

# Connections are Key

## Unlocking Relationship-Based Practice

### Summary

Corra Foundation is a Scottish grant making organisation. The Partnership Drugs Initiative (PDI) is a grant programme within Corra that funds charities that support children and families affected by alcohol and drugs. It is delivered and funded in partnership with the Scottish Government.

Corra's action research project *Everyone Has A Story* (2016) told us that practitioners, policy-makers and third sector organisations need to improve how they listen to children and young people in order to improve joined-up approaches between adult and children and family services. Listening facilitates an increased understanding of support needs of children and young people and is recommended to ensure children are given the best opportunities to enhance their wellbeing.

### Our Research Process

Using a Scoping Review, **Step 1** will gather literature on the emergence and elements of relationship-based third sector support services. Next, an archive review will look at annual reviews received from PDI funded charities between 2014-18 to explore how relationship-based practice is currently working with children and families.

**Step 2** invites practitioners and families to discuss their experiences of providing and receiving relationship-based support.

Families, young people and practitioners will have the same opportunity to discuss how practice is received and discuss any gaps or supports that arise during the process of providing relationship-based care.

**Step 3** involves holding focus groups with third support providers and young people and families to discuss the preliminary findings of the interviews, and creatively discuss the future of relationship-based practice.

**Step 4** will offer recommendations on how to improve or sustain approaches that maintain strong relationships for children and families living with drugs and alcohol.



Taking place over 2019, the latest PDI research project is gathering information on third sector support services and identifying elements of practice that support, strengthen and maintain positive relationships for children and families living with drugs and alcohol. This aims to improve relationship-based support provided to families and uncover barriers to support that affect the implementation of relationship-based practice. A further aim is to assess the role that communities and social circles play in children and families' lives. The focus on these services comes from Corra's interest in learning from the projects funded through PDI, which provide a wealth of insight to inform policy and practice.

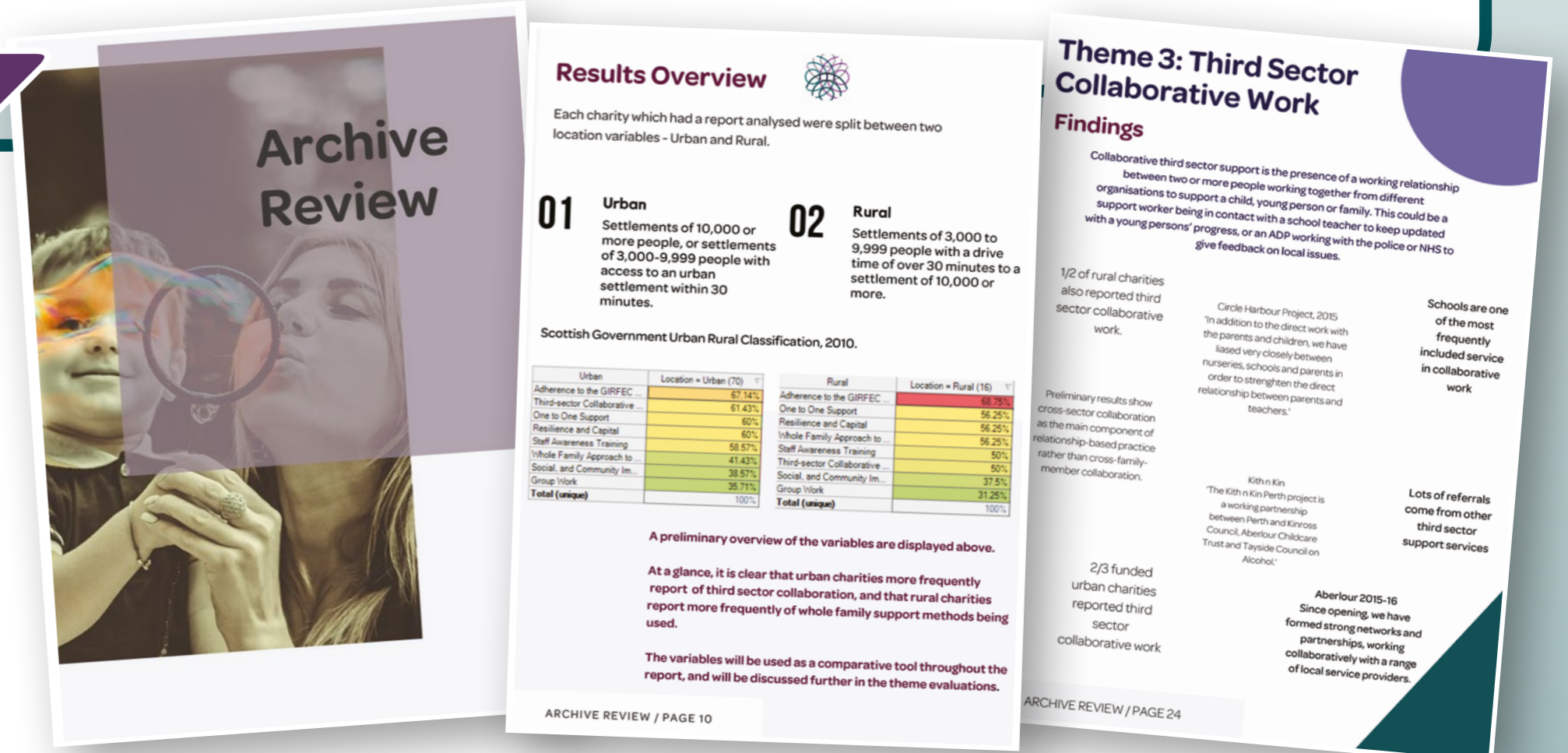
### What have we learned?

The archive review found that most charities report working collaboratively with different services, rather than working collaboratively with multiple family members. This suggests a lack of high-quality relationship-based practice being provided to the family as a unit.

A further result was that directives that were mentioned in policy reports (such as those featured in the landscape e.g. GIRFEC) were more frequently mentioned than those found in academic literature or elsewhere. This suggests that charities are likely to follow recommendations given in policy. This leads us to believe that an increased focus on providing relationship-based support should be prioritised and reflected in national and local strategies as these directly influence support provision.

### Preliminary findings

- Over 90% of one to one support PDI funded between 2014-18 was with children and young people. As we expected from our finding criteria, **this works with young people as they feel respected and can have confidential conversations with adults who are able to support them emotionally and physically be there to listen to them.**



- When asked if, as a practitioner, there are ways to make the relationship skills developed in these sessions transferable into adulthood with others, many responded that **being consistently open with the young person and building on their own strengths is key.** Promoting reflection on the relationship skills built is not encouraging a reliance on the worker but is drawing out strengths from the person being supported.
- Most practitioners have said they found the most important lessons they have learned about providing support is

through the relationships they have with those receiving support, and through the relationships built with their colleagues. It is said to be essential that everyone working together in an organisation is honest, open and respecting each other.

- Many of the skills that were discussed as being inherent to the role – empathy, compassion, respect and commitment – were described as 'incapable of being taught' – **you've got to have them there in the first place.** These skills can be honed through nurturing and compassionate leadership and organisational cultures.

### What's next?

The findings are important, but being safe, respected and compassionate isn't a surprising thing to be heard as integral to providing good relationship-based practice.

If these ideals have been present in support previously, the challenging aspect of this project is that some of the things we urgently need to address, are things we have known for years. The focus group purpose is then, how do we make these principles present in the support we provide?

### Next Up: Focus Groups

Taking what is learned from the interviews, the final stage of the project will host focus groups throughout October and November with the aim of forming a guided set of principles for relationship-based support for children and families affected by alcohol and drugs in Scotland.

### Currently the questions we are asking regard:

1. Relationship between practice & policy
2. Third sector relationships with statutory work
3. Relationships with young people and families
4. Learning through building relationships

