



If It Wasn't for Routes...

National Demonstration Project 2019-2022

Final Evaluation Report

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Contents

Page(s)

Introduction and Acknowledgements

3-7

Part One: Growing Routes

8-13

- 1.1. Routes In
- 1.2. Starting Stages and Co-design
- 1.3. Starting Stages Box Item
- 1.4. Building Trust and Long-lasting Relationships
- 1.5. If It Wasn't for Routes...Case Study
- 1.6. Building Trust and Long-lasting Relationships Box Item

Part Two: Partnerships and Whole Family Impact

14-19

- 2.1. Partnership Working
- 2.2. Partnership Working Box Item
- 2.3. Impact on the Whole Family
- 2.4. Impact on the Whole Family Box Item
- 2.5. If It Wasn't for Routes... Case Study

Part Three: Friendships and Peer Support

20-23

- 3.1. I Am Not Alone
- 3.2. I Am Not Alone Box Item: A Disk
- 3.3. One-to-One Support
- 3.4. If It Wasn't for Routes...Case Study
- 3.5. Friendships and Peer Support Box Item

Part Four: Sowing Seeds for the Future

24-26

- 4.1. Planning Ahead
- 4.2. If It Wasn't for Routes...Case Study
- 4.3. Sowing Seeds for the Future Box Item

Part Five: Discussion and Conclusion

27-28

- 5.1. Discussion
- 5.2. Conclusion

Introduction and Acknowledgements

Introduction

In March 2019, Scottish Families launched a three-year National Young Persons' Demonstration Project to co-design and test out a new model of support for young people affected by someone else's alcohol or drug use. This Project (later named 'Routes') was developed as part of Scottish Families' strategic plan 2018-21, 'It's All Relative'. While we offered support to adults aged 16+ years across our core services, we didn't offer anything particularly different to the younger age group within this. When we began the early project design, we found a significant gap in support for an even broader group of young people, and so we extended our focus to 12-26 years olds. We also recognised that young people were the best people to design and develop this Project, so a coproduction approach was built in from the start.

We decided to base the Project across East and West Dunbartonshire, as neighbouring and yet contrasting areas. However, we were clear that this was a national demonstration project, and that we would share our learning more widely over time.

For year one, we secured core funding from the Corra Partnership Development Initiative (PDI), Scottish Government and the Volant Trust, with start-up seed contributions for the first year from East and West Dunbartonshire Health and Social Care Partnerships. Over the three years we have been supported by a wide range of funders and we are extremely grateful for everything they have helped us achieve!

March 2022 marks an end to the original three-year demonstration project, and Routes has now become a core Scottish Families service. In this time, there has been an abundance of **learning and development** as Routes has continued to grow and progress.

This piece of work aims to encapsulate the experiences of our Routes young people, their parents and guardians, the Routes staff team and some of our partners in East and West Dunbartonshire over the past three years. A total of 10 qualitative interviews were conducted for this report, consisting of both virtual and in-person discussions. The rest of this section will provide a brief synopsis of each year thus far, dating back to the beginning of the project in 2019.

2019

After a few development sessions, the young people involved in the project decided upon the name '**Routes**'. The name has a double meaning to the young people. The term 'roots' refers to their own beginnings, that they feel they should be proud of but not **defined, ashamed or stigmatised** by them. The spelling that was decided upon was Routes, as the young people felt this reflected how their upbringing, or 'roots', should not define the route they choose to take



in their **own future**. The Routes logo was also designed by the young people with the support of arts organisation, Braw Talent. The young people themselves have been involved in the development of Routes throughout and have been integral to making Routes what it has become by the end of the three-year demonstration period.

It was established from the beginning the young people wanted the group to serve as **time away** from their home lives, rather than focus upon it. Routes then developed a busy agenda of events and activities, such as photography, drama, sports, and educational sessions such as drug and alcohol awareness sessions. The Routes team are always busy during the **school holidays**, with summer 2019 including a range of activities such as trips to the beach, the circus, go-karting, M&D's Theme Park and much more. August brought a **residential trip** to Biggar along with some adult family members from the East Dunbartonshire Family Support Group and September a trip to Inverness for the national **Recovery Walk**. The team also took the young people to visit **River Garden**, a residential horticultural community near Ayr for people in recovery. This experience was said to be extremely valuable to the young people, giving them an insight into the impact of drug and alcohol use and gave them a sense of hope and understanding of their own families:

“I thought a lot about it. It helped me get better at not being so angry and I want to go back.” – Routes young person after visit to River Garden.

2019 provided a process of **early learning**, with some key elements of Routes, such as **bringing young people with similar experiences together**, beginning to show their true value. Many of the young people had never spoke of what goes on in their home life and the **peer support** that has been developed is invaluable. The team utilised every opportunity to build friendships between the young people and support them to get to know one another, which in turn worked to reduce feelings of loneliness, isolation, and stigma amongst the young people.

Furthermore, it was evident quite quickly that despite initial uncertainty, the team's relationships with the **young people's families** were progressing in a **positive** way. The team began to build relationships with the young people's parents and guardians and were able to support them with other things by offering advice and signposting. 2019 was also the beginning of **strong partnerships** with other local organisations and services, such as schools, social work, and other youth projects, to name a few. The Routes team have excelled at partnership working and connecting with the **wider community** in both East and West Dunbartonshire.

2020

Year 2 of Routes brought a unique set of challenges, as the global **COVID-19** pandemic impacted services all over the world. Our Routes team continued to run one-to-one and group support, along with extra



support where needed in reaction to the challenges families had been faced with. With the support of our funders, the Routes team were able to provide food parcels, supermarket vouchers, hygiene essentials, homeware and access to technology for online schooling. The number of young people supported by Routes increased from 40 to 62 and a third member of staff joined the Routes team.

There were several challenges faced by our Routes young people, such as interruptions to schooling and being separated from friends whilst also living with the impact of alcohol and drugs.

“I felt at the start of last year I was beginning to slowly climb out of this dark hole for the first time in years and then Covid came along and it’s like someone turned the light out.” – Routes young person on the impact of COVID-19.

The team made every effort to keep **connected** with the young people through all of the stages of restrictions throughout 2020, dropping off wellbeing bags, staying in touch virtually and going for walks or meeting outdoors when restrictions allowed. For some families, Routes was the only service they were seeing throughout the various lockdown periods. During 2020, Routes delivered 1,748 wellbeing bags, over 423 food parcels, provided 207 supermarket vouchers and 400 home delivered meals to support the young people and their families.

Activities such as ‘Healthy Cooking on a Budget’ moved online, with all ingredients for the weeks recipe and any equipment needed delivered to the young people’s doors. Other activities such as Zoom makeup lessons and exercise sessions helped to keep the young people busy during lockdown, again we delivered everything they needed to fully participate to their doors. The online classes even inspired some of the young people in their **future aspirations**, as 2 of the girls who participated in the makeup lessons decided they wanted to study make up at college, and 12 of the young people went on to complete a Food Hygiene certificate after the cookery sessions.

2020 highlighted that just **being there** for the young people was one of the most important parts of Routes. Between March 2020 and March 2021, 23 of the Routes young people were forced to move out of their home at the time, with 7 having to move multiple times throughout the year. The Routes team did all they could to help with transitions, furniture items, food vouchers and keeping the young people engaged during these difficult times. 2020 also highlighted the need for face-to-face support and the importance **building trusting relationships** with the young people. A key part of this has been developing the Routes programme alongside the young people, making Routes a space designed by them and ensuring they are listened to.



2021

Although COVID-19 continued to seep into 2021, the Routes young people began to return to somewhat 'normality', as schools re-opened fully, and our Routes team were able to further resume face-to-face activities. The Routes team began to give more support around helping the young people **settle back into education** after months of disruption which included helping with morning drop offs, calls at lunchtime to check-in and meetings after school. With the reopening of venues came the restarting of regular after school groups, allowing the Routes young people to connect in-person again.

Routes had a fun and busy summer filled with various trips such as canoeing, super-car driving, bowling and many more. The **engagement** with Routes over the summer provides a positive outlet and focus for the young people whilst they are off school. Part of 2021's summer focused on cycling, with the help of a local volunteer to assist with bicycle repairs and share their skills.

Furthermore, the Routes young people became filmmakers with the production of their own **short film and documentary**, 'I am Not Alone', in partnership with film production company Braw Talent. The film includes some acting from the young people, along with clips from activities, inputs from school and social work staff, and parents discussing the impact Routes has had on the young people. The film itself was fun for the young people to make, but also provided an opportunity for them to share what Routes means to them and the impact it has had on their lives.

2022

So far, 2022 has been busy for Routes. In February, Routes had the first premiere of the film, 'I am Not Alone' in East Dunbartonshire, with a larger scale premiere in West Dunbartonshire taking place in March. Sharing the film was a monumental and emotional experience for the young people and highlighted how much Routes means to each of them. The film premieres were attended by family members, partner organisations and funders, and the young people took part in open Q&A sessions after each screening. We were delighted to welcome the Minister for Drug Policy, Angela Constance, to the Clydebank premiere. These were really powerful events for the young people themselves and for attendees.

With most of 2022 still to come, we can see it will be a busy year for Routes, with the end of the three-year demonstration period in March.

Routes Box

Throughout this study, each section has a theme which has been paired with an item. The item chosen physically represents the theme discussed, to give a visual, physical representation of what Routes



means to our young people and those who have supported the project. These items make up the Routes Box, which contains the key factors that have made Routes stand out as a service. A brief explanation is included next to each item at the end of every theme throughout this report.

Acknowledgements

We would like to extend our gratitude to all who have given their time to contribute to this piece of work to mark three years of Routes and evaluate the service. Please note this piece of writing has been produced by Scottish Families Affected by Alcohol and Drugs and does not represent the sole view of any individual who participated in the project. Any errors of interpretation remain our own.

Please note that this project included research on people's views and perceptions, some of which may not be factually accurate or up-to-date. However, this does give insight into people's thoughts, feelings, and experiences, which is integral to understanding what impact Routes has had in East and West Dunbartonshire. For reference, the people frequently named throughout the report, Claire, Pam and Callum are members of Routes staff team. Since the interviews were conducted for this project, Pam has moved on from Scottish Families and we have welcomed three new staff into the Routes team.



Part One: Growing Routes

1.1. Routes In

The connections between different agencies such as Social Work, schools and other services has been a defining part of Routes. A power of work was put in by the Routes staff team to establish themselves as a service in East and West Dunbartonshire and set up links with existing infrastructure in the area. Engaging with young people in the early stages could be challenging for the Routes team, but strong links with schools and social workers led to more referrals, and relationships being built with the young people. The young people emphasised that any time they spend with the Routes team is casual and relaxed and there is no pressure to talk about their home lives, but Routes provides a safe space for them to discuss that if they want to.

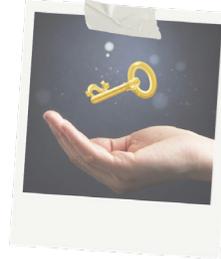
“I found out about it through school. It's a very casual setting, you know? Pam would, for example, I met Pam first and you'd meet her on a one-to-one basis, talk about things, then expand into bigger group things, things like that. It's very comfortable. And everyone you meet is very nice at the start as well, so you feel like you can talk to people at the start.” – Routes Young Person.

Routes staff noted that often they had to be persistent to get some young people to engage with them to begin with, but once they began to build trusting relationships with each other, some of the young people began referring other young people they knew who were also affected by alcohol and drugs. This is a testament to the significance of the one-to-one and group support Routes provide, as the young people have showed a determination to allow others to experience the positive impact Routes has had on their lives.

“I found out about Routes because one of my best friends has a similar home life to me, and I've seen how much Routes has impacted on her since she started. So I took the chance to kind of get better as well I guess, with my home life, and that's how I came along. And ever since then it has impacted on my life, like really, really significantly.” – Routes Young Person.

“(Name of Young Person) has been really modest because lots of the young people who come to our group, it's actually because of him. I used to pick a lot of them up for football training on a Monday, and he used to bring groups of people, like, oh, speak to Pamela! And they would say to me that they are going through something similar to me, and actually, a lot of the young people who receive support from us are because the young people encourage them to come along and seek out Claire and I.”

– Routes Team Member.



1.2. Starting Stages and Co-Design

The name of Routes was decided upon by the young people in the initial co-design phase of the project. It was important to Scottish Families and the Routes team that Routes was something that the young people wanted to engage with. The young people emphasised they wanted Routes to be a space that was completely separate from their home life, that focused on having fun and making friends. The Routes team found that providing the young people with activities to do and taking them for outings led to them organically opening up to them and each other about their home lives and a strong sense of peer support began to form.

“Your roots are important: your family, where you're from, where you were born, your parents; they're important, but the route you choose in your life is your own.” – Meaning of the name Routes described by a young person.

Since 2019, the Routes young people have played a key role in how Routes has developed and what they do as part of the group.

“So just by asking them what they wanted, it became really clear that they didn't want a support group where you're talking about what's going on at home. They wanted somewhere to have fun, where they knew that everyone was there for the same reasons, but it didn't have to be talked about, but if they did want to talk about it, it was fine and there was no stigma or judgement because everyone was the same. But it was much more about somewhere to get away from home and somewhere to decompress, somewhere to have fun.” – Routes Team Member.

1.3. Starting Stages Box Item: Seed/Seedling

The seed/seedling is representative of the planting of Routes and provides symbolism for the name. Since 2019, Routes has grown with the young people, and in turn grown into something unique and long-lasting, like a fully-grown tree.

1.4. Building Trust and Long-Lasting Relationships

“They're quite quick, if you forget something, it's like they have a jar of trust and if you forget something they take it out quite quickly, but you have to gain it back and you have to remember. I think that's what Routes is built on; it not just being a job but them knowing that they have someone that they can count on.” – Routes Team Member.

Our Routes team work across both East and West Dunbartonshire,



with both areas providing a unique set of challenges. Staff noted that in East Dunbartonshire, substance use could be quite hidden and young people were affected by stigma from their peers slightly more severely than in West Dunbartonshire. However, due to the greater openness of receiving support in West Dunbartonshire, young people came on board much faster to the point of capacity.

“In East Dunbartonshire it's quite hidden, so that's a lot more difficult. So you really had to work hard to say like, I'll take you for your nails, do you want a spray tan? For the boys, it's like, what are you into? Right, I'll take you go-karting. And it was really difficult... and there doesn't seem to be the same stigma about getting support in West Dunbartonshire, so it was really easy to build up my caseload there, to the point where I had to say, I can't take anybody else.” – Routes Team Member.

The following quote by one of our Routes team further explains the differences between working in East and West Dunbartonshire in a conversation with the interviewer for this report and two of the Routes young people:

“East and West Dunbartonshire are quite different. Like in West Dunbartonshire it is more open. I'll be at the school gates and people run out, they'll all be hugging me and they'll be like, this my pal! And I don't use this terminology, this has not come from me: 'Can you speak to them because they said their mum's a junkie.' It's far more...whereas do you remember in the summer, not that summer there but the summer before when covid was really bad and we could only ever meet outside in the park, lots of people looked at us from almost behind a corner in the park. Nobody wanted to be out in the park and be seen with Claire and I. Although we don't wear anything, I don't wear a name badge. I would never wear my Scottish Families hoodie unless...I never wear it like out. I don't ever wear my name badge. I just always have it on my car keys if I need it for ID, going into school or whatever. Whereas in West Dunbartonshire, they want me to be in the park. When they're hanging around in the train station, they want me to be in the train station, hanging about and stuff. It is slightly different.”

The Routes team were faced with two different scenarios which meant the steps needed to earn the young people's trust could vary depending on location.

Looking back to how the team thought Routes would look when it first began in 2019 and how it has developed to be now in 2022, it has turned into something unique and rather unexpected. This has stemmed largely from the time taken to build personal and trusting relationships with each young person who has engaged with Routes. The team quickly discovered that the young people had been let down by family members and other professionals in the past, and needed stable, long-lasting relationships with people they could depend on in



their lives.

“So we thought we'd have by this point 250 young people who had dipped in and out of the program. We thought by the end of the 3 years, people would come in, sort of get what they need and then not engage again unless they needed something else. A bit like counselling: you would just do your 6 to 8, maybe a maximum of 12 sessions with somebody, but that's obviously not the case. Nobody's left.” – Routes Team Member.

“No-one has left. No one wants to leave. I think it's a good thing that it goes up to 26 because a lot of services like this are really only for teens. I turned 18 this year, and I actually turned to Callum quite nervously, like, do I have to leave this year cause I'm 18? And I was actually really nervous about it because I didn't want to, because this is a really good support group that I have. And he said, no, it's up to 26. I was like, ha, you've still got me for another couple of years!” – Routes Young Person.

In order to build a meaningful relationship with the young people, it took the Routes team a considerably long time (although this could vary depending on the young person). As stated above, at the beginning, many of the young people were hesitant to open up to the Routes staff to begin with due to past experiences, but when they realised the Routes team were not going to give up on them, it meant a lot to them and trusting relationships began to form.

“Mad weird. I don't know. It is weird because even with your own family, it seems like they don't love you and stuff, and then there's these essentially like people that don't have anything to do with you, like that are pure messaging you and saying, how are you? And even when you don't message back, they'll message again. They don't just say – ‘oh, she's patched me. I'm not talking to her anymore.’ They can't. Claire always messages me and asks me about things and helps me and stuff like that, even though it's obviously not like fun. It's a stressful job. 100%. I don't think I could really do that. And stuff doesn't always work out for them if people are pure late or plans always change with all of us because sometimes, you know, things aren't always that steady at home and things. But it's good because you always feel like you can have fun and stuff like that. You don't need to think about stuff as much because you're just going to have fun and it's not going to be sad or you're not going to feel bad about stuff because you're having fun.” – Routes Young Person.

“It's really important that you are there for the long haul. They are used to professionals being in and out of their lives. I think that's a really positive part of Routes, that they know it's worth investing in you because you are not going to leave.” – Routes Team Member.

A key part in achieving those breakthroughs with the young people was the persistence of the Routes staff team. Most of the young people had





not experienced this kind of support before, and quickly realised that Routes would be different from services who had let them down previously. The Routes staff team noted they often have to reassure the young people when they have plans and let them know full details, as due to uncertainty they have experienced in the past, the young people can be anxious if they do not know exactly what is going on.



“They ask lots and lots of questions before we go out because of their anxiety. Because of the chaos at home, they want predictability when they are out and they don't want any surprises, whether you might think it's a good surprise, like, ooh, look who's here! They actually don't want that... You have to say to them, I know that it's important that you know what's going on because things are unpredictable at home and it's a bit of a relief for them that they're understood.” – Routes Team Member.



This understanding of how life is for them and the impact it can have on other aspects of their lives has allowed for the young people to have that feeling of trust with the Routes staff team. The Routes team always make the extra effort to ensure the young people are comfortable, listened to, and have all the information they need in an understanding, non-judgemental way.



1.5. If It Wasn't for Routes... Case Study: Building Trust and Long-Lasting Relationships

The following case study, from a member of our Routes team, is about a young person who has been supported by Routes. Our team member explains how although some things in his life they haven't been able to change, being there for him when he needed someone has been essential in emergency situations. The case study also demonstrates the strength of that relationship, and how much it means to both the young person and the worker.



“I think there's one boy in particular who I work with, and he's never lived with his mum. He does see her. She's been a heroin user since he was born. He lives with his dad, often in hostels. He overdosed on Valium. He never goes to school. He's always fighting. He goes out looking for fights at the weekend. Getting picked up, numerous charges, but he's on the cusp of turning 16 so social work can't really do anything about it, but really he should have been somebody who was in the care system. He is probably the one person who I'd probably say I've made not a difference to his life, because he still goes out and fights, but he has an adult in his life that he can 100% trust and rely on. He broke his leg. This happened on the Sunday night. I got up to 15 text messages at different periods throughout the night, saying that he was lying in bed, he couldn't move, he thought he'd broken his leg and he was in agony. His dad was in the house but wouldn't take him to hospital, so asked for me to go to the house and take him to hospital. So we went, he got one of those boot things, was x-rayed, everything. I then dropped him home and the next week we went up to the fracture clinic to see if



it needed a cast on or not. They decided he was just to keep with the boot on and different stuff. When we were in there, they kept calling me mum, so when we came out and they'd be like, 'Right, mum. This is what he's got to do. He's got to keep it elevated.' And I'm going, 'Right, okay.' And you just go along with it. I'm not going to start going 'I'm not his mum, I'm his worker.' You just go along with it.

We got outside and he put his arm around me, and he was like, 'I'm so chuffed that they would think that you could be my mum.' So, it's the likes of that. But he literally phones and texts me a hundred times a day, so it's quite a lot of pressure as well: where are you? What are you doing? It's like my own kids when they text every minute of the day: I'm bored in school, what are you doing? What's for dinner? I do feel like he is kind of my child.”

Our Routes team built up a strong relationship with this young person over time, allowing for him to have a dependable adult in his life he could trust. This young person’s story highlights that often, circumstances in a young person affected by alcohol and/or drug’s home life can often not be changed, but the stability of an adult who can help them when they need it is essential.

1.6. Building Trust and Long-Lasting Relationships Box Item: A Key

“During the Middle Ages, European cities were walled with the gates locked at night. The "key to the city" was given to residents and visitors who were trusted to enter the gates at any time. Today, mayors often give this ceremonial key to distinguished guests to honour and welcome them. Keys also were once worn proudly on outer garments or belts to display status. They remain a symbol of trust because awarding someone keys means you trust them with access to some portion of your domain.”¹

The Key represents the trust built between the young people and the Routes staff team, which has been essential in making Routes work how it does today.



¹ <https://www.trustsignals.com/blog/trust-symbols-freesias-rectangles-blue>

Part Two: Partnerships and Whole Family Impact

2.1. Partnership Working

As already stated, part of the success of Routes is the partnership working the Routes staff team have developed with other agencies in East and West Dunbartonshire, such as schools and social work. Other agencies that work with Routes spoke of the importance of Routes as a service, and the benefits the Routes team bring to them.

“It means it's an extra layer of keeping this person safe... I think that gives an extra pair of eyes into what can be a volatile and dangerous situation for young people.” - Guidance Teacher.

The importance of an ‘extra set of eyes’ came through strongly from other agencies, as they felt Routes allowed them to gain much needed information about the young person and what may be going on at home for them, that they may not have gotten otherwise. For example, both schools and social workers spoke of how Routes has helped break down barriers of stigma and fear when it comes to disclosing what may be going on at home for young people. Both external agencies and the young people agreed that Routes worked well to bring everyone together seamlessly and improved both communication and outcomes.

“An observation that I've made about Routes from conversations I've had, and obviously, working alongside Claire, Pam and Callum in the same organisation, is that it does seem to really connect those dots between social work, schools, and make things a lot more holistic for the young person. They're bringing people together who want the best outcome for the young person.”
– Scottish Families Staff.

“I just want to say: No matter your situation, you are loved by someone. You are worth it. You are everything you want to be. You can get out of that situation. If you don't think anything will get better, or things will get worse, say to a teacher, a social worker, a member of family that you trust, or a friend's parent. It can get better. Just persevere with it. The system, the social work system, the child protection hearings - the stuff like that. They are so annoying and boring... but it does get better. We are proof of that.”
- Routes Young Person.

External agencies noted how Routes had been able to fill a gap they hadn't been able to, giving the young people much needed, personalised support and the ability to provide respite for them in the means of fun activities.

“It's been nice to have some of that more holistic work reported back at meetings. For example, Claire spent the whole day with them at M&Ds, we would never get the opportunity to spend the



whole day with a wee family, so it's nice that she was able to do that and she could tell us how well they were doing, how they managed the baby and just lots of different things.” – Social worker talking about a Routes young person, who had just become a mum, after a day out with Routes.

Having the Routes staff team involved with other agencies such as schools and social work has been hugely beneficial to all involved, especially the young person. One of our Routes team members explains how being present at different meetings has been appreciated by the young people and has helped ensure their voices are heard:

“A lot of the time, the young person wants me to be there because they feel like the teachers talk to them differently when I'm there, and they'll often say, 'Oh, they just shout at me. They don't listen to me, but if you're there...' So, if you say to them, 'You tell me your side of the story.' And they feel they can be listened to, and I suppose that's a role that a parent would play, that they would not fight for their child, but they would go in and, you know. Whereas I'm more objective, and that young person feels they can be truthful.”

In turn, the presence of someone they trust and who knows them personally has helped to build a more trusting, cooperative relationship between the young people and social work. One social worker noted how they noticed a change in how one young person view social work due to Routes supporting them through meetings, which has had a positive impact on their relationship with the young person.

“I think, just in terms of how they view social work, they might be a bit less sceptical about kind of social work involvement or I don't think they are as mistrustful as maybe they had been before. And these are young people who, unfortunately, have been told to hide things from social work in the past, or that social work are bad and, 'you can't tell them that'. So, I think it's hard to break that down when children have been in a situation like that, but having Claire there has been really helpful for aiding some of that and building up some of those relationships.” – Social worker.

2.2. Partnership Working Box Item: Puzzle Pieces

The puzzle represents all of the pieces in a Routes young person's life (school, social work, parents/guardians) all fitting together. In many instances, the Routes team are the ones to put these pieces together. Routes can often be the connector that helps bring these agencies together in order to provide more positive outcomes for the young person and ensure their voices are heard.



2.3. Impact on the Whole Family

External agencies and the parents and guardians of the Routes young people also noted how impactful Routes had been on the whole family. Parents/guardians spoke of the knowledge and support the Routes team gave them with things such as court hearings, children's panel hearings, and things such as food vouchers and parcels when needed.

"Honesty, I wouldn't have got through a lot of things without her [Claire], to be honest. I love just the fact that of that connection and the things she does with my daughter. She'll answer the phone, and she'll answer my phone as well, anytime of day. And she'll be here for us anytime. She'll take [young person's name] to an appointment if I can't make it, things like that. Honestly. Above and beyond everything, absolutely fantastic. I can't praise her enough." – Parent of Routes young person.

"I mean, they love their kids, they've just got an addiction, but they love their kids and they love the fact that they can get a wee McDonalds because the parents can't get them that. So the kids and the parents really, really appreciate everything that Routes are doing. The kids are doing things that they would never ever have had an opportunity of doing, and the parents really appreciate it. They do really appreciate it. It's made a huge impact on families, and I can't even just think of any one thing, you just see the whole dynamic of that family changing. They got on so much better, the addictions still there but the parents are willing to work with the services to get them better." – Social Worker.

The young people themselves spoke of the impact and the relationships the Routes team had on their whole family and how their siblings were also always included:

"Claire especially, like, my whole family love her. My whole family love Claire. My nana loves Callum maybe a wee bit too much... Coming from a background of everybody's disappointing, it's just so strange and different, and you feel like you can actually trust them and they bring you food and snacks when there's nothing in the house and presents on Christmas and your birthday. Even bring stuff for your siblings and that. You just feel so loved and welcomed." – Routes Young Person.

The importance of having someone there to guarantee even a small gift on birthdays and Christmas has gone a long way to help the young people feel loved and supported, while also making sure their siblings are never left out. The Routes team always go out of their way to ensure everyone's birthday is remembered and something is in place for them to enjoy.

Other agencies such as schools and social work noted how the knowledge the Routes team had gained from the young people also



helped them put other supports in place to help with the needs of the family that they may not have known otherwise. Routes has also been able to put things in place such as food vouchers to help ease the pressure on some of the young people's parents and guardians at home.

“I definitely think it's actually benefited our family a lot. Obviously, everyone's home situation is very complicated and things, some of us do struggle not having money, and it's having things like food vouchers to be able to just do your weekly shop, you know what I mean as well? And it takes some stress off your parents as well because it isn't like you come to group and you can only talk about, oh, my parents, drugs and alcohol; that's not it. You can talk to Pam, Claire, Callum, about anything, and it takes that kind of stress off your parents, of having everything they're going through, because it can be difficult, and then having us as well. So, I think it benefits them a lot, just having that support on them as well as for us.” – Routes Young Person.

2.4. Impact on the Whole Family Box Item: Paper Chain

The paperchain represents how Routes has been able to support multiple people in a family by providing support for young people. Routes has provided a range of support and advice to members of the Routes young people's families and has also been able to provide much needed essentials such as food vouchers, while also providing gifts for the young people on special days ensuring they always have something to open.



2.5. If It Wasn't for Routes... Case Study: Partnership Working and Impact on the Whole Family

This section includes two case studies from external partners, one from East Dunbartonshire and one from West Dunbartonshire. Both case studies exemplify how partnership working with other agencies has improved their relationships with the young people and had an impact on the wider family of the young person being supported.

East Dunbartonshire – Guidance Teacher

“I've only got 1 pupil actually, that's been with Routes for some time, and I've seen a huge change in that person. She's working particularly with Claire, but I think all of the staff: Callum, Pam, she will mention specific staff quite a lot. I think that just knowing that someone's got your back is really important to her. I think that she's aware that when she's speaking to education and social work staff, that



we are, obviously, bound by child protection, and Routes staff are as well, but there is something about it being relaxed, an informal environment, and, for instance, being able to text the Routes staff, that makes a massive difference as for this young person, they've got a barrier to their communication skills and they prefer it being written down. But sometimes that puts me in a position where if that person emails me a concern, that if it hasn't been a dialogue, I might not have to act on it as kind of severely as I do, but with it being written down, it's like I'll need to follow that up in a way that maybe breaks trust a wee bit. Whereas I feel like when they spend time with people outside of an education setting, they get them McDonald's, they get their nails done, they'll go for a walk, they're doing all the things they do, it just seems so much more authentic... For me, being a teacher, there always has to be those boundaries of the general teaching code, I'm bound by really strict legislation, and there are times when I think that young person knows, right, I won't speak to my teacher about that. I'd rather speak to Claire about that.

I just make sure that I work in partnership, so like I'm in contact quite a lot with this person's social worker, but then I made sure to give Claire's details to social work, so that actually, I've included Routes staff at meetings for this young person because I think that it does give us an insight into the machinations of the family, that we don't get to see. I don't always know when dad's spent all the money or whatever, I don't know when they don't get the money they're owed, but Claire does. So it means it's an extra layer of keeping this person safe. Claire will tell me which then means that, ultimately, I'll report that to social work. It's just like, I think that gives an extra pair of eyes into what can be a volatile and dangerous situation for young people. I think Routes do that really, really well because when you're working with a young person as a guidance teacher, maybe not all young people, this young person does have complex needs... but there is a compartmentalisation sometimes of: that's not a thing to talk about. That's about my parents, that's not about my school. Whereas, obviously, I know that if you're not eating, then you're not healthy and you're hungry and you're worried that you're not going to be learning. The kids don't think about it like that.

I've found they are really helpful to work with in partnership with Routes, to try and support the best we can. I think we are all in the same place, we're here to change it and we're certainly not here to judge it. We're just here to try and stop the cycle, which would be amazing.”

West Dunbartonshire – Social Worker

“There's a family and there are three kids in the family. Pam has applied for various funding for them to get them cookers, microwaves, other things for the house. And the children are now attending school on a regular basis. They're not as tired as they used to be because they've got beds to sleep in. They're getting fed a bit better because Pam's been able to access the food share for them. She goes up to the food share and gets them groceries and things for the house, so that means



that they kids aren't going into school hungry. Pam's been able to access beds for them, they're getting a decent sleep at night, and I see a huge difference in the children and so do their teachers as well because the kids aren't tired and hungry. I mean, there are loads of families, but that family in particular have really thrived with getting support from other agencies as well to deal with the alcohol and drugs issues.”

Both studies show how often, social work and schools can be in a position where they must break the trust of the young person due to the nature of any information they have disclosed, and naturally this can cause a wobble of trust in their relationship. Having the Routes staff around the table has helped ensure that the young people always feel that there is someone in their corner, and staff at schools and social work know that the young people are receiving a type of support they would not be able to provide because of the general teaching code and various legislations. Routes has provided a space where the young people feel like they can be open and honest, and the Routes team are upfront with them if they ever give any information that they have to act on. The relationship that the Routes team has built with the young people has meant that often if they must take action on what they have been told, the relationship is able to recover afterwards, and the young people understand why any action has been taken.

The example from West Dunbartonshire shows the impact of having someone who knows what the whole family is going through, and has the knowledge and connections to put things in place that are desperately needed, such as cooking appliances and beds for the children. This has made a huge difference to this whole family by assisting the parents practically, and providing the children with somewhere comfortable to sleep, which has in turn improved their school attendance as well as how they are getting on at school.



Part Three – Friendships and Peer Support

3.1. I Am Not Alone

A key finding from Routes is the invaluable friendships and peer support that has organically formed over time. This stems from the young people knowing everyone around them is going through similar things, and there is no stigma or judgement from their peers or the Routes staff team.

“We have all been through shared experiences. We all understand how it feels not to have the best upbringing or the best family per se. We're all just kinda there to listen to each other and talk if anyone needs it.” – Routes Young Person.

A theme that has stemmed strongly from the young people themselves is knowing that they are not alone – the short film they created was named “I Am Not Alone” as the young people felt that was what they found when they first came along to Routes. Forming strong friendships with others who understand how they feel and what they have been through, has been beyond measurable value.

“It just makes you feel normal because obviously a lot of people aren't going through the things that we might have went through. A lot of people's lives in comparison might seem a lot easier. A lot of other people still have stuff going on. It just makes you feel less like a pure freak because you know other people; what's happened to other people. You know you're not alone even though sometimes you do feel it. You know other people are going through similar things. Sometimes it gets better, sometimes it doesn't, but it helps you feel a bit better because you don't feel like God has just put you in a situation and like no one else. You don't feel pure 'how's this happened to me and no one else', because you soon come to realise - like when I came to the group - you soon realise it is not just you but so many other people.”

– Routes Young Person.

The bonds that have been built between the young people themselves was clear to see when we spoke to them for this report, and when the Routes short film premiered in both East and West Dunbartonshire, followed by a question-and-answer session. The young people often finished each other's sentences, held hands and gave each other hugs when interacting with each other, which are clear indicators of the closeness within the group. The young people said they formed friendships quite quickly because of the mutual understanding they all had.

“It's because we understand each other and where everyone is coming from. It's really hard sometimes to make connections with people that don't understand your situation. When you come



here, everyone knows and everyone understands and you can say something and other people will be like, oh, I do that as well, and stuff like that. So you can really form a connection with people by that.” – Routes Young Person.

The Routes team often take the young people for days-out and exciting activities, and though their favourite one so far was said to be skiing, each other’s company was more than enough for them too.

“We don't even mind not doing certain activities, just being together is just fun enough. Like the drive here was so good with the music and everything.” – Routes Young Person.

Another activity that stood out for the young people was making the film itself, which was said to be a fun and creative way of telling their stories. The young people co-produced the film with Braw Talent, film production company, got to try out a bit of acting and were fully involved throughout the film-making process in terms of how they wanted the film to look. Having the confidence to partake in the film was a massive step for some of the young people, who said they never thought they would do something like that before.

“When we had the film and some of them were talking, the film that we'd made, some of them were answering questions and they were just like, ‘I never thought I'd do something like this.’ It's amazing.” – Routes Team Member.

“I would just say that it was a really good experience and I think the young people, seeing the film now is really rewarding because they're going to see their reactions and they can see themselves all the hard work that they've put in as well.”
– Routes Team Member.

3.2. I Am Not Alone Box Item: A Disk

To represent the short film, ‘I am not Alone’, and its significance to the young people, a disc. Participating in the film was a massive indicator that the young people’s confidence had increased, and they produced a product to be proud of. The film plays a notable role in the legacy of Routes.



3.3. One-to-One Support

Routes supports young people aged 12-26, which is a wide age range to cover. Routes has managed to overcome the issues that come with supporting a wide range of young people by providing essential one-to-one support to each young person, and those who are not involved in any group activities. As well as the strong group that has formed with some of the younger Routes young people, the Routes staff team have built strong, supporting relationships with those in the older scale of the



12-26 age bracket on a one-to-one basis. This age group can often fall through the gap that exists between youth support and adult support, and Routes has been able to work in a way that suits the needs of every young person referred, no matter their age.

A piece of learning has been that in order to support such a wide age range, the service must be flexible to meet each individual's needs. For example, the Routes staff team trialled an online group for some of the older young people they supported on a one-to-one basis, a format Scottish Families has found can work well for adult family support. However, the group was not well attended despite initial interest, and we now know that young people aged 20+ are more likely to appreciate and engage with one-to-one support as opposed to groups.

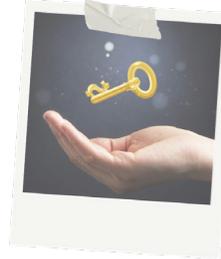
3.4. If It Wasn't for Routes... Case Study: Friendship and Peer Support

The series of quotes below from our Routes staff team discuss their observations of the friendships and peer support that has developed amongst the Routes young people.

"They know that there are so many people out there who are like them, that they are not alone, so it's okay to talk about these things because when they are with us they are not going to be judged, they're not going to be spoken about. And whether it's opening up about silly, daft things in their life or whether it's something really personal to them that's on their mind, I think that's really helped them to open up to people because they know that they are not alone."

"I think the biggest change I'm seeing in young people is having that network and that peer support group and having people they feel they can be truly honest with. And I think that's probably the biggest difference that I see in young people, because they don't feel so stigmatised anymore and they don't feel that they're the only person who's going through it. Because a lot of them need to testify against parents in court, they've got to go to social work meetings, they've got to go to panels all the time with social work, and most of their friends aren't going through that and wouldn't understand. Also, a lot of their friends don't understand about poverty."

"I think one of the main things that maybe helps that [the young people being open about their experiences] is the fact that when we do groups together, they know that there are so many people out there who are like them, that they are not alone, so it's okay to talk about these things because when they are with us they are not going to be judged, they're not going to be spoken about. That probably helps them to open up and talk to people because they know these people are talking to them for a reason. They want to help them and they want to try and understand them. Obviously, some people are more outgoing than others, people do keep things to themselves and stuff, but I think that in general,



everyone has really benefitted from especially groups and talking to people. And whether it's opening up about silly, daft things in their life or whether it's something really personal to them that's on their mind, I think that's really helped them to open up to people because they know that they are not alone. These people are here because ultimately we all want to help them.”

Lastly, a Routes young person discusses what the group and the friendships mean to them:

“There are loads of children like us and worse than us, better than us. Maybe not better than us but maybe their situations are bad, just not as worse as...you know, there are hundreds or even thousands of children where stuff has happened to them and they don't have a voice. So, it makes me feel special because I know that I've got a voice to speak about things and I know that I always will because I know that there are people that can't or that are too scared to.” – Routes Young Person.

As stated above, having that network of the Routes staff and other young people who understand, has gradually allowed for the young people to become more open and honest about what they may be going through, and in turn lead to them feeling less stigmatised by knowing they are not alone. The weight this must lift off the young people's shoulders is immeasurable.

3.5. Friendships and Peer Support Box Item:

Food!

This item was chosen by the young people themselves, who noted the snacks being a highlight of Routes for them. They said the Routes team were always on hand with food and drinks for them and eating together was a massive social aspect of Routes. Whether they were taken for a treat at McDonalds, given some strawberries on a nice day out or given food vouchers for their parents/guardians to stock up at home, the young people appreciated the effort from the Routes team to ensure they always had something to eat.



Part Four: Sowing Seeds for the Future

4.1. Planning Ahead

As stated at the beginning of this report, since first engaging with Routes, not a single young person has left or disengaged with the service. As a result of this, the Routes staff team have noted that Routes has very much grown with the young people themselves and reshaped into what they need as they continue through life. The Routes staff team have provided support and guidance to the young people who are looking for jobs and applying for college, university and apprenticeships. Routes has also been there to support young people moving out into their own homes.

4.2. If It Wasn't for Routes... Case Study: Sowing Seeds for the Future

Below, one of our Routes staff talks about how Routes works with the young people to help them succeed with applications and encourage them to engage with school in a way that works for them.

“Recently I've been taking one of the young girls to the Job Centre almost every week because she just wants to get into work but she wasn't sure if she was ready to work yet, so she had to get a kind of doctor's appointment and stuff, so it was doing all of that stuff for her and now getting weekly Job Centre appointments. It's also planning for the future, and she's got a placement with a different local charity, a charity which is local and they do like fashion, textile placements and things like that. It's really local to her, so that's something that she's looking to join. Pam this week has taken two young people to college appointments as well, interviews for college. I think they both got accepted as well, which is great news. So we do like interview skills, CV building, planning for the future, all that way. Also, one of the main things that I like to encourage is trying to go into school as often as possible, because we've got so many young people who either refuse to go to school at all or maybe they are part-time attendees. Whether that's their own choice and they just go whenever they want, or whether the school have decided to put them down to a part-time timetable, which is maybe all day on a Monday and Tuesday, but only a Wednesday afternoon, something like that, just to help that young person. So, something that I'm passionate about is trying to encourage them to go to school as much as possible because it wasn't long ago that I was their age, I'm only going back 10-12 years or so, so I know what it's like when you don't want to go to school and you think it's pointless and stuff. But it's only when you are older and you are trying to help them to appreciate that when you get older, you look back and you are really thankful that you went to school. So that's something that I'm really passionate about.”

Furthermore, a social worker who works closely with our Routes team

describes how Routes was able to provide more intensive support to a young person applying for college.

“She's [Claire] provided loads of support for my other young person as well, who has been keen to apply for college. She was quite anxious about a number of the application processes, and Claire had been such a good help. She's supported the young person to attend some of the virtual stuff online, she'd taken her up to see the campus when the school were organising it. It was childcare that the young person was interested in, and the school had identified a works type of thing, like a work experience placement in a local nursery. Claire had just been really helpful in encouraging the young person, building up her self-esteem and providing that real practical support, like physically, like I'll take you and you can see it for yourself. So, even things like that are so good. I think because these are young people who have been affected by parental substance misuse, she's been able to speak to me about things as well. If the young people have maybe spoken about some worries about their mum, then we're able to do that in quite a sensitive way. We're listening to what they're saying and respecting that, but also, the young person knows that they're safe and we can manage things in a different way.”

Both our Routes Support Assistant and the social worker explain how Routes has been able to provide support that extends beyond the capacity of social work and schools, ensuring that the Routes young people feel confident and supported when making plans for their futures. Having Routes there to provide more intensive support when needed has meant that the young people haven't been lost in crowd at school and have had the same opportunities as their peers to submit applications for college, university and jobs. This has changed how many of the young people see their futures panning out:

“Coming from a poorer background, poverty is a cycle and it's like you can break out of that cycle, you just need to believe in yourself and that you can do it. It's really up to you; your roots don't define who you are, and what you've come from doesn't mean you'll end up back there. My whole family has kind of been in a poverty cycle for as long as I can remember. I'm working now to try and get myself out of that and go to uni and get myself a good job.”

– Routes Young Person.

Routes has been instrumental in giving young people the confidence and self-worth they needed by always having someone to believe in. The boost of having the Routes staff team behind them, as well as support from their peers, has allowed many of the young people to recognise their own potential and to begin believing in themselves too.

“I wouldn't be here. If it wasn't for Routes, not necessarily I wouldn't be alive, but if it wasn't for Routes I wouldn't be who I am today. I wouldn't have all my goals and I wouldn't be so motivated to be a better version of myself and get myself out of this situation.” – Routes Young Person.



4.3. Sowing Seeds for the Future Box Item: An Anchor

The anchor has long represented hope and strength, which our Routes young people have displayed in abundance. The anchor stabilises the ship through heavy storms, and when it is lifted from the water, represents the beginning of a new journey or adventure. Much like our Routes young people, moving on to exciting new things.



Part Five: Discussion and Conclusion

5.1. Discussion

Routes is an **innovative** and **unique** project which has been successful as well as life changing for the young people involved. The Routes team have shown the ability to adapt the service to meet the young people's needs, from when they first met three years ago to where they are in their lives now.

The key piece of learning that has stemmed from Routes is that young people who are impacted by someone else's substance use need a service that is going to work with them **long-term**. As discussed, young people in these situations are often used to people and services dipping in and out of their lives. When they have someone dependable, they are more likely to engage, improve their own wellbeing, and allow for someone they trust to help them in times of need. This long-lasting relationship is also necessary to breakdown those barriers of **stigma and shame** young people affected by alcohol and drugs often feel. Having someone who will not judge them has been integral to the increase in many of the young people's confidence and self-esteem.

Closely linked to their long-term relationship with their workers, the young people have also benefited massively from a gained understanding that **they are not alone** in what they are experiencing. As above, this has allowed the young people to realise alcohol and drug use is a society wide issue, and they are not "freaks", in the young people's own words. This has also had an impact on the young people's self-worth, as they no longer see themselves as that different from their peers. The young people have built **immeasurable bonds** with each other through the understanding of shared experiences and feelings about what may be going on at home. The young people described Routes as their own family or community that they could no longer imagine life without.

Routes has no doubt earned the esteem it has with the young people as it was built in **collaboration** with them from the very start. Routes has shown when young people are consulted, listened to and given the service they have asked for, **positive outcomes** such as long-term engagement and life changing stories can occur.

However, Routes has also had a serious of challenges and learning curves along the way. Demand has far exceeded the **capacity** of the Routes team in both East and West Dunbartonshire and the team had to stop taking referrals. This was particularly difficult for staff and the young people themselves, who recognised the need for support of other young people in their area. How quickly Routes reached capacity in two local authorities exemplifies how many young people across the whole of Scotland are going without this much needed, specialised support.

The young people highlighted they would appreciate their **own space**,



such as a room in a community centre or, if possible, their own building. The young people said this would help increase capacity meaning more young people could engage and would give them a secure “**safe space**” where they could go to anytime. This is an idea that could be carefully considered in future but could also have its limitations (such as staff time/resources spent maintaining and supervising the building).

5.2. Conclusion

Throughout this study, a series of items have been selected to accompany each theme, to give a physical meaning. Our intention is to make a physical box of Routes, to explain the project in a simple, digestible way. Each item representing something meaningful that has been integral to Routes.

The **seedling** represents the beginning of the Routes co-design with the young people themselves; the **key** symbolises the trusting relationship between the young people and the Routes staff team; a **puzzle** to represent the pieces in a young person’s life clicking together with the help of Routes; the **paperchain** represents the impact Routes has had on whole families; the young people themselves choose **food**, as food is strongly connected to social memories with Routes...food is strongly connected to social memories with Routes and the support offered to families to help access food; a **disc** to represent the short film, ‘I Am Not Alone’, one of Route’s monumental achievements; and lastly the **anchor**, to represent stability and new adventures.

All of these elements have been essential to making Routes what it is today. These could be considered the ‘ingredients of Routes’. Any young person's service that put these themes at the heart would be best placed to support young people affected by someone else’s substance use in a long-lasting way, helping them reach a bright future.





If It Wasn't for Routes...

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Final Evaluation Report
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