



## ANNUAL REVIEW 2020/2021

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# CHAIR'S REPORT

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If Stepping Stones is about one thing it is about overcoming challenges. It underlies everything Morag Wilson and her exceptional team do. It is their superpower (or one of them at least) which is just as well, because, even by the standards of Stepping Stones, we were not short of challenges in the year from April 2020 to March 2021.

And yet, as I sat down to write this report, I found it difficult to call to mind the Board having to deal with any great dramas or crises. The reason for that is very simple. As ever, Morag and the staff coped with whatever was thrown at them, and it became obvious to the Board very quickly that the team was going to cope with the strange situation it found itself in. They adapted. They worked from home. They worked outside. They took valuable help and activity parcels to families cooped up during lockdown (and I saw myself how gratefully received those parcels were).

Typically, in her manager's report, Morag does not dwell upon the challenges faced by her team this past year; and nor would they want me to dwell upon them in my report. That is because, at all times during the past year, the team's focus remained the challenges faced, not by themselves, but by other people. Morag is right to emphasise the added hardships that the pandemic brought. But those gathered for our AGM and reading this

report should be in no doubt about one thing: that Morag and her team really stepped up.

That the team was able to do so owes much to the flexible way our funders were prepared to work with us, and for that we are grateful. We are grateful too for all the support we get from our various friends and supporters.

Speaking for myself, I would also like to acknowledge the support that the Board has provided this past year. In a number of different respects, the range of skills and support that they bring have been much in evidence.

Very sadly, one Board member is not with us to receive these thanks. As most of you will know, Fiona Gray died very suddenly earlier this year. For many years, Fiona gave exceptional service to Stepping Stones. Kindness and optimism were among her superpowers. Little wonder, perhaps, that she thought Stepping Stones was so deserving of her time. For that we give thanks.

**Alastair Duncan QC**  
Chair of Stepping Stones North Edinburgh



# CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

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Reflecting on 20/21 there is obviously one thing that has impacted all of our lives and our organisation and that is Covid. As we found ourselves plunged into the first national lockdown the staff team had their own challenges to cope with, alongside considering how this was going to impact the families we support, and the way that we work. Taking each day as it came we ensured that we sustained communication with families and adapted to telephone support and video calls. As ever the team quickly found their feet and started to focus on the emerging needs of families.

We saw families impacted by increased poverty and financial hardship, children struggling with the lack of routine without school, and parents who were overwhelmed with all they had to manage each day. We were fortunate to secure new funding streams which were put in place to help mitigate financial hardship, and we started to support families with accessing food, supermarket vouchers, support to pay utility bills and supplying clothes and household items.

We recognised the impact that lack of social connection was having on children and their parents and started to deliver activity packs, supplying games, art craft materials, sensory play and much more to families' doors each month. We continued to do this through most of 2020, often delivering 70 packs each month. Elements of our group work programme moved online and provided a source of connection

for young parents and, as restrictions started to ease, we moved some support outdoors. This included walk and talks and outdoor group work in a variety of local community settings.

With each change in guidance the team and the families we support have shown resilience and adaptability and our organisation has undoubtedly changed in long lasting ways. For example, we have fostered new and great partnerships with other local organisations and started new outdoor groups, which families have shown great commitment to. We are currently delivering 7 outdoor groups per week, and some of these we hope will remain permanent fixtures as we moved forward.

There is still a great level of need emerging and we are focused on supporting children and families to care for their mental health and wellbeing across all of our service areas. We will ensure that we continue to support families in a responsive and timely manner, offering support which is flexible and holistic. We would not be able to do this without the support and flexibility which has been offered to us by our funders throughout the last year and for which we are very grateful.

**Morag Wilson**  
Chief Executive







# EARLY YEARS

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Due to the pandemic and the lockdown we have adapted our Early years sessions and delivered them via zoom and outdoor groups, with the aim of keeping things as inclusive and accessible as possible, for the children and families attending.

These sessions included games, activities, story time and singing. The outdoors sessions were an opportunity for families to learn through outdoor play and to explore the local environment. It also provided a safe place for families to reconnect after a period of isolation and to help build their self-confidence and develop new friendships.

We also supported group work sessions for parents and children at the Granton Community Gardens by providing a variety of engaging activities such as: planting, picking fruit and vegetables, art, treasure hunts and picnics. Families could participate with cooking food on site, enjoying the meals made together with their peers and, also, take the meals home. These experiences not only helped bring families together but also created opportunities for parents and children to enjoy time together, whilst children engaged with activities designed to support their development.

The early years team also continued with their training throughout the year, with Clara undertaking

PEEP training due to the high demand on our existing peep group. This resulted in the creation of the new baby PEEP group which supports families with children up to the age of 1 years old.

The team also picked up more 1:1 support with preschool aged children in response to impacts of covid which saw children lacking routine, consistency and peer interaction. The early learning practitioners were able to support both parent and child together to develop new routines, bring in more play at home, and support new community connections for families.

Families were also provided with fortnightly and seasonal activity packs to support family engagement with a range of activities promoting learning and play. Parents showed their appreciation by sharing photos of the completed activities with the team, across our social channels.

**Mubarra Ashfaque**  
Early Years Practitioner

**Clara Massie**  
Early Years Practitioner







# OUTREACH

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The outreach service is often the first point of contact into the service: a home visit would usually be carried out to share what the service can offer families, but, over the past year, this has not always been possible, I have been very impressed with how the service users have adapted to phone support, online support and meeting in the community for walks. Families have been able to access support for welfare and benefits advice, housing issues, but the main support I have given this year is support around isolation.

Groups online have been a benefit to many. This has given families the opportunity to stay connected with their peers. As well as the social aspect of online groups we have also completed a variety of topics which build new skills and interests such as cooking on a budget, with cooking demonstrations, arts and crafts, mindfulness, relaxation sessions and confidence and self esteem building.

With indoor groups not be possible we took to the outdoors and explored what the local community had to offer. Granton Community Gardens has been the most successful venue, providing us with a safe outdoor space to meet each week. We have named this group Steps to Grow and, through the group,

we have aimed to increase wellbeing through physical activity, gardening, and a variety of activities influenced by the garden environment which are fun and relaxing for both children and parents. I would like to thank Granton Community Gardens for hosting our weekly group.

Throughout the last year it was identified there was a need for group work, targeted at new parents, which could be easily delivered outdoors. We started a new walking group for new parents living locally. All of the parents had babies under six months and had become very isolated during the pandemic. This group gave them the opportunity to discuss child development, feeding and sleeping and it also gave them the space to talk with their peers about becoming a new mother, and share experiences.

**Joanne Findlay**  
Outreach Worker





# GROUP WORK PROGRAMME

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This year our group work programme has looked different from usual. As with the rest of the world, most of what we had planned had to be cancelled. It has been a tough time for the young parent families we support but, coming through the other end, there are many positives to take away.

Given the nature of a lockdown in a pandemic, group work in particular faced many challenges. One challenge for our young parents was that they found themselves without any childcare which restricted their ability to access even online groups. Parents were feeling disconnected, isolated and overwhelmed which in turn was impacting the wellbeing of their family. In response to this we started an evening zoom group for young parents, where they could come on and meet with their peers once their children were in bed. It provided a safe space to process how things were going at home and find enjoyment in taking part in a range of activities. We would drop off any resources needed for the group and the young parents then all took part in the activity together via zoom, activities included cake decorating, cooking, photography, journaling and future planning – creating a five year plan. We also had three of our young parents photographs feature in the You Are Here exhibition in the Scottish National Portrait Gallery.

As restrictions eased we were also able to link in our young parents with other aspects of Stepping Stones, where groups such as Peep and Steps to Grow were starting to deliver outdoors, bringing parents and children together to learn and have fun. Alongside this we increased the one to one provision that our group members received to ensure that they felt supported throughout the pandemic.

Throughout it's been great to see the families try new things and I really admire how they have adapted and engaged with us in different ways. I'm sure there will be aspects of the last year which will shape and change the way we support families going forward.

**Kerry Riddell**  
Programme Development Worker







# BUMP START

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This past year has seen the Bump Start team working in very different way to which they are accustomed, in response to the changing Covid 19 pandemic and associated lockdowns

Bump Start has continued to receive referrals from the Pennywell and Leith Midwifery Teams. We have unfortunately been unable to maintain regular face to face contact with the midwives, but have continued to liaise and receive referrals over the phone and by email.

Support for women has also been altered over the course of the year. Whereas support is usually predominantly carried out in women's homes and at the Pregnancy Cafe, this year the Bump Start Workers have been carrying out more phone support, video meetings and emails with clients and the professionals supporting them. Where COVID Guidance has allowed, this has been extended to outdoor one to ones, and meeting women in local cafés.

Unfortunately, the Pregnancy Café has been on hold during the past year due to Covid 19 restrictions regarding indoor work. We have adapted our support to try and still provide some of the benefits of the

Cafe to the women we work with. This has included the setting up of an online weekly Mother and Baby Yoga session, in partnership with Allbeing Yoga, which has allowed women the time to take care of their emotional and physical wellbeing whilst also providing some social support. We have also hosted a Tiny Lives Baby First Aid online course, which reflected the Pregnancy Café's involvement of other professionals, and gave women the chance to learn more about how to respond if their baby were to become very unwell. In place of the Pregnancy Café we have also been referring postnatal women to other outdoor run Stepping Stones groups when restrictions have eased. These have included a Mother and Baby Walking Group and PEEP Group. The PEEP Group has also been available to women online, where face to face meetings were not possible, and the PEEP and a Bump Start worker have provided taster sessions and Baby Sensory Packs for postnatal mums.

To help lift women's mood during the isolation of lockdown, we have been delivering regular monthly Bump Start Activity Packs and Wellbeing packs, including –

# BUMP START

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- Craft Packs
- Christmas Packs
- Baking Packs
- Journaling and Mental Wellbeing Packs
- Antenatal/Postnatal Pamper Packs
- Grassroots Herbal Remedies Packs

As part of our partnership working with Link Up Leith, we have also delivered Afternoon Tea Packs and Food Parcels to support the engagement with online cooking classes. During the Christmas Period we worked with Changeworks and The Salvation Army to deliver food and present packs to families in need.

This year the team has been continuing to access training online. This training has primarily focused on Perinatal Mental Health and Trauma informed practice.

We are thankful for the continued support and understanding of our funders this year, including the Health Improvement Fund and Perinatal Maternal and Infant Health Fund. As always, we need to extend our appreciation to the women and families we work with, the resilience of whom, during such an isolating and challenging time for pregnant women and new mothers, has been amazing. Thank you for your patience and understanding with us as we have navigated changing support throughout this year.

**Claire Chalmers**  
Bump Start Worker

**Louisa Heaney**  
Bump Start Worker

**Nicola Milne**  
Bump Start Worker



# FAMILY SUPPORT

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The Family Support service provides holistic support to young parent families who are experiencing challenging circumstances. One of the main aims for support is to facilitate positive outcomes for the parent, the child and the family unit. Support is usually carried out by one-to-one home visits, support to attend appointments and meetings, or over the phone. Due to Covid, we have had to adapt our methods of delivery. We continued to support parents weekly using software such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams, phone calls, and walks and meet ups outside, within Scottish Government restriction guidelines. We continued to visit families at home when there was an immediate Child Protection concern. The nature of the support provided is determined by the individual or familial need. Together, we build a support plan that boosts the parent's self esteem and confidence, and tackle the key issues affecting the family. We work with professionals from Health, Education and Social Work to provide a robust plan of support to the family.

Poor mental health, domestic violence and poverty continue to be the key detrimental experiences our families face. We provide advice and support to parents applying for benefits. We also supply written evidence and attend formal appeals on their eligibility for particular benefit payments. We work in close partnership with local agencies and national charities to provide emergency food packages to families in immediate need. Alongside these practical supports, emotional support continues to be valuable to parents and

families. We provide a safe and comforting space for parents to offload their worries and stresses, without fear of judgement. This leads to improved mental health and parenting capacity. We work closely with health professionals, such as Community Psychiatric Nurses, to ensure that our client's needs are being met. We also signpost to and make referrals to NHS and voluntary mental health agencies, to create an all encompassing package of support.

Covid has been a stressful time for many, particularly those on low incomes. The Trussell Trust and our local food bank continue to provide a vital support to those in crisis. Family Support delivered over 100 wrapped Christmas presents to children in need thanks to the generous donations from The Salvation Army and State Street Bank. Granton Goes Greener at Granton Parish Church continues to provide clothing, food and toiletries to those in need. We are extremely grateful to these organisations who have helped us support our families, during this time.

We have taken the time to develop our skills through training such as the Trauma Informed and Trauma Skilled Practice training, facilitated by NHS Lothian. We have also recently completed training in Emotional Regulation Skills with Children which will support our practice in improving mental health, understanding emotions and how they affect us.

**Tiam Lithgow**  
Family Support Worker







# PARENTING OUTREACH SUPPORT SERVICE

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In order to overcome the challenges presented by the pandemic we had to modify aspects of our service to ensure that families were able to access consistent support. This involved thinking creatively and working in different ways, for example, delivering activity packs, walk and talks, and relying on video and phone calls when this was all that was permitted.

When lockdown restrictions relaxed it allowed us the opportunity to meet with clients outdoors on a 1:1 basis initially, giving much needed interactions, which was especially beneficial for the children receiving support. Moving away from contact being based on zoom calls and back to face to face interaction was a welcome change for us all!

Although the lifting of restrictions allowed more flexibility in the way support could be provided, we keep an emphasis on outdoor support to ensure the safety of families as much as possible. We saw the demand for our peep group rapidly increase as things opened up, an indication of the level of isolation families had been experiencing and their desire to have interaction with peers. We increased our peep provision and delivered these groups at different local outdoor spaces. This gave the parents the confidence to enjoy the outdoors and introduce risky play with support from the practitioners. Parents learnt the importance of child lead play by allowing their children to explore and experience new things. They became confident to stand in the park socially distanced and sing with their children. We also provided the

families with waterproof clothing, which enabled the children to enjoy the outdoors in all weathers.

Another key element of the parenting outreach service is the support offered to primary aged children and, again, this is an area where we have seen the level of need increase as children have been impacted by long periods of staying at home. Lack of routine, increased levels of isolation and time away from structured learning has impacted all children differently. As children returned to school we have received more referrals looking for one to one support for children to help them adjust and to support their wellbeing.

Throughout the last year the team have also continued to offer our sleep counselling service and have been supporting families, via telephone appointments, to implement new healthy sleep routines, which can come to benefit the whole household.

As we look to next year this service is re-branding and will now be a Family Wellbeing service as we feel this is more reflective of the support that families and individuals receive. We are excited to create new opportunities for parents and children to develop their resilience and support their mental health and wellbeing, as we continue to recover from Covid.

**Anna Chrystal**  
Parenting Outreach Support Worker

**Ali McIlhone**  
Early Years Parenting Practitioner





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# FINANCIAL REVIEW

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## Treasurer's Report Year Ended 31 March 2021

Stepping Stones (NE) has had a successful year financially, securing an income of £421, 603 which is an 8% increase from 2020.

Stepping Stones (NE) continues to diversify their funding streams, and despite the impact of Covid-19 received funds from sources such as: City of Edinburgh Council, National Lottery, Inspiring Scotland Perinatal Infant Mental Health (PIMH) fund, KPE4 Charitable Trust and Cattanach Fund.

We are very grateful to all funders who enable us to continue to provide an invaluable service to the local community.

From a cost perspective, total expenditure has remained well under control decreasing by 6.6% from £360,388 in 2020 to £336,513 in 2021, mainly due to staff costs, which have reduced because of recruitment delays resulting from the pandemic and restructuring within the organisation.

Stepping Stones (NE) has been successful in securing necessary funding and is budgeted to receive income of £398,746 for 2021/22 which is projected to result in a surplus. The budget will be closely monitored, against actual results, by the board, throughout the year.

**Roy Craig**  
Treasurer





“When we went into lockdown it was just me and A on our own and it was really hard. Taking part in a zoom group once a week really helped me through the tough times as it gave me other people to talk to. Having kids activity packs given to us really benefited A as it gave him new things to do, helped to keep him busy and gave us things to do together.”

“They gave me a chance to be a young person – You can lose that with all of the responsibility of being a young parent. I have now nearly completed my first year at college, gained a part time relief youth work job and started my driving lessons. I’m feeling optimistic about the year to come”

“When I think back over the last year I am proud of what I have achieved. I definitely have Stepping Stones to thank for this. The support I had at start to help with my anxiety was the first step.”

“After what has been an undeniably devastating and strange year, Stepping Stones as always has stepped up and made things a little easier. From activity packs for the children to zoom cooking classes for the adults, I think I not only speak for myself and my family when I say that without all this, this year would have been a lot bleaker.”

“Service was a God-send and what I’ve been praying for for years.”

# TRUSTEES AND STAFF

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## TRUSTEES

**Alastair Duncan**  
Chairperson

**Pat Haikney**  
Secretary

**Roy Craig**  
Treasurer

**Ian Moir**

**Fiona Gray**

**Russell Bradley**

**Amanda Young**

**Sandra Cumming**

**Ailene Preston**

## STAFF

**Morag Wilson**  
Chief Executive

**Jackie Souness**  
Business Administrator  
(Left September 2020)

**Zoe Jordan**  
Business Administrator  
(Appointed September 2020)

**Mubarra Ashfaq**  
Early Years Practitioner

**Clara Massie**  
Early Years Practitioner

**Anna Chrystal**  
Parenting Outreach  
Support Worker  
(Maternity leave from July 2021)

**Ali McIlhone**  
Early Years Parenting Practitioner

**Joanne Findlay**  
Outreach Worker

**Tiam Lithgow**  
Family Support Worker

**Kerry Riddell**  
Programme Development Worker

**Claire Chalmers**  
Bump Start Worker

**Louisa Heaney**  
Bump Start Worker  
(Maternity leave from July 2021)

**Nicola Milne**  
Bump Start Worker

**Charlie McFarlane**  
Parenting Outreach Support  
Worker (Maternity Cover)

**Candance Higgins**  
Family Wellbeing Practitioner  
(Appointed May 2021)

**Agnes Verity**  
Education Development Worker  
(Maternity cover, appointed June  
2021)

**Madeleine Grant**  
Bump Start Worker (Maternity  
cover, appointed July 2021)

Thank You  
Stepping Stones



For making the lockdown time fun.



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