

# Connect Project

Personalised funding  
for struggling families





## **Written by**

Anne Marie Pepper, Casework Manager, Scotland

Richard Barron, Director of Fundraising and Marketing

## **Acknowledgements:**

We are very grateful to the Big Lottery Fund for their generous funding of this project. We also want to thank all the organisations, services and individuals across Renfrewshire and East Renfrewshire who engaged with the project so positively, offering us advice, making applications and ensuring that the funds were used effectively for the families they work with. Finally, thanks to Madeleine Thornton who did the initial evaluation work and drafting for this report.

# Contents

Executive Summary .....	4
1. Introduction .....	6
2. What the Connect Project is all about .....	7
3. Structure, development and delivery of the project ....	11
4. Case Studies.....	18
5. What we achieved.....	23
6. Conclusions and recommendations .....	39
Appendix – Evaluation methodology .....	42
Buttle UK evaluation survey .....	43

# Executive Summary

Buttle UK has been providing financial support for children and families for over 60 years. We make grants to around 10,000 families a year, typically providing up to £300 worth of household goods (e.g. cookers, beds, washing machines) for families who are struggling both financially and in other areas of their lives. This helps fix an immediate problem, allowing a child to have a hot meal each day, go to school in clean clothes or get a proper night's sleep.

Over the years we have seen how important that small contribution can be to family life and it has made us consider what could happen if we were able to provide a little bit more. What could the families we support achieve with a grant of around £1500, a committed front line support worker and a little bit of imagination?

The Connect Project has been all about testing this. In May 2014, with the support of the Big Lottery Fund, we began work in Renfrewshire and East Renfrewshire seeking out support workers and families to work with.

In the following year we have made grants to 227 families worth a total of £300,000. Grants have been designed to meet both families' immediate material needs and also to address longer-term issues. The money has been spent on various items of need from household goods, to sports activities for children, to therapy.

The key findings from the project have been:

- 1) The use of a small amount of funding can have a disproportionately positive impact on the lives of vulnerable children and their families, if it is used to meet material needs and in combination with accessing existing services. Many families living in the sort of difficult circumstances that we have seen through this project simply do not have enough money, and the cumulative effect of living in such deprivation over a period of time has a profound effect on everyone in the family - but particularly the children. Families living on benefits or low income simply cannot afford even small capital spends. Alleviating that difficulty by astute use of a relatively small amount of cash can have benefits far beyond the practical or monetary value of the award. At a level of around £1500, a grant directed in this way has the potential to support the outcomes of other service providers, and move a family beyond a crisis point and towards a turning point in their lives.
- 2) Local service providers, however committed they are to their clients, are constrained in how they think about the work they do by both organisational funding and procedure. The kind of grant funding available through this project has the potential to help them work beyond these constraints.
- 3) Children living in poverty do not only suffer material deprivation but are also socially deprived. Their families are unable to afford even a limited range of the social activities enjoyed by most children and this is a really important issue to children. The use of existing, 'extra-curricular' activities of the sort funded during this project in particular could be a cost effective intervention if used more routinely for children who are experiencing developmental issues, and could be considered as services in their own right.

- 4) Connectivity in local services may be more about knowledge of the value of other services than the availability of information about their existence.

Buttle UK would like to now bring together a range of key stakeholders from government, statutory services, the voluntary sector, funding bodies and the families themselves, to consider how the learning from this project could be integrated more widely within local service delivery.

“ The project has given this family the opportunity to start fresh and this is an invaluable service to people struggling with social/economical problems who would have had their children accommodated without the help that was provided. ”

*Support Worker*

## 1. Introduction

Buttle UK has been providing financial support for children and families for over 60 years. We make grants to around 10,000 families a year, typically providing up to £300 worth of household goods (e.g. cookers, beds, washing machines) for families who are struggling both financially and in other areas of their lives. This helps fix an immediate problem, allowing a child to have a hot meal each day, go to school in clean clothes or get a proper night's sleep.

Over the years we have seen how important that small contribution can be to family life and it has made us consider what could happen if we were able to provide a little bit more. What could the families we support achieve with a grant of around £1500, a committed front line support worker and a little bit of imagination?

The Connect Project has been all about testing this. In May 2014, with the support of the Big Lottery Fund, we began work in Renfrewshire and East Renfrewshire seeking out support workers and families to work with.

In the following year we have made grants to 227 families worth a total of £300,000. Grants have been designed to meet both families' immediate material needs but also to address longer-term issues. The money has been spent on all sorts of things from household goods, to sports activities for children, to therapy.

The report that follows is a brief window in to everything we have learned as a result of this project.

*Please note: throughout the document, where the details of individual cases have been used for illustrative purposes, some details have been changed in each case to protect the anonymity of those involved.*

## 2. What the Connect Project is all about

### Who it is for

At Buttle UK we serve the needs of children who are living in families on low incomes and experiencing a range of other challenging circumstances. Many of the families we work with have recently set up home after a period of homelessness or having fled domestic abuse, some have family members with physical and/or mental health problems or children who are struggling at school. Many lack a strong social support network to help them through difficult times. These are situations that many families face at one time or another but the lack of an adequate income can make them much more difficult to cope with.

For most of the families we support, the household income barely stretches to meet the daily costs of living: food, fuel, rent and clothes for growing children. In these circumstances, it is often impossible to save up for big costs like buying furniture or household goods or to set money aside for anything that does not count as the bare necessities of life. The result can be children living in cold, sparsely furnished homes, parents in debt, relationships strained to breaking point and whole families experiencing social isolation as they are gradually cut off from their peers.

This project was designed to supply these vulnerable families with the material help they need when they are in crisis, but also to make a small additional amount of funding available to them to increase their ability to identify and access other relevant services and support that would help them move forward and take control of their circumstances. The project was set up to support families living in Renfrewshire and East Renfrewshire between June 2014 and June 2015.

These areas were chosen to run the project in based on our understanding of the level of need there. In the previous 2 years we made over 250 funding awards to families and young people in Renfrewshire and East Renfrewshire. The applications came from 127 different support workers across 30 organisations. Most were clustered in the South Eastern corner of Renfrewshire and adjoining northern tip of East Renfrewshire: Paisley, Linwood, Johnstone, Barrhead and Neilston. These are some of the poorest parts of the country: 71% of the funding we provided to families in these areas were to those living in the 20% most deprived places in Scotland (SIMD 2012). Each of these families was experiencing or recovering from other difficulties that create further barriers to exiting poverty.

### What we planned to do and hoped to achieve

This project was designed to both supply very vulnerable families with the material help they need when they are in crisis, but also using the opportunity of offering an enhanced package of funding for them to increase the ability and confidence of their key support workers to identify and access other relevant services and support.

Buttle UK already provides basic household goods to families in poverty across Scotland. These families live on very low incomes that barely meet the daily costs of living. For families in this situation, there are rarely enough funds available to pay out for durable goods, even when this would save them money in the long run.

Their options are incredibly limited – so we know that meeting this need in itself can be crucial.

However, this project was also intended to take our work a step further, beyond meeting this immediate need, by making the most of the opportunity providing that support can bring. The process of applying for funding from us creates a significant opportunity to look at whether the family has a clear and realistic pathway out of their current problems and to ensure that they are accessing all the support that may be available to them through other services. With a little more funding available to allow families to fully access those services, we anticipated that we could create significant additional impact for them.

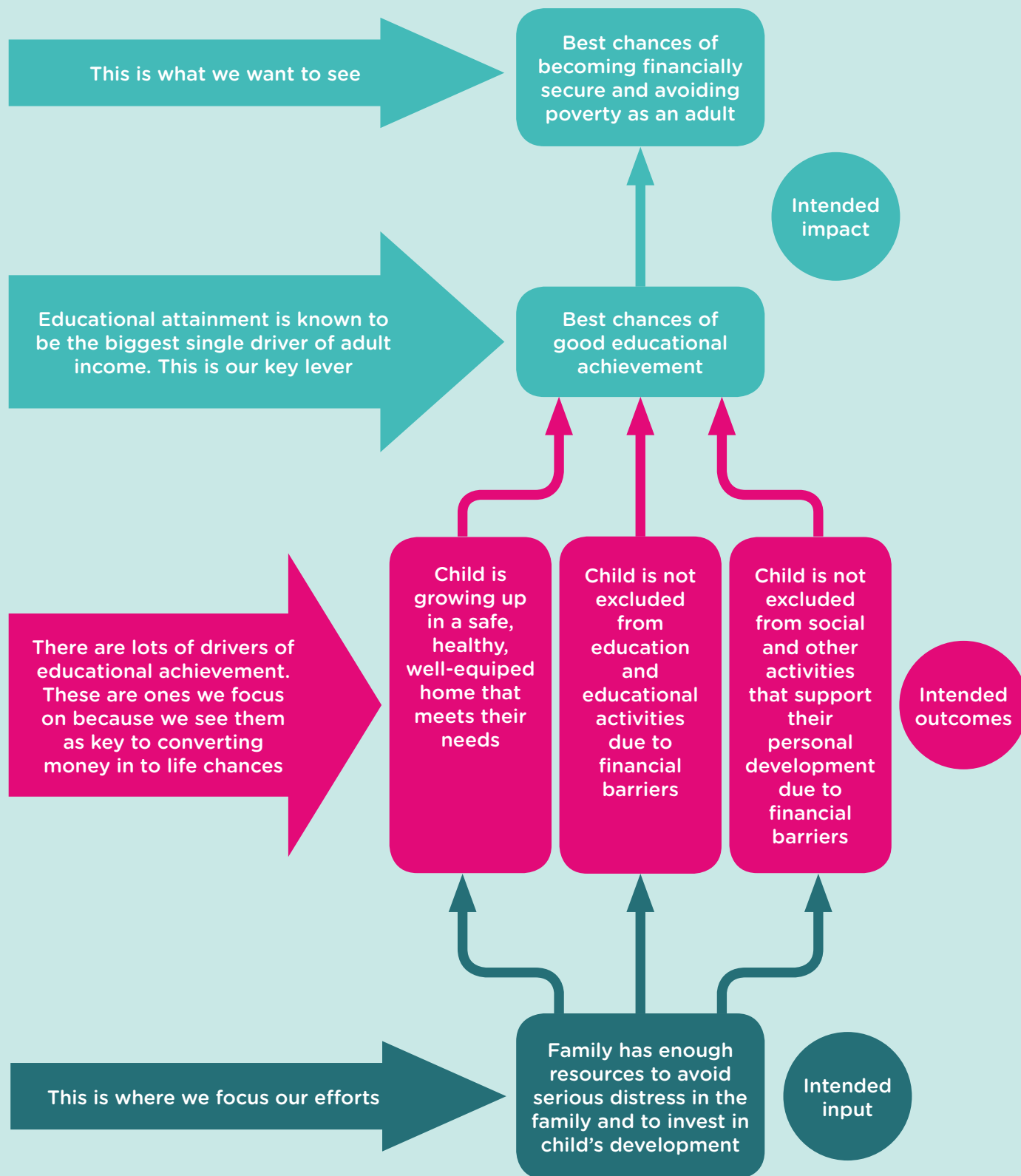
We piloted this approach in Renfrewshire and East Renfrewshire, drawing on our existing contacts in the area to bring together service users, support workers and other local stakeholders. Representatives from these groups came together to form an Advisory Group for the project to work together to guide its development, and to help us to understand whether each family referred to us for support is accessing all the available services they need.

The project has been developed as a result of changes to the way in which Buttle UK is considering its grant giving more generally. Initial testing of larger, highly personalised grants with a group of vulnerable young people not in education, employment or training between 2010-2013 demonstrated very impressive results in terms of getting those individuals back into education and work (A New Economic Foundation evaluation of this work found that the state was saving £1.97 for every pound invested in a grant, and this rises to £4.28 if the economic benefits to the grantees are also taken into account. In our own survey, subsequent to the NEF work, we found that 46% of grantees were in work 6 months after their grant was awarded).

We have therefore begun testing the same approach with other groups that we traditionally support through our Small Grants programme (specifically kinship carers, estranged young people and families affected by domestic abuse). At the same time, we have been developing a 'theory of change' for our grant giving which pulls together the knowledge we have accumulated over many years, but specifically surveying of the recipients of our Small Grants programme over the last 2 years, and our growing understanding of what larger, more personalised grants can achieve. This is illustrated below, and has directly informed the structure of this project.



# A model for creating change



## Local context

The Connect Project was focused on two local authority areas: Renfrewshire and East Renfrewshire. There is evidence in both areas of the impact spending cuts are having on service provision for vulnerable families. Barrhead for example, is under-served by community groups<sup>1</sup> and has recently seen its Women's Aid service shut down.<sup>2</sup> Other services exist in adjoining communities that have the potential to meet the needs of Barrhead's struggling families but they may need financial support to access those services.

A survey of support workers in the two target local authorities that we conducted prior to the project flagged concerns about their ability to enable clients to access certain types of services. Although many saw onward referral and eligibility checks as part of their role, only half felt totally confident they could enable their clients to access welfare benefits and money advice; only 1 in 3 felt totally confident they could enable their clients to access support to overcome addiction and only 1 in 5 felt totally confident they could enable their clients to access support to return to employment. The survey also suggested that support workers would be eager to work with us on the project: 90% said they wanted to receive information from us about other services in the area that may be of benefit to their clients and over 60% said they would like to attend an event to hear more about Buttle UK grants available for their clients.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=6269&p=0>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.barrheadnews.com/news/barrhead/articles/2013/07/18/464747-womens-aid-forced-to-close/>

### 3. Structure, development and delivery of the project

#### Project structure

This project was led by Anne Marie Pepper, Buttle UK's Case Work Manager in Scotland. Anne Marie has 16 years experience as a caseworker at Buttle UK, before which her career was in social work in both Renfrewshire and East Renfrewshire.

Support workers from both our existing network in the target areas, as well as new agencies, were informed that they were able to apply to us for grants for the families they work with. We encouraged applications that creatively considered how a grant could best be used, and actively developed a plan to bring about a sustainable reduction in hardship by combining a grant of up to a maximum of £1500 with any relevant local services that might be available and making sure families are receiving all their statutory entitlements. Support workers were asked to develop the applications based on discussions with the clients.

The process of assessing an application was then undertaken by a dedicated Casework Team in Scotland, using our existing application processes:

- ▶ All applications had to be via agencies, not individuals, and include full details of the client's circumstances.
- ▶ All funds were managed by the agency, or goods supplied directly to the recipient. All new agencies making a referral were authenticated.
- ▶ Decision-making was designed to be both transparent and accountable. The core of the assessment process was based on judging each application against published criteria, and we are independent of any service provision ensuring that no particular group of clients or individuals are given preference.

To help with the shape of the project we asked representatives from the participating agencies to join an Advisory Group. The group met twice and provided valuable feedback on the barriers to accessing available services, the criteria for awarding funding and what type of funding that they saw as making the most difference to their clients.

#### Preparatory Work

Prior to the funding being available to spend, Anne Marie spent considerable time identifying and visiting local facilities (as opposed to agencies) - libraries, GP surgeries, day centres and so on, and collected leaflets on the services they provided and others that they advertised. We also collected local newspapers and used this information to build up a more detailed picture of what was happening in the areas.

Although both East Renfrewshire and Renfrewshire have new and comprehensive websites, covering everything you might imagine in terms of services, it offers limited additional information on the value of these services, which we came to discover was key to this information not being seen as particularly useful by local support workers.

As soon as the funding for the grants themselves became available, we began to identify existing applications, from the appropriate areas, which might meet the criteria for a Connect award. So began a process of “cherrypicking” potential applicants, and at the same time using their referring worker to educate and spread the word about the project within their organisation.

This process immediately identified that the project, despite its obvious advantages, was not as easy to ‘sell’ as expected. Workers could not quite grasp that so big a grant might be made available to their clients and that it could be used in a very flexible way. Given the current funding climate, this seems to have been an unprecedented offer beyond their normal experience of grants that usually come with very tight restrictions on use. It became clear that much more guidance and encouragement would have to be given than we had imagined, so outreach became a crucial component of the project during these early stages. In the first weeks /months, at the same time as inviting and processing applications, we made something in the region of 40 visits to agencies. This exercise covered a wide range of organisations from the statutory to the voluntary, education, social work, Members of Scottish Parliament (MSPs), day nurseries, housing etc, and meetings had to be tailored to meet the different needs of each group. Some visits were simply information giving while others became tutorials on how to work a case in the “Connect” fashion. Outreach, while it tapered off as the project progressed, remained a significant component through out the life of the project and was the source of much of the learning.

## **Initial Learning from outreach**

The first thing we realised was that everybody knew about the local authority websites. They did not necessarily access the information very often, but it was available to them. As a result the general view was that there was not a real need for providing agencies with a “Service Map” as we had originally planned – most workers felt they knew what was out there. However, equally, it was clear that opportunities for sharing information and learning about the usefulness/value of what was available was limited. Many offices did not have a tearoom at all (the traditional venue for new workers to learn from more experienced staff). The practice of “agile” working was quite prevalent and actually reduced staff contact time significantly. So, what we were learning was that the gap was not in the availability of information but in the opportunity to share knowledge about resources and how best to use them.

The second issue we discovered was that workers were used to working in a very focused manner within fairly rigid parameters dictated by “job role/description” and the demands of management. As a result, the concept of using the award to offer families a wider service was difficult to grasp and, if not actually threatening to them, then definitely a challenge. Workers in the statutory services were not used to having this kind of flexibility available to them and a lot of effort had to be made, initially, to help them modify how they worked with the families and how they assessed need and so forth. It seemed almost as though workers were looking for permission of some kind from management to reshape how they approached a family with problems and this is something which merits further exploration.

We noticed that the more prescribed the job title, the less flexible the outlook was – one therapist, for example, commented that he would not normally consider it his



job to apply for a grant and would normally see this as a social work task – even if there was no social work involvement. Therapists often work with families where the children are chronic bedwetters and it might be very useful, in such instances, to ensure the family had a washing machine. This, however, would involve stepping into that kind of more intimate, less professionally specific, relationship with a family and, while this might be a more constructive approach, some professionals seemed to struggle with the concept. It seems that a lot of work with families is service-led, rather than needs-led, and that the Connect Project was asking some workers to make a big shift in their practice – again, something that merits further exploration.

Of course, many workers were very keen to harness what they saw as a new tool in working with families and were immediately enthusiastic. Voluntary organisations were especially eager and were among the first to produce thoroughly rounded reports on families. This was perhaps because clients came to them of their own volition and the whole nature of the relationship was different, allowing for freer discussion and sharing of problems.

So, while the concept of creating a Service Map, as we had originally envisaged, was not needed, there was a need for workers to share more information and expertise and in some ways the project allowed this to happen. Having funds to develop a new way of working with a family could bring workers together differently and therefore create, if not access to new services, then certainly more “connectedness”.

## **Developing the applications**

Applications were slow to come in at first and we found that we had to actually go out to workers with the forms and help them plan the first few “packages”. However, thereafter they would then pass the word to other workers in their agency and understanding began to grow.

It was important that workers fully involved the families in the planning of the use of the award. Some workers were reluctant to do this because they did not want families to be disappointed if the application was unsuccessful. However, we persisted, explaining that this was a mature approach, certain that families would respond. Almost all did and the advantage of a detailed discussion at the outset was that only applications that had a chance of funding were taken forward, so very few at this stage were refused.

The learning from this exercise was immense and was key to shaping the future of the project. The first thing to note was that all of the families responded very responsibly. No one asked for anything luxurious or unreasonable. Workers were asked to sit down with the families and talk about the situation and ask the families to identify what would best help them. Most families found it very easy to do this and quickly identified the material needs they needed met through the grant. Being consulted and involved in this way was clearly good for morale and having practical, constructive support was an enormous relief. Being given new white goods and not having to pay back (as they would have if they had bought on hire purchase) was a lasting benefit. Some families were able to return goods they had bought on hire purchase at extortionate rates of interest. In these cases the award not only replaced the necessary item but freed up weekly income as well. This definitely addressed debt problems in some instances, and so made a lasting material difference to families.

Having items Buttle UK would not normally provide like curtains and storage was a huge benefit to families, and being allowed to choose made a real difference to them. For many families, the material benefits of the awards were sufficient to make a significant difference to their lives, and removing some of the stress freed the families to tackle other problem areas. Often in these situations we would hear about Health Visitors discussing the award with the family and with the Social Worker, for example, and we really encouraged this kind of multi-agency dialogue, which should perhaps have been happening anyway. However, this is easier when the workers have some money to actually bring to the problem. So, again the connectedness increased.

## The Children

Using the awards to meet the needs of the children was a revelation. We had expected to perhaps be paying for play therapy and other formal services but, apart from a few instances, this has not been the case at all. As mentioned above, it was quite difficult to get applications going at first and we did have to sit down with workers and discuss families in some detail. The first case involved a child who had been subjected to a serious assault and had basically disengaged from all areas of his life. He was physically present but not in any way engaged. His relationships with mum and siblings were non-existent and there were serious concerns about his mental health. The worker was looking for funding for counselling but the child had made it clear that he would not attend. In discussing how the child had been before the assault, we identified activities he used to enjoy with his friends and family. Football had always been a favourite activity, to play and to watch. The suggestion that he might be able to join a football training club met with a tentative but positive response from him and this introduced the element of “therapeutic leisure activities” to the project. Funding was provided for the child to attend the club, fully equipped in terms of clothing and kit and with travel costs covered. This was a turning point for him and he returned to school, smiling. We then provided a small sum to support activities between the child and his mum and this went some way to repairing the relationship. The family were also awarded practical items but the learning from this case informed the rest of the project: Professionals tend to look for formal solutions to problems but children (and families) do not – they look for what works for them.

We then began to ask workers for more detailed reports on the issues the children were facing and to look, with the children, at possible solutions. For example, some children were described as socially isolated, aggressive, unable to sit still and concentrate at school, unable to make and sustain friendships etc. Some of these children had had to move home, school and area to escape domestic violence. They were angry, confused, had lost their friends and felt too embarrassed to make new friends because they could not bring them home. They had no bed in their bedroom and the place was a state. Together with workers we considered what would help these children, other than conventional therapy etc, and the answer seemed remarkably obvious. The material condition of the home could be improved by using part of the grant for beds, bedding, items to personalise the child’s bedroom, clothing to improve his or her appearance. The other problems could be addressed through structured social activities. We therefore asked workers to identify and

cost social activities and illustrate to us how they would address the child's needs. Swimming lessons, for example, require children to behave acceptably in a social group; to listen to and follow instructions; to learn a new skill, which increases self-esteem; to improve physical and mental health etc. Football, dance classes, karate lessons all allow children who have problems with coordination and concentration (often a feature in children whose mothers used drugs during pregnancy, an issue talked of frequently by kinship carers) to improve these areas of their lives while having fun and engaging in normal activities.

An intended outcome of the work had been to introduce families to new services through the project. What we began to realise is that we were in fact changing our perception of what a service actually is. We have encouraged workers to listen to children and we have tried to tailor activities to meet their needs. Parents who have sufficient funds routinely engage their children in a range of social activities in the knowledge that this is beneficial to their development in so many ways. The very children who need this most are often in families without funds and the children are therefore excluded from this important aspect of growing up. This project has addressed a very real need, and illustrated the advantages to children and their families. We would therefore argue now that these activities are "services" which should be available to children in difficult circumstances and that they are both cost effective and productive.

## **The importance of flexibility**

As the project progressed it became clear that flexibility was key. We never really reached a stage where applications became routine in terms of content. We were in constant contact with support workers, and throughout we encouraged them to look at each family as people with a unique set of problems. This allowed us to help workers devise new and creative ways of helping them. For example, we provided a lot of storage to one family so that the worker could help the mum address her "hoarding" issues. The support worker was struggling to tackle the issues without there being sufficient storage in the house, and it was equally difficult to get funding to pay for it, even though it was a cheap and effective solution. We were also able to help one adolescent girl who suffered from agoraphobia and other mental health issues, by funding singing lessons. This provided her with a social activity she considered safe but the breathing exercises involved in singing are similar to those used to control panic attacks. So this fairly inexpensive pastime was of clear therapeutic value beyond the simple enjoyment factor.

We were very impressed over the course of the project that the flexibility factor was not abused. Many services are governed by such strict parameters and eligibility criteria because there is a fear of abuse. However, the project illustrated that most families, and their children, have a very good idea of what would help them address the problems they faced and that these solutions were often very simple and inexpensive, and both families and support workers could be trusted not to abuse the grant flexibility.

## **The Workers**

The project allowed us to have frequent, ongoing contact with workers and to

form close working relationships with many. The concern and commitment most demonstrated when dealing with the families on whose behalf they made applications was very impressive. Most agencies using the project are working under very difficult conditions. There is constant worry about funding and budgets, which inevitably limit the work that can be done with families. Staffing levels are also an issue but, above all, finding resources to bring to families is an overwhelming problem. The funding available through the project was, when they understood what it was for, a joy to most of the workers. It allowed them to be creative, to engage with families on a different level and to see some real progress. So the project had a positive effect not only on the morale of the families involved, but of the workers too. The importance of this should not be underestimated – it is difficult for workers to keep going with families when they are very restricted in what they can offer and how they can offer it, no matter how committed, so the value of the awards went well beyond the individual grant cost.

Initially, we intended to form a project steering group of workers to oversee the progress of the project. However, this proved to be impractical and not the best way forward. From our outreach work we had learned that workers from different agencies did not often get a chance to meet and share experiences so we arranged two meetings to bring together workers who had used the project with workers just learning about it. This allowed for full and free discussion and it was clear that the workers found this transfer of knowledge and experience in a supportive environment very valuable. They would then arrange group meetings within their own organisations to which we would be invited.

As the project progressed and became more known in the community, we were invited to a wider range of meetings - heads of secondary schools followed by heads of primary schools. It is relatively easy to track how outreach actually leads to applications. The meeting with the heads of schools led to more applications from schools than we have ever experienced previously (a 500% increase on our general referral rates from schools). Indeed school link workers became amongst the best users of the project, and were extremely enthusiastic about its value.

## **The Families**

The project required that workers provide much more detailed reports on families than we would normally require for our standard Small Grant programme application. This allowed us to get a much fuller picture of families and the problems they face and we were, without exception, impressed with their resilience and persistence in face of great adversity. Some of the issues families had to deal with were shocking and very moving. Specific examples include the kinship carer who at 55 was asked, with no notice, to take on the care of two grandchildren, one of whom was a baby going through a neo-natal heroin detox. The child cried constantly day and night and only rested if being rocked. The carer had to give up work, move house and set aside all of her own life plans. She had not slept a full night since the children were placed with her. The project funding allowed the carer to move house and establish herself in a more suitable property. It also allowed some childcare to be arranged to give the carer respite.

Another example concerned a teenage girl whose despair had become evident to her peers – a concerned friend reported this to guidance staff who alerted the home



link worker. A visit was made to the home which was found to be ill-equipped. The children had no beds, there was no working cooker and the only item of furniture in the living room was about to be repossessed by BrightHouse. The child in question had become aware of her mother's distress because of the financial problems. She had given up all of her social activities as the family could not afford these – making the excuse that they were “boring”. Her anxiety about her mother had led to her becoming depressed and isolated and effected her performance at school. Because of the project, the workers were able to approach the family in a different way. The fact that they could offer practical help immediately made a positive impact on the working relationship. The grant bought white goods, beds and bedding, furniture for the living room and clothing. A small amount of money allowed the affected child to resume social activities and the relief this assistance provided helped her address her depression and get back to a level of enjoyment in her life.

## 4. Case Studies

In this section we have provided a sample of the cases that we supported through the project. Names and other details that might identify the families involved have been changed.

### David and Jonathan

*Single parent David C, aged 36 years. One child, Jonathan aged 11 years. Referred by Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) team, via their social worker.*

This is a single parent family. Father has a number of health issues and is unable to work. Mother has not been in contact for a number of years and suffers mental health issues herself. Father and son have a very close relationship and father is a very committed parent. However, there are several big problems facing the family and dad is struggling to cope.

Jonathan has presented a degree of problematic behaviour throughout his childhood. He was recently diagnosed with Asperger's, dyscalculia and has sensory and coordination difficulties. Jonathan struggles to express his emotions and can behave in a very aggressive manner. He finds transitions difficult and, at the time of application, was about to leave primary school. There was concern about his ability to cope with the move to senior school. Jonathan was described as socially very isolated. His sensory sensitivity meant that he struggled with change of ordinary things like clothing, décor in his bedroom etc, so the move to a new school with new uniform, new routines and so on was particularly worrying. It was anticipated that Jonathan would not cope with these changes, that he would become more aggressive and difficult to manage and that he would, in fact, refuse to go to school.

This seemed a very appropriate application to the Connect Project, but several discussions took place before the package was agreed. The CAMHS team had considered Jonathan's predicament but felt the case did not meet their criteria. The social worker involved had introduced the family to a Play Therapist and was encouraged by their reaction. However, there was no funding to pursue this course. Very little was known about the family's financial circumstances or the domestic pressures on dad, because the workers had focused on the child and his problems rather than on the family as a whole. Lack of funding was clearly a driver here – it is very difficult for workers to be creative when there is no funding to back up planning. The professionals involved were also used to working within the strict parameters of their own roles – indeed this is what was expected of them by their agencies. However, one worker was particularly committed to improving the family's situation and open to discussion and suggestion.

A package was devised which provided a course of 10 sessions of Play Therapy for Jonathan with several "liaison" conversations between the therapist and dad. The worker used the possibility of the grant from the project to broach new areas of discussion with the family and in this way discovered that there was no washing machine in the house. This was then supplied through the project. A grant was also made for clothing for Jonathan but this was not simply to meet the practical need,

but to try and involve him in the selection of leisure clothes as well as school uniform and thereby address, in some small way, his sensory issues.

When this application was made, several agencies had already been involved with the family. However, it is clear that, without some funding, professional input alone cannot always make the necessary difference. It is also clear that having that relatively small amount of money available and the ability to provide practical assistance, can give a worker a whole new currency with which to work and can change their relationship with a family completely.

This application also illustrated the commitment and persistence some workers have to create positive change for children and families and that they are prepared to embrace new ways of working and have new, challenging conversations to achieve this.

## **Doreen, John, Julie, Sarah and Toni**

*Doreen G, aged 40 years, is a single mum living with her four children: John, aged 17, Julie, aged 14, Sarah, aged 11, and Toni, aged 4. Referred by School Home Link Service.*

This family were described as living in very overcrowded conditions with the children sharing beds. Mum had finally separated from her abusive husband and was trying to establish a new life for herself and her children. However, the situation had had a huge impact on the children and this was evidenced in their behaviour both at home and at school. At the point of referral, Julie was refusing to attend school, Toni's attendance at nursery was irregular and both children presented as ill-kempt, tired and disengaged. The Home Link worker visited the family and discovered that sleep patterns in the household were poor. Mum had several physical conditions, which caused her to suffer a disabling degree of fatigue and this, together with disrupted sleep, really affected her parenting ability. She therefore found it difficult to insist that her daughter attend school and to establish manageable routines around bedtime etc. To complicate matters, Sarah suffered from a very well established bed wetting problem which was having a big impact on her presentation at school, her self-esteem and her standing amongst her peers. The family were struggling in all aspects of their lives. The children were disengaged and mum felt hopeless.

The referring worker established that the children actually had no suitable beds or bedding - 3 of the beds were broken and the 4th ruined by urine. A grant of £800 from the Connect Project, was made immediately to purchase new beds and bedding (including protective covers for Sarah's bed). The ability to provide this practical support quickly and without fuss, allowed the worker to consolidate her relationship with the family and begin to discuss the problems in more depth. A fridge freezer was awarded to assist mum to better manage her budget by bulk buying and cooking ahead. This meant she could cook when she felt well and rely on previously prepared meals on her off days.

The children were then consulted about what, apart from beds, would make things better for them. An award for clothing was made, which improved the children's presentation at school and boosted their self-esteem. A small grant was then given to allow the worker, with the children, to select social activities to address some

of their emotional/developmental needs. It was apparent that these children felt marginalised at school and in their community. They struggled to make friends and had become alienated and quite hostile. The opportunity to become involved in club style activities such as dance classes and boxing clubs, allowed the children to mix on more equal terms with their peers, to experience the fun but also the discipline of group involvement, to improve their self esteem, coordination, fitness etc. This in turn helped them to feel more positive about themselves and more hopeful for the future. It also contributed to a growth in the relationship between the children and their worker thereby enhancing future practice.

## **Josie and Alanna**

***Josie M is a young single mum, aged 19, with a 3 year old daughter, Alanna. Referred by Barnardos Threads.***

Josie is a young single parent who has had a difficult, disrupted childhood – she was cared for by relatives much of the time but is now isolated and unsupported by extended family. Josie has been struggling to set up a home for herself and her daughter. She desperately wants to provide Alanna with a better childhood than she herself experienced and is very keen to improve her parenting skills. Josie is lacking in confidence and suffers from extreme anxiety and depression. Josie can see that this situation impacts on her ability to parent and wants to find a solution to her difficulties.

In this instance, the worker from Barnardos Threads had a very clear idea of the optimum casework plan for Josie but had been unable to access funds to put this into practice. An award of £1,500 from the Connect Project enabled the worker to go forward with this plan.

Three main aims were identified in the casework plan:

- 1)** To improve the fabric of Josie's home.
- 2)** To encourage Josie to become involved in her community to decrease her social isolation and help her build relationships with other young parents.
- 3)** To assist Josie to improve her relationship with her daughter and improve her parenting skills.

The award helped achieve this by paying for a cooker, Hoover, flooring and curtains which had an immediate positive impact on Josie's outlook.

Once the cooker was in place, cookery lessons were arranged which allowed Josie to improve her practical skills at the same time as introducing her to other young parents.

A nursery place was arranged for Alanna, which allowed Josie the free time to attend the cookery class and begin to make constructive relationships with her peers.

A travel pass was funded which allowed Josie affordable freedom of movement and, again, increased her opportunity to decrease her social isolation. At the very



least this allowed Josie to attend the various groups run at Barnardos Threads as often as she wanted.

Josie was encouraged to use her travel pass to take Alanna out over the summer months and a very small sum of money was provided to assist with the other associated costs of this venture. This was seen as part of the plan to help improve Josie's relationship with her daughter and was used by the worker to help Josie understand and develop parenting skills. Josie also began attending Triple P parenting classes, which she could now access because she could afford the travel and Alanna was in nursery.

The referring worker maintained contact with Josie's GP and Health Visitor to continue to address her anxiety problems thereby ensuring a genuinely holistic approach to the casework. Very little of this would have been possible without the award from the Connect Project.

## **Maria and Lyla**

*Single parent Maria M, aged 23 years. One child Lyla aged 18 months. Referred by the social work department's Children and Families Team.*

Maria and her extended family had been known to the social work department for many years and Maria had been subject to Child Protection proceedings as a child. Her mother had issues with alcohol and was abusive to Maria who was occasionally "accommodated and looked after" away from home.

Maria's relationship with Lyla's father was marred by domestic violence. Maria found it difficult to accept that her partner's behaviour was unlikely to change and endured several assaults before deciding that she should leave him. She was at this time supported by the referring social worker and the police who tried to persuade her to enter a Women's Aid facility. Maria felt unable to do this and decided she would fare better trying to manage on her own – her partner was ejected from the property but continued to harass her. However, her situation became even worse when Maria became the victim of community violence in her local area and had to be moved to a new address. It was at this point that the referring agency contacted Buttle and discussions began about using funds from the Connect Project.

For Maria, moving to a new home was a hugely significant event and a symbol of beginning a new life. However, she found the prospect quite overwhelming. She received a very limited Community Care Grant to help her prepare the house and was afraid she would be unable to cope with her sparse living conditions and the responsibility of being a single parent, with no extended family support. When her relationship with her ex-partner was at its worst, Maria had developed mental health problems and a dependency on alcohol. At one stage, her daughter had to be accommodated for a brief period while Maria tried to sort herself out. Maria then discovered she was pregnant.

At the point of referral to Buttle UK, Maria's case had been allocated to the Intensive Home Treatment Team and a Community Psychiatric Nurse had been appointed. However, none of these agencies could offer financial support, which meant that they could not assist Maria with the material deprivation, which was compounding her

problems and this, in turn, hindered the development of a positive working relationship between Maria and the various professionals involved.

The Connect Project was used to provide immediate assistance through a grant for a double buggy and items for the new baby. It is worth noting here that there would be no entitlement to assistance from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) as Sure Start Maternity Grants are only available for the first child. Making this provision so quickly alleviated Maria's immediate feelings of panic and allowed the worker to engage her in planning the further use of the Connect Grant. A fridge freezer was then provided plus a cheque for flooring, furniture and clothing. The total award was £1,500. None of the items funded were considered "essential" by DWP and had been refused when the worker applied for a Community Care Grant.

In this instance, the award from the Connect Project was not used to identify new services for the family. However, this case study clearly illustrates how the grant allowed the various agencies involved to much better engage with the family and to appear a more credible source of help to Maria. The fact that they could bring tangible, constructive, practical help allowed them to help Maria through this period of stress and uncertainty and gave her a much better chance of establishing herself in the new home and really making a new start. Relieving Maria of the immediate anxiety over her unmet material need also allowed her to relax a little and consider her future from a better position. Above all, Maria was more able to concentrate on her relationship with her children and her capacity to increase her ability as a parent.

## 5. What we achieved

### How the money was spent

In total we spent £299,834 on grants to 227 families. The average grant value was £1320. The funding directly reached 485 children (0-18).

The top 10 'presenting issues' of the families being referred for a grant were as follows:

Issue	Number of cases	Percentage
Domestic Abuse	41	18%
Parent with Mental Health Issues	36	16%
Child/Young Person Health/ Development Problems	27	12%
Kinship Care	20	9%
Child/Young Person Behavioural/ Emotional Difficulties	18	8%
Parent with Drug/Alcohol Problems	18	8%
Poor Living Conditions/Poverty	9	4%
Parent with Physical Ill-Health	8	4%
Child/Young Person with Psychiatric Problems	6	3%
Homelessness	5	2%

Through the grants we funded 960 individual items and activities. The top twenty are listed below:

Item	No.	Percentage
Beds and bedding	157	16%
Clothing	114	12%
Therapeutic leisure activities	91	9%
Furniture	75	8%
Household Items	72	8%
Carpets/ flooring	66	7%
Washing machine	40	4%
Cooker	37	4%
Fridge/freezer	29	3%
Tumble dryer	24	3%
Decorating materials	19	2%
Baby equipment	18	2%
Lap top	16	2%
Curtains/ blinds	13	1%
Swimming lessons	12	1%
Hoover	11	1%
Toys	11	1%
Travel costs	11	1%
Books	10	1%
School trip	9	1%



Applications were made from 25 different organisations from the following sectors:

Sector	Percentage of families referred
Social Services/Children's Services	36%
Other Local Authority Services	17%
Local Education Services	13%
Voluntary Organisations	9%
Community Schools	5%
Health Services	5%
Other	14%
Total	100%

The demographic composition of the families.

Status	Percentage of families supported
SINGLE PARENT over 21 + Children	63.1%
TWO PARENTS, or parent living with partner + Children	19.8%
SINGLE PARENT under 21 + Children	6.3%
GUARDIAN - relatives or friends + Children	5.9%
GRANDPARENT + Children	4.1%
ORPHAN - living independently	0.5%
YOUNG PERSON - Estranged, under 21	0.5%
Total	100.0%

## Evaluation results

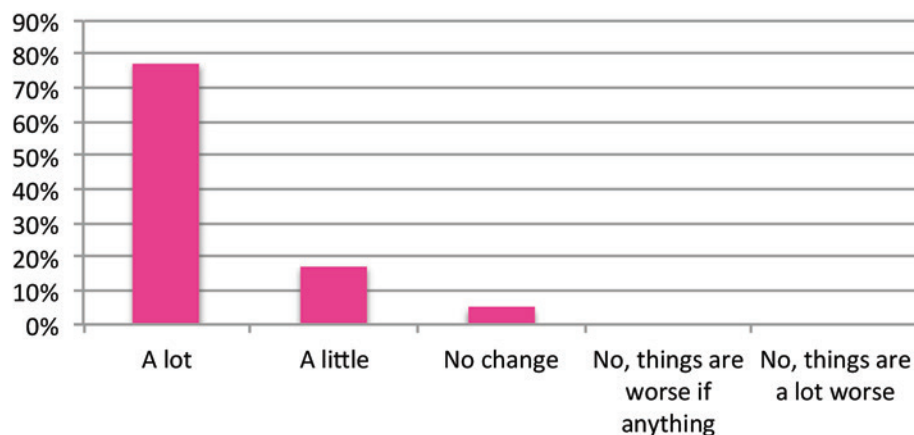
Surveying of both support workers, and the grantees themselves, has helped us to identify 5 key areas where the provision of the grants has had an impact. These are described below.

The response rates to the survey have been very high, reflecting the level of engagement with the work: 103 individual support workers were surveyed, of which 39% responded, and 147 grantees, with a 27% response rate.

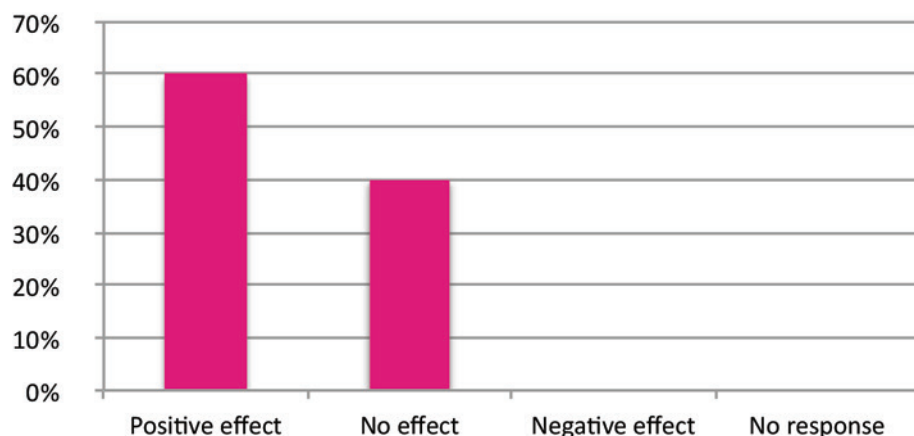
### 1) Better equipped and safer home

The first area of learning is around the quality of the home environment. Here this impact seems to have been most direct and immediate, as might be expected. Making homes suitable living environments has tangible benefits to the children as the quotes below illustrate, but as noted above improving the home environment has many other, equally important, if less direct benefits. This is discussed further on.

**Are the child(ren) growing up in a safer, healthier, and better equipped home?**



**What effect, if any, do you think the grant has had on your children's safety?**



- ▶ *"I would firstly like to thank your organisation for creating such a helpful, trusted grant! I was able to equip my full household with safety equipment so myself and my son can live a happy safe life in our home, such as stair gates, cupboard locks, corner cushions, gas and electric check! Our house is definitely feeling like a home since being awarded this grant."* - Grantee
- ▶ *"Prior to the grant being awarded the house was deemed as unsuitable as the children had no beds carpets or places to play, eat or sleep this has all been resolved thanks to the grant money."* - Support Worker
- ▶ *"Like going into a new home, great benefits to the children"* - Support Worker
- ▶ *"The child also sleeps in her own bed now and this has had a really positive impact on the child and mum, mum has also been a lot less stressed which appears to have had an overall positive impact at home and the child presents as very happy."* - Support Worker
- ▶ *"The requirements met through the award were such that it allowed a safer and more hygienic environment at home, this impacting all round their welfare in terms of health, safety, and simply feeling more content at home."* - Support Worker

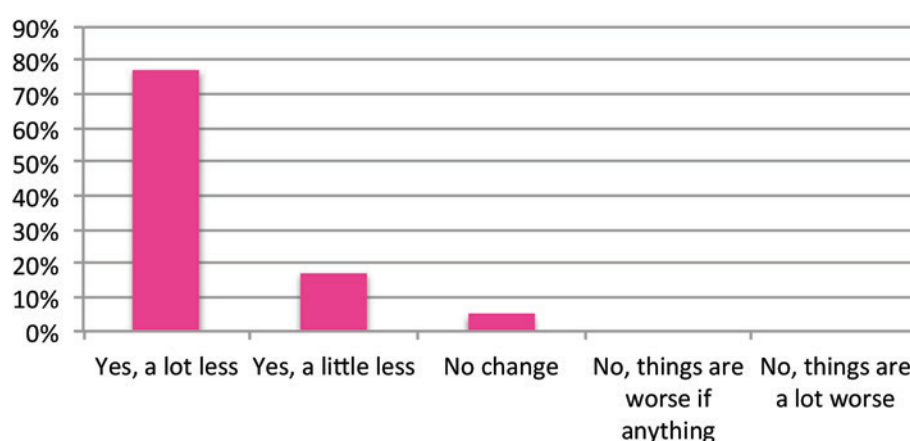
## 2) Changing in family dynamics

A key finding from the evaluation is that the availability of the funding, and therefore the ability of parents to provide essential items, in itself reduces stress. When parents are less stressed this then positively impacts on the child. In others, this is because the family has had to take on less debt. In other cases, it is because the parent or carer feel their children are better provided for. Beyond this, a home that is a little more comfortable, and is more child-friendly, creates a living environment more conducive to positive family relationships. The combination of these factors means that the parents spend more time with their children, and this again has a net positive impact.

- ▶ *"The comments from parents have been positive and explaining they feel less pressure around being able to have much needed household items, white goods and clothing without getting into debt".* - Support Worker
- ▶ *"The Connect Project allowed the family to purchase amenities/ equipment in the family home which improved parents mental health/ stress level. This consequently had a positive impact on the children's lives"* - Support Worker
- ▶ *"The grant has made a fair bit of difference to the family although but no amount of money will take away all the stresses."* - Support Worker
- ▶ *"The grant has brought the family together."* - Support Worker
- ▶ *"The impact on the children's physical environment made them more comfortable and consequently less agitated and anxious, affecting behaviour positively thus reducing stress on parents."* - Support Worker

- ▶ *"This family had absolutely nothing and statutory help was not available quickly enough to provide essential items. The money was a huge relief to the parents but also carried an emotional message that they were worth supporting."* - Support Worker
- ▶ *"As the parents are less stressful they are spending better time with the child."* - Support Worker
- ▶ *"When I spoke to the recipient of this grant it had been several weeks, I could not believe the change in her. She was happy, positive and her body language and whole outlook had changed from before."* - Support Worker
- ▶ *"Family relationships have improved. One family has now been taken off their supervision order and the mother has commented the help she received from the Buttle Trust Connect Fund has helped improve her mental health as financial pressures have lessened."* - Support Worker
- ▶ *"It was great to go shopping and buy R stuff without worrying about the money. Made a great impact on his life. Thanks again."* - Grantee
- ▶ *"I moved into a new house with my 6 month old daughter, being on my own and on maternity I had nothing. No carpets etc. Without this help I would have been, and did, feel helpless. Was an amazing turn of events for me and my daughter."* - Grantee
- ▶ *"I am very grateful for receiving this grant; my kids got things they needed badly. We are all really grateful for this. They have activities and also new items for room [and] clothing. Thank you for making a difference to myself and my children's life."* - Grantee
- ▶ *"The grant came at a difficult time. I was struggling making ends meet, the grant helped so much and I do appreciate the help it [has] done. So thanks so much."* - Grantee

**Since your client(s) received a grant do the parents/  
carers seem less stressed?**



### Overall, has receiving a grant from Buttle UK made any difference to your quality of life as a family?



Sometimes what can seem like relatively modest changes in the family environment can have an impact far beyond this:

- ▶ *“The family also have a table and chairs now which has significantly helped with eating. There are now good mealtime routines at home and the family sit down at a table together.” - Support Worker*
- ▶ *“Parents have commented on better routine and organisation within the home due to the purchase of wardrobe, drawers and storage. A new cooker & fridge freezer has allowed the parents of 5 children to plan ahead and cook nutritional meals more economically.” - Support worker*

The provision of some social activities either as a family, or specifically for the children, also has an obvious positive impact on relationships, in some cases this is a very new experience for the families, and includes activities that the children undertake that help them to socialise, build self-esteem and burn off energy, which again all feeds into a more comfortable home life and better family relationships.

- ▶ *“The funds have enabled the family to spend quality time together and enjoy new experiences and build positive memories.” - Support worker.*
- ▶ *“Our daughter’s attendance at the Youth Zone project has been fantastic. It has given her greater independence, be able to spend time with her friends and participate in fun activities. It has also allowed us to focus and spend time with our other children when she is at the project.” - Grantee*
- ▶ *“It was a very positive experience. How good it feels to have a working cooker and fridge, makes an enormous difference. My niece now enjoys going to dancing, which is great for her and lets her burn off all her excess energy. She is so much more calm. I feel her quality of life is better, also my family’s. Thank you.” - Grantee*

### 3) Letting children be children

Much of the focus of the funding has been directed specifically at the children in the families. This has taken the form of extra-curricular activities, or ‘therapeutic leisure activities’ as described above. The value of offering funding for this emerged

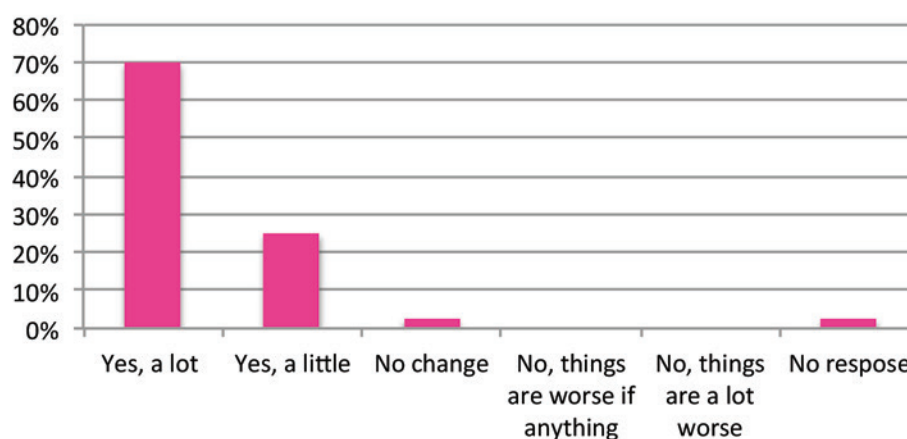


through the initial period of grant giving, but we have come to recognise how they serve a number of purposes. This is reflected in the feedback from other support workers and grantees who discuss how the activities build confidence and self-esteem in themselves, but how they also help children to socialise out of school and make them feel more 'normal'. Beyond this, they help the children direct their energy, and create a little bit of respite for their parent or carer.

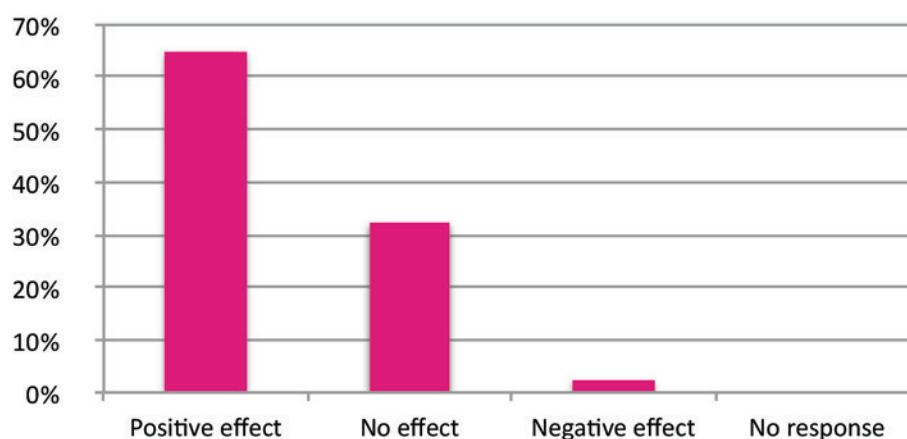
The other important aspect of the grants, is how they help create an environment within the family home that allows children and parent/carers to feel comfortable for the children to invite friends home. This is incredibly important for their ability to develop their social networks as a family, but again also builds their sense of self-esteem and helps the children feel 'normal'.

- ▶ *"The grants help to build self esteem, and confidence... some of this comes from being able to do things that other children do: go to after school clubs, feel confident to get involved in social opportunities outside the home, and very importantly invite friends into the family home." - Support Worker*
- ▶ *"More able to socialise with friends at their own home. One girl is now able to take part in gym activities with her friends". - Support Worker*
- ▶ *"I was feeling really low with the living conditions in my household. Now my children and myself are a lot more happy and proud to bring people and friends into our house." - Grantee*
- ▶ *"The children are in far more comfortable surroundings and less embarrassed about where they live. This impacts on friendships as they can invite peers in, and school attendance as they feel better in starting their day in a more pleasant environment." - Grantee*
- ▶ *"The grant was used to decorate my daughter's bedroom, furniture and clothing. C now looks after her room and improved the way she thinks about everyday life. She now attends a 1-day course run by Skills Development Scotland. She is also talking about going to college to get some grades. C missed out on her last 2 years at school." - Grantee*
- ▶ *"I was relieved when we were granted it as I was able to update my 10 year olds room and make [it] more of what he deserves and not be embarrassed that his friends rooms are equipped better. My son works hard at school and is a good boy... Thank you so much, it's really appreciated and my kids love the difference and I love having new furniture to be able to organise better." - Grantee*

### Since receiving their grant does the welfare of your client's child(ren) appear to have improved?



### What effect, if any, do you think the grant has had on your children's behaviour?

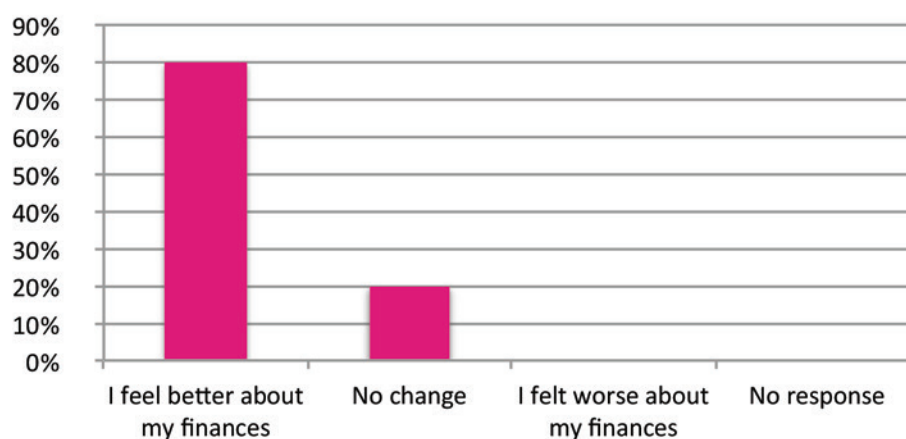


#### 4) Reducing financial barriers

We were particularly interested in how the grants can reduce the financial barriers to the parents/carers access to resources they need for their children, as we have outlined in our theory of change. In the short term, the impact is clearer – as the grants have in many cases only been awarded relatively recently. Certainly, the families themselves indicate that they feel better about their finances as a result of the grant, and here there is some evidence that the grants can relieve financial pressure, or the level of debt (for example by replacing an item being paid for through hire purchase) and this frees up some income to pay for activities directly.

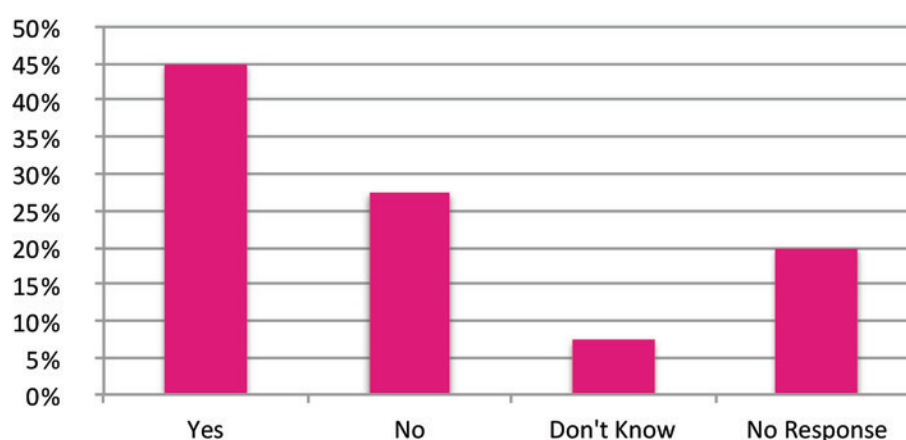
- ▶ *“Clients have more disposable income and can go swimming trips.”*
- ▶ *“Mum was able to afford to send her children to local clubs over the summer holidays, this helped improve their social peer relationships and I was able to witness the younger child develop positive relationships with other young people and grow in confidence during this time.” - Social Worker*
- ▶ *“With kinship carers it has helped springboard them onto participating in other activities themselves i.e. swimming lessons has led to a walk home in the park and a game of football every Monday night.” - Support Worker*

### Did receiving a grant from Buttle UK change how you feel about your finances?



We understood that there may be an issue of sustainability of some of the activities when our funding ran out, and while this may exist for some families it is not the case universally, with more families believing that the activities could continue than those that did not.

### If yes, do you expect any of your children to continue these activities after the grant funding has been spent?



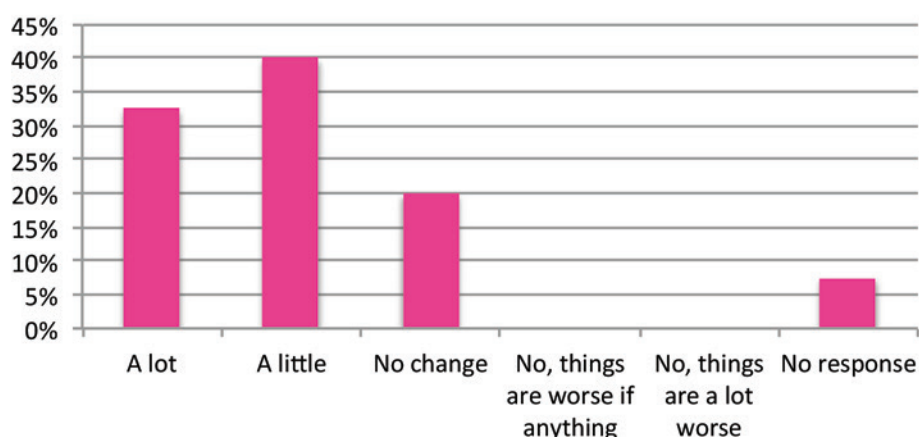
Longer term, it is harder to judge from the evidence we have so far, but there are encouraging signs. We looked at the barriers to social development activities and educational activities in particular and the initial findings are below.

### a) Barriers to social and other activities that support personal development

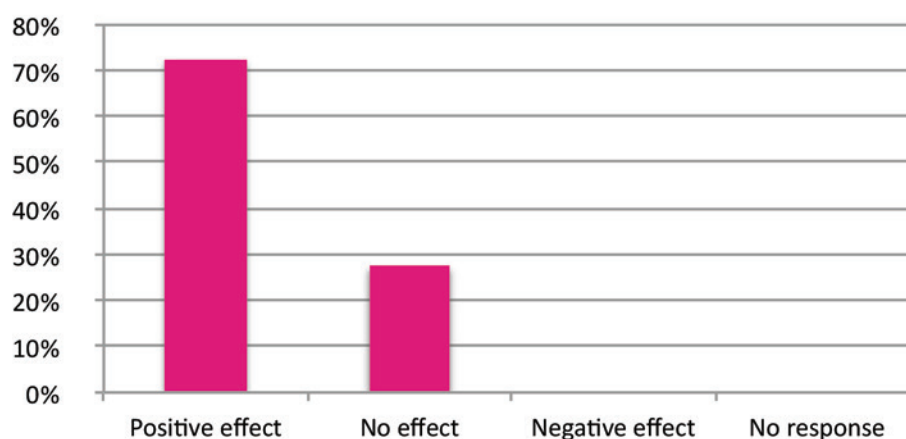
Here, the impact of being able to invite friends back into the home is again very clear, as noted above. But there are other aspects of the grants which have helped grantees socialise or access social activities. This means that families that have been isolated begin to reintegrate into the community.

- ▶ *“The children’s mum is still a little reluctant to let the children join groups etc but she has however started letting them out to play at the house so they can socialise and make new friends within the local community”. - Social Worker*
- ▶ *“The client has mental health issues and finds it difficult to leave the house - due to her bedroom now being a nice environment she has been able to invite friends to visit meaning she is now less isolated.” - Social Worker*
- ▶ *“The sense of embarrassment due to not having choices that their peers have has diminished markedly and the ability to wear a variety of outfits on social nights with peers has also helped immensely, allowing development at a social level with peers”. - Supporter Worker*
- ▶ *“Swimming lessons have helped the children mix with others that they normally wouldn’t do.”*
- ▶ *“Grant received enabled my client to access a service which helps to improve her life skills and socialisation skills which she would otherwise not have been able to do at the time. Parents were therefore less stressed and the child happier and upbeat about gaining as much skills as she can. Although, what has been achieved through the grant may not have had a direct impact on the family home becoming safer, healthier or better equipped, it is however having a positive impact significantly on other important aspects of the child’s development.”*

**Are the child(ren) less excluded from education and educational activities due to financial barriers?**



### What effect, if any, do you think the grant has had on your children's social life?



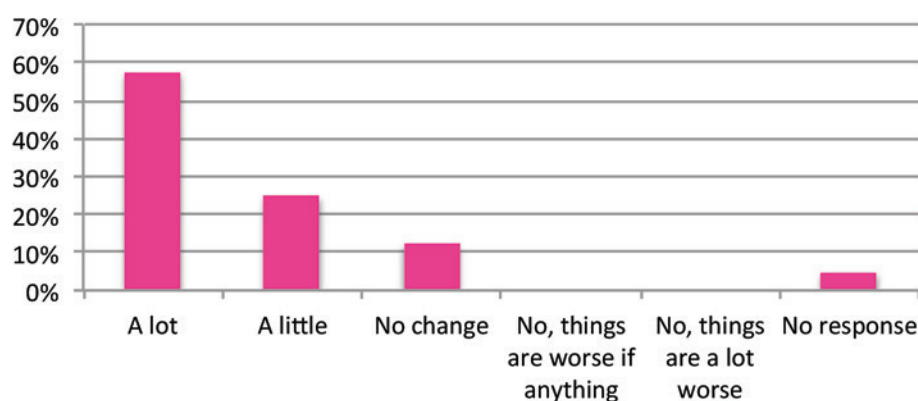
#### b) Barriers to educational activities

As education itself is largely state provided, here we are primarily looking at those barriers that prevent children from accessing it full, and with confidence. Perhaps because of this less direct relationship, the reporting from support workers indicates less clarity of the benefits, however the comments below do indicate the correlation. It is worth noting here that we made several grants for IT equipment, good value laptops etc. These awards were made specifically to assist children in educational pursuits. It is easy to assume that all children have access to essential IT equipment to help them fully participate in their school work, but this is simply not the case and highlights another area in which children from poorer backgrounds experience exclusion and isolation.

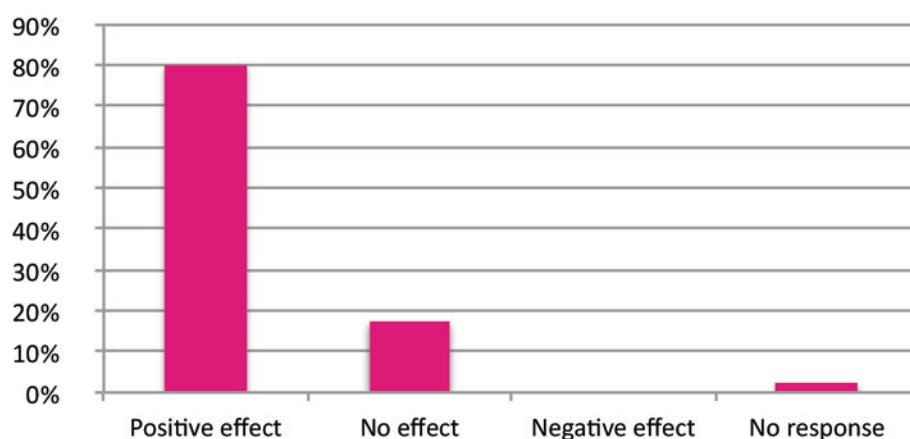
- ▶ *"The children are all happy at home and reports from school and nursery have said there has been a significant change in their emotional wellbeing since the intervention." - Support worker*
- ▶ *"School attendance has improved due to access to regular laundry facilities and extra curricular activities have also improved due to access to necessary attire now being available." - Support worker*
- ▶ *"The client had had no new clothing for around 4 years, we were able to purchase some much needed clothing for her which gave her self esteem a boost - this has meant she has been able to approach Skills Development Scotland with a view to engaging with college/work experience." - Social Worker*



**Are child(ren) less excluded from social and other activities that support their personal development due to financial barriers?**



**What effect, if any, do you think the grant has had on your children's education?**



## 5) The value of the funding to service providers

Here we wanted to understand if the availability of the funding did one of two things: a) make support workers aware of other services in their area, and b) facilitate access to these for their clients.

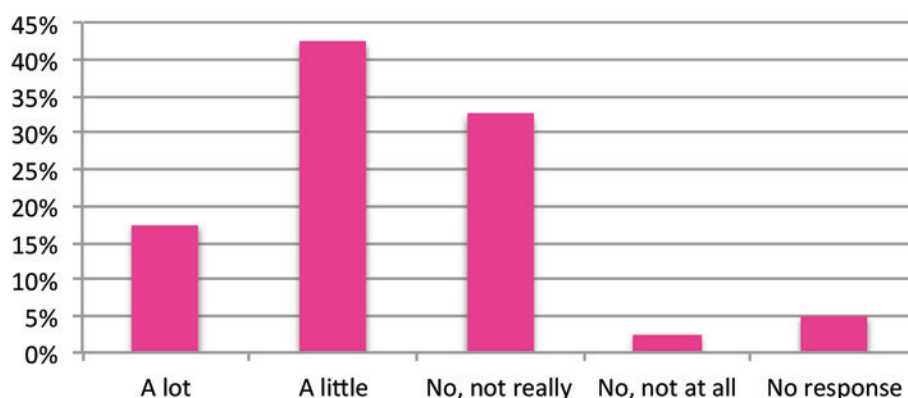
As we have discussed above, our sense early on was that support workers have access to information on what is available and saw accessing this for their clients as part of their role. Our surveying reflects this, for some it appears that they already believe this is what they are doing within their current role:

- ▶ *"Already had a good idea what was available locally."*
- ▶ *"Word of mouth is the way forward to help people in the community."*
- ▶ *"I would always refer to another agency if they could do better or would put the Service User or child in a better position."*

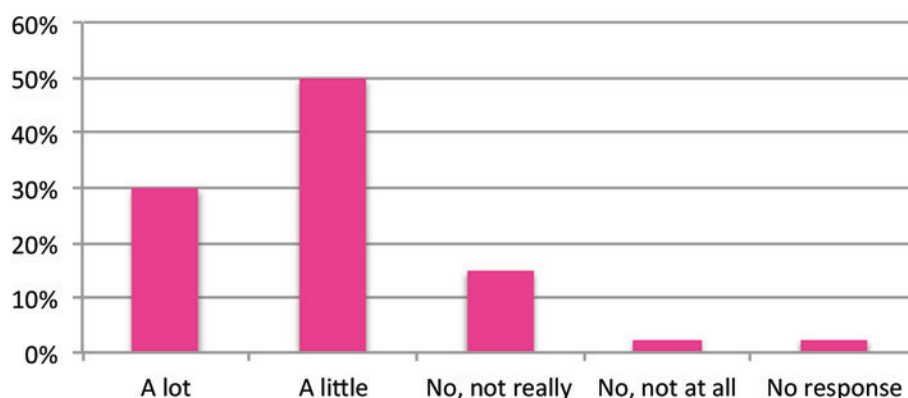
However, the feedback is split and some do indicate they see the project as having helped them connect with other services or provision locally:

- ▶ *“Researching children’s clubs/activities in the area”*
- ▶ *“Good links established with local project that provides Theraplay and Play Therapy”*
- ▶ *“Having seen the positive difference this funding has made to individuals I will certainly looking for something else.”*
- ▶ *“This has helped break down barriers in some cases and families have engaged better with Home Link and school. This has made it easier to sign post families for additional support if needed.”*

**Do you think you have more information about services available locally as a result of accessing the Connect Project funding?**



**Are you more likely to make a cross-referral to help your clients access other local services as a result of having applied for Connect Project funding?**



While there is a mixed response from support workers as to whether the funding helps them access other existing services, a consistent theme from them, and a critical aspect of the value of the project, has been what the grants can achieve for them themselves in achieving their goals with the families they support. They describe how the availability of the funding has the potential to change their relationship with the client. This is a constant feature of the comments in the summary statements

that the support workers wrote, a selection of which are set out below. Many of the other themes highlighted above are reiterated too.

*“Everyone likes good outcomes, especially when it is the exact desire of all relevant parties. Receiving the grant was a desired outcome for the child, the parents and I, the allocated worker. It helped to reduce the tension that was about how to fill a major gap in the skills that the child requires as she grows older, especially at a time when family resources appeared to be a bit short and support from statutory agencies could not stretch enough to meet the identified additional need. The grant helped to further improved my working relationship with the child and the family, as they were more re-assured in terms of my commitment to ensuring that the child’s needs get met through looking at the various options that might be available, and not giving up because the need could not be met through my service.”*

*“I was able to encourage the client to go shopping for clothes - something she has not done for many years - she finds it difficult to go out of the house but she was able to visit a shopping centre for several hours. I have been able to use this example to encourage her to leave the house again, pointing out to her that she managed it successfully before.”*

*“The grant has enabled the children and families overall improve standards within the home. Also provide clothing to ensure children adequately clothed and equal to their peers. Improving physical presentation and home surroundings provide a period of positivity and reduced stress within the home. Access to social activities, and opportunity to learn new skills and gain new experiences. This has assisted in the building of confidence and self esteem of some of the children and an overall feeling of being included. It has helped parent and child spend quality time together and share new experiences. This has enabled worker to address and progress some unmet needs of children.”*

*“The flexibility allowed in spending the award has allowed the client to have a major say in how the cash element should be spent. This has meant discussions took place as to what constitutes a priority in the child’s life, whether in terms of wardrobe, bedroom fittings, weekend break etc. The parents were very pleased to suggest ideas and to listen to advice but more importantly, it made them part of the whole process in a way that earlier awards did not. This gave them a further sense of enabling them to show that they saw the child’s needs as paramount but also that we could evidence that a reduction in the parent’s stress through meeting some essential need for them also impacted in a positive way on the child’s general wellbeing. It allowed this to be done without the parent feeling as if they were selfish but simply as part of the whole family ethos where they are a unit who all need to feel emotionally well.”*

*“I have noticed the impact of the grant on the mood of parents. The connect grant gives hope and lifts mood. A better living environment has a positive impact on the whole family. Parents and children have commented on being able to invite relatives to their home where previously they were embarrassed due to the lack of flooring, poor decor etc. Children have felt able to invite friends for play dates as they are no longer ashamed of their bedroom. Parents have commented on better routine and organisation within the home due to the purchase of wardrobe, drawers and storage. A new cooker & fridge freezer has allowed the parents of 5 children to plan ahead and cook nutritional meals more economically. Supporting the parents to*

*select and purchase items helps to build a positive relationship and trust. This can make it easier to support parents to become actively involved in other supports.”*

*“The award of the grant has improved my relationship with clients. They have been most grateful of how the grant has benefited the children. In particular one of the families were provided with funds to enable them to participate in leisure activities over the summer holidays and make improvements to the family home. There was a lot of stressors previously with a risk of one of the children being received into care. The situation is now less stressful.”*

## 6. Conclusions and recommendations

- 1) It is a simple truth that many families living in the sort of difficult circumstances that we have seen through this project simply do not have enough money, and the cumulative effect of living in such deprivation over a period of time has a profound effect on everyone in the family - but particularly the children. The current welfare system does not sufficiently address material need and forthcoming changes are only likely to make things much worse. Families living on benefits or low income simply cannot afford even small capital spends.
- 2) Alleviating that difficulty by astute use of a relatively small amount of cash can have benefits way beyond the practical or monetary value of the award. Feedback often illustrated how parents who described themselves as suffering from depression or anxiety, insomnia and general inability to cope with life, described a markedly positive change after receiving a grant to address immediate material need. This mental/emotional improvement then motivated/freed parents to address other issues in their lives.
- 3) There is no doubt that families living in this kind of poverty face harsh hardship. Equally, the project has shown that families dealing with problems are usually well aware of what would help them and should therefore be at the forefront of planning services for themselves individually, but also that they should have an input into service delivery at a more strategic level.
- 4) Families have shown themselves to be resilient and resourceful and responded sensibly and positively to the assistance offered by the project. The requests made were generally considered and appropriate to their circumstances.
- 5) One of the biggest learning points is that children living in poverty do not only suffer material deprivation but are also socially deprived. Their families are unable to afford even a limited range of the social activities enjoyed by most children and this is a really important issue to children.
- 6) Professionals considering and designing services would be well advised to consult more closely, not only with parents, but also with children about what best helps them.
- 7) What constitutes a “service” should be redefined throughout the social care sector. The project showed that many of the problems exhibited by children could be addressed within the context of mainstream social activities as opposed to formal, and much more expensive, interventions. This also highlights how damaging it is for children not to have access to such activities and is another illustration of exclusion through poverty.
- 8) Workers are generally very committed to their clients but are often demotivated and discouraged because of lack of resources. They experience a lot of restriction on being able to creatively address issues because of job description/roles etc. More flexibility would be a great advantage.
- 9) Workers should be encouraged to think outside the box and it would be cost effective in the long run, if small budgets like the grants in this project could



be made available to them on an ongoing basis as we have seen how this can act as a catalyst to wider more constructive work with the families, and therefore greater impact in their work.

- 10)** Provision should be made for workers both from the same and other agencies to come together more often to share experiences and learn from each other.
- 11)** Supporting services within agencies should actually support workers. It was often difficult for workers to access the grants because they had to meet conditions imposed by their finance department. Often this was because of poor communication between departments but in the end, all of these services should have the family at their core and should be productive rather than obstructive (we always got over this and it stopped being a problem after we had worked it out and could advise workers at early stage).
- 12)** Finally, we recognise the importance of having both front line staff and management involved in the development work of this kind if there is to be change in the way local services operate in the longer term.

## What next?

Vital learning from this project is being applied to all our grant giving, and now forms part of our long-term organisational strategy. Traditionally, our grants have had an average value of around £300, but we want to be able to offer a higher number of larger, more personalised grants at the £1,000-£1,500 level. We have 3 other projects that are testing a similar concept but targeted at particular vulnerable groups (families affected by domestic abuse, kinship carers and estranged young people) and we are about to launch a major fundraising appeal to generate an extra £20m over the next 5 years specifically for the funds to deliver these larger grants.

We will continue to offer grants at both £300 and aim to still be able to offer grants at around the £1000 level in Renfrewshire and East Renfrewshire, as far as our resources will allow. However, we hope that the results from this work will make other agencies and statutory bodies consider the following:

- 1)** How the use of a small amount of funding can have a disproportionate impact on the lives of vulnerable children and their families, if it is used to meet material needs and in combination with existing services and provision. We believe that if this funding can be made available, and managed effectively, it could in the longer-term save funds in statutory services. Recognising that these are times of extremely tight budgets for services, we are not suggesting new funding – but a more creative use of existing resources.
- 2)** That local support services will consider the use of existing, ‘extra-curricular’ activities of the sort funded during this project more routinely, and perhaps instead of more formal statutory services. Again there could be a cost savings if this wider definition of what services for some children could be.

- 3) In considering these areas we would like to see a group formed, that involves government, statutory services, the voluntary sector and funding bodies, to look at the implications of making funding available to work with families in this way. We would urge that the families themselves are involved in the process. We have seen that they know better than anyone how they need to change their circumstances and that they are not a problem – with the imaginative use of the resources available they are their own solution.

# Appendix – Evaluation methodology

Surveys were sent out to 103 individual support workers – all of whom had referred a family to the project, and 147 grantees (the named contact of the family receiving the grant). The support worker surveys were online, sent via email and grantee surveys were postal. In both cases, a reminder was sent between 1-2 weeks after the original survey was distributed.

## Grantee Survey

Buttle UK  
15 Greycoat Place  
London  
SW1P 1SB  
[Date]

Address 1  
Address 2  
Address 3  
Address 4  
Postcode

Dear [first name],

[x] months ago [support worker name] from [referral org name] applied to Buttle UK for a grant for your family. We made a grant of [£x] to help you pay for [summary of services/items].

I am writing to ask for your help. I have enclosed a very short survey that asks about your experiences of getting a grant from Buttle UK and what it has meant for your family.

Your feedback is really important to us. The grant you received was part of a small pilot project in your local area. We want to learn everything we can from it so we can improve and expand our services to support more families in the future.

Please fill in the enclosed survey and return it to us in the pre-paid envelope provided. If you have any questions, please call me on 0207 798 6236.

We are very grateful for your help.  
Yours sincerely

Buttle UK

# Buttle UK evaluation survey

**Please circle the answers that you feel fit best below**

Buttle UK made a grant for [£x] for you and your family

- 1)** Did you spend any of this money on goods for your home (e.g. furniture, appliances, household goods etc.)?

Yes	No
-----	----

- 2)** Did you spend any of this money on things for your children (e.g. clothes, activities, hobbies, toys, books, a computer, therapy or counselling etc.)?

Yes	No
-----	----

- 3)** Have any of your children taken up any new activities as a result of getting the grant (e.g. a new hobby, an after-school activity etc.)?

Yes	No	Don't Know
-----	----	------------

- 4)** If yes, do you expect any of your children to continue these activities after the grant funding has been spent?

Yes	No	Don't Know
-----	----	------------

- 5)** What effect, if any, do you think the grant has had on your children's education?

Positive Effect	No Effect	Negative Effect
-----------------	-----------	-----------------

- 6)** What effect, if any, do you think the grant has had on your children's social life?

Positive Effect	No Effect	Negative Effect
-----------------	-----------	-----------------

- 7)** What effect, if any, do you think the grant has had on your children's behaviour?

Positive Effect	No Effect	Negative Effect
-----------------	-----------	-----------------

Please turn over, just a few more questions!

**8)** What effect, if any, do you think the grant has had on your children's safety?

Positive Effect	No Effect	Negative Effect
-----------------	-----------	-----------------

9) Did receiving a grant from Buttle UK change how you feel about your finances?

I felt better about my finances	No Change	I felt worse about my finances
---------------------------------	-----------	--------------------------------

**10)** Overall, has receiving a grant from Buttle UK made any difference to your quality of life as a family?

Quality of life is better	Quality of life is no different	Quality of life is worse
---------------------------	---------------------------------	--------------------------

**11)** Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your experience of getting a grant from Buttle UK? If yes, please write it in here:

100

We would like to use the results of this survey to write a report that we will publish on our website. We respect your privacy and will never name you or use anything that could identify you. May we have your permission to use the answers you have given in our report?

Yes	No
-----	----

Many thanks for your help. Don't forget to put this in the post!



## Connect Project

### Buttle UK pilot evaluation

As a support worker who has referred one or more of your clients to access funding from our Connect Project in Renfrewshire and East Renfrewshire we would like to ask you some questions as part of the evaluation of this work. This will help provide important data to the Big Lottery Fund, who funded the project, but also to other practitioners, commissioners, funders and stakeholders as we share the learning. We hope that, through this we can expand the work in the future, offering more grants to families like the ones you have referred already. We would like to publish the results of this survey, but none of your individual answers will be attributed to you.

#### 1. Your name

#### 2. Name of your organisation

#### 3. Since your client(s) received a grant do the parents/carers seem less stressed?

Yes, a lot less

Yes, a little less

No change

No, they are worse if  
anything

No, things are worse

☐☐☐☐☐

Please add comments if you have any...

#### 4. Since receiving their grant goes the welfare of your client's child(ren) appear to have improved?

Yes, a lot

Yes, a little

No change

No, it is worse if  
anything

No, things are worse

☐☐☐☐☐

Please add comments if you have any...



We are interested to know if the issues you are addressing with the family easier to tackle since the grant. To what extent would you say that the grant has helped in the following areas...

**5. Are the child(ren) growing up in a safer, healthier, and better equipped home?**

A lot	A little	No change	No, things are worse if anything	No, things are a lot worse
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please add comments if you have any...

**6. Are the child(ren) less excluded from education and educational activities due to financial barriers?**

A lot	A little	No change	No, things are worse if anything	No, things are a lot worse
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please add comments if you have any...

**7. Are child(ren) less excluded from social and other activities that support their personal development due to financial barriers?**

A lot	A little	No change	No, things are worse if anything	No, things are a lot worse
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please add comments if you have any...

**8. Do you think you have more information about services available locally as a result of accessing the Connect Project funding?**

Yes, a lot	Yes, a little	No, not really	No, not at all
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please add comments if you have any...

**9. Are you more likely to make a cross-referral to help your clients access other local services as a result of having applied for Connect Project funding?**

Yes, a lot

Yes, a little

No, not really

No, not at all

☐☐☐☐

Please add comments if you have any...

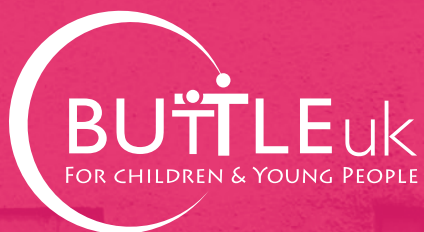
**10. Can you describe any other ways that the grant has helped to change/improve your work with the clients you have referred...**

**11. Can you describe what you hope the long-term benefits of the funding will be for your client...**

**12. How would you like to see this kind of funding used in future?**

**13. Any other comments...**

Many thanks for completing this survey.



England:

Buttle UK  
15 Greycoat Place  
London  
SW1P 1SB

info@buttleuk.org  
0207 828 7311

Northern Ireland:

Buttle UK  
PO Box 484  
Belfast  
BT6 0YA

nireland@buttleuk.org  
028 90 641 164

Scotland:

Buttle UK  
PO Box 5075  
Glasgow  
G78 4WA

scotland@buttleuk.org  
01505 850 437

Wales:

Buttle UK  
PO Box 2528  
Cardiff  
CF23 0GX

wales@buttleuk.org  
02920 541 996

 [www.facebook.com/buttleuk](http://www.facebook.com/buttleuk)

 [www.twitter.com/buttleuk](http://www.twitter.com/buttleuk)

 [www.buttleuk.org](http://www.buttleuk.org)

Registered Charity No. 313007  
Scotland - SCO37997