child and there is never any feeling of embarrassment or label when you feel like a failure as a parent when you can't provide what they need for their family."

"The bespoke work that the team provide is unique and insightful and something that I as a parent will be truly thankful for. For the first time some just got it!! They see what we see with no judgement. I will never be able to say thank you enough or put into words the impact that they have had. They are truly inspirational. "




The Junior Pathfinder and IAP

Junior pathfinder, IAP and evaluation

The evaluation will continue to collate the impact of Junior Pathfinders, particularly with children and families who receive 1:1 support, and will share learning about as the role as the work develops. Initial measures related to the test of change themes (*more and better family engagement with primary school, creating more confidence and resilience for parents and children at points of transition*) will be undertaken with children and families via activity books and postcard surveys. Other evaluation activities will be undertaken as work develops. We have received anecdotal information that other localities, currently outwith the remit of IAP, are exploring funding projects that are similar to or modelled on 'Junior Pathfinders', and other local authorities are also using or modelling similar approaches.

Improvement activities are underway with around 20 practitioners working in areas related to primary school support. Over the course of 6 sessions they will design and carry out small improvement activities which support the aim of the test.

The Engagement Coordinator will support the pathfinder workers as required, and will ensure a feedback loop for children and families voices to influence the work undertaken by IAP, and shape the services and supports delivered to these groups in South Lanarkshire.



The Junior Pathfinder and IAP : Looking ahead ...

Emerging questions.

- Workers will be developing relationships with children, families and the school at an increased pace- how can the Engagement Co-ordinator support this?
- Improvement Coordinators will be supporting the practitioners involved in the Improvement Sessions to develop their Test of Change- will this require budgetary commitment ?
- How can the evaluation best support the needs of the Test of Change as it develops?
 - How can IAP broker conversations on sourcing funding beyond the initial spend?