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Message from the Chief Executive

Morag Wilson

Another year has passed at Stepping Stones, and we continue to operate within a landscape marked by persistent inequalities across North Edinburgh. Long-standing poverty, the ongoing cost-of-living crisis, and a worsening housing emergency continue to affect the families we work alongside. Yet in the face of these challenges, we are proud to celebrate the progress and resilience of both our organisation and the families we support.

Our Parents Forum transitioned online this year, enabling more frequent engagement with our parent representatives. Monthly meetings have created a valuable space for listening, collaboration, and shared decision-making, helping to shape both the work at Stepping Stones and community action. (Read more about the Parents Forum on page 10.)

We are proud to have worked alongside trusted partners to develop The Family Hub – a new whole-family support model for families with children under five who are not yet in early years settings. Rooted in Scotland's National Principles of Whole Family Support, this initiative has extended our reach across the North West locality, bringing play, learning and early development opportunities to local communities. The Family Hub is this year's Spotlight Service on page 5.

This year, we invested further in our staff team to ensure that we continue to offer high-quality, evidence-based support to families. Our Bump Start team completed Antenatal Peep training to strengthen expectant parents' bond with their babies and support their understanding of babies' early needs. Staff also trained in Circle of Security parenting which is designed to help parents better understand their child's emotional needs and support the parent-infant relationship. Forest Kindergarten training, Trauma Informed Practice and Incredible Years are other training opportunities that the team have enjoyed this year. These learning opportunities are already influencing practice, and we look forward to embedding them more deeply in the year ahead.

At the strategic level, we were pleased to secure space on Social Enterprise Academy's Developing Sustainability residential, supported by the RS Macdonald Charitable Trust. Over four days, we stepped back from daily operations to reflect on our organisational sustainability. It was a valuable opportunity to map our strengths, identifying areas for growth, and explore how we can diversify income and strengthen our long-term impact.

Throughout the year, we have seen remarkable personal growth among the families we support. Parents have stepped outside their comfort zones – joining new groups, forming friendships, engaging in learning, and strengthening both their emotional resilience and parenting skills to help give their children the best possible start in life. Meanwhile, their children are enjoying new play experiences, sharing quality time with their parents, and gaining newfound independence in their early learning sessions.

As we look to the year ahead, we remain committed to responding to challenges with compassion, collaboration, and a deep belief in the strength and potential of the families we support.



Message from the Chair

Alastair Duncan

For the second year in a row, I began writing my Chair's report shortly after the Joseph Rowntree Foundation published its annual report on poverty in Scotland. It would seem that the problem is deepening in Scotland, with something like 1 in 4 children in Scotland currently living in poverty. The position in Edinburgh, although not by any means the worst in Scotland, appears to have deteriorated over the last year.

This is the context in which parents in north Edinburgh strive to give their families the best start in life. In her own annual report, Morag Wilson, our CEO, makes a similar point. She mentions some of the challenges that families presently face. Morag does not dwell on this point. Instead she focuses on the positives. She does that because that is how our families see things.

This was something that came across to me very strongly last year in the process for revising our strategy. At the heart of that process was a series of group meetings where parents, staff, board members, stakeholders and supporters could come together to discuss what Stepping Stones should set out to achieve over the next few years. The input from our parents was vital. What I took from it was an emphasis on the positives. Yes, there is much to be done to help families in Edinburgh. But together our parents and the team within Stepping Stones are making a difference.

What emerged from the strategy review process was a strong shared vision between the project and our parents. I would encourage everyone reading this report to look at the finalised strategic plan. It sets out our vision, and I am certain it provides us with the route map for delivering that. The Board is very grateful to everyone who took part.

Although we like to focus on the positives at Stepping Stones, we are only able to do that because we take care to identify the challenges that families face. I mentioned in previous years' reports that from time to time we have commissioned "data mapping" of the north Edinburgh area, in order that we could have a more detailed understanding of these

challenges. The trustees were delighted that the author of those reports, Emma Davidson, agreed to join the Board this year.

Two board members stepped down this year, Jaymee Gorrie and Ian Moir. The Board is grateful to both of them for their service and we wish them well. It is only right to say a little more about Ian, whose connection and commitment to the area and to Stepping Stones goes back many years. He was a trustee and then Chair of Stepping Stones, and he then continued on the Board for



some years after that. Ian's support for the project was immense, and I have a very clear recollection of him emphasising to the Board on several occasions the uniquely holistic and family-centred approach of Stepping Stones. It is very reassuring that our recently revised strategy so strongly reflects that vision.

I would finally like to thank our many supporters and in particular our funders. Without you none of this would be possible. We are very grateful for your continued support.

Our services at a glance



EARLY LEARNING

- Our Early Learning team provide a range of group work and one-to-one supports for children under 5 and their parents.
- A range of group work sessions are delivered to support and enhance children's early learning and development.
- Support is designed to build confidence and nurture the parent-child relationship.



BUMP START

- Bump Start provides support to pregnant women and their families from conception through to the early postnatal months.
- Support is tailored to the individual needs of families and offers both practical and emotional support throughout the pregnancy journey.
- One-to-one support and group work opportunities promotes the holistic wellbeing of the family during pregnancy, enabling families to have better experiences during pregnancy and early parenthood.



FAMILY WELLBEING

- The Family Wellbeing team encompasses a range of services from our BWell Together project which supports the mental health and wellbeing of children aged 5 plus, the Sparrow project which supports parents who have lost care of a child and holistic whole family wellbeing supports for families with a child under 5.
- Support is delivered across communities, taking place in families homes or in local community settings and schools. Support is flexible and responsive to the changes needs of children and their families and helps to increase resilience, improve wellbeing and connect families with wider support networks.



GROUP WORK

- We deliver an extensive group work programme throughout the project which includes groups such as Baby Steps and Toddler Steps delivered by our Early Learning team and a range of group work opportunities aimed at school age children including Equine Assisted Learning.
- A core component of our group work programme is our educational and life skill based group work courses for parents. These include wellbeing focused groups, SQA accredited courses and a range of employability focused groups. These courses provide parents with a safe space in which to re-engage in education and develop their confidence and skills.

Service Spotlight: The Family Hub

The Family Hub is a collaboration between third sector organisations Stepping Stones, Circle, Citizens Advice Edinburgh, Home Link Family Support, Home-Start Edinburgh, and NHS Lothian's Infant Mental Health Service PAIRS and City of Edinburgh Council's Early Years team.

Funded through the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund, The Family Hub aims to develop a transformational partnership approach that will test bespoke holistic whole family support throughout the early years. The project will ensure that appropriate, universal, and enhanced support is available at the earliest stage possible for families with a child under 5 not yet in a funded early learning and childcare place. This will be prioritised by developing a cohesive pathway and menu of supports alongside families, ensuring that families can reach the right support at the right time.

Through providing holistic support to parents, the project aims to:

- Improve family wellbeing
- Reduce inequalities in family wellbeing
- Long-term reduction in families requiring crisis intervention
- Long-term reduction in the number of children living away from their families

The service is delivered through drop in Hubs delivered weekly across the city, and as of March 2025 five hubs were operational. The service can 'pop-up' where need presents, to ensure city-wide equity and upholds the 20-minute neighbourhood strategy. Where families are not able to physically access a Hub, outreach within the home will be made available. Families can flex the intensity of the support as required, and shape the services delivered to them. Partners can deliver a variety of services including:

- Income Maximisation
- Housing support
- Family Learning approaches such as peep
- Parenting programmes such as Raising Children with Confidence
- Attuned parenting approaches such as Solihull and Circle of Security Parenting
- A range of infant mental health supports

Service delivery across the project is underpinned by Trauma Informed Practice and the Solihull approach, creating a nurturing, supportive space which supports the wellbeing of both parents and infants. PAIRS also deliver group reflective practice to Family Hub staff monthly, providing a space for staff to develop their practice together.



Feedback from families

"The group has really changed everything for me. My mental health is so much better, I am up and out every day with L, we are using the card for the gym organised by you and we are going swimming and to a gym class. I can't thank you enough for everything"

"I love the way that staff interact with my child, I feel totally comfortable and safe in the space. The hub provides a fun, safe environment for myself and B"

"Your encouragement and support really helps me, thank you for being here"

A Family Journey: Case Study



1 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Jodie is a young single parent who was referred by her health visitor after feeling isolated at home. While her family are supportive, they live far away and can't be there day to day. Jodie often feels judged about her parenting, both by relatives and professionals, which has left her confidence low and made it harder to ask for help.



2 INITIAL ISSUES

Jodie needed support with:

- Housing, as she was living in temporary accommodation
- Budgeting and managing her finances
- Building her confidence and self-esteem
- Overcoming isolation and feeling able to attend groups



3 MEASURES IMPLEMENTED

Support provided:

- 1:1 home sessions to build trust, confidence, and self-esteem
- Benefit check to ensure the family's income was maximised
- Support to secure permanent housing and help create a home for Jodie and her son
- Connecting with the local community, including visits to spaces where Jodie could enjoy time with her son
- Encouragement to attend our Introductory Group, moving onto the Core Group when she was ready



4 CHANGES NOTED

As a result, Jodie and her son experienced:

- A boost in their confidence and feeling able to try new things
- A positive weekly routine through regular group attendance
- New friendships and a supportive peer network
- New learning opportunities to support their development
- A sense of stability from settling into their permanent home

5 EVIDENCE OF CHANGE

Jodie has grown from feeling unsure about joining groups to becoming an active and valued member of Stepping Stones. She has built friendships that continue outside the sessions and now offers encouragement to new parents coming into the project. Her son is thriving in our playroom, and together they have both found a sense of belonging. Looking ahead, Jodie is excited about the future and has started planning to return to college and she feels confident that her son will feel ready for nursery when the time comes.

Group Work

Groups delivered this year



Groups for children

Equilearn
Schools Out
Seasons for Growth
Transition Group



Parent and Child

Pregnancy and Baby Cafe
Baby Steps
Garden group
Family Hub
Baby Massage



Parent only

Young parents group
Employability group
Sparrow group
Triple P
Introduction to groupwork



Seasons for Growth

Seasons for Growth is a grief and loss education programme designed to support the social and emotional wellbeing of children and young people who have experienced significant life changes like death and separation. This year we have delivered two groups within Pirniehall Primary School to 12 pupils. The pupils ranged from Primary 5 to Primary 7 and chose if they would like to engage in the group before getting started.

Both groups were delivered in partnership with Ferrywell Youth Project, which enabled us to work with the groups in a flexible way to meet the different needs of the children. Smaller groups were created to allow those children who struggled to take part in the larger group, the opportunity

to open up. It also allowed us to support children who found writing difficult to have more support and be able to write in their journals without feeling overlooked by their peers.

The children who attended the groups this year have commented that they are now better able to understand and recognise that we all experience change and that we all cope with this differently. Through the sessions the children have learnt strategies on how to manage their emotions and feelings and also recognise who they can speak to when they are finding things hard.

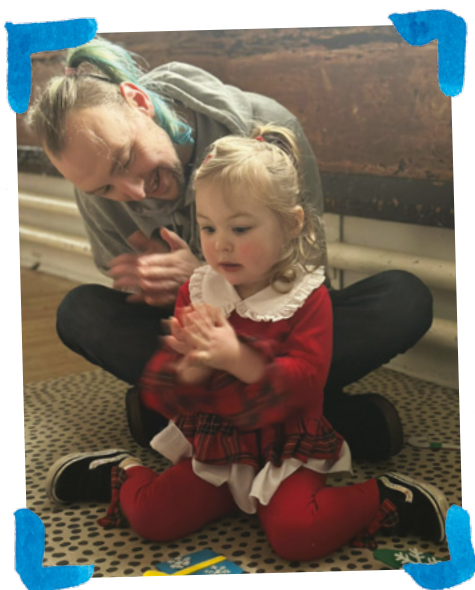
Pregnancy and Baby Cafe

Pregnancy and Baby Cafe was delivered from The Heart of Newhaven up until June 2024. Most families that were attending the cafe were from North West Edinburgh and travelled by bus to attend, so we made the decision to move the group in-house to Stepping Stones.

This has been a positive move, and the families have fed back that they prefer the space at Stepping Stones as there is access to a kitchen and play zones for the older siblings.

All three members of the Bump Start team have been needed in the weekly sessions as group numbers have been high throughout the year, and we wanted to ensure that the space was a supportive and nurturing environment. This has included regular toasties and snacks, which have proved popular with the parents to be.

In December 2024 four group members welcomed their babies into the world and as a group we spent time focusing on the emotional wellbeing of new parents and their babies. The group members welcomed having peer support and safe space to talk about their birth, feeding difficulties and how their mood had been affected.



Employability

Our employability group has continued to be a place where parents can come together each week to explore their goals, share experiences, and feel supported in their journey. The group is shaped by the parents themselves, which means every session feels relevant, meaningful, and aligned with their aspirations.

This year, we've placed equal importance on activities that build confidence and self-belief, alongside those that provide practical skills for the future. Parents have taken part in boxing sessions that boosted both fitness and resilience, journaling workshops that encouraged reflection and personal growth, and formal learning such as First Aid at Work. This mix has created a balance between personal wellbeing and employability, recognising that both are vital stepping stones on the path forward.

Beyond the weekly group, one-to-one support has helped parents take their next steps with confidence. For some, this has meant accessing grants to fund training or driving lessons, while others have been supported to find volunteering opportunities or link in with other employability services. One parent was able to secure funding for a course in a subject she feels passionate about, a first step toward turning her interest into a future career.

Alongside supporting parents directly, our staff have been building connections with the wider employability sector to strengthen the support available. By developing their own knowledge and networks, they are better equipped to guide parents toward the opportunities that will help them thrive.

Family Voice

At Stepping Stones, involving families in the design and delivery of our services has always been central to our approach. Strong relationships with families are at the heart of this, empowering them to recognise the value of their voices and how they can influence meaningful change.

Across the organisation, we use a variety of methods to capture the views of children, young people, and their parents – shaping not only individual support plans but also our wider strategic direction. A key part of this work is our Parents Forum, which has been a particular focus of development over the past year.

We identified that for the forum to be truly effective, it needed to meet more regularly. This would allow parents to build confidence in their roles and ensure we had the space to meaningfully address the topics they raised. As a result, we recruited new representatives from across Stepping Stones, relaunching the forum with a committed group of four parents. Together, they helped shape a new format and direction, co-designing both the agenda and the key themes for discussion.

To encourage participation and increase accessibility, we agreed to meet online once a month in the evenings, removing the need for childcare and offering greater flexibility for parents. We also now meet in person once a quarter, providing a valuable opportunity to connect face-to-face and strengthen our relationships.

The forum began by identifying key areas of interest. One of the first projects involved reviewing our publicity materials, with parents suggesting changes to the language used in our leaflets to make them more inclusive and relatable. We then turned our attention to our social media presence, where parents felt we could have a stronger profile to

better reach and support local families. Most recently, the group has started exploring local playparks and green spaces, highlighting the importance of accessible, safe outdoor areas within the community.

What our parent representative have to say:

Allisa – “I’ve engaged with different supports from Stepping Stones for many years now. Being able to join the forum has given me a formal opportunity to engage with staff and it feels good to be really involved with a project that has meant so much to me. The forum gives me the space to interact with the project as an adult, not just as a parent, and it empowers me to feel part of the project. I know the staff really value our contributions and I’m excited to see what else we can work on together.”

Marcia – “I am Portuguese, and didn’t speak a lot of English when I first started coming to Stepping Stones. Right from the start it felt like a safe and supportive space, and I want other families whose first language isn’t English to know that Stepping Stones is here to support them. I’ve raised this with the forum and look forward to seeing how we can help all families to feel confident getting support. As part of the forum, I’ve also had the opportunity to sit on recruitment panels, which I love.”

Thank you to all of our Parent Forum Representatives – Allisa, Marcia, Shannon, Robyn, Marta and Vicky.



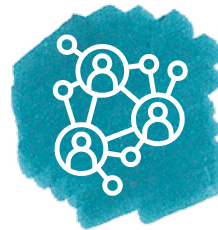
Impact



328 FAMILIES
engaged in
SUPPORT



475 GROUP WORK
sessions delivered



88% of families report
IMPROVED SOCIAL NETWORKS



267 ONWARD
CONNECTIONS
made for families



75% of families report
IMPROVED CONFIDENCE
AS A PARENT



67% of families report
IMPROVED EMOTIONAL
WELLBEING



59% of children feel
MORE RESPONSIBLE



57% of children feel
as though they have
ACHIEVED MORE

Treasurer's Report

Roy Craig

Stepping Stones has had financial results in line with what was budgeted, utilising funds awarded to maintain the services that we provide, detailed in this report. The financial results for 24/25 resulted in surplus of £7,393. We continue to maintain a diversified funding stream and received funds from sources such as KPE4 Charitable Trust, City of Edinburgh Council, Henry Smith, Whole Family Wellbeing Fund, National lottery and RS MacDonald.

We are very grateful to all funders who enable us to continue to provide an invaluable service of care and holistic support to the local community in a safe environment.

For 2025/26 Stepping Stones is budgeted to receive income of £639,965, resulting in a projected deficit of £196. As the 25/26 financial year has progressed, we are confident that we will end up in a surplus position due to additional funding achieved.



Thanks to our funders

- Capital City Partnership
- City of Edinburgh Council
- Corra Foundation
- Edinburgh Festival & Fringe
- Gannochy Trust
- Henry Duncan
- Henry Smith
- Inspiring Scotland
- KPE4 Charitable Trust
- Lloyds Graduate Program
- Mazars
- National Lottery
- Ps&Gs
- Ronald Miller
- RS Macdonald
- Ryvoan Trust
- Saints and Sinners
- Scottish Children's Lottery Trust
- Trust House
- University of Edinburgh
- Whole Family Wellbeing Fund
- William Dawson Trust

Team and Trustees

STEPPING STONES TEAM

-  Morag Wilson
Chief Executive
-  Claire Chalmers
Senior Practitioner
-  Kerry Riddell
Senior Practitioner
-  Zoe Jordan
Business Manager
-  Mubarra Ashfaque
Senior Family Wellbeing Practitioner
-  Sarah McLelland
Senior Early Years Practitioner
-  Joanne Findlay
Family Wellbeing Practitioner Outreach
-  Ali McIlhone
Family Wellbeing Practitioner
-  Clare Mommessin
Family Wellbeing Practitioner
-  Liam Budler
Family Wellbeing Practitioner
-  Tiam Lithgow
Family Wellbeing Practitioner Sparrow Project
-  Louisa Heaney
Family Wellbeing Practitioner Bump Start
-  Anna Chaney
Family Wellbeing Practitioner Bump Start
-  Abi Sinclair
Family Wellbeing Practitioner BWell Together
-  Aimee McKewan
Family Wellbeing Practitioner BWell Together
-  Bethany Braidwood
Family Wellbeing Practitioner
-  Ellen Stevens
Early Learning Practitioner
-  Stacy McKenzie
Early Learning Practitioner

-  Hope Lockwood
Family Wellbeing Practitioner
-  Kathryn Cyr
Family Wellbeing Practitioner (left July 2024)
-  Dee Reid
Early Learning Practitioner (left May 2024)

VOLUNTEERS

-  Jordanna Tennant
-  Robyn Raiker
-  Shannon Borthwick
Parent Mentor

TRUSTEES

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Chairperson
-  Roy Craig
Treasurer
-  Pat Haikney
Secretary
-  Ian Moir
-  Ailene Preston
Depute Chairperson
-  Sandra Cumming
-  Pauline McPherson
-  Jaymee Gorrie
-  Russell Bradley



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