2026

RELATIONSHIPS SCOTLAND

Family Mediation Highland







ANNUAL REPORT

About Us

Our Board

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Katrina Beaton - Director (resigned 25th November 2025)

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Jane Young - Director (resigned 8th April 2026)

Jenna Thomson - Director (appointed 8th April 2026)

Amy MacLeod - Director (appointed 8th April 2026)

Laura Clarke - Director (appointed 8th April 2026)

Mary Bauld - Child Contact Centre Representative

Christina Hamilton -Child Contact Centre Staff Representative

Our Staff Team

Service & Development Manager	Margret MacRae	
Administrator	Brenda Dunbar	
Children & Young Person's Counsellor	Tine Butterworth	
Parenting Apart Facilitator	Jennifer Dibble	
Mediators	Jennifer Dibble Margret MacRae	Karen MacLeod Maria Stavrou
Trainee Mediators	Cindy Anderson	Lindy Cameron
Intake Worker	Brenda Dunbar	
Contact Centre Coordinator	Mary Bauld	
Family Support Workers	Jennifer Dibble	Jasmine Miller
Supervised Contact Workers	Christina Hamilton Donna McBreen	Claire Pollock
Duty Organisers	Lindy Cameron Brenda Dunbar Sarah Mackenzie Donna McBreen Claire Pollock Nicolle Wilson	Jackie Crennell Christina Hamilton Karen MacLeod Leigh Payne Fiona Powney

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Chair's Report



It is always a pleasure to have the opportunity to thank the staff of Relationships Scotland - Family Mediation Highland for the hard work, commitment and dedication they routinely give which makes the services that we deliver so effective and life-changing for our clients.

This annual report outlines just some of the work that has been carried out to improve the lives of families in the Highlands affected by separation and divorce and just some of the positive impacts that this work in turn creates. I hope that you will agree that the inspiring case studies included in the report provide ample evidence that what we do really does make a huge difference to children and families. We aim to empower and enable families to cope with separation and divorce in a more positive way, using tools and advice and guidance to move forward.

As ever, funding remains a constant challenge and we continue to make funding applications to a wide range of organisations to maintain and develop our services. Our aim, wherever possible, is to try to attract longer-term funding which would introduce a higher level of stability and certainty of continuity to our service users and to our staff. I would like to express our sincere gratitude to all of our funders for their support and assistance, without which we could not continue to deliver the invaluable services that we do.

Finally, I would like to thank my fellow trustees for contributing their knowledge, expertise, guidance and insight in providing governance and oversight of our charity.

Carol Greer

Mediation Service

We aim to help separated parents establish effective communication and make decisions regarding the future parenting of their children. We are extremely grateful to the Scottish Government and the Margaret Douglas Trust for their support which made it possible to provide this service.



During 2025-26 we continued to provide a safe environment, either virtually or at our Inverness based office, for parties to identify the elements of a dispute, explore issues in a solution focused way, identify options and formulate an action plan. The service improved family relationships and enabled parents to focus on the needs of their children.

116 new referrals to the mediation service were received during 2025-26. 152 parents attended an individual intake appointment, either by telephone or Zoom, to safely share their concerns, explore the issues that they and their children were experiencing, and help them identify what they would like to address in mediation. 82 parents went on to attend 69 joint mediation appointments (88 arranged), which in turn benefitted 63 children.

50% of families that utilised the mediation service did so via Zoom.
3% of mediations were conducted as shuttle mediations, with the mediators facilitating indirect conversations and negotiations between parents.

The necessity to facilitate the Zoom mediations with two mediators working from separate premises and utilising different broadband lines, did increase the cost of service delivery. However, this was necessary to ensure that parents were not left online by themselves during a mediation session, should one mediator's connection fail. 430 staff hours were required to facilitate the 69 joint mediation sessions.

Staff training and continuing professional development opportunities were provided both in person and via online platforms. The opportunity to be able to continue to access a range of training online has enabled practitioners to be able to be provided with training from a greater range of experts throughout the UK. To ensure that we can continue to provide a responsive service two trainee mediators were recruited and began their training in the autumn of 2025. It is anticipated that they will become part-qualified by the autumn of 2026 and fully qualified registered mediators by the autumn of 2028.

116 New referrals to mediation

152 Parents attended an initial appointment

69 Joint mediation appointments attended

63 Children benefitted

Mary and Scott's Story

Mary and Scott have been separated for four years and have three sons Andrew (12) Robbie (10) and Calum (8). They have managed to co-parent successfully since separation and have kept a positive relationship, but recently they have been arguing and unable to agree on the best way forward for their children. They have come to mediation in the hope that they can resolve the current issues and return to the way that they shared the care of their children in the past.

Scott shared that he had been brought up by strict parents who had enforced lots of rules. Whilst he had found that quite difficult as a child, he still felt that it was good for children to have discipline. He felt that when he and Mary were together they had rules and boundaries but thought that things changed after Mary had a new partner. He felt that she had become much softer on the children. Scott found this frustrating as he felt that he was the one enforcing discipline and sticking to the rules while Mary and her partner were taking the easy route. Mary shared that it was very important to her to be in tune with the children's emotions, and felt that being able to talk things through with them was more important than lots of rules. She shared that she sometimes felt that Scott was too rigid, especially now the children were older. She stated that Scott was a good father and was aware that he was trying to do what he thought was best for the children. Both Mary and Scott felt that they had managed arrangements well for their children since their separation and were disappointed that they seemed to be having problems now that they couldn't resolve.

Prior to the recent difficulties, all three boys spent time with Scott after school on 2 afternoons per week and would stay with him overnight on a Saturday. The current problems arose when Calum recently said that he didn't want to stay overnight with Scott on the Saturday. Scott was visibly upset when talking about this. He felt that he hadn't had a proper explanation and shared that he couldn't move on until he knew what the reason for this was. Mary was frustrated and shared that they had gone over this many times and that they kept having the same argument. She had spoken to Calum about it, and he had just said that he wanted to stay with her that weekend. She viewed this as a normal 'blip' and felt that Scott had blown this out of all proportion. She felt that Scott had made everything worse by saying that if Calum wouldn't stay the night, then he shouldn't come at all. Scott said that this was an example of what he had said about Mary being 'too soft' and that he felt that she should not have allowed Calum to refuse to come. Mary said that she had tried really hard to get Calum to go to his dad's house but wasn't prepared to force him if he was refusing. Calum hadn't seen Scott for over a month at the time of the mediation and Mary was very concerned about how they could resolve this situation.

Initially Mary and Scott found it difficult to see each other's perspectives and blamed each other for the situation. Mary explained that she had felt guilty about the separation and it was really important to her for the children to feel safe and secure in both homes. She felt that they had worked hard to achieve this and couldn't understand why Scott had overreacted to Calum choosing not to go once. She shared that the boys had always loved their time with Scott but that since Calum's refusal, Andrew and Robbie had said that things had changed and that Scott seemed angry. The mediators explored the situation with Scott, particularly why he had felt that he had to stop Calum from spending time with him altogether when time with his children was obviously so important to him. Scott shared that he felt that he had to show some authority as a parent. He feared that if he didn't do so, the children wouldn't respect him and that he would not be able to cope with parenting them. Scott said that he felt that Mary was a brilliant parent and that her new partner was really good with the children too. He feared losing his role as a dad and disclosed that he lacked confidence in dealing with difficult situations with the children. He explained that he would previously have asked

Mary and Scott's Story (cont'd)

Mary for help but felt uncomfortable with this now that she had a new partner. Mary was able to see that Scott was very hurt and confused by Calum's refusal and had been using rules and discipline as a way of managing these emotions.

Once Mary and Scott had a better understanding of their respective viewpoints, they were able to start looking at options for dealing with the current situation. They agreed that Mary would talk to Calum about going back to Scott's house and that she would tell him Saturday visits would be restarting. Mary voiced frustration that Scott expected her to enforce this but that he had not been helpful at the pick-ups and drop offs, making comments about her lack of discipline in front of the children and rushing to drive away. The mediators supported Scott and Mary to think about how the pick-ups and drop offs where likely to have been experienced by the children. This included giving thought to Andrew and Robbie's comments that they felt that Scott was angry. Mary and Scott were initially very focused on their own experience of the situation but once they felt that they had both been heard, were able to recognise that it must be very unpleasant for the children. They agreed to change the current pattern of Scott picking up the children from Mary's house and would in future meet up on Saturdays at the Rugby Club to create a more relaxed handover. They felt that this might help Calum as it was a different pattern and would involve them both sharing the responsibility for creating a positive atmosphere for the pick-ups and drop offs. It was also important for Mary to hear that Scott would remain flexible with all of the children and in the event of further refusals. They agreed that they would try and manage any future difficulties together.

Having agreed to try and re-establish Calum's time with Scott, the parents were encouraged to think about whether the current arrangements were working for Andrew and Robbie. They were able to recognise that there had been a number of changes in family life which included Mary's partner moving in. Andrew and Robbie had also become closer due to their shared interest in rugby. They were helped to explore this from each child's perspective and they realised that Calum now spent more time alone with Scott during the week when Andrew and Robbie were at rugby training, however, Calum rarely had any one-to-one time with Mary. This allowed Scott to see that Calum may have just wanted some time on his own with Mary, rather than it being that he didn't want to spend time with him. They decided to build some flexibility into their plan to ensure that it met the needs of all their children.



Neal and Iona's Story

Neal and Iona separated 2 years ago. They have a 6-year-old daughter, Judith and Iona has an older son, Jack who is 13. Neal works away from home regularly and arrangements have been ad-hoc. Judith has been unsettled after spending time with her dad and has been acting out and lashing out at both Iona and her brother. Iona had some concerns that Neal had been drinking on some occasions that Judith had stayed overnight with him. She decided to stop the contact arrangements to see if Judith's behaviour improved. Recently Judith has started asking for her dad and Iona approached mediation to try and re-establish contact between Judith and Neal.

During his initial appointment Neal shared that he did not feel able to sit in the same room as Iona for the mediation. He explained that he was not sure that he was able to manage his emotions. He was angry at Iona for stopping the contact and was also very emotional at not having seen or spoken to Judith for over 5 months. He had been in touch with a solicitor but hadn't been able to take legal action due to the costs involved.

Both Neal and Iona agreed to take part in shuttle mediation, whereby they are in separate rooms and two mediators shuttle between the parents to facilitate an indirect conversation.

At the first session Iona shared that she did really want Judith to be able to spend time with her dad but that she was concerned about her behaviour regressing. She also had some concerns about whether Neal was drinking. She wanted some reassurance that he wouldn't do so when Judith was in his care – Judith had told her that dad had some beers and that she had got upset when daddy was watching the football and was shouting at the TV. The mediators sought Iona's permission to share this with dad and Iona felt it would be important for Neal to know this.

Neal shared that he had been distraught when Iona had stopped him seeing Judith. When he had tried to talk to her about it, she had accused him of drinking and blamed him for the fact that Judith was hitting her and Jack. The mediators relayed the information from Iona and Neal shared his disappointment that Iona had not shared this with him previously. He considered this and then wondered if this information had got lost in their argument. He asked that Iona and Judith both be reassured that he would not drink whilst Judith was in his care.

The mediators shuttled between the two rooms and helped Iona and Neal think about Judith needed from them both. Neal felt that she needed both of them in her life and that they should be working together to bring her up. He really wanted to be involved in her life. He wanted to be included in her education, help with homework and felt that she would really benefit from his love of the outdoors.

Iona explained that Jack sees his dad every other weekend and they have a strong relationship. She wanted Judith to have the same relationship with her dad but was unsure how to make this happen. She acknowledged that arrangements with Jack's dad had also been difficult at first. Through the mediators, they agreed on a limited interim arrangement to begin rebuilding trust. It was agreed that Neal would collect Judith from school on Friday for the next 4 weeks and that they would spend the afternoon together. He would then drop her off at Iona's house at 7.00pm. Discussion took place around the drop off, and some simple boundaries were agreed to help this feel less stressful for them all.

A further session was arranged and this took place shortly after the interim agreement had ended. Iona acknowledged that the contact had gone well and that Judith appeared happy each time she came home. Neal had found it hard to know what to say to Judith when she had asked to stay for longer and told her that she would need to speak to her mum. Iona had been frustrated with this and felt that Judith blamed her when she hadn't been permitted to stay overnight.

Neal and Iona's Story (cont'd)

The mediators supported Iona and Neal to have an indirect conversation about their communication with Judith and also with one another. Neal acknowledged that this had resulted in Judith getting caught between them and consideration was given to how they might respond to some of Judith's questions in future, so that she was able to maintain a positive relationship with them both. Iona and Neal agreed on a form of words that they would both use so that it was a joint position and did not attribute blame to either parent. They both agreed that they would need to communicate with one another about parenting issues, and that if they had been caught on the spot by Judith, let the other know what she had been asking and how they responded to her. This would ensure that she received a consistent message from them both and did not get caught up in adult issues.

Further arrangements for Judith to spend time with her dad were agreed. Neal was very keen to teach Judith to swim and wanted to be involved in her swimming lessons. As these took place on a Saturday morning it was agreed that Judith would spend overnight with him on the Friday and he would drop her up at Iona's house at 7pm on the Saturday. Neal also requested that he could collect her from school on a Tuesday so that he could be involved in her homework for the week and help her with her reading practice and Iona was happy to agree to this.

Further mediation sessions followed where the time that Judith spent with her dad was increased. She now spends alternate weekends with him, with Iona taking her to the swimming lessons on the weeks in between allowing them both to encourage Judith and see her progress. The weekends were arranged to coincide for the weekends that Jack spends time with his dad, so that Judith and Jack could still spend time together on the weekends in between. Weekday contact has continued and seems to be working well. Arrangements were also agreed for school holidays, Christmas, birthdays and other special days.



Both Neal and Iona shared that the discussions around the dates and times had been much more productive as a shuttle mediation as they had remained very focused on the topic in hand and not got caught up in arguments. Neal shared how Iona would trigger a reaction in him due to some of her body language which had made him feel that his requests were ridiculous and that he was not good enough.

Iona shared that she felt that Neal would, "Just go on and on until she gave in." She reported that the shuttle mediation had given her time to think and not feel browbeaten into submission. The phased approach had helped her to build trust, and she could see at the handovers just how happy that Judith was with Neal. Both parents shared that they were using the strategies that they had put in place for their communication and although it felt a bit awkward at times, it had stopped the arguments. Neal shared that although the process was slower and had taken longer than he had hoped for, they would not have been able to sort things out by themselves. He also shared that his parents were delighted when he had been able to take Judith to visit them as they had really missed her too.

Child Contact Centre



Our Child Contact Centre services, based in Inverness and Wick, provide a safe, friendly, neutral, child-centred environment for children to meet with the parent they no longer live with or with wider family members. We are grateful to The Robertson Trust, The Henry Smith Foundation, The Paristamen Charity and Scottish Government for their financial support, which ensured that this service was provided free of charge.

During the last financial year, the service supported 51 families and enabled 64 children to spend time with their non-resident parent. 312 hours of supported contact were facilitated (463 arranged). A further 7682 hours of contact (8242 arranged) were facilitated outwith the centre, through the provision of a handover service.

The aim of the Child Contact Centre is to provide a stepping-stone to more permanent contact arrangements. Regular review meetings with parents, facilitated by the Family Support Worker, allow parents to explore and identify their own needs and the barriers which need to be addressed for contact to progress. This can be vital in terms of the parent's own well-being and their capacity to parent.

The input from the Family Support Worker, and the regular contact with their children increases self-esteem and confidence, enabling the relationship between the parent and children to flourish. The Family Support Worker is instrumental in assisting parents to maintain regular and consistent contact and implement manageable next steps towards contact outwith the centre that feels both safe and sustainable.

The provision of indirect contact was developed further and the service offered both Supported E-Contact and Supervised E-Contact.

Three families made use of the Supported E-Contact service. Resident parents sent videos and photos of their children, together with written or verbal updates. Non-resident parents in turn, sent videos, photos and messages from themselves for the other parent to share with their child. All content was screened by staff to ensure that it was appropriate before being passed on. The service was utilised by the families as a means of children and their non-resident parent or wider family maintaining a relationship where direct contact was not possible. Correspondence included video recordings of parents reading to their children, children sharing stories of what they had been doing and achievements such as learning to ride their bikes. During the course of the year the service shared 354 photos, 141 videos and 78 written updates.

463 Hours of supported contact arranged

7682 Hours of contact facilitated via handovers

64 Children benefitted

The Supervised E-Contact service was developed in recognition of the complexity of issues that some families face. There are some circumstances when it may not be possible for the resident parent to be able to share the videos and photos with their children in a positive or meaningful way. The information is instead shared with children by trained staff at the centre. Staff engage the children in play and conversation, interspersing this with showing the children videos, photos and letters that have been sent, and chatting to them about the messages. Children are supported to send a response, should they wish to do so. One family made use of this service.

Supervised Contact

Our service also provides in-person supervised contact. A trained member of staff supervises 1-hour or 2-hour contact sessions between a child and their parent in the Contact Centre. The contact is supervised at all times to ensure the safety of all the parties, and the staff member provides a factual report of the contact session. This is often ordered by the Sheriff Court but may be agreed between families and their solicitors.



During the year to March 2026 the supervised contact service received 46 new referrals.

211 supervised contact sessions were held (257 arranged) facilitating 418 hours of contact (564 hours arranged). The service supported 44 families and enabled 56 children to spend time with their non-resident parent. 85% of these referrals were received from the Sheriff Court, 11% from solicitors 2% from Social Work and 2% were self-referrals.

257 Supervised contact sessions arranged

418 Hours of supervised contact facilitated

56 Children benefitted

Oscar and Claudia's Story

Oscar and Claudia were in a relationship for over 3 years. Claudia shared that, during this time, Oscar had been coercively controlling and, at times, physically abusive including when she was pregnant with Lori. They separated when Lori was 4 months old. Shortly after this, Oscar was arrested and charged with Domestic Abuse. When he was released from custody, he discovered that Claudia had moved to France to be nearer her family for support. Oscar invoked the Haig Convention and Claudia returned to Scotland, and settled in Highland with Lori. In the meantime, Oscar was convicted of Domestic Abuse and a Non – Harassment Order was granted which prevented Oscar from approaching Claudia.

Oscar and Claudia's Story (cont'd)

Oscar went to court to seek a court order for contact with Lori. A final order was granted for Supervised Contact visits of up to one hour each month for Lori with her dad, with this to take place at the Inverness Child Contact Centre. Initial and individual meetings with each parent highlighted the challenges they were facing. Lori was now 4 years old and did not know her dad so it was agreed with all parties that a gradual introduction to him would be needed for Lori to feel safe, secure and not overwhelmed.



Contact centre staff arranged a familiarisation visit for Lori and Claudia. This provided an opportunity to meet the staff who would be facilitating the contact and for the service to find out more about Lori's particular needs and routines. The Family Support Worker met with both parents to explore their concerns and how to best support them moving forward. It was agreed that she would support the contact initially so that Lori had a familiar face between the waiting room where Claudia would be and the contact room with Oscar.

Following the initial contacts, the Family Support Worker supported Claudia when she shared concerns around changes in Lori's behaviour after contact, reporting increased clinginess, dysregulation and lethargy. The Family Support Worker reassured Claudia that some children can find the change in routine and meeting new people difficult, but this usually settles as they adjust to the new routine. She also encouraged Claudia to seek the support of Lori's nursery and Health Visitor if she was still worried or thought that this was getting worse. Claudia was also able to share some ideas that she thought would work well for Lori to ensure the separation from her mum was predictable and she worked in collaboration with centre staff so that Lori was able to feel a sense of safety and trust during visits. Staff implemented these and Lori adjusted quickly to being at the centre.

Lori played happily with Oscar and the Family Support Worker during the early contacts. The Family Support Worker modelled play and chat with Lori and supported Oscar to join in. Very quickly, Oscar and Lori were engaging well together, and the Family Support Worker was able to take a less active role in the contact.

Contact centre staff were also able to intervene when Oscar began asking staff for information about Lori that could enable him to discover Claudia and Lori's new home location. Contact centre staff remained vigilant at all times and followed the centre's protocols ensuring that personal information was not shared, and that the centre remained a place of safety and neutrality for all parties who use it.

The Family Support Worker provided ongoing support for Claudia as she found coming to the contact centre very difficult due to her previous experiences with Oscar. This support included safety planning in relation to travelling to and from the centre and signposting her to Women's Aid for more in-depth support and planning for their safety when not in the contact centre. Supporting Claudia's safety in this way enabled Lori to have consistent and regular contact with her dad and the relationship began to grow.

Unfortunately, after five months, Oscar's health deteriorated and he was no longer able to travel to Inverness. The service negotiated with both parents and provided video contact in the centre. This enabled Lori to continue to see Oscar and maintain and develop the relationship between them whilst keeping their home location private.

Robert and Jade's Story

Robert and Jade lived together for six years and have a daughter, Audrey. Their relationship ended when Audrey was a baby, but they continued living together to support each other as parents. During this period, Robert's mental health deteriorated, particularly following several family bereavements. He developed trauma symptoms and suicidal thoughts. His relationship with Jade then broke down completely, and he moved out. At first, they continued to co-parent, and Robert spent regular time with Audrey. However, their communication broke down and contact ceased. Audrey has since been diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. She has limited verbal communication, finds it difficult to express her needs and can become distressed in busy environments.

Robert went to court to seek contact with Audrey, and a court order was granted for supervised contact which was to be facilitated by the Inverness Child Contact Centre. During the centre's intake process, Robert shared that he had been diagnosed with Emotionally Unstable Personality Disorder, explaining that, for him, this can be particularly difficult in situations where he has to say goodbye when someone leaves. This triggers intense feelings of grief.



Robert expressed his fear that this would be distressing for Audrey at the end of a contact session and might impact his contact. Working with the Family Support Worker and contact centre co-ordinator, the centre adopted a flexible approach and adapted their normal procedure so that Robert was able to leave the contact room first and be taken to a waiting room. Staff then accompanied Audrey to her mum. The Family Support Worker was also available at the end of contact to support Robert.

Audrey, who was now 5 years old, responded well and enjoyed her time with her dad during the contacts that followed. Staff worked with Robert to ensure that the contact room was safe for Audrey during times she struggled to regulate her behaviour. For example, on one occasion she discovered a storage cupboard for toys and activities not in use during their contact and was determined to access this. Staff supported Robert by securing the cupboard and clearing space to create a calmer, safer space for her while he supported her to regulate.

There was a brief gap in contact after the supervised contact order ended and before a new order was granted. Under the new order, contact progressed from supervised contact to supported contact, and then to the supported handover service, allowing Robert and Audrey to spend two hours together outside the centre. Staff helped Robert with safety planning and suggested activities near the centre that they might enjoy. The family then progressed to managing handovers themselves, with Robert and Jade communicating effectively to make the new arrangements work.

Sadly, the arrangement became difficult to sustain over the following months. Communication broke down amid conflict and concerns that Robert could not keep Audrey safe when they were out together. His mental health deteriorated significantly, and he struggled to regulate his moods. Contact stopped, and Robert returned to court. A new order granted one hour of supervised contact every fortnight, and the family returned to Inverness Child Contact Centre.

Robert and Jade's Story (cont'd)

Since returning to the centre, Robert and Audrey have maintained a strong relationship. Audrey enjoys spending time with her dad, who is attentive to her needs. However, she has become increasingly dysregulated and unsettled during contact, requiring Robert to spend much of each session helping her regulate. Now aged seven, Audrey is bigger and stronger, and when dysregulated may accidentally hurt herself or others. On some occasions, sessions have had to end early because Audrey was unable to regulate in the contact room.

Robert attended an individual Parenting Apart information session with the Family Support Worker, tailored to his needs. While discussing the emotional impact of separation, he connected his traumatic experiences of significant loss with the way he had managed his separation from Jade and his fear of losing Audrey. He also recognised, for the first time, how his difficulties had affected Jade and Audrey. When discussing communication and conflict, Robert acknowledged that direct communication with Jade did not currently feel safe. However, he was keen to learn alternative strategies and hoped to put them into practice in the near future.

The Contact Centre service is also considering how best to support Audrey within the centre. The charity has recognised the need for a safe, quiet space for Robert to be able to take Audrey when she is becoming dysregulated or distressed. Funding is currently being sought for equipment to enable the service to adapt a room within the centre into a sensory space. This would provide a safe and quiet space with lighting, tactile objects and soothing sounds where parents and children can spend time whenever needed.



Children & Young Person's Counselling Service



We have continued to provide a robust counselling service to vulnerable children and young people, between the ages of 5 and 18 years, experiencing the effects of parental separation and family breakdown.

We are extremely grateful to The Henry Smith Foundation for their support which made it possible to provide this service.

96 new referrals to the Children & Young Person's Counselling service were received during 2025-26 and our counsellor provided support for 142 children through a combination of both direct and indirect support.

The counsellor delivered 252 (285 arranged) therapeutic support sessions to 75 children and young people who have been adversely affected by their parents' divorce or family restructuring to prevent serious mental health difficulties. 8% of these appointments were facilitated to young people aged 12- 18 via WhatsApp video call ensuring that geography was not a barrier to enable them to access support.

These counselling sessions enabled children and young people to:

- Work through their feelings about themselves and /or their situation using counselling and / or play therapy to express their feelings, reach understanding and let go of the misplaced feelings of guilt or responsibility.
- Develop positive and constructive coping mechanisms thereby reducing risk taking behaviour (anti-social behaviour, early sexual behaviour, self-harming, drugs / alcohol misuse).
- Become pro-active in making positive changes and be able to set themselves realistic and achievable goals.
- Increase their self-esteem, confidence and motivation allowing them to achieve their potential.

In addition, the counsellor also provided indirect support to children who were too young or did not wish to engage by offering support via a parent. 212 (223 arranged) appointments were provided to 99 parents. This enabled them to gain a better understanding of their children's needs and how the separation has impacted them, and they received support to develop ways to better help their children through the changes in their lives. This benefitted an additional 67 children.

142 Children benefitted

252 Counselling sessions for children facilited

212 Parental support appointments facilitated

Rosie's Story

Rosie, aged 15 was signposted to the service by CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service).



Her parents had separated acrimoniously 10 years ago. Rosie and her sister lived with their mum and had regular contact with their dad. It emerged that Rosie was struggling with her relationship with her mum. She described her mum sending her and her sister outside in the early hours of the morning and instructing them not to return home until the evening during school holidays. They had to essentially fend for themselves. Often, they were sent to their room on returning from school. They described their stepdad as a bully who had threatened to "get rid" of her and her sister. Rosie described being screamed at by her mum if she said, "I love you mum" and being petrified of her stepdad. She developed an eating disorder and was referred to CAMHS for treatment. It was at this point the abuse was disclosed, and child concerns were raised by the team at CAMHS. Rosie and her sister were given into the care of her dad and stepmum who were loving and supportive.

At the time of referral to the Children & Young Person's Counselling Service, Rosie had stopped attending school, dropped out of activities that she had once enjoyed and had begun to self-harm. Contact with her mum had been sporadic, on mum's terms and had broken down leaving Rosie feeling abandoned and rejected.She blamed herself and said, "All I want is for mum to love me, what's wrong with me?"

Counselling provided Rosie with a safe space where she slowly was able to talk about very painful and traumatic experiences that had created deep emotional wounds. She was at a very low ebb, vulnerable and gave off an air of being lost. She was carrying a lot of misplaced guilt, feeling not good enough and blaming herself for all that had happened with her mum. Counselling took place over many months. Gradually Rosie was able to find the words to express her feelings of sadness and confusion. She was encouraged to talk about the self-harm, reducing the emotional pain, punishing herself, and worked on healthier coping strategies. Throughout the work with the counsellor, her dad and step-mum provided a consistent and stable home for Rosie. The counsellor helped them to understand what the self-harming was about, what it represented and how they could support Rosie as she recovered.

In the past few weeks Rosie has returned to Cadets and is socialising with her friends. Her attendance at school has improved. The therapeutic work is ongoing and is anticipated to conclude over the coming months.

Bethan's Story

Bethan, aged 14 was referred to the service by her mum due to deterioration in their relationship. Mum had collapsed at home following a serious medical event that resulted in brain surgery. It was Bethan who found her mum, contacted emergency services and subsequently refused to speak about her experience. Mum described Bethan as difficult, disrespectful and entitled. Often, she would stay with her maternal grandmother who lived close by. Mum was unhappy with this as she had a fractious relationship with her mother and resented Bethan sharing information with her. Bethan recently became drunk at a party, adding to mum's concerns.



Bethan's parents had separated before she was born and her dad had been largely absent throughout her childhood. He had recently remarried and had a baby boy. Bethan struggled with dad's expectations that she should now be integrating into his new family and spending time with them.

School reported that Bethan was a diligent, ambitious and capable pupil.

Through counselling, Bethan has gradually begun to reveal a much more vulnerable picture of her experience, in particular the traumatic event with her mum's collapse and the fear and worry about the brain surgery. She felt unable to speak to her mum about it or anyone else in the family. She felt insecure, misunderstood and frequently compared herself to others, often unfavourably. Despite being ambitious and high achieving, she struggled with feeling that she was not good enough and displayed strong perfectionist tendencies. She was caught between the expectations of both parents and was trying to establish her own identity and independence.

Counselling provided a safe space where she was able to express difficult and conflicting emotions. She began to process her frightening experience with her mum and to explore her feelings towards both parents. It has helped her to move from being judged by her behaviour to understanding what the reasons behind it are and sharing this with her parents.

This case highlights the importance of early therapeutic support to a youngster, giving the opportunity to process family disruption, trauma and adolescence before these difficulties become entrenched and compromise her abilities to manage emotions and relationships now and later on in life.

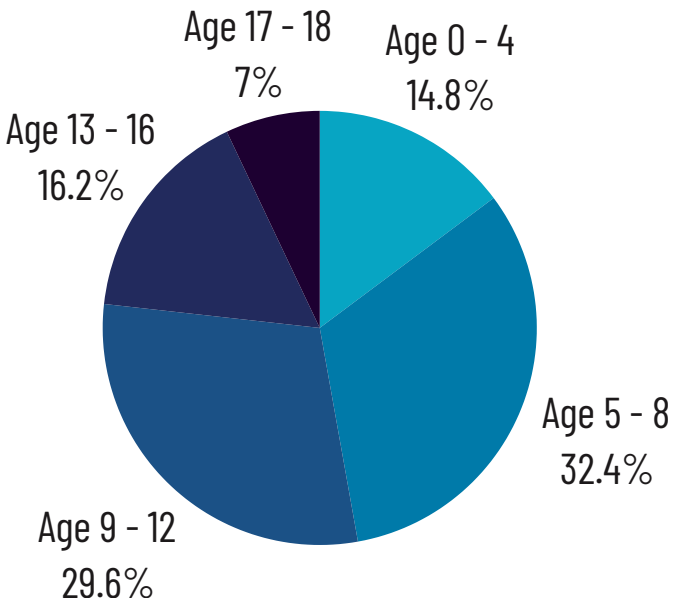
Mary's Story

Mary who has three children aged 18, 16 and 11, was signposted to the service by her solicitor. She was seeking counselling for her youngest child, but the child's father refused consent for the youngster to access the service. Parenting support was offered to Mary instead, thus providing indirect support to the child. The sessions also enabled Mary to understand how the parental separation may have affected the children, helped her to find her voice and to advocate for the children.

Mary was experiencing a difficult and controlling relationship with her former partner. She felt intimidated by his overpowering approach to family decision-making, including his attempts to determine where the children should reside and how much time they should have with her. Mary was forced out of the family home and managed to establish a home of her own in another town. She was deeply worried about the impact on the children, especially the youngest who was particularly unhappy and expressed a strong wish to spend more time with her. Despite recognising her son's needs, Mary initially lacked the confidence to challenge their dad about what she believed was best for the children. The work she did with the counsellor over many sessions enabled her to recognise her own strengths, develop confidence, find her voice and begin to assert her needs and boundaries. She could explore her fears and uncertainties and consider decisions from the perspective of her children and their needs. As her confidence grew, she felt increasingly able to engage in mediation with her children's dad to try and reach a workable agreement about contact arrangements for the children. The parenting support continued throughout this time, enabling her to manage the emotional challenges she experienced. This ensured that she was able to remain focused on the children's needs. This ultimately resulted in an agreement that reflected her son's wishes to spend most of his time with his mum. The impact on the child has been significant, he has been noticeably happier, more settled and more secure. For Mary the outcome represents an important step in her reclaiming her voice and confidence as a parent.

This case demonstrates how providing parenting support to parents who have experienced controlling or difficult relationships can lead to developing confidence, establishing a sense of agency and being able to effectively advocate for their children's needs. Helping the mum to find her voice contributed to a more positive and settled outcome for her children.

Age of Children who have benefitted from the Children & Young Person's Counselling Service in 2025-2026



Parenting Apart

Parenting Apart sessions are designed to support parents to help their children successfully manage separation or divorce and parenting when living apart. The sessions focus on the different impacts of a separation, particularly the emotional impact and the grief cycle. They also focus on how children are affected at their different ages and stages and what parents can do to support them. Finally, they explore the impact of conflict, strategies for constructive communication and decision making. Many parents who attend a session had experienced their own parents' separation, and this impacts how they manage their own situation, particularly when their childhood experience was traumatic with high conflict and the loss of the relationship with a much-loved parent. Resources are sent out to each parent following completion of the session enabling parents to refer back to these as situations arise, or their children's needs change.

We strive to ensure that services meet the needs of the families and adapts these wherever possible to make them accessible and appropriate. Group sessions are delivered via zoom, whilst individual appointments are provided in-person or via video call.

A total of 20 parents attended a Parenting Apart session during 2025-26, benefiting 36 children. These were a combination of individual and group sessions. 45% of parents attended individual meetings due to the complexity of their situation, and meetings were tailored to their individual needs.

We are grateful to The Robertson Trust who provided funding for this service, which enabled the sessions to be delivered free of charge. The importance of this was highlighted when a mum expressed how this made attending a session possible for her. "I found the session incredibly valuable. I so appreciated the help. The facilitators were so knowledgeable, supportive and helpful. The fact the session was free was amazing at such a difficult time in my personal life financially at the moment."



Group Session - Case Study

4 parents, Mark, Cheryl, Nina and Lewis, attended a group session of Parenting Apart. The session took place online using Zoom video conferencing. The parents did not know one another prior to the session.

Mark separated from his ex-partner, Julie, 2 years ago. Their son, Sean, is now 5 years old and lives with his mum. Mark and Julie tried mediation a year ago and reached some positive agreements around the time that Sean spent with Mark. However, the process stalled and the family case went to court. Mark described Julie as very controlling of his time with Sean. By the time he came to Parenting Apart, direct communication between the parents had broken down completely. At the end of the session, Mark said that he wished he had done Parenting Apart before mediating as he thinks this might have improved the outcomes and negated the need to go to court.

Mark reported that he had found the session very helpful. He felt reassured about the things he was already doing as a parent and shared that the session has improved how he is coping with his situation. He also reported an improved understanding of what his son is going through and now feels better able to support him. Mark also commented on more longer-term benefits of the session, sharing that there was loads of useful information that he will no doubt come back to as his son gets older. A short time later, Mark approached the mediation service again, and he and Julie have since returned to mediation.

Cheryl was married to Ian for 19 years before they separated 1 year ago. Although separated, they still live in the same house. Ian works away from home. They have 2 children, Sarah aged 11 and Daisy aged 14. Whilst they are using solicitors, there is no court action. Cheryl explained that she struggles with their situation, finding it very stressful. She thinks Sarah and Daisy are okay. Although communication around arrangements is quite good, Cheryl and Ian struggle to manage conflict. At the end of the session, Cheryl shared that she found talking to other parents in similar situations very helpful. She also felt she had a better understanding of, “where her ex is at”, recognising that he is going through the same things that she is.

Lewis and Angela were together for 14 years before making the decision to separate. They were also still living in the same house with their daughter Ellen, who is 10 years old. After the session, Lewis shared that this really increased his understanding, enabling him to see that his partner is currently in a different emotional place to him (within the grieving process) and that this had resulted in them having different views regarding shared care. He acknowledged that it’s okay and normal to be at different stages from one another, particularly in the early stages of separation where there are a lot of changes still to be made practically.

Nina and Daniel separated 11 months ago after 18 years together. Daniel was struggling to find affordable housing, so they too were still living in the same house. Their 2 children, Louise, aged 1 and William, aged 4 years, had not yet been told about their parents’ separation. Nina became very emotional during the session talking about her fears for how the children will react to the news and how this might “damage them.” Both Cheryl and Lewis spoke directly to Nina about their own experiences of having this conversation with their children, reassuring her that they were able to support their children well afterwards as they were still in the same house. They also shared that telling the children felt like a huge weight being lifted. Nina expressed her gratitude for sharing their own experiences which she found very reassuring.

At the end of the session, Nina shared, “It is very reassuring to hear that what we’re going through is normal and not that I am doing something wrong. Hearing about the different impacts of a separation, particularly the emotional and psychological ones made sense of a lot of things we’re all experiencing.”

Finance

SUMMARY INCOME & EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT TO 31.03.26	2025/26	2024/25
Income	£	£
Grants from statutory bodies	143,563	143,563
Grants from charitable sources	85,122	81,454
Income from charitable activities	77,921	77,948
Donations	1,837	2,290
	308,443	305,255
Expenditure		
Staff Costs (incl. Pension Contributions)	218,522	225,826
Course Fees, Training and Travel	9,022	3,560
Premises	20,454	21,393
Running Costs	20,637	23,420
Purchase of Equipment	1,439	982
Depreciation	1,601	1,554
	271,675	276,735
Surplus / (Deficit) for Year	36,768	28,520
BALANCE SHEET		
Fixed Assets	4,803	4,664
Current Assets - Debtors	23,000	28,060
- Cash at bank and in Hand	336,525	299,324
Total Current Assets	359,525	327,384
Current Liabilities - Accruals & Deferred Income	(12,690)	(17,178)
Net Current Assets	346,835	310,206
Net Assets	351,638	314,870

Finance

Our main source of funding for core running costs and the facilitation of mediation around the issues of separation continues to be provided by the Scottish Government. Clients are required to pay a contribution towards the cost of this service.

The Scottish Government funding continues to be channelled through Relationships Scotland, and £64,669 (2025 - £64,669 was received from the Children, Young People and Families Early Intervention Fund and Adult Learning and Empowering Communities Fund (CYPFEIF/ALEC). We are grateful for to The Margaret Douglas Trust for funding of £1,500. This has enabled the fee for mediation to be kept to a minimum.

The Child Contact Centre services, which include the Family Support Service, were funded during 2025-2026 by Scottish Government (£78,893), The Robertson Trust (£63,000 which is split evenly over three years from 01/06/2022 to 30/05/2025) and further funding of £90,000 which is split evenly across three years from 01/06/2025 t0 31/05/2028, and The Henry Smith Foundation (award of £68,299 over three years 01/10/2022 – 30/09/2025) with additional Flex funding of £26,780 for 01/10/2025 - 30/09/2026.

The Children & Young Person's Counselling Service was funded during 2025-2026 by The Henry Smith Foundation. We are grateful to The Henry Smith Foundation for the award of £67,501 over three years (01/10/2022 – 30/09/2025).

We are grateful to Highland Cross for funding of £3,300, which enabled us to replace three laptops and purchase textbooks for the trainee mediators.

The overall surplus for the year is £36,768 compared to a surplus last year of £28,520. This includes £27,650 received in 2025-26 for utilisation during 2026-27.

Calculated in accordance with the charities SORP this includes a restricted funds surplus of £3,103 compared to last year's deficit of £6,640, with a restricted closing funds balances totalling £91,700 compared with £88,597 last year and an unrestricted funds surplus of £33,665 compared to a surplus of £35,160 last year, with the closing unrestricted funds balance totalling £259,938 compared to £226,273 last year.

Unrestricted funds total £259,938 (2025 - £226,273) . As at 31 March 2026 we hold an unrestricted cash balance of £247,201. The board have set aside £33,075 for redundancy and closure costs and £68,500 for contingency costs which leaves £145,626 available for use in the day to day running of the charity.

Thank You

For financial support during 2025 - 26 to:

Scottish Government

The Robertson Trust

The Henry Smith Foundation

Margaret Douglas Trust

Highland Cross

The Hugh Fraser Foundation

The Paristamen Charity

All individuals and organisations who made donations



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