Aberlour Urgent Assistance Fund

How-to Guide

This guide offers more detailed information and advice for those who may be interested in adopting or adapting the initiative in their local area.

This document comprises the following sections (click hyperlink to skip to that section)

- Initial Idea
- Early Development of the Project
- Accessing the Service and Engaging with Service Users
- Working with People with Lived Experience of Poverty
- Leadership, Governance and Partnership Working
- Links to Wider Policies, Strategies and Statutory Requirements
- Funding
- Staffing and Resources
- Monitoring and Evaluation
- Reach and Impact
- Learning from Experience

Aberlour Urgent Assistance Fund

Title	Aberlour Urgent Assistance Fund
Organisation	Aberlour's Children Charity.
Category	Fully Validated Effective Local Practice.
Poverty Impact	Prevention., Reduction., Mitigation.
Introduction to the Project	
Aberlour Urgent Assistance Fund provides financial support to families with children under 21 facing extreme hardship across Scotland. Families can apply online to gain assistance for a range of urgent needs, such as food, utilities, clothing, bedding, appliance repairs, replacement of appliances that have failed, or other essentials. The cash-first-based support has spread in recent years to cover the majority of council areas in Scotland. To date, more than 2000 families have benefited from the fund.	

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Initial Idea

Who had the initial idea?	
The project was derived from an initial fund gifted by the St Clair's Trust.	

How did the idea for the project come about?	
The idea derived from an initial fund the St Clair's Trust gifted. The St Clair's trust fund was gifted to Aberlour's Children Charity in 2016, based on the understanding that the organisation would continue using its resources to help children and young people experiencing hardship. It was originally a small cash fund which then expanded to cover all of Scotland. This became known as the Aberlour Urgent Assistance Fund and has since enabled the organisation to provide funds to children and families identified as being most in need of assistance.	

Were plans informed by any published reports / papers / research evidence or practice from elsewhere?

	No	xxx
	Yes	

The organisation did not draw on any published reports or papers but was aware of the needs of families during the COVID-19 pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis. Subsequently, they have used the data generated as part of the project to undertake research.

Was anyone else involved in developing the initial idea of the project?

	No	
	Yes	xxx

This project was initially developed by St Clair's.

Were those with lived experience of poverty involved in developing the initial idea of the project?

	No	xxx
	Yes	

However, the staff were fully aware of the needs of identified family groups based on their work in the field.

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Was funding required to support the development of the initial idea of the project?			
No		**Yes**	xxx
Did any barriers have to be overcome when developing the initial idea of the project?			
No			
Yes			xxx
The initial idea included that postal applications were required. This has been updated to online applications throughout the Covid-19 pandemic.			
Did anything in particular enable development of the initial idea of the project?			
No			
Yes *(please add details below)*			xxx
Moving to an online application has made things easier.			
How long did it take between having the initial idea and starting the project?			
N/A			
Who made the decision to introduce the project?			
St Clair's trustees and Aberlour CEO SallyAnn Kelly.			

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Early Development – Pilot Project or Feasibility Study

Was there a pilot project or feasibility study?	
No	xxx
Yes, a pilot project	
Yes, a feasibility study	

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Accessing the Service and Engaging with Service Users

Is there a referral process?		
	No	
	Yes	xxx
Applications must be endorsed and submitted by a referrer, called sponsor, who is acting in their professional capacity. Eligible sponsors include social workers, healthcare professionals, teachers, clergy, and third-sector organisations. Applications from individuals cannot be accepted.		
Is referral the only way that potential clients are made aware of the project?		
	Yes	
	No	xxx
Other than referral, how do potential clients come to know about the project?		
There are social media posts on this subject. The fund is also signposted by social work and other charities**.**		
What is the most common way through which users typically access the service?		
N/A		
Do you take steps to keep in touch / reach out to service users?		
	No	xxx
	Yes	
Families can only use the service once a year, so there is limited contact. They use the online form or the referral process to get in touch with the organisation. The organisations seek feedback from sponsors (referrers) on the impact the support has made to families.		

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Working with People with Lived Experience of Poverty

Are those with lived experience of poverty involved in <u>delivering</u> the project?		
	No	xxx
	Yes	
Are people with lived experience of poverty involved in <u>managing</u> the project or project governance?		
	No	xxx
	Yes	
Are people with lived experience of poverty involved <u>in any other aspect</u> of the project? *If so, please describe below*.		
	No	xxx
	Yes	

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Leadership, Governance and Partnership Working

Who is responsible for managing the project?		
Liz Nolan and Sallyann Kelly.		
Is this the only responsibility of the person managing the project?		
Yes		
No	xxx	
Liz Nolan is a director of the Aberlour organisation, responsible for managing the charity's main projects. These projects are delivered by volunteers who already work for the organisation and administer them in addition to their paid work. SallyAnn Kelly is the CEO of the organisation and has overall responsibility for the charity.		
Is there a Project Steering or Advisory Group?		
No	xxx	
Yes		
Are any other governance arrangements in place to review strategy and performance?		
No		
Yes	xxx	
Research enables management to deliver a fund that meets the needs of service users and to campaign for better family support.		

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Links to Wider Policies, Strategies and Statutory Requirements

In your opinion, is the project aligned with national and/or local anti-poverty strategies and priorities (e.g., local authority or health board priorities)?		
	Don't know	
	No	
	Yes	xxx
The project is central to the Aberlour Children's Charity mission and aims to tackle child poverty, food poverty, fuel poverty, and prevent homelessness.		
Is the project part of any other strategy?		
	Don't know	
	No	xxx
	Yes	
Is the project delivering a service that is a statutory commitment?		
	No	
	Yes	xxx
Ending child poverty.		

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Funding

Has external funding been secured to support the work?		
No		
Yes	xxx	
Please provide details of the external funding that was used secured to support this work?		
Which organisation provided funding?	Scottish government. Individual donors. Charity donors.	
What was the specific funding stream/source/scheme?	N/A	
How much funding was secured?	Between 2016 and 2020, approximately £350,000 was received by external donations, the rest was invested by Aberlour's Children Charity, bringing the total fund value (as of July 2020) close to £500,000.	
For how long has funding been secured?	N/A	
Is future funding from the same external source a possibility?		
Don't know		
No		
Yes	xxx	
Is future funding from the same external source based on pre-agreed outcomes or outputs being delivered from this work?		
No		
Yes		
Not specified.		

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Has a specific sum been secured from the host organisation to support this work?		
No		
Yes	xxx	
Please provide details of the funding that was used secured from the host organisation to support this work?		
How much funding was secured?	Approximately £150,000 (2020).	
For how long has funding been secured?	N/A	
Is future funding from the host organisation a possibility?		
Don't know		
No		
Yes	xxx	

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Staffing and Resources

Do existing staff from the host organisation contribute toward the work of this project as part of their broader work for the organisation?		
No		
Yes	xxx	
There is no paid staff for this specific project as they all work for the organisation but take on this work in addition to their paid duties.		

Are existing staff from the host organisation paid extra (for example, taking on extra hours) to contribute toward the work of this project?		
No	xxx	
Yes		

Are volunteers involved in delivering the project?		
No	xxx	
Yes		

Are specific resources – other than staff/volunteer time and money - needed to support the delivery of the project?			
No		**Yes**	

Please provide details of the resources that are required to deliver the project?	
Facilities / Workspace	N/A
Equipment	N/A
Local Knowledge	N/A
Food and Drink	N/A

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Are any of the resources needed to deliver the project provided in-kind, rather than budgeted from project funds?	
No	
Yes	xxx
The project is run from the organisation's facilities.	

Were new IT systems, additional software, or upgrades existing software (databases, Apps) required to deliver this project?	
No	
Yes	xxx
New IT systems became available during COVID-19, and this allowed the application process to shift online.	

Was additional training – for staff or volunteers - required to deliver this project?	
No	xxx
Yes	

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Monitoring and Evaluation

Is there baseline data to describe what things were like before the start of the project?		
	No	xxx
	Yes	

Is the difference that the project is making measured or monitored by the host organisation?		
	Yes	XXX
	No	

Who within the host organisation is responsible for monitoring the impact of the project?
N/A

How often is the impact of the project monitored or measured by the host organisation?
Continuously.

What methods, techniques or strategies are used by the host organisation to measure the impact of the project?
Data is collected continuously using the referral system, and feedback is sought from sponsors (referrers) on the impact the support has made on families. The team also assesses the needs of the service users, family dynamics and geography, and looks out for emerging trends.

What information is collected by the host organisation about the project?				
Number of users	**Yes**	xxx	**No**	
Profile of users	**Yes**	xxx	**No**	
Experience of users	**Yes**	xxx	**No**	
Outcomes for users	**Yes**	xxx	**No**	
Anything else	**Yes**	xxx	**No**	

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Has the data that has been collected by the host organisation been used to adapt the way the project works?		
	No	
	Yes	xxx
The data is used to see what the changing needs of those in poverty are.		
Has an external organisation been employed to formally evaluate the project?		
	No	
	Yes	xxx

The evaluation report was published in 2022, authored by Professor Morag Treanor. Main findings include:

- Aberlour's cash-first approach was praised for its simplicity and flexibility, unlike other complex charitable funds.
- COVID-19 impact led to job losses, delayed benefits, and financial struggles for families.
- Applications to the Urgent Assistance Fund rose by over 1000% compared to 2019, with 71% from lone-parent families.
- Support was widespread, reaching 31 of Scotland's 32 local authorities, with Glasgow accounting for 46.6% of applications.
- Families sought help primarily for food, fuel, clothing, bedding, and baby supplies, highlighting severe financial distress.

Has the insight from the external organisation's evaluation been used to adapt the way the project works?		
	No	
	Yes	xxx
It has been used to examine the changing needs of service users and support Aberlour's campaigning work on child poverty.		

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Is there an intention to employ an external organisation to evaluate the impact of the project in the future?	
Don't know / no current plans	
No	
Yes	xxx

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Impact

To what extent have the aims of the project been achieved?	
Fully met	xxx
Making progress toward meeting Aims	
Not making progress	
The aims of the project have been achieved as shown by the number of people who have been helped.	

What difference has the project made?
The fund has significantly impacted those who have been in abject poverty or have encountered unexpected expenses.

Have conditions or demand changed since the project was introduced?	
No	
Yes	xxx
Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and the current cost-of-living crisis, there has been a significant increase in the number of families requiring support for utility and rent arrears.	

Has the project had the capacity to meet these changing conditions and demand?	
Yes	xxx
No	
The project has been able to meet the increased demand so far; however, this relies on continuing donations and funding. The Charity has campaigned relentlessly to support child poverty initiatives, and it is part of their strategy to provide evidence of need e.g. on school meal debt and public debt.	

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Has the project changed through time?		
No		
Yes		xxx
What changed	Scale., Delivery demographics., The offer.	
Why has it changed	Scale: Increased demands and increased funds, meaning the organisation is now helping more people. Delivery demographics: From only Aberdeen to all over Scotland. The application process shifted from postal to online applications.	

Has the project had any unexpected or unintended outcomes?	
No	xxx
Yes	

In your opinion, is the project having an impact on tackling poverty?	
No	
Yes	xxx

This project is important in tackling poverty, particularly among families and children. Until everyone has enough to live on the fund will continue, as far as funding allows, to provides a resource that can help families in urgent need, prevent, and mitigate various forms of poverty and homelessness.

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Learning from Experience

What is working well?
The online system is user-friendly and immediately accessible to people in different situations. The project is able to respond to applications very quickly, ensuring that urgent needs are met. Particularly good is also the cash-first approach which is very important to families. Receiving the fund means that a family is helped to mitigate a crisis situation which could otherwise potentially lead them further into poverty.

What, if anything, is working less well?
N/A

What are the key learning points that you'd like to share with other practitioners?
The needs of people experiencing poverty can change, and a cash-first approach in supporting them means that emergent needs to be met.
There is a nationwide demand for a fund that supports people in crisis.

Are there plans to develop or expand the project in the future?

	No	xxx
	Yes	

There are currently no plans to expand or develop; however, more funding could lead to helping more people.

How easily do you think this project could be replicated in another setting?
This project could be easily replicated in another setting as long as the finances and systems are in place.