

THEMATIC SUMMARY: ENGAGEMENT



Inclusion as Prevention

Background

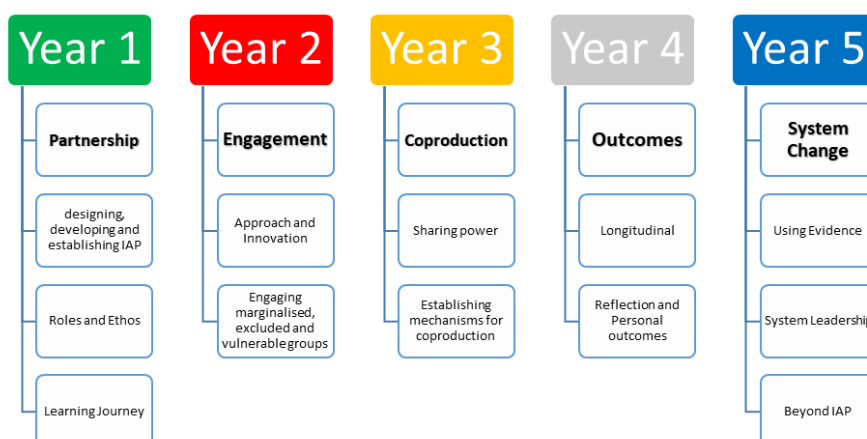
“The Inclusion as Prevention (IAP) project began in January 2019. A five year project, it seeks collaboratively to re-shape the design and delivery of preventative services with children and young people and their families in Cambuslang and Rutherglen who are at risk of offending. The ultimate aim of the project, through co-design and co-production, is to re-design services to, “realise a shift from an acute and crisis driven approach, when a young person becomes involved in offending, to identify and intervene at an earlier point in the lives of children who are at risk of becoming involved in future offending or other negative outcomes, tackling the root cause” (IAP Delivery Plan, 2019).

Background

The guiding ethos of the project is to prevent offending and other negative outcomes by promoting inclusion and the more effective delivery of interventions to significantly improve the outcomes of some of the most vulnerable children and young people (IAP Insights Report, 2020).

IAP as a concept involves promoting and prioritising engagement with children, young people, families, communities, workers and services. Coproducing change with these groups; working in partnership with a range of support/service providers and strategic leads; and promoting and helping to facilitate lasting and widespread system change in terms of delivery and experience of services and approaches to supporting children (Evaluation Framework, 2020).

This is the second in a series of annual summaries, which will focus on foundational aspects of IAP (identified below). These themes are fundamental to IAP, and in some respect act as a benchmark for its progress, and journey towards achieving its overall aim. Thematic summaries will draw together the learning on each theme from across different aspects of the project, using multiple sources of evidence. Capturing this learning is important both for the project and for wider audiences. Partnership was explored in Year 1 and documented in Dartingtons Insight Report. The second summary will explore Engagement.



Methodology

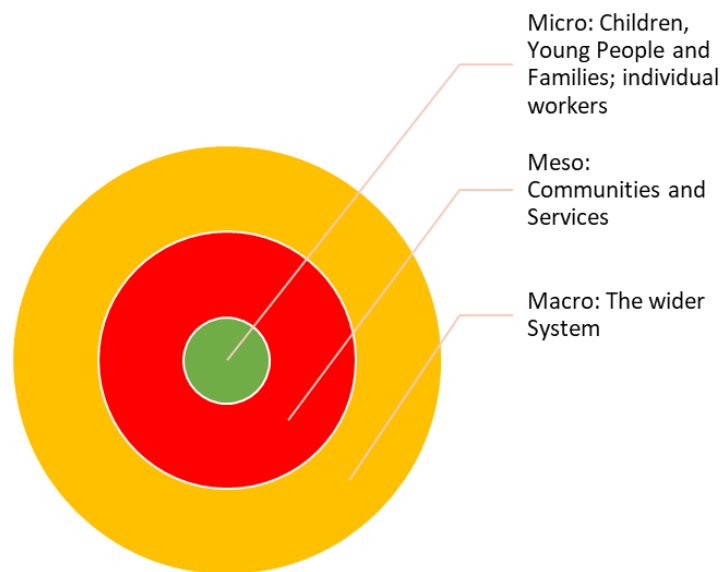
The nature of the project requires the evaluator to be embedded, and take on an ethnographic approach. The evaluation approach is participatory, conducted 'with' rather than 'on' the project and those involved in all aspects of it. Practically this means we as evaluators have access to all aspects and areas of the IAP project, are immersed in its work, and practically in its 'workers' team alongside the Engagement Coordinator, Improvement Coordinator and Project Manager. The findings presented in this thematic summary have been integrated from a number of methods, with various participant groups, and include both covert and overt methods:

- A significant amount of learning is gathered from attendance at various meeting (including workers meetings, core partner meetings, steering group meetings) observations collated via extensive meeting observation notes;
- Workers, Core Partners and steering group members of IAP are asked to contribute their reflections via monthly, bi-monthly or bi-annual diary entries or interviews,
- An additional extensive interview was undertaken with the Engagement worker due to the centrality of their role in relation to this thematic summary;
- A short online survey on the topic of engagement was distributed to wider partners via the engagement worker. Responses represent 6 different services or agencies across statutory and third sector;
- Participatory sessions on the theme of engagement were held with three of the groups of young people (Street Cones, Young Activists and SWYDT) involved in test activity. These were tailored to the specific test activity. They took place both online and socially distanced in person, and were supported by the engagement worker. Fourteen young people took part in total.
- Practitioner feedback from the Improvement Session via the Improvement Coordinator has been included, representing the views of 24 practitioner participants.
- Review of existing documentation and Reports, and findings has been included (annual report, steering group updates) etc.

The period of IAP activity included in this summary runs from August 2020, soon after the Evaluator took up post, to April 2021.

Introduction

The second thematic summary focuses on engagement as it is fundamental to the ethos and approach of IAP, and key to the overall success of the project. IAP is essentially about relationships. The work of IAP entails forming, building, and empowering communities of excluded young people, and those who support them, to better understand and therefore improve the support they need and receive in areas of their lives which are important to them. This inclusion is created through relationships. IAP seeks to influence change and create relationships across a range of levels, with a number of different audiences. The graphic below (taken from the evaluation framework) outlines the spheres of influence IAP works across, and identifies the stakeholder groups who are equally critical and interdependent to the success of IAP.



The summary draws together the learning on engagement, showcasing and to some extent scrutinising the engagement which has been undertaken to date. It provides context to wider engagement issues experienced by our stakeholders during COVID-19; assesses the role and contribution of the Engagement Coordinator to the project, as well as understand the skills and approach required; and considers the learning from our approach to engagement for the wider project and progress of IAP.

Our Approach to Engagement



Breakfast delivered to the office this morning.
- actually mum's sewing room that I've taken over

Our Approach to Engagement

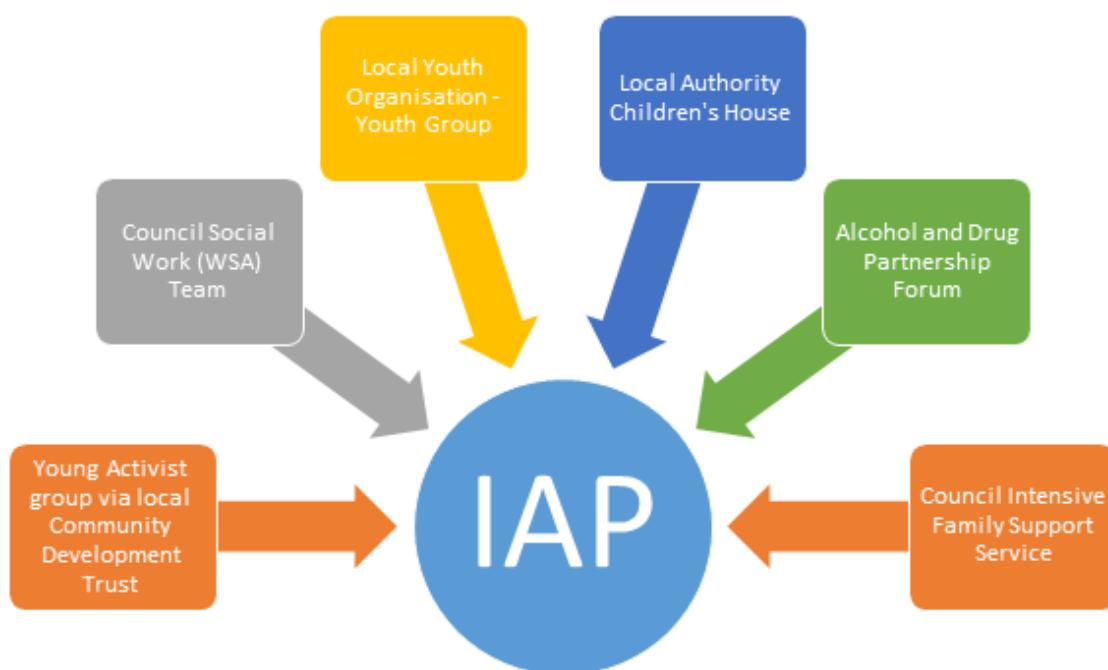
In March 2020, a newly appointed Engagement Coordinator came into post, full of ideas and energy. In that same month there was a global health pandemic, the consequences of which impacted on social interaction and relationships and fundamentally changed the nature of engagement. The vision and plan for IAP engagement at the outset of the project could be characterised as community based, detached and adhoc, bottom up community engagement, with the additional support of services and organisations already working in the locality with children, young people, families and communities. The context of the pandemic undoubtedly and unavoidably changed the approach to IAP in a number of respects, but particularly engagement, and this will undoubtedly have an impact on the project as a whole.

In this section of the thematic summary, we would like to outline what has been achieved in Year 2 of IAP in terms of engagement, which highlights our revised approach across the various levels of our work.

Young people

Some initial detached youth work was able to occur prior to, and early into, lockdown. This was fruitful and immediately suggested material for development into a test of change (For more information see test summaries flow chart ([hyperlink](#))).

Due to the wider context, engagement has been more dependent on positive relationship building with organisations who act as initial gatekeepers to young people/families. Due to this approach, the majority of engagement has taken place with existing groups of young people (Outlined below).



Our Approach to Engagement

When restrictions have and do allow, face to face work is undertaken however the groups have engaged well and consistently online which constitutes the majority of the interactions. The Engagement Coordinator indicated there are complexities associated with engaging online, including:

- Hard to develop new relationships
- Unnatural social etiquette can make things awkward (turn taking, no small talk, recognising people)
- Some young people have struggled with access to devices or data, or they have an unstable connection
- Young people can become distracted or be hard to motivate when engaging online.

However, some young people told us they prefer online engagement: they can interact with more and different people; they do not have to travel to attend sessions; and it gives them something to do while at home, breaking up the monotony of lockdown.

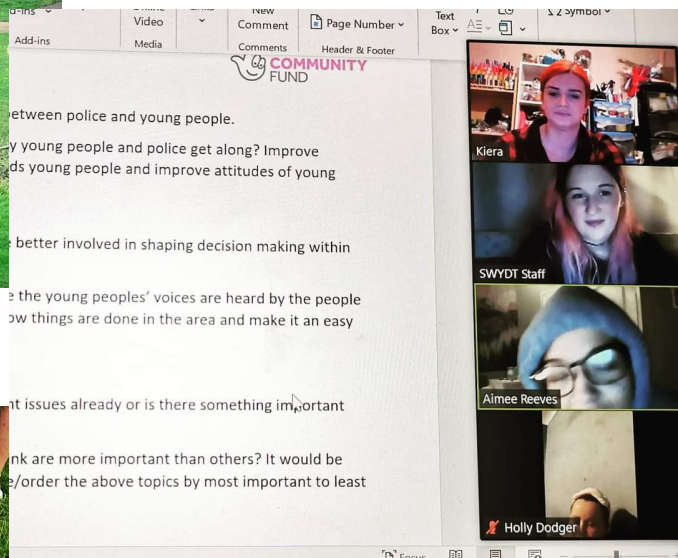
There has also been the added complexity that many of the young people, families and communities IAP is most interested in working with are likely to have been most acutely impacted by COVID-19, with a significant impact for the project being that they will have become further excluded or in crisis and therefore less able to willing to take part. During this time, engagement has had to go at the pace and interest of the children and families and for some it was not a suitable time to engage. Young people in particular have reported at point's fatigue of online engagement, and wider anxieties around education or social restrictions that have affected their ability to engage in additional activities.

IAP has a strong social media presence, coordinated by the engagement worker and this has proved a positive way to engage with young people. The social media platforms (Instagram in particular) offer a way to promote engagement opportunities but also as a medium to engage directly- with some young people engaging with initial consultation questions on 'what's working well/ not so well' via Direct Messaging; or taking part in voting polls. Pre-recorded activities or online challenges have had a positive response from young people.

Social Media has provided the opportunity to build informal relationships between our audience and the team (eg. Meet the team posts, International Pet Day), and help create an identity for IAP through involvement in campaigns, raising awareness of IAP related issues, and providing young people with relevant information. For example, IAP social media promoted International Women's Day. This engagement will be further supported by the creation of an IAP website, which is currently under development.

Engagement in Numbers

- **17 young people** took part in an initial consultation session on IAP themes
- **63 young people** via detached youth work (Pizza in the Park) on joint patrols with Community Policing Team, with significant development being that of a test around young people, community and police relations
- **4 young people** engaged in a consultation exercise for South Lanarkshire Council Children's Service Planning. IAP designed and held sessions in partnership with WC?S and Regen:FX
- **12 young people** took part in a pre-recorded online craft activity for National Care Day.
- **Approx.30 young people** taking part consistently, over a prolonged period across four different groups looking at a particular theme, which will develop into a test of change.
- **112 Instagram followers; 192 Twitter followers; 42 Facebook followers**



Our Approach to Engagement

Practitioners

Initial practitioner engagement developed through the creation of practitioner forum. These were held to inform a range of practitioners about IAP: its ethos and approach, and the opportunity to get involved; and gain feedback and intelligence from the practice community about areas for development, success and frustration. These insights, along with initial consultation with children and young people, and evidence of best practice & what works led to the creation of broad test themes.

As the tests of change develop around the identified themes, improvement sessions are a more structured and thematic way for practitioners to engage, learn and benefit from the project. 24 practitioners across two tests of change met for the first time in March 2021 and will meet another five times through set improvement sessions, where they will design and implement small improvement activities and develop system leadership skills. Importantly, we know that participants are also actively meeting each other, discussing and progressing improvement activities between set sessions. Initial feedback overwhelmingly suggests that practitioners are excited about the prospect about making change in their area of practice, and appreciate the opportunity to be brought together and share ideas, frustrations etc. Improvement opportunities will be developed alongside the other tests of change still in development.

"Realising that I don't know the partners in my community – scary! It seems to me that so many people are trying to work to support families in so many different ways, yet few of us know enough of what the others are doing". (Improvement Session Participant)

"I just cannot believe the amount of services and people out there all working towards the common theme of improving lives and outcomes for children and families and we haven't heard of them or been working closer". (Improvement Session Participant)

"I have found new contacts in the area that I would like to follow up in terms of community working so that lends itself well to the path forward. I am also amazed at how many of us are doing similar roles, posing the question of why this is not being utilised or joined up to create a more cohesive approach to family support in the community." (Improvement Session Participant)

"It also made me wonder how families manage to navigate all this "support". (Improvement Session Participant)

The quotes above, from the feedback from the initial improvement session, show that IAP is creating a space for practitioners to engage across agency silos, in the name of their client group or issue, which is appreciated by practitioners. From the quotes it does not appear that protected space or time to come together to share experiences, practice etc. is created or supported by any other agency or entity, particularly with any structure or outcome focus.

Our Approach to Engagement

System

IAP have also taken up opportunities to engage with, shape and influence wider areas of practice and work. Through the dynamic arrangements of the partnership, the group has fed into the South Lanarkshire Council GIRFEC Board; the Community Justice Strategy; Children's Service Planning; and the workforce development at large.

Children's service plan work

IAP is very much on the radar of the team who develop the Children's services plan, a 3 year strategic document which outlines the council's priorities in terms of spending and action across children's services and includes measures for reporting again outcomes in relation to these priority areas, which are submitted to the Scottish Government. As well as supporting the professionals involved in developing the plan to align and incorporate IAP in the plan itself, a longer-term aim is to support the development of a plan that is underpinned by the ethos of IAP. In order to build relationships with the Children's Planning team the engagement worker and partner organisations (REGEN:fx and Who Cares? Scotland) held a consultation exercise with young people to help ensure the plan is inclusive of children and young people's voice.

Presentation to Children and Family Justice Social Work development day

IAP workers presented to 100 staff working with children and families across South Lanarkshire about system change and how adopting new ideas and approaches can better support children, young people and their families. There was also an opportunity for staff to explore these issues in smaller groups.

The steering group is a primary mechanism for supporting wider system change. Members are committed and passionate, and many have a longstanding relationship with the project. The steering group provides an important function in spreading the reach of IAP across agencies and areas of practice and similarly IAP benefits from the membership in various way, including offers of support, local and agency intelligence and input. The way IAP engages with the steering group has evolved as the project has developed, following findings from Dartington's Insight Report which found while, "there remains energy and optimism for the project... some may be drifting away and losing interest with limited progress being made in the first year". Current engagement with the steering group was noted by members as more streamlined, with the role of the group more clearly articulated, and the asks of the group more directive. This appears to have rejuvenated and cemented the commitment to, and enthusiasm for IAP. In terms of the direct impact of this improved engagement activity observations from steering group meetings have found that the group willingly and openly share opportunities, information and offers of support via various means both directly related to IAP activity, and between each other more broadly, creating an additional system impact.

Our Approach to Engagement

Who are we not hearing from?

Working in this way, which has been necessary under the conditions, may be more conducive to engaging with some groups more than to others. As the project has progressed, it is interesting both to explore who is engaging and who is not. Below we explore some of these groups, with the caveat that we understand that some may feature more as restrictions ease, or may want to be actively prioritised for future work of IAP engagement:

- Digital Exclusion as noted earlier, there are some groups of young people for whom online communication is not appropriate or preferred, for example younger children. There is also the issue of digital exclusion. While most children and families will have some sort of access to devices (through school provision for example), additional issues persist, including connectivity and data, and confidence and digital competency.
- The wider community: with no social gatherings, and travel restrictions in place it has not been possible to hold community events. The limited opportunities available have been seized such as local newspaper updates, and more recently attending online neighbourhood planning meetings. As opportunities for detached work and travel to the CamGlen increase, informal relationships with the community will develop and further strengthen the place-based aspect of IAP. This group will be a key consideration in the planning of the upcoming online Annual Assembly. Moreover, the notion of 'community' and its role and extent in promoting or facilitating inclusion and prevention may want to be considered in greater depth.
- Outreach: By continuing to engage via existing groups we are likely to be engaging with those who are already engaged, to some extent. Using existing groups potentially limits engagement with those who are more isolated and excluded. Those who are most vulnerable to the issues and circumstances we seek to improve will require more sensitive engagement which is likely to be more time and resource intensive, however we acknowledge this will be supported through the easing of social restrictions.
- CamGlen: the original delivery plan outlined engagement and improvement in years 1-3 of the project focusing specifically on Cambuslang and Rutherglen. However, as the project has developed this emphasis has come up against practical considerations and at times been required to be flexible, for example some services operate across wider areas or have few participants from within this specific location. Due to various, inevitable delays (which although unforeseen were likely to occur) it is unlikely all tests will be scalable to wider South Lanarkshire in years 4 & 5 as per the delivery plan. This

Our Approach to Engagement

Who are we not hearing from?

divergence from the delivery plan may require some consideration, and it affords an opportunity to anticipate issues which will need to be addressed.

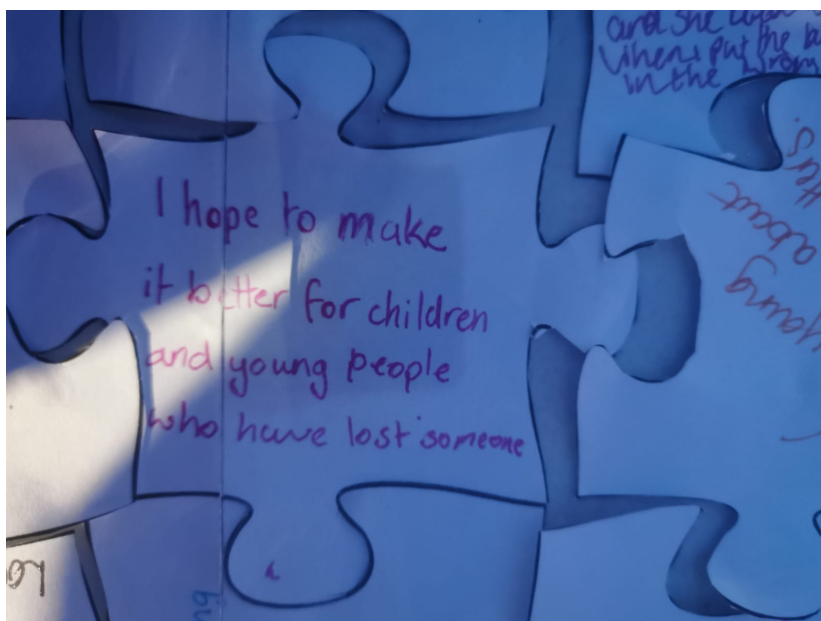
- Agency and Frontline workers- at various levels of the project, there has been mixed representation from a range of organisations. For a number of reasons health partners have limited engagement in the project at a steering group level, however were present at the improvement sessions. Due to working patterns, Education and Health colleagues can struggle to attend or identify appropriate representatives. However, the sustained engagement of all agency staff at all levels throughout the pandemic, in consideration of its impact on workload and additional pressures, is testament to the project and its aims.

What are young people and services telling us about Engagement?

We have also been talking about engagement with and learning from the young people and wider partners we work with. This section is about some of the engagement issues they have experienced and raised, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Young People

Young people have been adversely impacted by the COVID-19 restrictions in a number of ways- lack of access to education, leisure, sport and play and social interaction. This has affected, at times, their willingness and motivation to engage and participate, particularly in voluntary or additional endeavours or new opportunities such as IAP. The efforts of IAP have therefore had to adapt and go at the pace of the children and young peoples 'head space'. The young people felt that having somewhere to go, and something to do was really important for them, during lockdown especially. As such, while online was not preferred, it was 'better than nothing' and they could see that for some people it may be preferred, and that in some ways you can reach and engage with more or different people. They said they enjoyed taking part in their groups and found them 'welcoming' 'comfortable' 'inclusive' and 'yours'. Across all groups, there was a strong sense of ownership and control being an important factor in the buy in from young people, and all groups had a strong desire to help other young people, have an impact, and make a change. These are all positive values and desires for working to achieve co-produced change.



What are young people and services telling us about Engagement?

Services

We also surveyed our wider partners to understand how services have been engaging with children and families during this time. They spoke of the immediate need to adapt their ways of working to integrate socially distanced, outdoor, or online engagement. Initial complexities arose around digital poverty, which are well documented elsewhere and concerns around families feeling isolated, unsupported or unheard. Residential, group work or peer support was also seen as a challenge in those initial stages. Practitioners also noted various ways in which the young people and families they supported had struggled during this time: mental health and wellbeing; alcohol and drug use; lack of services (particularly face-to-face contact). Positives during this time included the increased engagement of those who have previously been difficult to engage, who have preferred maintaining contact via phone, text and virtual meetings. Similarly, for some young people and families, the contact with their worker or services was the only social interaction or support they were receiving during that time and it was therefore especially valued. Workers noted the conditions encouraged and provided opportunities to work in different ways with people, ultimately making them more responsive to their needs, and having the flexibility to continually adapt and change. While this period has undoubtedly had its challenges for practice, similar to the challenges IAP have faced, when asked to reflect on what they had learned about engagement it was:

“to adapt; to be creative; to maintain hope and motivation”

“we are required to embrace change and think about solutions that may be different to the way we have previously done things.”

This reiterates the value for IAP to be gathering, sharing and supporting the learning on best practice and changes in service design and delivery as it evolves.

Role of the Engagement Coordinator

The project has undoubtedly benefited from the appointment of a skilled and capable Engagement Coordinator. There has been significant learning about what is required from the post holder, and since being in post what their personal qualities, skills and attributes bring to the role, as well as what the role contributes to the wider project.

Skills: flexible, adaptive, persistent, passionate

The worker has been relentless, while respectful, of engaging with existing community groups, services and organisations to share the opportunity IAP can present for their team or young people, and provide an offer to work in partnership. They have had to be flexible and adaptive, and negotiate complex dynamics such as ever changing social restrictions and the delicate relationships and headspace of children, young people and the services that they work with and are supported by. She has had to continually motivate services and young people to stay engaged in the work, for example providing Hampers to all young people who engaged in IAP at Christmas as a thank you for their contributions. This led to young people asking about future sessions in 2021. The work is specialist and dedicated and as such should be monitored and protected to ensure the delivery and standards of engagement remain at the high standard at which they have been set.

Feedback/Champion/Anchor

A further aspect of the role of the engagement coordinator is to act a champion for the co-productive aspect of the project as a whole, holding the project to account to the values and aspirations of the approach, and the wishes and desires of children, young people, families and communities. The worker is the conduit between the project and the people it aims to support, therefore their role facilitates a feedback loop between the project and the lived experienced stakeholders. Practically this includes setting up new activities and initiatives, feeding back about test direction, and activity and reiterating to the project of the desires and wishes of young people.

Role of the Engagement Coordinator

IAP identity

It is apparent through consultation with steering group members and wider partners the engagement coordinator has become the face of the project, is known widely across agencies and through the locality, and is well respected. She is routinely invited to meetings to share the work of IAP and the opportunities this brings has helped establish IAP as an entity, a project with a purpose. As the project more broadly progresses, with tests of change underway or in development, the coordinator reflects it has been easier to explain to people what IAP is as there are tangible opportunities to get involved, or asks of different people. As people learn and understand IAP better; the project is also developing a better understanding of services and supports which are out there, and where gaps or frustrations may be arising. The worker reflects the importance of targeting the information shared about the project, so while practitioners or young people may not understand IAP as a complex system change project, they know that it is working with excluded groups of children, young people and families to create change, and they can raise and seize opportunities accordingly. However, as IAP is a multi-faceted project, there may be benefits to developing consistent messages for different audiences to try to establish a clear and concise project identity, beyond the role of the worker.

Building on existing relationships and Partnership working

As noted earlier, an emphasis on engagement in IAP has been developing relationships through existing service and supports and pre-existing relationships with young people, joining existing groups or sessions. Often this has resulted in IAP working in partnership with organisations to offer something different or new to their groups of young people. This has been more imperative to the worker 'doing' IAP than may have initially been anticipated. However, by working in this way, building on existing relationships and groups, the worker can develop strong relationships with groups of young people more quickly, offer opportunities to young people through IAP, and also strengthen the offer and commitment of IAP to these organisations in return. This reciprocal relationship is key in successful partnership working, and the worker reflects on the importance of being mindful to maintain for the gatekeeper organisation a sense of ownership, as well as partnership. For many groups IAP provides an opportunity to increase what is possible for their group to achieve (funds, capacity building). In addition to providing additional support or activities for young people, the worker in partnership with the improvement arm of IAP, acts as a conduit for young people to influence and carry out change. As the engagement work develops and restrictions ease, a natural progression for engagement under IAP would be for groups to be established under the banner of IAP, independent of other organisations to support and develop the projects' identity and legacy.

Role of the Engagement Coordinator

Coproduction

The effective working of the engagement coordinator has implications for the progression of the co-productive element of IAP. We should see IAP increasing up the ladder of participation, initial asks being more consultative- 'what's working/ what's good'- to more participatory activities of choosing a topic and developing test activities; to coproducing outcomes and change. As engagement progresses, we would expect to see opportunities arising for other young people to get involved in the project through forms other than IAP tests of change (steering group, comms, events, co-facilitation, presentations, evaluation and sense checking or approving). This skilled and intensive work is time-consuming and requires dedication. The role of the worker must be protected and maximised to working in the interests of co-production, providing direct support to young people and communities, and as their link into IAP.

What is the wider impact and learning for IAP?

As embedded evaluators in IAP, we have access to all aspects and areas of the IAP project, are immersed in its work and practically in its 'workers' team alongside the Engagement Coordinator, Improvement Coordinator and Project Manager. This means that the thinking and learning captured within this thematic summary sparks broader learning for the project. This learning is outlined below, and may serve as helpful and interesting propositions for IAP to consider in more depth.

What is IAP?

The engagement journey of IAP can be captured through the ways in which we talk about and share the projects aims and ideas with others. IAP is comprised of a dynamic partnership of organisations with differing professional backgrounds, areas of expertise and spheres of influence. Similarly, the work of IAP is complex: coproduction, improvement methodology and system change are no simple task. While IAP is a project with clear but complex aims, its methodology and operations are fluid and responsive. This can make it hard for people to grasp what the project actually does, as it is not a case of simply providing services or funding initiatives similar to traditional projects. Yet there are examples of where IAP acts as both a service provider and a funder. Due to the organic development of different tests of change, IAP is more 'involved' in some tests than in others. This is also dependent on the nature of the 'leaders' of the test: with younger people requiring more support to achieve co-produced change than established partners such as services.

IAP can already evidence exerting influence as an ethos or concept, for example people often spoke of 'doing IAP' in meetings or interviews in ways which were not directly influenced by the workers group. Using IAP as a space or more formal partnership which can promote, explore, develop and influence this approach beyond the initial work of the tests of change (or operational duties) has the potential to achieve the greatest system change (influencing children's service plans, shift in spend, service provision and creation, all in line with the concept/ethos of IAP). Using IAP as a lens to approach wider changes (beyond the test activity) to service delivery and development may be an area the project wants to focus on more purposefully.

It might also be interesting to explore the nuances of the IAP lens in order to further its reach, influence, and develop the evidence base. There are naturally allied conceptual lenses, which influence effective service delivery in line with IAPs aims (for example, Community Justice Principles, Public Health approaches, and the values which underpin Recovery models and Disability movements etc.). There are also wider shifts in practice and culture to which IAP can be aligned (UNCRC Incorporation Bill, The Promise etc.). Being able to speak to different communities of practice about IAP in various forms will help develop greater buy in, support, and strengthen the approach. Additionally, the positionality of the complex partnership creates conditions for this dynamism, allowing flexibility to act accordingly to the sphere of influence.

Commitment to and Embedding of IAP

There is significant evidence of support for IAP, in terms of resource and affiliation, which brings continued credibility to the ethos of the project and recognises the complexity and continual learning approach of the work undertaken. The uplift and additional funds from both The National Lottery Fund and South Lanarkshire Council are hugely positive, acknowledging the value of, commitment to and ambition for the project.

What is the wider impact and learning for IAP?

As IAPs reputation grows, the commitment to and embeddedness of IAP will continue through the integral work of the project, in particular engagement, carried out by the workers group.

Some tests are already at the stage where conversations about the continuation of tests is required. IAP has an important role in brokering discussions around continuation of projects that fall under the banner of IAP (sourcing funding, developing evidence etc.) but it is not immediately clear under whose remit this will fall. This is where IAP has the potential to embed change and have impact beyond the direct work of IAP and potentially beyond the life of the project. The next steps for IAP is encouraging conversations for other partners to share financial responsibility of IAP work in practice; and understanding, monitoring and influencing the shift in spend. However, this may create capacity issues as the workers group continue to focus on the integral aspects of the work of the project in the respective areas of coproduction, improvement and project management. This could create a space for the other members of the project, working at different levels and parts of the system, to broker conversations about the broader and longer term embedding of the approach, which would also create a clearer delineation between the roles and remit of the workers and the core partner's.

The Ethos of IAP: Tests and Spend

The success and drive of engagement activity has led to the numerous opportunities for genuine co-production which could result in real and impactful system change. This is fundamental to the ethos and ambition of the project. It may be helpful for the project to return to the aims and ethos of IAP, to consider if these are still relevant in the current climate, and the extent to which these drive the decisions made in the project. Either informally or more formally it may be helpful to explore explicitly how the tests areas link to the overall aims and logic of the project and review this in terms of allocation of spend (e.g. bottom-up vs top down). This could be a helpful reporting mechanism going forward; and essential in testing whether inclusion can lead to prevention.

Summary - Learning into the future of IAP

Engagement was identified as a key theme of year two and this was apt as a great deal of the second year of IAP included engaging with potential partners, young people, families and communities, however, it is important to note that engagement, like the other strands of IAP continues throughout the project.

Highlighted within this report is the unique **role of the engagement co-ordinator** who was able to responsively adapt to the changing circumstances of the pandemic and was able to make use of some detached youth work while also linking in with already existing organisations working with young people. However, it is important to recognise the **impact of Covid-19** on engaging young people with the loss of those initial communication and relationship cues and of course the need for appropriate devices and software that can potentially lock-out some young people from participating. However, it is worth acknowledging that for some young people who have been engaged with have found distant participation in many ways been easier as they can participate from home or from other locations that suit them, while reducing the effect of other obstacles such as time and travel.

Learning into the future

The IAP team are acknowledging the role that engagement plays in each strand of IAP, this is not limited to the engagement co-ordinator alone but **engagement is vital to improvement, evaluation and project management.**

It has proven helpful to reaffirm that engagement takes many forms, for example reaching out to children and young people who practitioners might have previously not found ways to reach, providing space for practitioners to share experience, bringing decision makers together but all these engagement activities have a shared purpose, within IAP that aim is to achieve a shared outcome of improved wellbeing and outcomes.

The team have been able to reflect on where engagement has taken IAP to date and where further engagement is required to achieve system change.

The IAP project team have also examined the role that relationships play with and around engagement, relationships are crucial to the effective working of IAP, the combination of knowledge, relationships, capacity, and community ownership can set the right conditions for system change.

IAP staff changes have not appeared to negatively impact the focus or effectiveness of the IAP project, this may be as a result of the engagement coordinator remaining constant and effective and indeed the project manager who remains core to the project. The project benefitted from a period of handover for both of the IAP strands where there were changes in personnel; evaluator and improvement. However, the relatively smooth transition might also be reflective of the structure of the project with ample opportunities for sharing knowledge, experience and ownership of decisions, strong relationships and clear communication.