

# Impact Evaluation of Bide Oot

## Final Report, November 2024



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## Executive Summary

### Introduction

The Bide Oot programme, launched by Children 1st in 2020, provides outdoor wellbeing support for families in partnership with the Ardroy Outdoor Education Centre. It aims to support children, parents and carers who face significant challenges to achieve the following outcomes:

- Families develop the connections and relationships to sustain peer support and mentoring.
- Families are more active in their local community through strong connections and networks.
- Families are healthier and lead more active lives.

This report presents the findings of an external evaluation funded by the STV Children's Appeal.

### Supporting families to get involved in Bide Oot

A total of 135 families took part in Bide Oot between 2020 and 2024. The programme has three core elements: planning sessions (Afore), a residential weekend (Awa), and ongoing community events (Efter). Different aspects of delivery support participation in Bide Oot.



**Afore**



**Awa**



**Efter**

Children First's credibility and reach with children, parents and carers across Scotland are vital for engaging and identifying families who may benefit from outdoor wellbeing opportunities. Relationship-based practice by staff helps to encourage and support families to get involved, and a flexible approach helps those who struggle in groups or with specific tasks to take part, stay engaged and thrive.

### Families develop connections and relationships.

Bide Oot helps families to develop meaningful connections and relationships. This has a particularly significant impact on those with experience of relationship breakdowns, isolation, fear, stress, and stigma.

Parents and carers value the friendships they make through Bide Oot. These provide support and encouragement, and children form lasting friendships. The thoughtful design of the Awa experience enables families to quickly develop meaningful, enduring connections with others and strengthen family bonds. The shared exciting experiences and beautiful surroundings play a pivotal role in deepening these connections.

Ongoing Efter events and communication help families maintain connections and continue to support each other after the residential weekend. This enduring engagement reinforces the programme's positive impact. Families told us that Bide Oot was unlike other forms of support they have accessed; many had engaged with other services before. The relationships they formed with peers were a core part of the difference.

### **Strengthening Local Community Connections**

Bide Oot has connected families with community resources and networks by helping them feel less isolated, providing information, and supporting them to overcome fears about joining groups and activities locally. Bide Oot allowed families to re-engage in networks, providing them with the skills and confidence needed to try new hobbies or make new friends. Examples include engaging with new groups, making friends, taking new opportunities, feeling worthy of good relationships, defining boundaries, setting goals, forming new attitudes about community involvement and children joining in more at school.

### **Healthier and More Active Lives**

Many families involved in Bide Oot said they wanted to improve their health and wellbeing. The focus varied by individual and family. Some parents described poor mental health and living with complex, long-term conditions. Some were recovering from addictions. Many experienced exacerbating factors, such as stress and poverty. Others described worries about their children's mental health; some children had been diagnosed with anxiety or depression or were waiting for assessment.

We found that involvement in Bide Oot positively impacts families' health and activity levels. Examples include new routines, earlier bedtimes and less screen time. Families described exposure to and enjoyment of different types of food and drink, as well as increased physical activity, leading to improved fitness and wellbeing.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

The evaluation findings align with existing research on the importance of strong family relationships for wellbeing. Bide Oot has successfully achieved its intended outcomes, supporting families in developing connections, becoming more active in their communities, and leading healthier lives.

- **Recommendation One:** Children First should seek additional funding to extend the life of the Bide Oot programme
- **Recommendation Two:** Raise awareness of the evaluation findings and encourage funders, policymakers, and advocacy organisations to focus on the value of whole-family wellbeing approaches and whole-family outdoor experiences. The role of Bide Oot in enabling children to access their rights to education, be healthy, rest, relax and play through engagement in nature should be emphasised in calls for policy development to enhance access to the outdoors.
- **Recommendation Three:** Revisit the programme logic model and outcomes, with an emphasis on recognising the immediate positive impacts for individuals and families. These are connections, relationships, friendships, confidence, self-belief, and skills; the building blocks of the longer changes brought about through Bide Oot.
- **Recommendation Four:** Involve families in revisiting the programme logic model and outcomes activity and support them in contributing to future programme developments and planning.
- **Recommendation Five:** Consider ways to raise awareness of Bide Oot and broaden the referral routes into the programme.
- **Recommendation Six:** To apply the learning from this evaluation in the future development of Bide Oot. For example:
  - Consider offering some Bide Oot activities just for parents and carers.
  - Create structured resource packs on local outdoor community activities.
  - Create resource packs for the Awa weekend at Ardroy house.
- **Recommendation Seven:** Consolidated internal data capture to enable further analysis. This could include structured debrief sessions across all teams involved.
- **Recommendation Eight:** Local hub staff who have attended a residential can enhance their work with families because of the trust and knowledge developed over the weekend. We recommend a focus on detailed handovers and supporting staff to attend residential.

# 1. Evaluation and Bide Oot activity in years 1 - 3

## Introduction to the programme, methodology and report structure

### Introduction

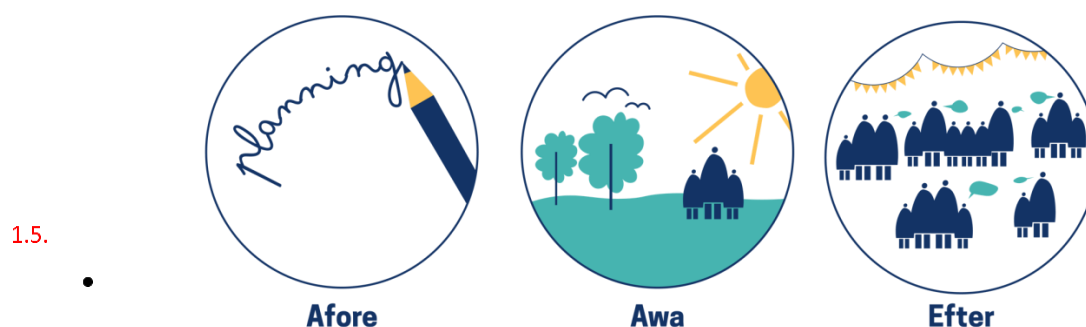
1.1. As Scotland's national children's charity, Children First stands up for children, keeps them safe and supports them to recover from trauma and abuse through their national and local services.

1.2. In 2020 Children First launched Bide Oot, a pilot programme of outdoor wellbeing support for families, delivered in partnership with the Ardroy Outdoor Education Centre. Findings from an internal evaluation of the pilot were positive, leading STV Children's Appeal to grant funding for three years of delivery and an external evaluation.

1.3. This report presents the findings of the three-year evaluation by The Lines Between.

### Bide Oot

1.4. Bide Oot offers families an opportunity to take part in a structured programme of outdoor activities with other local families. It includes planning sessions (Afore), a residential weekend (Awa), and ongoing events in the community (Efter):



The Bide Oot programme is designed to achieve three outcomes:

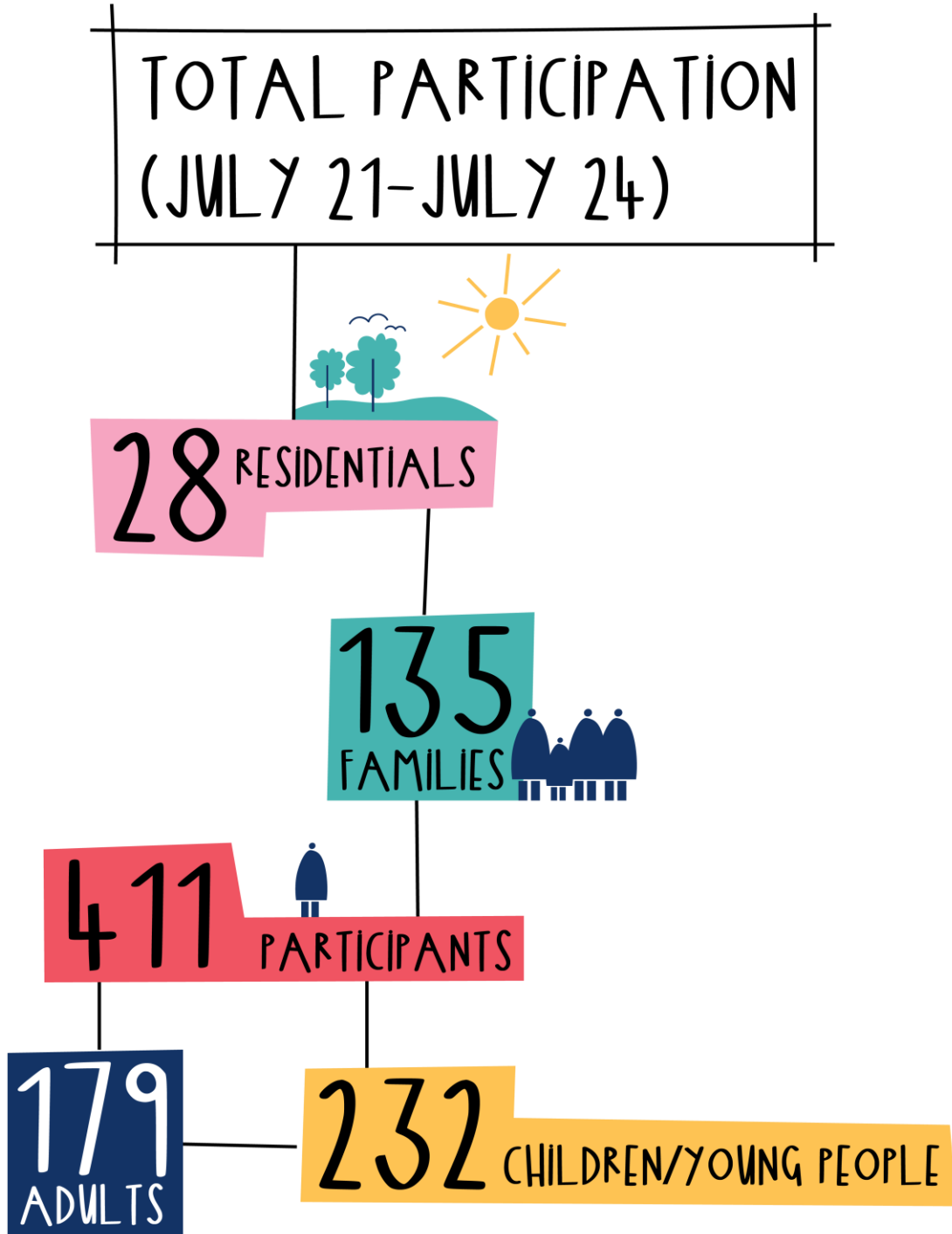
Outcome 1: Families develop the connections and relationships to sustain peer support and mentoring.

Outcome 2: Families are more active in their local community through strong connections and networks.

Outcome 3: Families are healthier and lead more active lives.

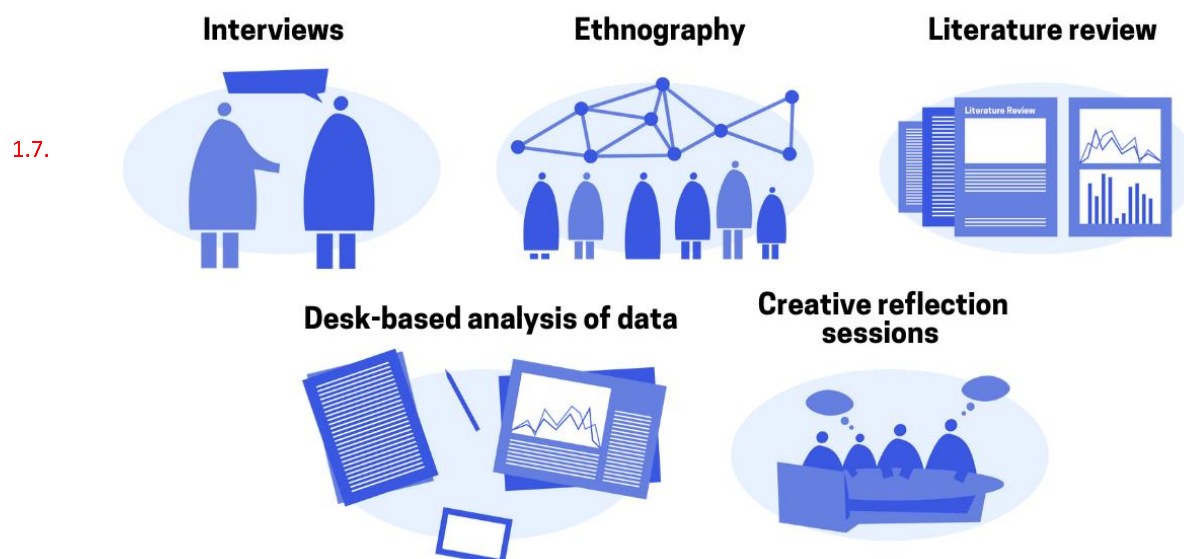
The total number of participants in Bide Oot is shown below:

1.6.



## Methodology

A mixed-method approach was developed for this evaluation, which included:



1.8. Evidence gathered from more than half of the families who took part in Bide Oot has been used to inform the findings presented in this evaluation. Fieldwork was carried out between February 2022 and June 2024 and involved several strands of activity:

- Firstly, to identify impacts and explore whether these were sustained, phased interviews were carried out with children, parents and carers from 33 families after their Awa trip, at 1 month, 3 month and 6 month post-residential.
  - Secondly, to widen our breadth of understanding about experiences and impacts, in the last year of the evaluation, researchers undertook creative and ethnographic fieldwork across all elements of Bide Oot delivery and engaged with children, parents and carers from another 30 families in this process.
  - Further evidence from a wider sample of families was gathered through observation at events and a review of notes and messages shared by families during Bide Oot activities and on the Bide Oot Facebook page.
  - Finally, to explore observed impacts and understand the delivery model, a total of 24 staff from Bide Oot (3), Ardroy (6) and Children First local hub teams (16) were interviewed.
- 1.9.

Children First and The Lines Between would like to thank the families who took part in this evaluation. This work would not have been possible without your willingness to share your experiences and give your time to reflect on Bide Oot and the difference it has made to you and your family. Thank you.



## Report Structure

The report is divided into the following sections:

Chapter Two explains why families join Bide Oot, the challenges families face, and how staff support their engagement in the programme.

Chapter Three identifies the impact of relationships strengthened through Bide Oot.

1.10. Chapter Four identifies Bide Oot's impact on family activity in their communities.

- Chapter Five identifies Bide Oot's impact on healthy and active lives.

- Chapter Six discusses how the findings link to the wider evidence base.

- Chapter Seven presents our conclusions and recommendations.

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- This report includes

- Moments: snapshots of activity observed during ethnographic fieldwork.

1.11. Anonymised quotes from young people, parents and carers, and staff.

- Anonymised comments shared on the Bide Oot Facebook group.

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# 2. The Bide Oot model

## How Bide Oot engages with families

- 2.1. Bide Oot is designed to help families who face significant challenges. Each family is unique, with their own history and experiences. The types of adversity they face may relate to a past trauma or a current challenge, to varying degrees. Often, the challenges experienced by families intersect and experiences through the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the difficulties for some. In interviews with families and staff, we found a range of challenges faced by the families who took part in Bide Oot, spanning:



Poverty



Mental health issues



Neurodiversity



Estranged and struggling blended families



Recovery from addiction



Experiences of violence or sexual abuse



Experiences of the criminal justice system



Young carers



Families with disabilities



Children at risk of exclusion from school



Kinship carers



Child protection concerns



Overworked families who spend little time together



Families seeking asylum



Families experiencing isolation



Families at risk of separation

- 2.2. The Bide Oot team strives to build enough trust and understanding with families to secure their involvement in the programme, despite the complex challenges they face. Different elements of the programme work together to support family participation, as shown below:

**Local hub staff**, who have existing strong relationships with families, identify those they think have the most to gain from the residential weekend. They support families to attend planning sessions and introduce them to the Bide Oot Team. These local staff help the Bide Oot team to understand what the families have been through, and what support they need. Some attend residential with families, to provide encouragement and reassurance.

**The Bide Oot team**, drawn from staff in Children First and Ardroy, are specialists at group work, outdoor activities, and delivering intense family support. They manage the residential, attend to group dynamics, help families gel and participate, and work with other instructors at Ardroy to deliver activities. They also deliver outdoor activities in local communities after the residential, to help families stay connected and encourage them to make the most of local resources.

**Ardroy Instructors** are specialist outdoor educators, who help facilitate the outdoor experiences.

- 2.3. Children First's credibility and reach with children and parents across Scotland is vital. It helps engage and identify families who may benefit from the programme. When Bide Oot launched, Children First made efforts to raise awareness of the programme across the entire organisation to promote an understanding of the whole family work and support Bide Oot could offer.
- 2.4. Each Children First hub has opportunities to send four to seven families on a weekend trip per year. Families who are offered an opportunity to take part in Bide Oot often have existing connections with local hub staff. Their support worker, who will have already established a trusting relationship with the family, explains how Bide Oot could support them.
- 2.5. While parents were interested in what Bide Oot could offer, they told us that the idea of a weekend of activities with strangers was daunting. Some described fears about whether they or their children would cope. Parents of children with additional support needs often worried about the weekend; some were concerned due to negative experiences in their local community.



*"I'm very anti-social, really really anti-social, and because [X, son] is autistic, so for him meeting new people is a big thing too. Like, he's just sort of not knowing who is going to be there, and are they going to get on, and is he going to like it?" (parent/carer)*



*It's quite a small community and I think because of different situations in the past there is a good degree of notoriety or being recognised - like coming across like neighbours they don't have a great relationship with would really kind of put them off like attending anything in the community. (Local Hub Staff)*

### **Motivations for engagement with Bide Oot**

- 2.6. Each family is unique, but in talks with them, a golden thread emerged. They all loved their children and wanted something positive for them. This drove their involvement with Bide Oot.
- 2.7. Parent and carers expressed different motivations for engaging with Bide Oot, often linked to their specific circumstances. Most saw Bide Oot as a chance to share a positive experience and bring the family closer together. Some hoped it would help them or their children connect with others; some hoped it might improve relationships at home. Others, particularly those living in poverty, or those who have recently experienced a significant loss, such as bereavement, initially focused on the opportunity for respite. They saw Bide Oot as a way for their family to have a short holiday that they could not afford, or lacked the capacity to arrange.



*[We wanted to go for] a weekend of fun, [but also] meeting other kids as well, because I think sometimes [child] feels he's maybe sometimes a bit, you know, when he goes to school, obviously everyone's got mums and dads... Probably meeting other people as well, because obviously our social life is not sort of great, do you know what I mean? Apart from going to school and obviously going to the parks, but you know, social, like meeting like other people in the same kind of boat and you can actually relate to a lot of things." (Kinship carer)*

- 2.8. Local hub workers often told us they first saw Bide Oot as an opportunity for families to strengthen their relationships. Later in this report, we explain that many also found other positive impacts from families' involvement with Bide Oot. Some considered Bide Oot as a unique 'hook' for engagement. Others believed it could help families to make friends and tackle isolation. Others hoped it would help families to overcome difficulties, connect, and recover; particularly those who had experienced trauma, separation or conflict.

### **Effective Engagement - the Significance of Afore Sessions**

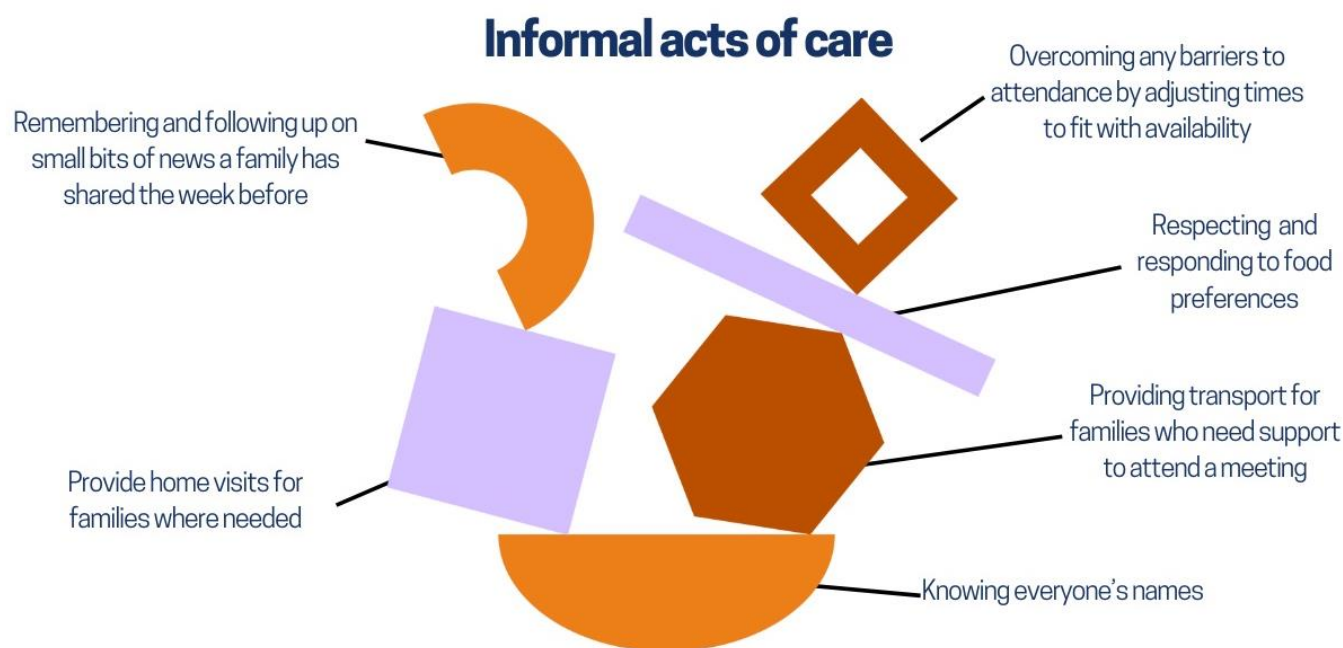
- 2.9. After securing initial interest in the Bide Oot programme, the next step is to ensure that families have positive experiences at the Afore Sessions before the residential. This is an opportunity for families to meet and bond. They begin to gel as a group, confirm their interest in involvement, and plan the trip. Success at this early stage of the programme is crucial. If families are uncomfortable at these events, they are likely to disengage.
- 2.10. The Bide Oot team make efforts in this early stage to reassure families that they will be supported and comfortable at the residential weekend. The principles of relationship-

based practice are evident; the team are friendly and welcoming, interested in and playful with the children. They strive to break down barriers and support everyone to get to know one another. Families who felt stigmatised or isolated told us that this stage mattered greatly to them and was a key reason for their continued engagement in Bide Oot.



*The first thing [local hub stuff] asked about the wean's schooling. And then yesterday [Bide Oot staff member] came up to me and says to me, "How was the wean's first couple of days?" Like, they don't need to ask, they don't need to remember any of that, but they did, they did. If it's a wean's birthday, they'll get them a wee cake and we'll do a happy birthday." (parent/carer)*

- 2.11. The team build trust through informal acts of care which continue throughout families' involvement with Bide Oot. They do this in various ways, as shown in the image below:
- 2.12. If needed, the Bide Oot team offer home visits. This offers a private space to get to know the family and provides an opportunity for them to ask questions and discuss their fears about the trip, or any specific adaptations or requirements that need to be considered.



- 2.13. At the sessions, the Bide Oot team use their group work and facilitation skills to create a relaxed environment. Food is provided. There are games and activities to help people get to know one another, share information, ease anxieties, and plan the trip. The weekend is described in detail, with photos. This helps families – particularly those with anxiety or different support needs – visualise how the weekend will go. There is a strong emphasis on giving families knowledge, choice and control. This covers core aspects such as food, sleeping arrangements and activities.
- 2.14. The format of each session is adapted to meet the mood, needs and dynamics of those in the group. As one staff member said, a core job is to 'read the room' and create a

positive atmosphere. Families can ask questions, voice doubts, and express preferences. They also meet all core members of the staff team they will spend the weekend with.

- 2.15. By the final Afore session, everything is in place for the journey to Ardroy. Families are usually more comfortable in the group and excited about the weekend.



*See when I first met [other parent], to be honest, I thought, 'nah, they're not my cup of tea'. Like I'm not going to get on with them, that they're not for me, definitely not. Actually I kind of thought that about all the mums. And so we had had a couple of meetings before we had went on the Bide Oot trip. And I just kind of kept my distance. And yet we got on that bus on the Friday morning and it was as if we were all old pals wi all our weans. Do you know what I mean?" (parent/carer)*

- 2.16. This chapter has described the role of the Afore sessions in creating the conditions for engagement and supporting families to begin building relationships with other families and staff. It sets out the challenges families may be facing, their motivations for involvement in Bide Oot, and what they hope their family will gain from the experience. Success in this stage encourages families to attend the residential and enjoy the experiences at Ardroy House and Efter Sessions. The findings in the following chapters highlight the impact of all events from the Awa weekend onwards.

# 3. Connections and relationships

How parents/carers, children and staff build connections through Bide Oot

- 3.1. This chapter presents the findings against Outcome One: how families develop connections and relationships to sustain peer support and mentoring.
- 3.2. Each family is different, and each Bide Oot trip brings together families with diverse needs and challenges. Families often do not know each other despite living in relative proximity, but some have met before, for example, through local support groups. While each family's circumstances are unique, the challenges they experience can have similar negative impacts, including contribution to relationship breakdowns, isolation, fear, stress, stigmatisation or withdrawal.
- 3.3. These challenges can cause parents, carers and children to feel isolated and unsafe with others. For example, one parent, a domestic violence survivor, described anxiety and hypervigilance. This prevented her from spending time out of the house with the children. A family seeking asylum mentioned the loneliness of living in a new country without friends and family. A mother described her anger, frustration and fear when meeting new people, recounting a stranger who had mocked her son who has additional support needs and verbal tics.
- 3.4. Evidence gathered through the evaluation demonstrates that Bide Oot is achieving the intended outcome of supporting families to develop the connections and relationships to sustain peer support and mentoring. Many parents – some with significant social anxiety, explained that they had forged close friendships with others they met through the residential.

## Peer support

- 3.5. Many parents and carers stressed how much they valued the friendships they made with Bide Oot, noting that the other adults they had bonded with were not judgemental, and understood their circumstances. Often the parents and carers who made friends through Bide Oot said they enjoyed time with other adults who shared something in common with them. For example, some kinship carers described a sense of isolation in the community because their family's circumstances were different from many others.
- 3.6. Parents and carers said these relationships were a source of friendship, encouragement, support and advice. Some stayed in touch with these new friends through the Efer

Sessions in their communities. Others arranged for their families to stay connected on social media, by phone and WhatsApp.

Big thank you for an amazing few days of adventures and making memories and great friends

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Seen by 34

We as a group bonded more if that was at all possible, our young people made new forever friends as a family new memories made to children's first thank you for making this happen, we are very lucky to have you, to bid oot team thank you so much for this fabulous weekend we had and all your hard work, a thank you to all the staff at Ardroy lochgoil , and a special thank you to Frances and kitchen staff nothing was too much for you to make sure our bellies were full and catered for, xx

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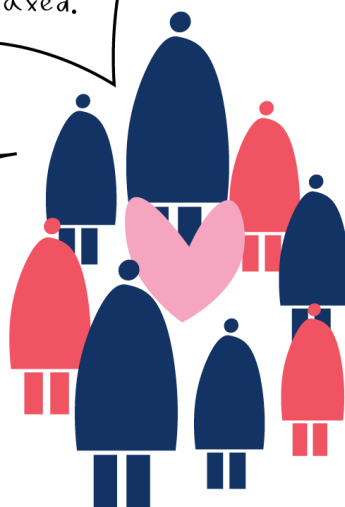
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- 3.7. Children who participated in the evaluation described the friends they or their siblings had made. Through ethnographic fieldwork, we saw first-hand that these friendships endured; children and young people connected and made lasting friendships. Parents told us these friendships were a strong motivation for further engagement in the programme after the residential weekend.

"I was sceptical about bringing her because she was so young - but all the kids all supported each other - everyone was looking out for each other - I relaxed!"

"Were you not going to give up? A bit of cheering kept you going." (parent to their child)

"Nice because everybody was working together" (young person kayaking)

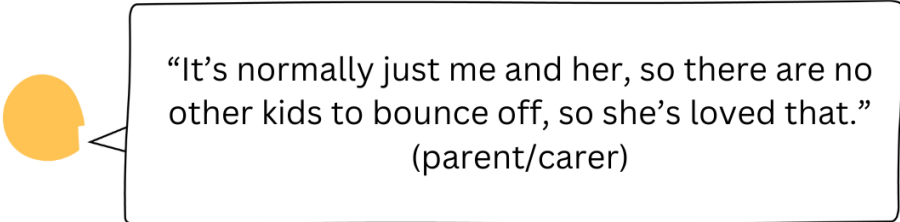


BEING PART OF A  
SUPPORTIVE/FUN  
GROUP





“I made my best friend.” (young person)

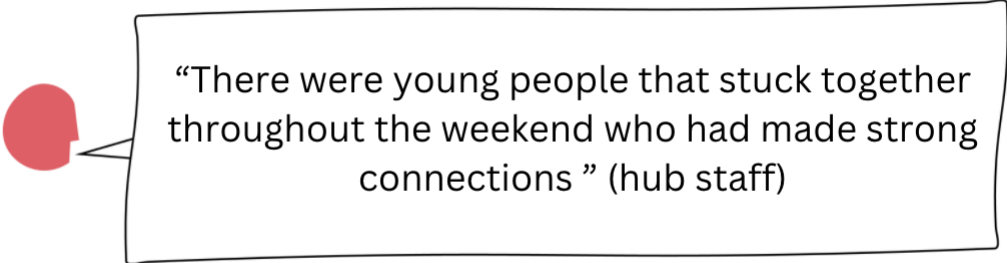


“It’s normally just me and her, so there are no other kids to bounce off, so she’s loved that.”  
(parent/carer)

- 3.8. One kinship carer saw another struggle with their child at one point during the trip. She described recognising the sense of isolation and loss of control. She went to the other carer to let her know she had “been there... felt that before” and said: “Don’t worry... it’s not your fault.”

#### Transformations through the Awa Experience, at Ardroy House

- 3.9. We explored how Bide Oot enables families to quickly form meaningful, enduring connections with others. While the Afore Sessions help families feel comfortable enough to attend the trip, most families said their friendships were built on the bus journey to Ardroy and the first night at the residential. The shared nervousness and excitement helped the adults and children to bond. From there on, families identified points where they got to know, understand and trust one another. Families described how they built and strengthened relationships through deep, honest conversations or shared moments.
- 3.10. During our visits to the residential, we observed core delivery features that help create moments and spaces for people to come together. There is a dynamic mix of changes which move people through different scenarios, with groups of different sizes and make-ups. This model recognises that a flexible relationship-building approach is required as people react differently, depending on the environment. Some interventions work for some people, at various points in time.




“There were young people that stuck together throughout the weekend who had made strong connections ” (hub staff)

- 3.11. The example below presents the first day of activity on a residential weekend, and a similar pattern was evident on days two and three, with a mix of private spaces for

families, whole group activities, small group activities and opportunities for mixed groups to form:


- TRAVEL TOGETHER ON THE BUS TO ARDROY  
(WHOLE GROUP ACTIVITY)
- ON ARRIVAL, SHOWN AROUND AND FAMILIES SPEND TIME UNPACKING IN THEIR ROOMS  
(FAMILY LED ACTIVITY; A PRIVATE SPACE)
- SNACKS AND REFRESHMENTS, AND TIME PLAN THE EVENING (WHOLE GROUP ACTIVITY)
- KIT FITTING AND RECEIPT OF OUTDOOR GEAR FOR THE WEEKEND  
(LONG LINE, SMALL GROUPS HAVE OPPORTUNITIES TO FORM)
- UNDERGROUND MAZE  
(PLUS OPTIONS FOR NON-PARTICIPATION, SMALL GROUPS HAVE OPPORTUNITIES TO FORM)
- ACCESSIBLE GAMES (WHOLE GROUP ACTIVITY)
- PRE-BED HOT CHOCOLATE AND BRIEFING ON NEXT DAY'S ACTIVITIES, AND BOARD GAMES WITH THE CHILDREN  
(WHOLE GROUP PRESENT BUT OPPORTUNITIES FOR SMALL GROUPS TO FORM).

- 3.12. The Bide Oot team constantly adapt and create alternative ways to participate in activities, to help those who struggle in groups or with specific tasks. This offers choice on how and with whom families engage in activities.

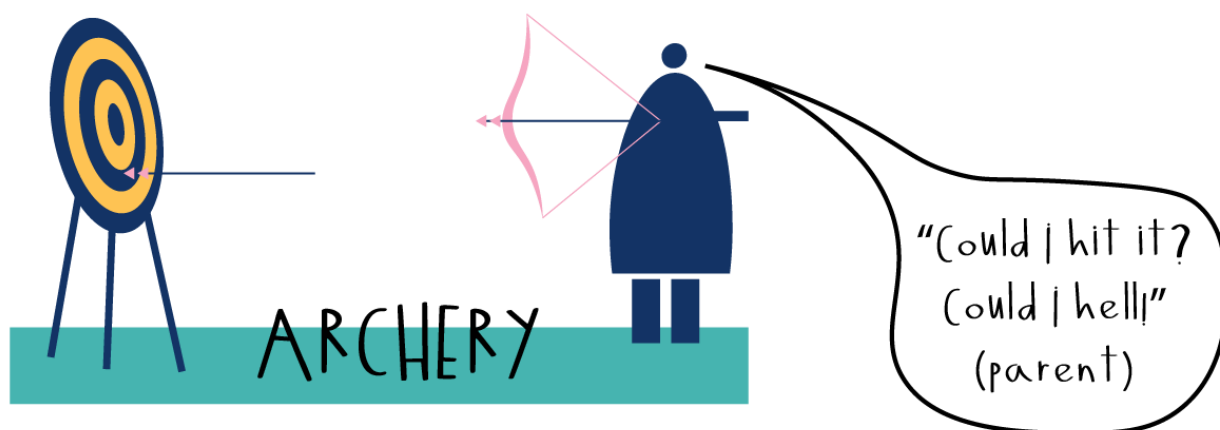


“We were strangers and we bonded really well” (family member)

“We all became one big family” (family member)



- 3.13. Many bonding moments throughout the weekend stem from activities which cause adrenaline, new experiences, activities in beautiful surroundings, and new sensations. These were often described as pivotal moments for families and sparked happy memories that families returned to at happy and challenging times. Memories usually centred on points at which new friendships were made, or situations in which they felt supported and valued by others.
- 3.14. The Bide Oot programme aims to strengthen families' ties to these moments. The team take pictures. They invite the group to share how they are feeling at special moments, and there are regular reflection sections throughout the weekend.



### Family bonding

- 3.15. Another common theme in conversations with children, parents and carers was the bonding within the family unit that happened at Ardroy. They described different challenges at home and said Bide Oot gave them time without distractions, stress and responsibilities. They enjoyed each other's company away from the common routines and dynamics.

One kinship carer noted that their husband worked weekends and having him around for a whole weekend was very good for their relationship with their grandson. She said that it was "nice for them to feel like a family for that weekend".

"Usually me and my mum don't talk a lot, but when we were at Bide Oot we talked all the time" (young person)

"Since going away, they are just loving one another... their relationship is completely changed. They're still high on life after climbing that wall." (hub staff)



## **A family affair** **First night at Ardroy**

Ardroy is humming with conversation and laughter as the group of five families settle into sofas and beanbags. A tray of hot chocolates, tea and biscuits appear. It's the first night of the residential weekend and we're winding down to bedtime, after a busy day.

There was the bus journey to Ardroy, exploring the house and grounds, setting up bedrooms, our first meal, kit collection, play and games in the underground maze, then an obstacle course with blindfolds. Finally, some paddling and a stone skimming session along the shoreline, until the light began to fade.

Parents are tired and more relaxed now – the kids still straining with energy. A dad invites a boy from another family to play Connect 4, three girls show off their handstands, a hub staff member is chatting quietly to a parent about their recent move – she helped the family to access new, better housing to support the growing family. Two younger children are colouring in. Other parents and carers are talking across the room to each other, laughing about the mayhem of the maze.

The Bide Oot team introduce a quick reflection moment to share how we feel on this first night. Post its go up on the wall. The children shout first: "Happy", "Brilliant", "Excited!". Then the Ardroy team explain the plans for the next day, with contingencies for the weather: a woodland walk, campfire and bushcraft activities, and a canoe trip where we might get to see a family of seals spotted in the loch that afternoon.

Six weeks ago, on the first Afore session, we were self-conscious strangers. There were smiles and mis-remembered names. People apologised if their children wouldn't sit still, interrupted by text messages and phone calls, undecided if Bide Oot was for them. Now it's a family gathering; messier, noisier, relaxed and together.



"I think that when we went to Ardroy, [my carer] realised that I'm not just an extremely moody teenager, but that all teenagers are like that" (young person)

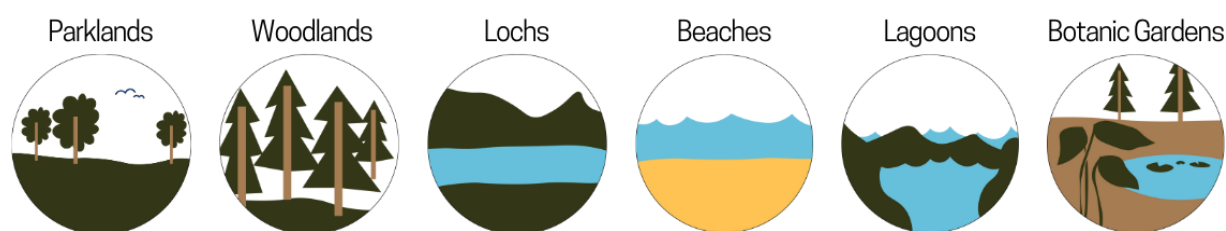
During mealtimes the family always sat together which enabled some quality connecting time.” (hub staff)

“I think it’s made me realise that we need to bring that family time back in.” (parent/carer)

- 3.16. Another parent described the benefit of quality time with parents for siblings of children with complex support needs. Bide Oot enabled her children to spend rare one-on-one time with their parents.

“It’s really, really benefited the whole family.” (parent/carer)

- 3.17. Efter sessions usually begin a fortnight after the residential weekend. These take place in a range of different locations outdoors and in the communities. Locations include:



### Sustained Connections through the Efter Sessions

- 3.18. After the trip, families receive mementoes that help sustain their connection with their Awa experience. These include a group portrait, family portrait, and sometimes pebbles from a beach, for example. At the first Efter session, the group reunites, reviews photos and reflect on their shared experiences. Often, there are shared art activities, such as painting stones or creating pictures using leaves, twigs, and other found objects. This activity helps families describe memories and aims to help them strengthen their bonds and sustain connections.



- 3.19. The ongoing Efter events and a Facebook group, open to all families, are key parts of the Bide Oot Efter model. This part of the programme has grown as family interest in events and activities has expanded. A mix of small group local activities and larger events, such as the annual Ceilidh and Big Day Out, is offered. Parents reflected that these social opportunities made it easy for friendships to endure.

## Human Nature



It's time to slow down – to look closely – to take an interest in what's around – and to do it together. Bide Oot Efter sessions in woodlands, country parks and botanic gardens put families into new places and encourage them to reflect on their shared experiences.

The instruction might be to find eye-catching items – or there could be a scavenger hunt 'shopping list' to gather - particular shapes, colours or textures – there's a shared focus in the search. Some children sprint off in search of the treasures which might be up ahead, and then charge back clutching their finds. Others walk slowly, more methodically, looking down with new interest at what would otherwise have been ignored underfoot. Carrier bags fill with sticks, leaves, cones – each one chosen for a reason. Children team up for the challenge, or families fill

their bag together – companions in creating a collection of the moment and the place.

After all the gathering up, there is a gathering together. Pictures and words emerge as leaves, twigs, moss and bark are arranged. The occasional insect, accidentally picked up, escapes to liven up the craft table.

There's a low buzzing hush - everyone is absorbed with pictures, pens and glue pots. Then the artists all have a chance to explain their work and what it represents – there's appreciation and warm applause. It's clear that each person's creation and memory is understood. The treasures have been transformed into memorable moments with Bide Oot – a welly lost in the mud – two grans side by side: "that's the two of us in the bus talking". Others have created canoes, Jacob's Ladder or base it on a word that Bide Oot represents for them; FUN.

- 3.20. Children First support staff provided insight into how different groups have maintained contact. For example, staff members in different locations around Scotland reported that:

Parents/carers had created their own “wee social media group to keep in contact”.

Parents/carers are connecting “quite well and quickly... they were quite close and now have a WhatsApp group”.

One parent/carer “is just getting stuck in with all the community work. It’s amazing to see”.

- 
- Another was looking forward to the community activity because they will “not go out with the bairns myself, I get too anxious”.
- 

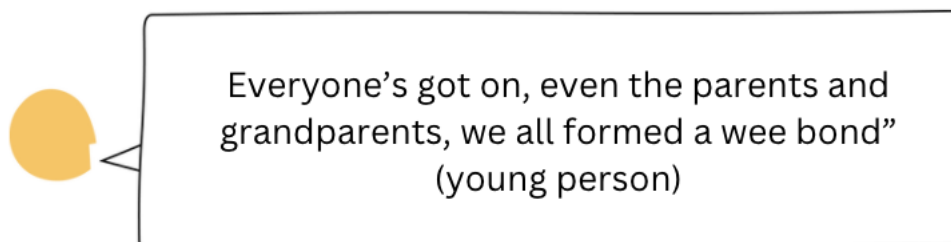
- 3.21. Comments in the Facebook group also provide evidence of friendships and lasting connections.

Just wanted to take the time to thank [Children 1st - Bide Oot](#) team for the past few months spent with the group & all the fun activities the kids and I have taken part in. The group has become a big part of our lives, the kids and I have made new friends and have loved being part of it all. We’ve learned to come out of our comfort zones and take part in things we would never usually have the chance to do and for that, we will be forever grateful! Looking forward to the water sports day on Sunday with everyone, meeting new and existing members of the bide oot team and having another fun filled day. Thank you once again for this opportunity to be part of the bide oot experience 🌈 x

❤️👍 8

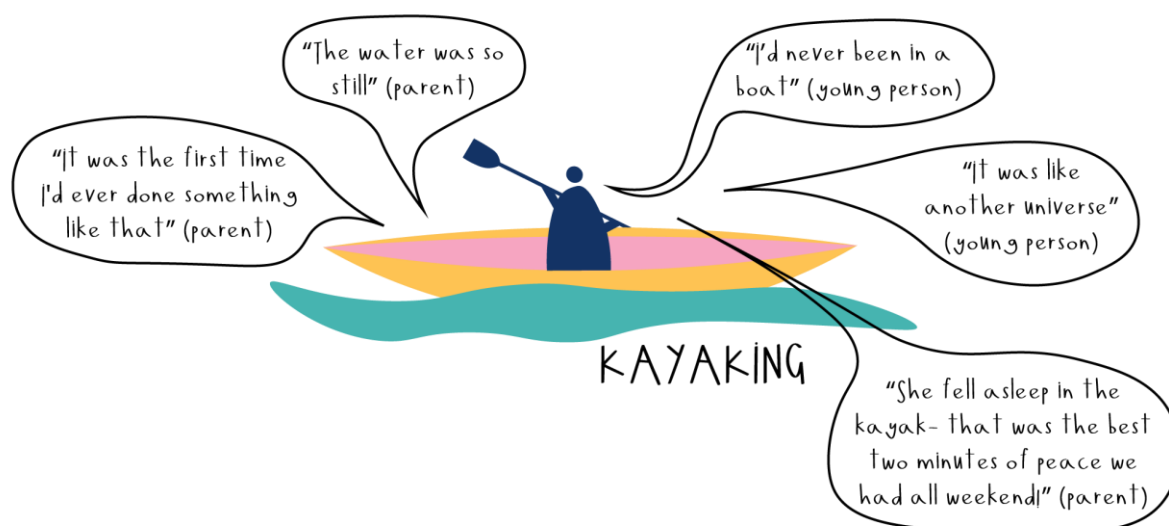
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- 3.22. Some parents who had moved on from their local Children First hub support work, told us the Efter sessions reinforced the message that their connection with Children First could continue if they ever needed it. They said they and their children felt welcome. The open invitation to Efter sessions provided access to help and support if required; a Bide Oot community and support network has been established.

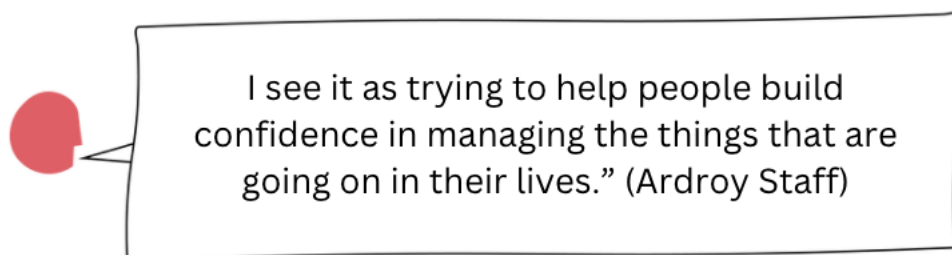


### Staff perspectives on relationships

- 3.23.** Staff from Children First and Bide Oot provide a unique view on their experiences with families who have been supported by Bide Oot. They told us that parents are much more likely to seek other support after their involvement with Bide Oot. Hub staff who had spent the weekend with families on the Awa trip were able to offer enhanced support due to the trust and deeper knowledge generated by the shared experience at the residential. Some families described feeling more connected with staff, which stemmed from sharing new experiences.
- 3.24.** Staff explained that the extended time together exposed them to family dynamics, routines and challenges. For example, a local hub worker learned of a parent's confusion about accessing financial support through lengthy conversations at the residential weekend. After the trip, they worked with the family to help them secure the additional benefits and grants they were entitled to. Another, who was supporting a young person at risk of exclusion from school, advocated for them when they return from the Awa trip. They changed the school's perception of the pupil's capacity to learn, citing examples of the pupil's positive participation at the Bide Oot residential weekend.



- 3.25.** The outdoor instructors at the Ardroy residential weekend play a crucial part in the Bide Oot experience. They create an atmosphere that helps families connect and feel safe, which encourages them to step outside their comfort zones. The instructors know families can find the new environment and activities challenging, and use a family-centred model of support. One described this as: "giving them time, and activities, and little things where they can just spend time together."







## Connections in a Canoe

### A moment captured on Loch Goil

In our canoes roped together for stability, we play games and examine buoys to find the treasures in the loch; starfish, molluscs, and crabs. Everyone is excited to try something new and to get out on the water on such a beautiful day.

One child, Suzy, is energetic, excited and seeks independence. She moves seats to sit on her own, but her grandmother wants to see her at all times. At each splash, her grandmother quickly turns to make sure Suzy is sitting down, not leaning over too far, is safe in the canoe. For Suzy, the control is too much, she feels frustrated.

An Ardroy instructor steps in. They sit beside Suzy and start teaching her canoeing skills: how to paddle and control the boat. They talk with Suzy and she laughs. The instructor's confidence and rapport with the children on the boat helps everyone relax.

Suzy begins to develop her canoeing skills, she concentrates on the movement through the water, choosing new places in the loch to explore. This gives Suzy's grandmother some freedom from worry; she begins to enjoy the calm water, the beautiful hills, and time with her peers.

Another attendee described a similar experience in a woodland walk: "A couple of times [my grandson] was... hitting me and ... standing on my feet, but one of the instructors did pull him over to the side and speak to him... he said to him that it wasn't nice to do that to your granny. And he actually did listen, and he actually walked [the rest of the way with the instructor] which I thought, well, that was good. 'Cause he can be, when he starts his hitting, he can be a bit of a handful."

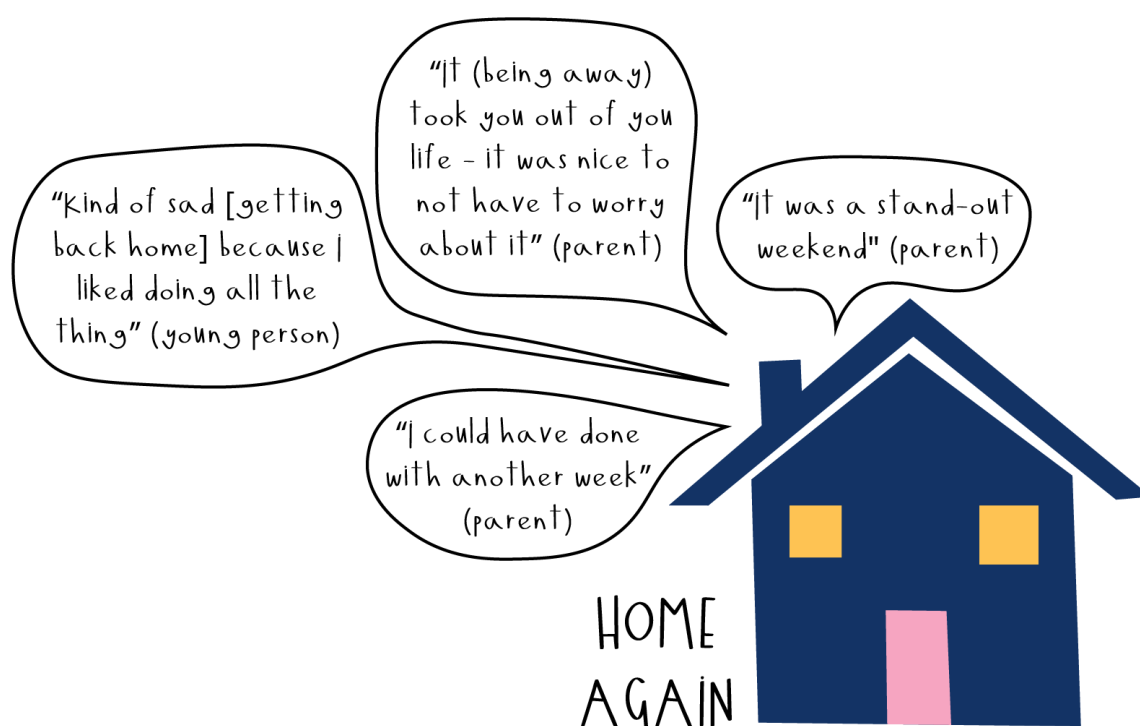
In each space there is shared experience, new learning, exploration, sights to enjoy, and knowledgeable staff to guide and support.

- 3.26. As family members support each other in activities they see each other in a new light. Staff members described seeing changes as families work through tasks and activities.

"Just seeing the confidence and the happiness and the way folks talk about it afterwards - it's more of a team thing rather than an individual thing." (Ardroy Staff)



- 3.27. Families told us that Bide Oot was unlike other forms of support they have accessed; many had engaged with other services before. The relationships they formed with peers were a core part of the difference. They learned from the experiences and from other families, the Ardroy and Bide Oot staff, and said taking part in the activities reinforced positive perceptions of each other within their own family units.
- 3.28. Five different families had two Ardroy House visits across the life of Bide Oot. In each case, this was offered because the staff saw that a return trip could help the family at a time of need. This knowledge of families' changing circumstances stemmed from the trust and relationships built between staff and families, and families' sustained engagement with Bide Oot. For example, one family was grieving after a bereavement; the staff knew how much they had enjoyed their time together at Ardroy. They thought a positive experience for the adults and children could benefit all, give them something to look forward to, and help them to process the loss and change.



### Chapter Summary

- 3.29. While parents and carers spoke about the anxiety of meeting people they thought they might not relate to, this was overcome by time spent together. They described accepting differences and finding common ground. It was a relief to be among people with shared experiences, despite their different daily lives. Staff helped parents/carers overcome hesitancy and fears.
- 3.30. The evaluation findings about family relationships align with existing research, which emphasises the importance of strong family relationships for children's and parents' wellbeing. Several studies demonstrate the link between strong relationships and interactions within families and positive outcomes for parental wellbeing and children's cognitive, emotional and social development (see Chapter Six).

## Examples for Outcome 1: Families develop the connections and relationships to sustain peer support and mentoring



“I enjoyed meeting new people”. (young person)

“Meeting new people has been like the best part because it's sort of like people that have an understanding for what you've kind of been through and stuff as well which is good because some people don't really understand it and haven't been through it... I speak to one of the ladies [met at Bide Oot]; I speak to her most days”. (parent/carer)

“It's given me a friendship group. If I didn't go I wouldn't have met the other families and would still just feel a bit lonely and isolated. It's good for me to have that interaction with other adults rather than just being around the kids all the time, it just gives you that wee bit of relaxing time.” (parent/carer)

“I made friends”. (young person)

“I'm not sure how it happened yet but we all got to know each other so I think that was good and then in the bus there as well we were all just chatting away and then obviously you end up opening up to each another and speaking about what youse have been through and you just get that understanding with each and what the kids are going through. I just think they were all lovely families and I love the fact that we've all had that bond where we're planning doing things with each other and stuff like that as well outwith the programme.” (parent/carer)

“I think that's a big thing for the children as well because they didn't feel any different because they're with families like themselves. And I think it enables them to just totally relax... being out with other families like yourself, I think allows them to just be completely themselves. You don't have to pretend about anything because other people are there with their grandparents and I do think it helps you to feel less isolated, definitely.” (parent/carer)

“The evening time, is really just as important as the activities through the day, when you're sitting relaxing, kids are playing games, it's giving us time to speak with the adults, and so the adults can talk about how they see a difference with their kids, and we can interact with that, and that reflection is really quite powerful as well, just to give them that opportunity to talk about how they can see the difference.” (Local Hub Worker).

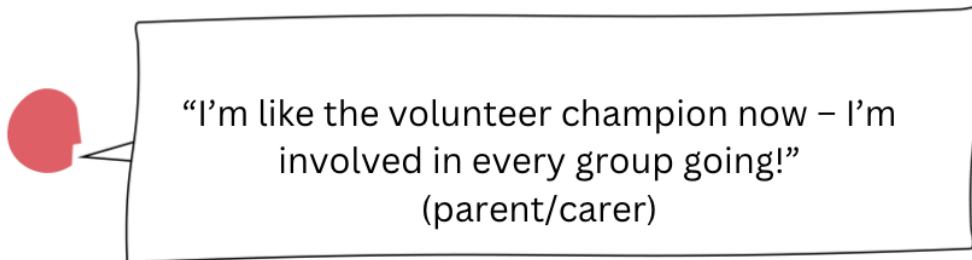
“I think I made, you know, definitely friends with these ladies and they were all really nice, do you know what I mean? And I would be keeping in touch with them. It was a good weekend, 'cause I was actually a bit nervous before I actually went, I was like, oh God, meeting new people, what do you say? But they were really nice, the kids and the adults, they all just seemed to get on great.” (parent/carer)

“I've seen family units where the bond gets a bit stronger - the children's relationships with their parents - over the course of the weekend...how they interact with each other - just a bit more relaxed around each other ...at the end of the weekend they're very comfortable in the surroundings compared to where they were at the beginning.” (staff member)

# 4. Strengthening local community connections

## How Bide Oot helps families create strong connections and networks

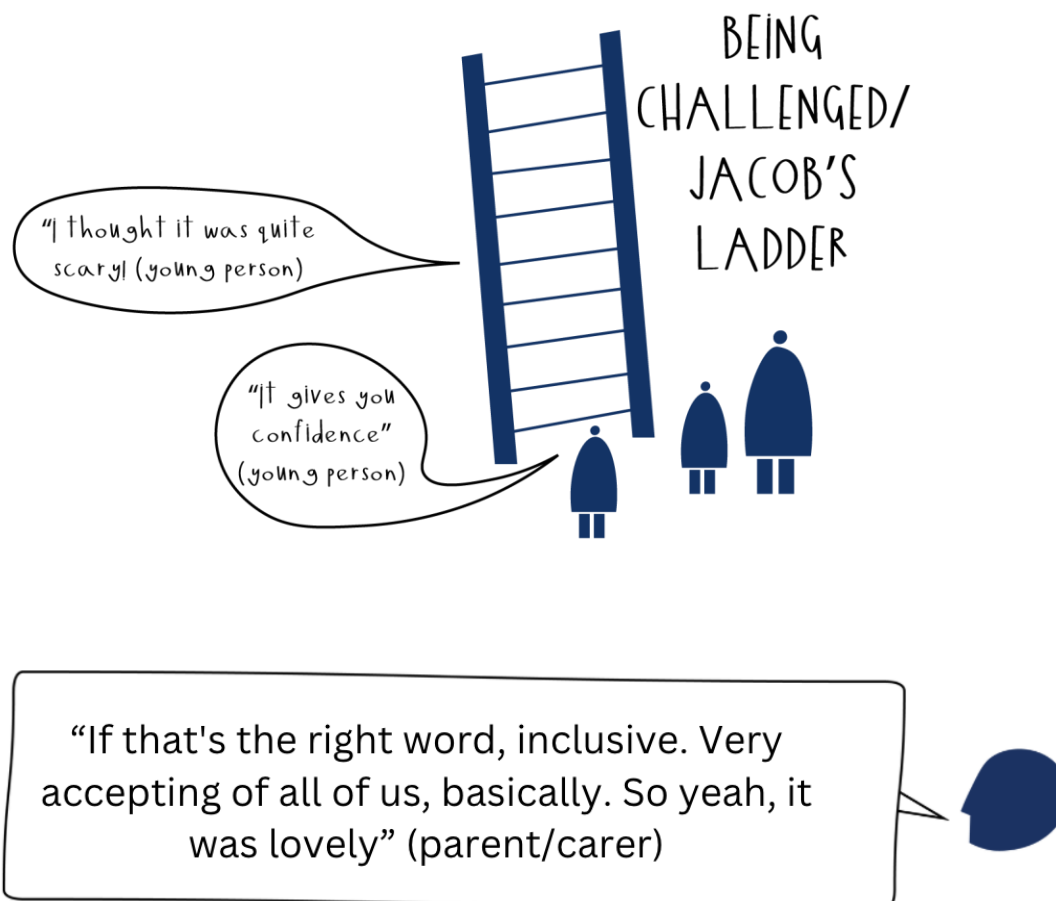
- 4.1. This chapter examines Bide Oot’s achievements against Outcome Two: families build strong connections and networks in their local communities.
- 4.2. The evidence gathered in the evaluation demonstrates that Bide Oot is supporting families to become more active in their local community through strong connections and networks. Examples include engaging with new groups, making friends, taking new opportunities, feeling worthy of good relationships, defining boundaries, setting goals, and forming new attitudes about community engagement.



- 4.3. Bide Oot enables families to form lasting local connections and networks that endure beyond their involvement in the programme. An enabling approach was evident in the way the Bide Oot team engage with families. They make suggestions, and offer opportunities, but nothing is forced. Dignity and respect are key to engagement and these help family members to come away from the weekend with an empowered sense of ownership and success.

### Stepping out of the comfort zone

- 4.4. Parents often reflected that the weekend with people who didn't judge them, and who they shared positive experiences with, made them appreciate that there were other opportunities they had perhaps declined because of fear or insecurities. They said stepping out of their comfort zone made them want to do it again. Seeing their children thrive in a new social situation boosted their confidence that they could do that at home, too. Families highly praised staff support during the activities.



- 4.5. Some linked this to willingness to engage in the community to a sense of pride and exhilaration they experienced because of the new activities they had tried with Bide Oot. Now, they had things to discuss with others at home or school, and new ideas to try. For some, particularly those living in poverty, accessing a new type of experience was important. Children with a comparative lack of holidays and activities, could talk with pride about an exciting weekend they had shared with their family, or other outdoor activities they had taken part in through Efer sessions.
- 4.6. Many described a new sense of energy when they returned from the residential weekend. They looked forward to Efer sessions; some mentioned a desire to arrange additional activities for themselves or their families, activities such as surfing, skydiving and horse riding.
- 4.7. Some said they reflected on stigma and how that stopped them from doing things in the past. They saw negative views as other people's issues, not a reason to be held back.



“I quite enjoyed chatting with some of the leaders and staff there. I don’t exactly talk with a lot of people when I am home.”  
(young person)

“At school they say she is mis-behaved and difficult, but you can see here she’s not; she’s excited and buzzing and clever. She’ll do anything to help.” (parent)



Thank you to the Bide Oot team for organising these outdoor activities .it was the most amazing day and meeting with other families who are in similar situations as myself . It is great quality time spent with my grandson and to see him mix with the other kids and adults is great for his confidence . We now like to adventure out on our own and with friends and take them to places we did not know existed. The whole experience with the BideOot team has been exceptional and long may it last .I have never had this much support where the team have gone more than beyond to make feel we are not forgotten. So a big massive thank you to the children first who are always in touch and keep us up to date with all the activities .And a big thank you to the BideOot team .we'll done guys 🙌🙌🙌

2 y Like Reply

Can you give me the details of the archery group you mentioned.  
Thank you 🙌

4 comments Seen by 50

### Re-energised and open to new experiences

- 4.8. Some parents and carers described children’s renewed interest in after-school activities and other types of play after their trip on the residential weekend. They stressed that the family was now using outdoor activities as something to do in the local area.
- 4.9. Bide Oot offered the John Muir award for families to complete while taking part in outdoor activities; children from 9 families achieved this accreditation. This is an example of the proactive efforts by staff to extend the types of support and opportunities that Bide Oot could offer families.

- 4.10. During ethnographic fieldwork, the research team observed how this structured form of engagement excited some children. They were keen to identify, count and discover features of the woodlands they were exploring.

"I speak to her all the time" (parent talking about another parent)

"It's nice to see everybody and do the activities together" (parent)

"It's not new people for us - it's like a team" (parent)



## DOING ACTIVITIES DIFFERENTLY/FOLLOW UP EVENTS IN THE COMMUNITY

- 4.11. Families described the challenges which contributed to gaps in their skills and confidence before joining Bide Oot. These included not knowing what to do, lack of familiarity with outdoor activities, fearing judgement or being unable to cope. In some cases, staff, parents and carers told us children found it difficult to engage with support groups, for example, those who do not attend school, are worried about leaving their parent alone, struggle to make friends, or feel safer behind a screen. These sorts of barriers can limit the capacity to identify and engage with opportunities for self-directed support.
- 4.12. Families described the barriers to accessing local resources they experienced before getting involved with Bide Oot. For example, families seeking asylum may be unfamiliar with the local area. Some families with disabilities face accessibility barriers. Costs are often a concern. Many articulated difficulties with trusting new people, or a fear of being judged in public. These challenges leave some families without a local support network, isolated and inactive.
- 4.13. Evidence gathered through the evaluation demonstrates that Bide Oot is helping parents and carers to develop a new sense of self-belief. This includes being open to meeting new people, having the confidence to sign up to new activities, feeling strong enough to ignore judgement or stigma, developing problem-solving skills,

enjoying a sense of empowerment and opportunity, and knowing that others will value and support them.

- 4.14. Some described finding new forms of support and enjoyment; others reconnected with past positive experiences, hobbies and relationships. This self-directed activity provided families with a new source of friendship and support.

### Space Invaders

***“I’m not going in there. I hate small spaces.”...  
“That was brilliant. I want to go in again.”***

The same person. Ten minutes apart. What happened in between?

The labyrinth at Ardroy is long set of dark tunnels and tubes which people can crawl, climb, and slide through, lit only by headtorches. A few don’t fancy it – there’s something about the dark or feeling closed in, which is downright scary. As people put on their helmets, one young person is adamant they won’t be getting involved.

The instructors find ways to help everyone feel included. “Just put the helmet on anyway – you can have fun with the headtorch.”

As people line up to have their turn, there is further subtle encouragement. “Take a look in the door. Actually, that’s the smallest bit – it gets bigger after that.”

Then a challenge is thrown in. Their Mum gets a helmet on and decides to have a go. Cue young person in state of disbelief, confusion – and concern.

***“You’re not going in!”  
“Yes I am!”***



You can see they are thinking: ‘My Mum? In there? Doing that?!’

Mum heads in – breathing hard and sounding nervous at the start - but the sounds of her laughter and excitement echo back as she heads deeper into the labyrinth. You can almost see the thought bubble in the air. ‘If she can do it – I can do it.’

Suddenly talk of ‘not going in’ and ‘hating small spaces’ has evaporated. The young person eases themselves over the threshold and is quickly swallowed up by the labyrinth. A few minutes later they appear out of the other end – red in the face – a little bit sweaty – grinning, and eager for more.

That first go becomes two, three, four times more – up and around and in and through again – sometimes encouraging other people to get involved too, talking them through the tricky bits and showing people the halfway-escape door is, if they need it.

Everyone is offered a chance to take part in the labyrinth on their first night at Ardroy. It sets a tone of adventure. This is a real opportunity to face a fear, and build a sense of achievement. Laughter, and a shared experience with Mum. A chance for parents and children, to see themselves - and each other - in a different light.



### New skills and confidence

- 4.15. We explored how Bide Oot supports families to develop skills and confidence. A few core elements emerged in conversations on this theme. They are normalising fears, taking part in activities that challenge people, demonstrating skills, facilitating participation at an individual's pace, providing affirmation and encouragement, and highlighting successes.
- 4.16. Parents described two crucial aspects of Bide Oot which boosted their confidence and inspired them to do more in future:
- The fact that they went on the residential weekend and enjoyed it, despite being nervous about it, and;
  - Participation in challenging activities over the weekend. Many had tried things they had never attempted before.
- 4.17. The Bide Oot team also provide ideas and information for families to act on, should they choose to. Support continues after the residential weekend, through regular meet-ups at the Efer sessions. The sustained connection between families is a further source of encouragement and motivation.

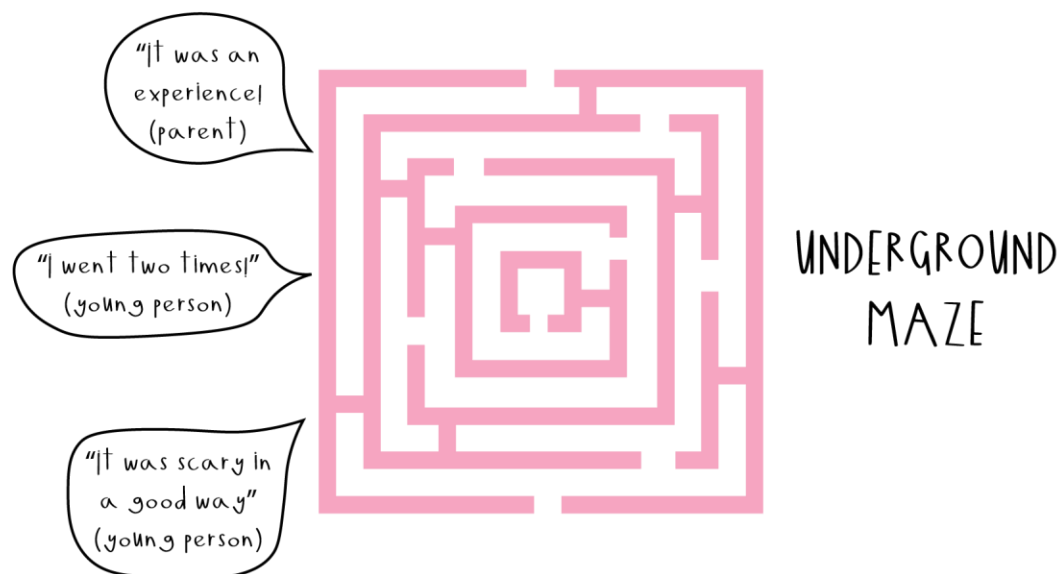


“I felt so proud of myself.” (young person)

“I am going to tell all my friends what I’ve been up to when I get back to school”  
(young person)



- 4.18. A kinship carer spoke to us about the confidence her grandson gained after going through the tunnels at Ardroy House. She noted that he was nervous at first but explored the maze repeatedly on the first night and then again the next day. The Bide Oot team encouraged him to try it in different ways – with a torch, with a light on, taking his time, trying different routes and then racing to see how fast it could complete it. She felt this approach worked for her grandson and adults, too. Motivated by the support from staff as well as other families and children, her grandson went on to try numerous challenges she felt he otherwise would not have attempted, such as Jacob’s ladder.



- 4.19. One young person attributed her increase in confidence to Bide Oot and said it led her to travel to Thailand independently.

Wouldn't have the confidence to be where I am today if it wasn't for going on bideoot 🇹🇭

Thank you for the life skills guys!

Currently travelling Thailand as a solo traveller 🇹🇭🇸🇮

- 4.20. Overall Bide Oot has connected families with community resources and networks. Many spoke about feeling isolated and worried about joining groups and activities locally. Bide Oot allowed families to re-engage in networks, providing them with the skills and confidence needed to try new hobbies or make new friends. Families spoke about children joining in more at school. Bide Oot also provided recommendations and information for families to act upon, such as suggestions for local services or resources, provided in an informal way, often in response to families' interests.



### The spark

Bide Oot can mean climbing, paddling, crawling or hiking – each activity is a new challenge and a chance for celebration, as people manage things they thought were out of their reach.

Building and lighting a fire and sharing it with others, creates a community. It's talking about the hypnotic glow of the burning logs, the smell of woodsmoke or how your eyes sting when the breeze shifts. It's agreeing how to be safe around flames or the excitement of being trusted to split a log with an axe. And of course it's about marshmallows on sticks, held by the flames, forming crust and delicious goo – children and adults smiling with ash-covered sticky fingers and faces.

But before this is possible it's about a spark to start the whole thing off.

Some challenges come in small packages like the flint and steel – these need patience, fine motor skills and coordination to work. For some people that's a significant challenge. This is classic Bide Oot – a place where everyone can have a go – everyone can be encouraged – and everyone can succeed in their own time and their own way.

A young person with additional support needs finds it hard to hold the flint and move the steel at the right angle and with the short sharp speed needed to make it do its job. With patient direction, readjustment, and tenacity from a young person desperate to succeed, the cotton wool kindling is intact for agonising minutes – until - the spark finally flies and the fire catches light. There are cheers all around. Then some parents face their fears and try it too.

You don't need to climb high or paddle far to feel a sense of achievement.  
Sometimes it just needs a spark.

### Chapter Summary

- 4.21.** This evaluation has found that Bide Oot, and the new connections that families make through the programme, has a positive impact on self-confidence among the parents and young people who take part. This is important because, as previous research has shown, increased self-confidence helps to reduce parental stress, improves parental-child relationships, and has been linked to improved academic performance, reduced addictive behaviours, increased self-control, higher levels of happiness and resilience in children as well as positive emotional and behavioural development.

## Examples for Outcome 2:

Families are more active in their local community through strong connections and networks



“So yeah, it has been really, really good. I have to say my kids have come out of their shell massively. I loved it. It was like sort of pushing myself out of my comfort zone. Like anything I'm sort of fearful of now, I try and just go for it because I know that I can get past it.”(parent/carer)

“One of the parents that came on the trip, actually, historically she was involved in domestic abuse, perpetrated from a male, reflecting back on it, she's had conversations with me and another worker around that experience helped her to understand that there's men out there that she can trust, and she can be around.” (Local Hub Worker)

“I think it [Bide Oot] gave me more, I don't know, I was just more relaxed. Like, we don't do things like that together. I don't go to activities and things like that because I'm always, like, dead anxious and stuff like that. But it's made me want to do a lot of things. Obviously my children don't know anything of what was going on with my mental health or anything. But I was wanting to start doing things with them and spending more time, quality time with them more than anything.” (parent/carer)

“If that's the right word, inclusive. Very accepting of all of us, basically. So yeah, it was lovely... And even with [my son], he relaxes a lot more. If we're good, and, you know, and especially that last part, you know, when we went down to the garden, you know, further on, and the fire and stuff. I just totally relaxed and I learnt new things. It's always lovely. Yeah, really, really important and wonderful at the same time that we're, you know, we don't have to, like, because we've got a lot of stress. Most, most families, though, it really speaks volumes that when we are like, we don't have to keep apologising, you know, for certain things” (parent/carer)

“It was nice to see my mum being sociable, she has stayed in touch with the friends she met at Bide Oot”. (young person)

“There's a women's group tonight that's on every Monday. If I hadn't done Bide Oot, I wouldn't have done any of that. I wouldn't have started going to other groups and all that. But that's just how I am, I'm not into making pals and all that, that's not for me. But yeah, but with Bide Oot, it's pure opened ma horizons, like, you don't need to be dead guarded all the time and it's okay to go and enjoy yourself, like.” (parent/carer)

“So we've been continuing on with canoeing. What else have we done? We were going to go rock climbing and we've just been out and about more often. So it sort of gave us, I would say, more confidence to go out and about. It's brought them out of the shell. The oldest the most because she's autistic. She's met lots of children that accept her for who she is. Which has been amazing. But my oldest especially, I've noticed she's chatting more, she's full out her shell, she speaks about her problems, whereas before she was just sort of closed off to the world. So I've noticed a massive difference in her.” (parent/carer)

“You're not telling anybody anything about their life, their family and how they can do it better or worse. But it's OK for us to chat. It's OK for us to talk about what we see, what we think, what we found helpful, what we see you might think be helpful for somebody and they take it or they don't, they take it on or they don't take it on if they don't want to.” (Bide Oot staff)

“Never been canoeing, never been in water before, and the encouragement from the staff, the warmth and the security, it was all there. I was nervous about the boys. It was a foggy day and I asked staff, 'How far are you going to go? You may not be able to see them. I won't be able to see them, I hope everything will be OK'. And they said, 'Why don't you come with us?' She said 'You've got a life jacket, just put it on'. And it felt so safe, I overcame my fear. My husband was shocked I went, the staff were so encouraging, the way they handled fear and I just went on and enjoyed it”.

(parent/carer)

“It's just a really positive experience. It brings families a bit closer together. They're very accepting of different needs. They're with you every step, they they plan everything so there's no surprises. Yeah, it's a lot of fun. And what would they get out of it? Yeah, that just you would get closer together. And, and there's always support, like before and afterwards. And you get to meet other families in a relaxed way.” (parent/carer)

“Last week we went to the nature trail... the kids were looking for these things, me and [other parent met at Bide Oot], we were just talking away with each other, the kids were enjoying themselves but the parents were also enjoying while the staff were doing things with the kids and they were just running wild and free and it was just great. I can't thank them enough for the confidence that they've given us for to actually go do things like that with each other.”

(parent/carer)

# 5. Healthier and more active lives

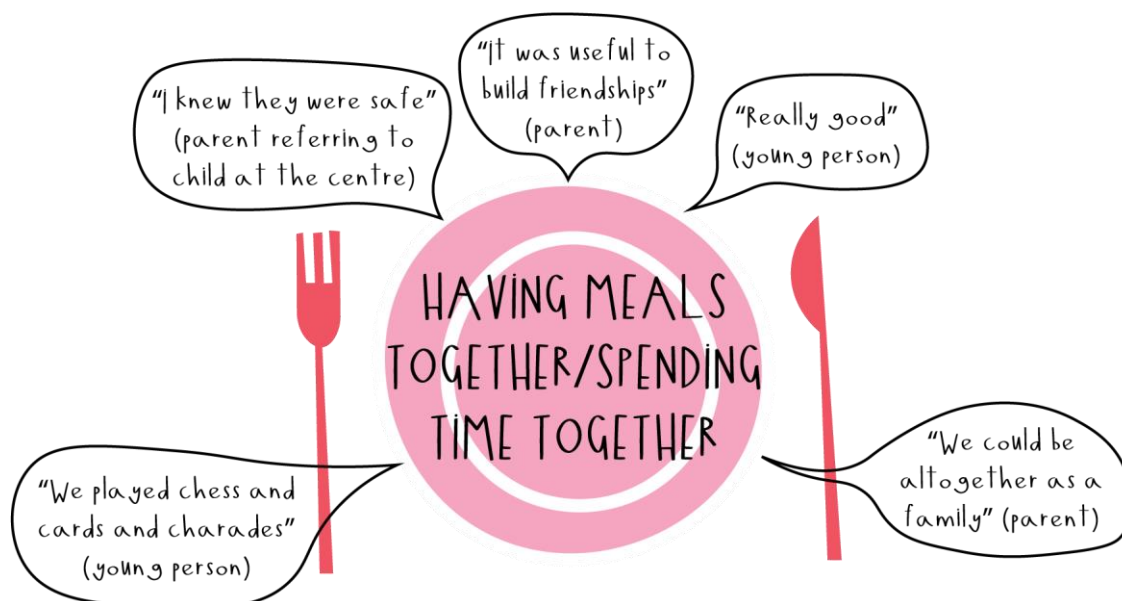
## The impact of Bide Oot on families' health and wellbeing

- 5.1. This chapter focuses on Bide Oot Outcome Three: for families to live healthier and more active lives.
- 5.2. Many families involved in Bide Oot said they wanted to improve their health and wellbeing. The focus varied by individual and family. Some parents described poor mental health and living with complex, long-term conditions. Some were recovering from addictions. Many experienced exacerbating factors, such as stress and poverty. Others described worries about their children's mental health; some children had been diagnosed with anxiety or depression, or were waiting for assessment.
- 5.3. Common discussions about barriers to healthy, active lives included:
  - difficulties in finding and accessing activities;
  - transport barriers;
  - entrenched unhealthy habits at home;
  - lack of fitness;
  - costs; and
  - fears about safety
- 5.4. Some parents/carers lacked the energy, time and skills to provide activities for energetic children; and this was a particular difficulty for those with health issues.
- 5.5. The evidence gathered through the evaluation demonstrates that Bide Oot is achieving the intended outcome of supporting families to become healthier and more active. Examples include new routines, earlier bedtimes and less screen time. Exposure to and enjoyment of different types of food and drink, and increased physical activity, lead to improved fitness and wellbeing. Bide Oot has contributed to a reduction in friction between family members, reduced stress at home, and helped strengthen relationships.

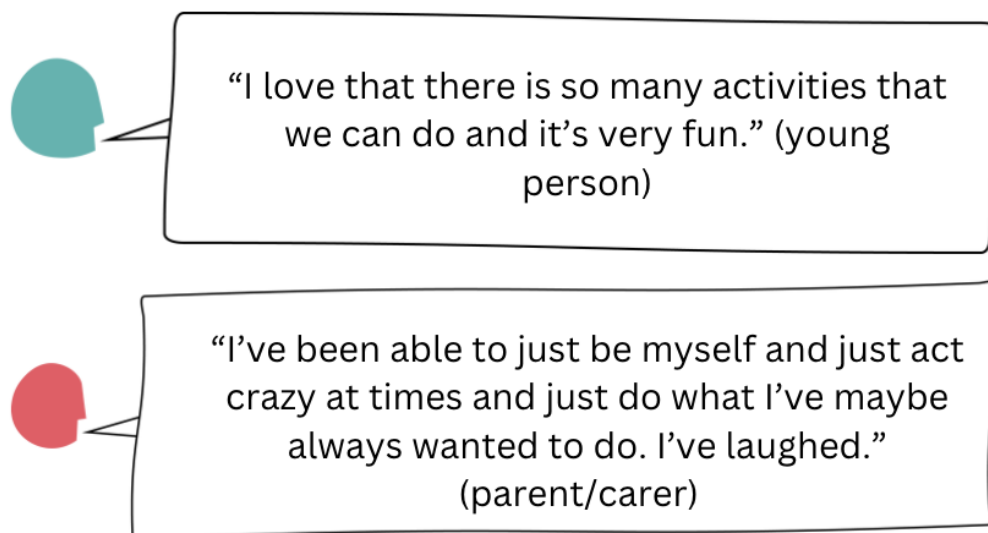
### **Making more time to focus on each other and prioritise wellbeing**

- 5.6. Families said the residential weekend had re-energised them and left them motivated to make changes. Some staff observed that families had continued activities they had first tried at Ardroy. Through ongoing work with families, they were aware the new hobby or

activity had been maintained. On the Bide Oot Facebook group, one parent/carer said their partner finds it easier to refuse overtime at work so they can spend time together.



- 5.7. We explored how Bide Oot supports families to live healthier and more active lives. Parents often emphasised the sense of safety they felt at the residential weekend. The support from staff provided an opportunity to try new experiences that they would not have previously felt able to do, or would not have had the inclination or resources to try before.



- 5.8. One parent highlighted how the Bide Oot experience boosted her courage, noting she was not used to walking in the woods and canoeing. The theme of overcoming fears repeated across interviews with parents/carers and children.



*“I had a good time and it's the most exercise I've had in about 10 years and it's the most sleep I think I've ever had when I came home... As I say, it's good to do things that you've never tried before. Now if somebody says to me do you want to go canoeing, I know what to expect”.*  
(parent/carer)

### **Picking up where we left off A moment captured at Irvine Beach**

At the beach for today's Efer event, everyone is getting stuck in: children, parents and carers are all gloved up and armed with litter pickers and clipboards to record rubbish collected.

Children from different families join forces in teams. The activity brings them together with an easy focus: to see who can gather the most rubbish.

The older ones are the most organised. Teenagers spot rubbish from a distance, log it as they go, and carry a heavy bag with pride. The younger ones are happier using litterpickers to make shapes in the sand.

Relationships come more easily for the children when they are working together toward a goal or provided a task.

One attendee tells me: “[Before this] she [daughter] hadn't been outside for two days... [the beach clean activity] is good because the kids focus not on each other but on something else.”

At the end the bags are weighed and it's time for lunch and games on the beach. Some families remain in their unit, enjoying the time together in a new place. Other adults come together and take the chance to meet up with those they know from their weekend away.

For another attendee, being outside and being at these events provided freedom: “[For me] It was less stress. It gave me a bit of a space to breathe. They [children] were doing things instead of me having to entice them to enjoy themselves. I would have stayed for a week!”

And all the time, the children perfect the art of running around, getting wet and muddy, and enjoying the moment.

### **More time outdoors**

- 5.9. Parents and carers said their family enjoyed the activities at Ardroy. They left wanting to do more and felt capable of doing it themselves. In these conversations, some shared examples of family outdoor activities after the trip including woodland walks, adventure activities, wildlife and camping trips. They described the sense of peace they had felt outdoors, and how much the family enjoyed the shared time together outside the home.
- 5.10. In a poll on Bide Oot's Facebook page, 85% (18) said they spent more time outdoors since joining Bide Oot. One said they now cycle four to five days a week.
- 5.11. Across interviews, we heard reflections about the power of outdoor space to put people at ease and use different skills. Energetic children slept well after a day of outdoor



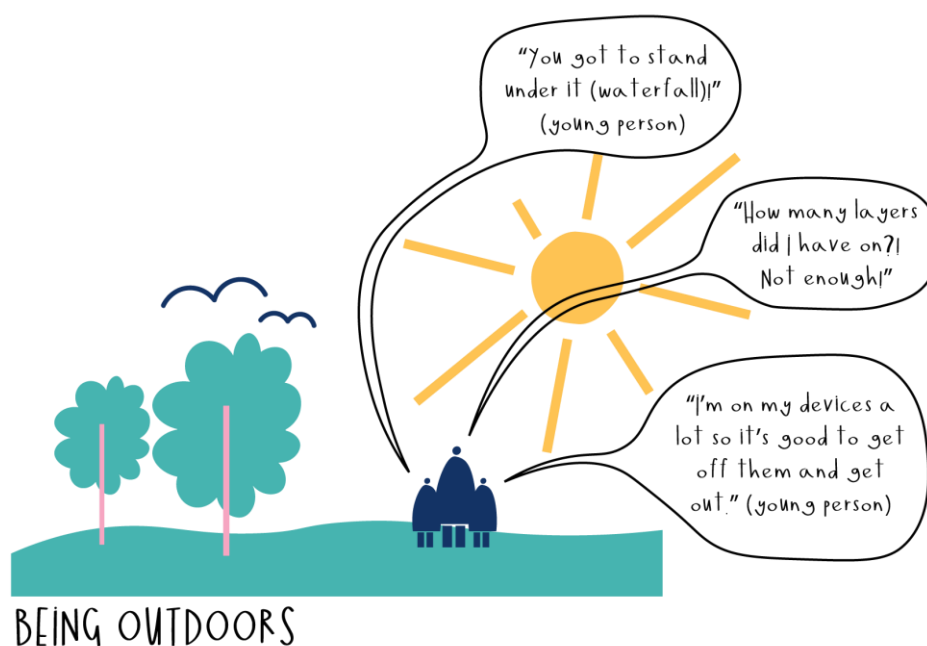
activity with Bide Oot, and parents said they did more of this type of activity with children when they returned home.

A great experience from someone who was not into exploring the outdoor world to someone now who has learned to appreciate it, my time with bideoot was an eyeopener and let me enjoy the time re connecting with my granddaughter to the point where we enjoyed our time together and having fun

1 y Like Reply



- 5.12. A few staff members noted observing different children's enjoyment of the outdoors; in one case, a young person was at risk of exclusion from school; but the staff member shared this learning with the school, which then changed its learning approach. The school found different ways to engage this young person, who later secured an accredited apprenticeship in a role with an outdoors focus.



## Examples for Outcome 3: Families are healthier and lead more active lives



“I wouldn't have done outdoor things like that before Bide Oot”. (young person)

“The weekend helped to show the [the children] the importance of discipline. Sitting together at mealtimes. And even upon returning home, keep talking about the routine. Getting up on time, sleeping on time and still having fun, less TV, and away from devices. That is what they were used to before and then they came to me and the device time and TV time is less with me than with their mother and we found it difficult, but this trip, with everyone getting together for little meetings, it showed a different way of getting together that wasn't school. They liked that.”  
(parent/carer)

“I was quite apprehensive because obviously like my partner he suffers from like, um, PTSD, depression, agoraphobia, and I was a bit apprehensive [before the residential weekend]. But for us all it was really lovely for us to see him engaging more with the kids as well, and spending that quality time with the kids that he doesn't normally get to do.” (parent/carer)

“I have tried lots of new things since then!”  
(young person)

“Because they're so active, the families all of a sudden see the importance of diet... they recognise that being active gives them a better appetite, drinking better, drinking water, eating, you can just see how the difference in the food makes it for them, so that plays a big part”. (Local Hub Worker)

“One of the young person got up at half six in the morning to go for a run with me, and that just would never normally happen... he's actively spoken about that since, he's doing more exercise for his physical health, but also for his mental health as well, and that's kind of where it all started from as well I suppose, so you're able to have those conversations with them in a really informal way, just like 'do you want to come for a run with me?' That weekend, they'd see little things that they thought, 'oh that would actually make a bit of a difference in my life on a day-to-day basis at home', so they've taken that forward, it's not just a weekend where they just do activities, and it stays there, it continues.” (Local Hub Worker)

“That weekend without screens – it was like having my kids back, and I've tried to keep that up at home”. (parent/carer)

# 6. Discussion

## The learning from Bide Oot in the context of wider evidence

- 6.1. This chapter considers the evaluation findings alongside wider evidence into the benefits of spending time outdoors and whole family approaches, two unique features of the support Bide Oot offers families.



### Time outdoors

- 6.2. Families involved in Bide Oot told us that the programme made them spend more time together outdoors. The positive impact on togetherness is a particularly important finding as much of the research on the impact of outdoor wellbeing approaches focuses on individuals or young age groups. Through the Awa and Efer sessions, families become more confident in outdoor spaces and connected these with a sense of peace and discovery. They valued outdoor experiences as an inexpensive way to spend time together during the holidays and weekends. They also welcomed introductions to local outdoor places and activities.
- 6.3. Many highlighted how much they enjoyed spending time outdoors together. They loved the different types of conversations and play that happened in parks, woodlands, beaches and other natural environments. Many parents, carers and young people described the positive impacts of time outdoors on their wellbeing and physical health.
- 6.4. Their feedback is reinforced by the wider evidence on the importance of an active lifestyle and spending time outdoors for physical and mental health. For example, recent research by the Mental Health Foundation shows that time in nature can significantly

reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety.<sup>1</sup> Engaging with nature improves mood, reduces feelings of stress or anger, and can help people relax and recharge.<sup>2</sup>

- 6.5. The Wildlife Trust's 2023 report, The Natural Health Service: Improving lives and saving money (2023), noted the benefits of time outdoors and reducing barriers to access and engagement with nature. It used a project example to model that supporting 1.2 million people with poor mental health to spend time together outdoors would save the NHS £635.6 million.
- 6.6. A recent report by Play Scotland, Children and Young People's Views of Play, describes the benefits to young people of being outdoors, such as increased stamina, better balance, immune system, eyesight and building resilience and that the outdoors may be particularly beneficial for children who are neurodivergent or have additional support needs. Specifically, research cited by MacLean et al (2023)<sup>3</sup> notes that the experiences children have in natural areas increase the likelihood of return visits in adulthood and that families having frequent nature-based activities can increase time spent outdoors in emerging adulthood (a period of development approximately between ages 18 and 29), meaning the impact of the decisions parents make on how children spend their time can have lasting effects.
- 6.7. More broadly, the evidence gathered through the evaluation demonstrates the role of engagement in nature through Bide Oot in enabling children to access their rights, established in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child<sup>4</sup> (UNCRC). This includes the right to an education that develops their personality, talents, and abilities (Article 29), health (Article 24), rest, relax, and play (Article 31).
- 6.8. The evaluation found that Bide Oot helps families overcome barriers to spending time in the outdoors; for some, the trip to Ardroy House was their first-ever visit to a remote area of natural beauty. The wider evidence shows that many families struggle to access the outdoors.
- 6.9. An evidence review by Edinburgh University, commissioned by Ramblers Scotland and Paths for All (Barriers and Facilitators to Recreational Walking: An Evidence Review, 2019) found that social deprivation is one of 12 factors that affect recreational walking. It cites data from the 2017 Scottish Household Survey, which shows that participation in recreational walking was 19% higher among the least deprived quintile group than among the most deprived, and recommends that targeting or more intensive approaches could be beneficial for certain groups. The report also highlights that walking with other people for a sense of companionship and a sense of achievement from reaching a summit or the end of a route can provide motivators for engaging with the outdoors. The Ramblers' The Grass isn't Greener – why access to green space matters notes that nine

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/2022-06/MHAW21-Nature-research-report.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/nature-and-mental-health/how-nature-benefits-mental-health/>

<sup>3</sup> MacLean, L., Marshall, A., Conniff, A., Somervail, P., Irvine, K.N. (2023). Linkages between Outdoor Learning in early years and primary education with recreational visits to the outdoors as young adults: A narrative literature review. James Hutton Institute, Scotland, UK.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.cypcs.org.uk/rights/uncrc/>

out of ten visitors to a National Park have access to a car, compared to only half of UK households.

### Whole family approaches

- 6.10. Families involved in Bide Oot told us the programme strengthened their relationships, provided respite, and allowed them to reflect. It helped them make friends and improved their wellbeing.
- 6.11. In Chapter 2, we explained that all the families that took part in Bide Oot faced significant challenges. Many had recently experienced stress, disruption and adversity and some of the children and adults were living with severe trauma. There is a growing understanding of the link between parent and child wellbeing, and we emphasise the importance of Bide Oot for its positive impacts on wellbeing for both children and adults. In this way, Bide Oot creates a virtuous circle of impact. It boosts individual wellbeing, and as, each parent, carer, or child sees their loved one's wellbeing improve, their own wellbeing rises, in turn.
- 6.12. [Treanor and Troncoso](#) draw on data from the Growing up in Scotland (GUS) study to explore the relationship between parental mental health and children's emotional and behavioural difficulties. Results found a bi-directional relationship between the wellbeing of parents and children, strongly associated with poverty. They noted that children and parents share many of the same external stressors, often caused by structural inequalities.
- 6.13. Recent research by Save the Children on [Parents' Experiences and Views on Supporting Early Learning and Development](#) highlights how competing demands can affect parents' capacity to interact with and support their children in the ways they would like. Some parents with experience of poor mental health, neurodiversity, or trauma articulated challenges linked to attunement and suggested that stigma and a sense of shame can prevent parents from seeking out support and help to develop enhanced home environments. Many of the participants described how sharing activities helped them to bond with their children, with the implied feelings of connection and safety. Parents also emphasised the value of talking to others who they share common experiences with, who have past experiences they can learn from, or who face similar challenges in supporting their children to learn and develop.
- 6.14. The Scottish Government has recognised the importance of holistic, readily available, whole-family support delivered through a range of services to help families meet their needs. A COVID-19 Children and Families Collective Leadership Group was set up in May 2020. It developed a [Holistic Family Support Vision and Blueprint for Change](#), as well as a [Routemap and National Principles of Holistic Whole Family Support](#), to deliver the vision. Among the principles outlined in the route map are that support should be: tailored to fit around each individual family; be flexible, responsive and proportionate for as long as families need it; and be based on trusted relationships between families and professionals working together with mutual respect to ensure targeted and developmental support.
- 6.15. To support change, the Scottish Government introduced the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund (WFWF), a £500 million investment from 2022 to 2026 to support a transformational change to reduce the need for crisis intervention and shift investment

towards prevention and early intervention. The evaluation of Elements 1 and 2 of the WFWF during its first year of operation (2022-2023) indicated that a significant upscale of family support was required.

- 6.16. The Promise is a policy commitment from the Scottish Government that children and young people with care experience will grow up feeling loved, safe and respected. The recent Promise Plan 24-30 notes the continuing importance of the Fund in enabling holistic funding to deliver support, allowing relationships to be nurtured through various hosted activities and peer-to-peer support groups.

# 7. Conclusions and recommendations

## Concluding comments and recommendations based on the three-year evaluation

- 7.1. This is the final report in a three-year evaluation of Bide Oot, a new national programme. Families' circumstances and challenges have not changed; but through a flexible, sensitive and thoughtful approach, Bide Oot has made significant, lasting, positive changes for families who face great challenges. These impacts stem from the trust built with families through careful, complex work.
- 7.2. All the core outcomes envisaged at the outset of Bide Oot have been achieved. They have developed the connections and relationships to sustain peer support and mentoring. They are more active in their local communities and lead healthier and more active lives. Bide Oot also achieves short-term outcomes for families: connections, relationships, friendships, confidence, belief, and skills. These short-term impacts are the building blocks of long-term changes and are of particular significance to families who face many challenges.
- 7.3. Over the years, we gathered extensive feedback from families about how Bide Oot makes them feel. They associated it with joy, togetherness, rest, resilience and wellbeing. The evidence suggests there is a virtuous circle of impact from participation in Bide Oot. As an individual's wellbeing is boosted, the wellbeing of their parent, carer or children increases, in turn.
- 7.4. These changes will have lasting impacts that may ripple across generations. Bide Oot removes barriers to accessing the natural environment, and as the evidence in Chapter Six highlights, children who spend time outdoors are far more likely to visit outdoor environments in adult life. In turn, their children are more likely to access those spaces.
- 7.5. Over the past three years, Bide Oot has developed an effective delivery model that strongly emphasises providing families with a sense of safety, control and choice. It embeds flexibility to meet families' needs, with nuanced delivery to encourage participation and support involvement. This enables families who face profound challenges to nurture and strengthen their relationships, bond with others, deepen their connections and explore new experiences and approaches.
- 7.6. Bide Oot's success is evident in the high level of engagement with the Efter element of the programme; most families go on to sustain their involvement in Bide Oot and attend local events in their communities.

- 7.7. Two unique features of Bide Oot stand out; it enables families to spend time together in areas of outdoor beauty, and works with all family members. This approach aligns with the latest evidence on the value of whole family approaches and the powerful positive impacts of time in green environments.
- 7.8. Families' engagement with Bide Oot leads to a range of positive outcomes for parents and children. Those who took part in the evaluation highly valued their involvement in Bide Oot.



“When are we meeting up next time?”  
(young person)



## Recommendations

**Recommendation One:** We recommend that Children First seeks additional funding to extend the life of the Bide Oot programme beyond the initial three years of funding and increase the number of places to offer to families each year.

**Recommendation Two:** We recommend that Children First raise awareness of the evidence gathered through the evaluation. Specifically, to encourage a focus by funders, policymakers and advocacy organisations on the value of whole family wellbeing approaches, and whole family outdoor experiences. The role of Bide Oot in enabling children to access their rights to education, be healthy, rest, relax and play through engagement in nature should be emphasised in calls for policy development to enhance access to the outdoors.

**Recommendation Three:** In light of the broader range of positive impacts attributed to Bide Oot, we recommend revisiting the programme logic model and outcomes, to acknowledge the programme's immediate positive impacts on individuals and families. These are connections, relationships, friendships, confidence, self-belief, and skills; the building blocks of the longer changes brought about through Bide Oot.

**Recommendation Four:** We suggest that families should be involved in revisiting the programme logic model and outcomes activity and also be supported to contribute to future programme developments and planning.

**Recommendation Five:** consider ways to raise awareness of Bide Oot and broaden the referral routes into the programme. This could include supporting families to share stories of impact to communicate Bide Oot's benefits, or providing channels for families to make referrals to others they feel could benefit from participation.

**Recommendation Six:** To apply the learning from this evaluation in the future development of Bide Oot. For example:

- Due to the importance of peer relationships, consider offering some Bide Oot activities just for parents and carers to help reinforce the peer support networks.
- Create structured resource packs for all families, including ideas for outdoor community activities.
- Create resource packs for families attending the Awa weekend at Ardroy House. They should include details about the length and potential difficulties of walks, with pictures. These will help families choose what to do.

**Recommendation Seven:** There is a desire for deep learning. Consolidated internal data capture would enable further analysis. This could include structured debrief sessions across all teams involved in a weekend: Ardroy, Bide Oot, and local hub staff to reflect, identify and log any potential areas of improvement.

**Recommendation Eight:** Local hub staff who have attended a residential can enhance their work with families because of the trust and knowledge developed over the weekend. We recommend focusing on supporting staff to attend residential and providing detailed handovers between staff who attend the residential and those working in the local hubs. This will create a structured process for exchanging information.