



SCOTCH WHISKY
ACTION FUND

MANAGED BY



Home-Start Garioch



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Organisation: **Home-Start Garioch**
Date of Award: **2022**
Amount Awarded: **£8,000**
Project Name: **Family Counselling Project**



Home-Start Garioch (HSG) supports parents to offer their children the best start in life. Based in Inverurie, they have a large cohort of trained volunteers tasked with visiting families in their home who have at least one child under the age of five. These families are often struggling with a particular issue or challenge, and the volunteer is on-hand to offer them informal, friendly, and confidential support. Through this they hope it will increase the wellbeing of parents and children and minimise the impact of poverty and inequality across Aberdeenshire. Families are typically visited by a volunteer once a week for a few of hours, and last year they supported more than 100 families and over 200 children.

The Project: Family Counselling

In 2022, Home Start Garioch (HSG) received a grant of £8,000 from the Scotch Whisky Action Fund (SWAF) to cover the cost of 200 hours of counselling sessions to families whose lives and mental health have been impacted by a family member's alcohol dependency.

HSG experienced an influx of referrals in recent years in relation to families struggling with the consequences of parental alcohol dependency with COVID increasing the prevalence of drinking at home, which then led to a pattern of behaviour that has increased problematic alcohol use. The number of families presenting to HSG for support with an alcohol misuse problem increased from one per 100 referrals before Covid-19, to twenty per 100 referrals in 2022.



While the team of volunteers work hard to support families in this situation, including offering practical and emotional support, they are not a specialist alcohol support charity, and families are not usually referred to them for this reason. This increase in demand however led to the charity to source funding for the provision of expert counselling in-house to families who have had their health and well-being affected by alcohol dependency.

Some of these families had already tried to seek support independently but were told the waiting list via their GP was up to nine months or more, and the costs of private counselling is financially out of reach for many. In addition, many of their families live in poor, rural areas, and travelling to Aberdeen or another major city to access the counselling is impractical and unaffordable.

HSG therefore now work in partnership with a local counsellor who has worked with the charity before and whom they know and trust. Families are made aware of the counselling available when a co-ordinator carries out an initial visit and assesses that they would be a good fit for the service. If families provide their consent, the counsellor is then provided the family's details and they contact the family directly. This approach ensures the family are taking control of their own support.

By providing free counselling from HSG's office in Inverurie, it helps to remove any barriers and increase families access to much needed support. They also provide volunteers to transport people to and from the counselling sessions and offer a childcare service – which are additional barriers families face in accessing support.

Families can use the counselling sessions to work through the difficulties faced as a unit, or independently, depending on what is appropriate for them. Difficulties particularly faced by children when a family is facing alcohol dependency issues are stark, and can lead to them missing school, facing adverse childhood development, affect their own future livelihoods and careers prospects, and ultimately lead to the increased likelihood that they themselves develop alcohol dependency. Therefore, by looking to repair family relationships and improve well-being whilst children are still at a young age, they hope this will lead to the creation of a stable and nurturing environment where children grow up to be confident, independent, and resilient.

The Impact:

Initially, HSG anticipated twenty-five individuals receiving six to eight counselling sessions each for the 200 funded hours. However, the demand for this support was greater than they anticipated and at the six-month stage they already had a waiting list. They also recently extended the area covered to include Huntly and Turriff and surrounding area. This demographic is very different from Garioch and Formartine with more poverty and a culture of drinking being the norm and therefore families thinking they just need to cope because it is the norm, but with the cost of living increasing, it's not affordable when household spending is squeezed, but alcohol is still seen as an essential.

At the end of the funding year the counsellor had supported twenty-eight individuals, mainly mums, with between eight to ten sessions each.

Of the 28 individuals benefiting from the counselling:

8 mums required counselling support only.

12 mums required the support of a volunteer to watch their child while they received counselling.

5 mums required transportation to the counselling sessions.

2 mums separated from their partners and were supported with housing and other aspects of this new transition.



4 referrals were made for the counselling by health visitors.

16 felt less lonely.

3 improved social networks.

5 reported improved physical health.

4 are undertaking further treatment/therapy to meet their needs.

All 28 reported the following as a result of receiving counselling:

- Better access to services and support
- Increased confidence in keeping themselves safe
- Increased resilience and/or self care
- Reduction in stress and anxiety
- Improved mental health and wellbeing

Case Study

The parents of two young children had moved to the Garioch area. Previously, both parents were heavy social drinkers, and the Grandparents would look after the children from Friday to Monday while the parents were out drinking all weekend. The parents moved to get away from the influences and their peer group who supported this behaviour.

While mum turned her life around, dad continued to drink, often going back to where they used to live for the weekend. This was leaving mum alone with the children in a new area where she knew no-one. It was impacting on her mental health and the children weren't going to activities or groups outside of school which was impacting on them settling in and making new friends.

Dads' refusal to change his lifestyle caused a lot of stress and unhappiness in the home. He was paid weekly and would disappear all weekend after he had been paid which meant the family were struggling financially also. Mum was unable to pay bills, buy food, clothing for the children.

She was referred for a home visiting volunteer, but during the initial visit the addition of counselling was discussed as the main contributing factor to the presenting issues was her husband's drinking. Mum received ten counselling sessions and during that time, she set boundaries for herself and family, she sourced support from other services and separated from her husband.

Mum said the counselling was empowering in helping her to take the step forward, but also in helping her to recognise she couldn't be responsible for him changing, that would need to come from him, but she could be responsible for making a positive change for her and her children. It is early days, but the whole family unit are now in a much better place.

"We didn't anticipate the sheer volume of individuals needing support because of this issue and are therefore delighted we have secured continuation funding from SWAF for a further year"

– Mhairi Philip, Manager of Home-Start Garioch