

A large, stylized graphic of a person jumping, composed of a white central shape with blue, green, red, and orange wavy borders, surrounded by several colored circles (blue, green, red, orange, purple, grey).

SPACE

SUPPORTED PHYSICAL ACTIVITY
FOR CARE EXPERIENCED

2024/25

Annual Report



getting
it right
for every child



the promise
scotland



Community
Planning
Aberdeen

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1. Introduction

The Promise is an ambitious and transformative national initiative designed to improve the lives and experiences of care experienced children and young people across Scotland. As part of the broader vision for transformation, The Promise also emphasises the importance of sport and physical activity in supporting the development of care experienced children and young people with its underlying strategy to develop relationships, wellbeing and voice.

Care experienced young people face unique challenges, including disrupted education, emotional trauma, and social isolation, which often impact their academic attainment and overall wellbeing. However, engaging in physical activities and sport has been shown to offer numerous benefits, not only improving academic performance but also fostering physical, mental, emotional, and social health. This report focuses on the positive impact that the 'Supported Physical Activity for Care Experienced' (SPACE) programme has on sport and physical activity participation and the holistic development of care experienced young people in Aberdeen.



2. Specialist Provision - SPACE

Sport Aberdeen and Virtual School Aberdeen continues its collaboration to provide tailored sport and physical activity opportunities for care experienced young people. The SPACE programme offers person-centred, 1-2-1 and small group sessions, promoting wellbeing and contributing to broader personal development outcomes. The focus remains on creating supportive, inclusive environments that enable care experienced young people to achieve their full potential through engagement in sport and physical activity, whilst contributing to the following Virtual School commissioning intentions:

- Improve and support educational attendance and attainment.
- Improve physical and mental wellbeing markers.
- Increase opportunities to access a positive destination.

The success of the programme has been largely driven by strong collaborative working between all partners involved. By bringing together the expertise, resources, and shared commitment of ACC, Sport Aberdeen and wider support networks, the project has created a cohesive and responsive approach to meeting the needs of care experienced young people. Open communication, joint planning, and a shared vision have ensured that each element of the programme is aligned and effective, resulting in supportive and engaging environments for young people to flourish and reach their potential. This continued collective effort has not only enhanced the quality and reach of the programme but has also maintained the foundation for sustainable, long-term impact.

2.1 Investment

Aberdeen City Council Virtual School's investment in a project centred on sport and physical activity for care experienced young people plays a unique and crucial role in improving their physical and mental wellbeing, building confidence and creating a sense of belonging. Sport Aberdeen has further strengthened this initiative by providing additional funding, reinforcing a shared commitment to equity, inclusion and long-term impact.

Table 1 – Value of investment to SPACE programme.

Organisation	Investment	Value
Aberdeen City Council	1 x 1.0 FTE Project Activator and operational activity budget.	£30,000
Sport Aberdeen	'Get Active' memberships accessible for all care experienced children/young people and a member of their support network.	£294,420
	Priority swimming lesson spaces.	£7,900
Sportscotland	1 x 1.0 FTE Lead Active Schools Co-ordinator (Keeping the Promise).	£42,613
Total		£374,933

Sport Aberdeen's dedication to the role of Corporate Parent is clear, investing £10 from Sport Aberdeen and £1.50 from partnership funding to every £1 invested by ACC into the project this year. Therefore increasing the number of opportunities available across its universal, targeted and specialist support. Sport Aberdeen's investment into memberships and increased Project Activator resource has enabled a whole-family approach, placing emphasis on working in partnership with children, young people and their families.

2.2 SPACE Implementation

A key aspect of analysing the effectiveness of SPACE is tracking attendance and the number of hours of sport and physical delivered across the 1.0 FTE Project Activator provision. This helps to evaluate the consistency and engagement in the programme as well as identify behavioural patterns and challenges faced by the young people. Regular tracking and analysis of these indicators also ensures timely collaboration with partners to discuss current and future support plans when required. Table 1 shows the average attendance across 25 young people with SPACE sessions, education and the hours of activity engaged in by the young people.

This year has seen an increased number of young people waiting for the availability of 1-2-1 SPACE provision, a testament to the improved awareness of the programme and newly established partnerships. This recognises the positive

impact of SPACE support whilst highlighting the necessity amongst care experienced young people and their families to have access to this type of support.

Table 2 – Engagement with SPACE and school attendance.

Indicator	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3	Term 4
Number of young people receiving 1-2-1 SPACE sessions.	17	23	25	22
Average percentage term time attendance with SPACE.	85.70%	76.20%	69.00%	72.90%
Hours of term time 1-2-1 SPACE support.	129	154	194.5	216
Average education attendance*	89.40%	89.30%		

*Denotes that figures reported only include children and young people receiving direct support from Virtual School Aberdeen.

Attendance with SPACE remains high and therefore relationships with the Project Activators and young people have continued to develop. This has allowed for young people to try activities such as swimming, horse riding and basketball on a regular, routinely basis. Sport Aberdeen has made efficient use of financial resource to prioritise and sustain horse riding lessons, driving range and rock-climbing sessions given the expertise and financial strain barriers that prevent participation for many young people without additional support mechanisms. This has encouraged self-belief and confidence in young people whilst also supporting family and professional relationships as additional pressures are mitigated where possible. This year, the influence of SPACE has seen several young people enter pathways requiring less direct 1-2-1 support, reducing overall attendance with SPACE and increasing the capacity to support new referrals.

As SPACE supports care experienced young people in the broadest sense, education attendance figures are reported for those who receive direct support from Virtual School Aberdeen (15/25) and where SPACE provides curricular-based support. Although important to monitor, it is important to note that the



variance in school registration processes and the number of alternative timetables in place for the young people involved with SPACE significantly reduce the validity of the education attendance recorded in Table 1. Therefore, no direct correlation can be made between SPACE support and school attendance with the current data however qualitative feedback suggests that SPACE input has helped bridge the gap between home and school (see Figure 1)

2.3 Educational Outcomes

Sport can be a powerful motivator for care experienced young people to engage with their education and improve their academic outcomes. In addition, it provides alternative pathways for young people to achieve and re-define what success means to them. SPACE continues to provide opportunities for young people to explore their interests and have fun away from the classroom, with improvements in concentration, attendance and attainment as the key intentions of support. Key educational outcomes achieved by young people this year include:

- 2 young people enrolled and completed a Level 4 Horse Care National Progression Award in partnership with Hayfield Riding Centre.
- 1 young person volunteering at Hayfield Riding Centre.
- 1 young person volunteering at a local primary school.
- 1 young person accepted into a Pony Racing Academy scheme following a nomination by their Project Activator.
- 1 young person achieved the Bronze Active Schools Volunteering Award and 25-hour Saltire Award.

Placing emphasis on pathways this year has encouraged young people to find new passions, whilst gaining qualifications and building connections with new networks. Next year, the programme aims to support young people to access further and higher education by utilising the qualifications and experiences gained through these volunteering and leadership roles and through its established partnership with North East College Scotland College, which allows alternative entry into the sports coaching, fitness and uniformed services courses.

2.4 Health and Wellbeing

Some of the most immediate benefits of sport and physical activity participation are the impact on physical, mental and emotional health indicators. Engaging in regular physical activity has been shown to reduce the risk of obesity, promote emotional resilience, enhance physical fitness, and mitigate symptoms of anxiety and depression — factors that are particularly prevalent among care experienced young people. SPACE provides young people with positive outlets for emotional expression and to escape negative thoughts and stressors, directly impacting their ability to regulate their mood, engage in school and build connections within their communities.

This term has seen emphasis placed on working with children and young people to self-report wellbeing ratings (1-5), where they assess their own satisfaction with life, mood, and overall health prior to and after their SPACE activity session. This included using a variety of descriptive, age-tailored methods such as emotions characters, words and colours to support young people to identify their thoughts and feeling in greater depths. The average pre- and post-wellbeing ratings given by young people are detailed in Table 3.



Thank you so much for getting her into school, its great having someone who can bridge the gap between home and school a little easier.

(Caregiver)



Table 3 – Young person wellbeing ratings pre- and post-SPACE activity session.

Indicator	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3	Term 4
Average wellbeing scores pre-SPACE session.	3.83	3.84	4.07	4.14
Average wellbeing scores post-SPACE session.	4.29	4.55	4.65	4.75
Average wellbeing score change.	0.18	0.28	0.58	0.61

These subjective ratings provide valuable insight into the young people's perspective on the factors contributing to their wellbeing and provide a platform to discuss emotions like anxiety or stress with improved ease. The Project Activators report that this has increased the number of discussions had with young people about the positive wellbeing benefits associated with sport and physical activity, allowing them to support young people to directly correlate their own change in wellbeing with being active.

As each young person and Project Activator relationship are different and emotions fluctuate throughout the day, certain aspects of wellbeing, such as the complexity of personal emotions, are often better understood through qualitative feedback. Therefore, 43% of young people have elected to better capture their wellbeing rating through qualitative feedback, displayed in Figure 1.

Figure 1 - Family based feedback about support received by the SPACE programme.



Figure 1 demonstrates the importance of valuing and embedding the voices of young people in understanding the emotions, stressors and aspirations that affect their lives, ensuring that the support they receive continuously evolves to meet their needs. The SPACE programme delivers on The Promise by maintaining a person-centred and relational ethos to provide supportive and trusted environments for young people to explore their emotions and interests.

3. Universal and Targeted Provision

Further to the reach of the specialist provision provided by the SPACE programme remains Sport Aberdeen's commitment to increase accessibility for families and support networks to be active. This includes providing free and reduced cost access to facilities, lessons and social opportunities, evidenced in Table 4 and Table 5. Increasing awareness of the SPACE programme and Sport Aberdeen's commitment to support all care experienced young people and their families has positively impacted families to become more active in the following ways:

- Specific focus to create new partnerships and increase awareness of free membership eligibility and include in young people support packages.
- Continued support to local authority agencies to support access to memberships and promote family and professional wellbeing.
- Allocation of free memberships – further detailed in Table 5.
- Facilitation of partnership events – bringing sport and physical activities to group-based activity session organised by key partners.
- Access to free sports clothing through the Kit for All scheme – removing barriers to participation by providing free sports clothing wherever required.
- Organising family fun day events - creating a stay and play environment for families from across the city to engage in games and activities as well as access food and drink.
- Access to 'Get Active for Less' memberships – providing discounts on coached programmes and facility usage.

Table 4 - Allocation of Sport Aberdeen targeted provision.

Indicator	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3	Term 4
Number of young people enrolled in free swimming lessons (at one time).	30	30	30	30
Number of family-based events supported and/or organised.	4	2	0	0
Number of care experienced young people and families in attendance at Sport Aberdeen's Christmas Celebration.	N/A	22	N/A	N/A

Table 5 - Allocation of Sport Aberdeen universal provision.

Indicator	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3	Term 4
Total number of young people memberships.	455	487	541	638
Total number of caregiver memberships.	294	334	365	382
Total number of care experienced memberships allocated.	794	821	906	1020

To build a clearer understanding of the physical activity levels of care experienced young people, Sport Aberdeen continues to work in partnership with Aberdeen City Council to establish a data sharing agreement to better track opportunities available to care experienced young people on a universal and targeted level e.g. extracurricular provision.

4. Conclusion

Engagement in sport and physical activity plays a crucial role in the academic success and holistic wellbeing of care experienced young people in Aberdeen City. The positive impact of SPACE evidenced throughout this report, alongside the emphasis placed on providing meaningful opportunities by The Promise, highlights the need for continued investment in support programmes that promote physical activity and social integration within the care experienced community. The SPACE programme is unique in its ability to deliver on these outcomes within Aberdeen, with the data for August - December clearly demonstrating that the support provided by SPACE provides numerous benefits, including better physical and mental health, enhanced emotional resilience and increased opportunities to enter a positive destination pathway.



