

Glasgow Kelvin College

STAY

Partners: Glasgow Colleges Regional Board; Glasgow Kelvin College; City of Glasgow College; West College Scotland; Action for Children

Focus: Wrap-around support for enrolled college students who are care experienced to maintain and sustain college success

Description

Launched in February 2019, STAY is a regional programme funded by the Glasgow Colleges Region Board. The programme is facilitated by the Action for Children (Action for Children) organisation in partnership with Glasgow Kelvin College, City of Glasgow College, and West College Scotland. Its remit is to support care experienced learners, aged 16-24. The programme applies front line preventative measures to ensure care experienced learners remain in college.

Glasgow Kelvin College's high number of learners identified as care experienced emphasises the criticality of the STAY programme.



“ There was a much more demonstrable need for a project like this at Kelvin for a number of reasons: the volume of care experienced learners that we had – not just those who were identifiable as care experienced, but those students that we knew were care experienced, but wouldn't recognise that within themselves. Particularly the 'looked after at home' cohort who don't see themselves as in the care system but are probably the most vulnerable cohort of care experienced learners you can work with.

Maggie Murphy, Glasgow Kelvin College

Based on an awareness of multiple external issues experienced by care experienced learners, STAY at Glasgow Kelvin College is working to prevent this group of vulnerable learners from dropping out of education due to non-college related issues.



Success factor: partnership

STAY is notably successful at Glasgow Kelvin College because of the close partnership between college staff and Action for Children staff. In summer 2019, Action for Children staff met with Glasgow Kelvin College staff at the College's East End campus, where a discussion around the feasibility of the programme at Kelvin took place.

“ We were asked, ‘do you think this will work in Kelvin’, which to me was rhetorical, because, yes, there’s need, there’s demand, there’s opportunity. I knew right away there would be massive gains and massive opportunities to refer young people and other people in the College.

Maggie Murphy, Glasgow Kelvin College

Working in collaboration with 42 learning and community centres, Glasgow Kelvin College is entrenched in college learning development delivery. By default, the College works in partnership, meaning there was a strong foundation in place for the relationship with Action for Children to take hold. Now, Action for Children staff are situated in the Advice, Guidance and Learner Support office at Glasgow Kelvin College's East End campus. *“We’ve organically grown together; we’ve just embedded, and it’s taken hold”* (Marlyn Davidson). The foundational relationship between Glasgow Kelvin College and Action for Children has enabled the STAY programme to flourish in Glasgow's East End, and the people at the heart of the programme make it work.

“ Their passion is community support. Our passion is community support. So, when we come in with an ambition to support college students, we know there’s a wraparound required. It’s not going to just stop at the College, and most of the barriers that students face is externally. And that’s where the teamwork makes such a difference.

Marlyn Davidson, Action for Children

The impact of poverty in the geographic areas of Glasgow Kelvin College's campuses, and the community profile of the College, means that college staff are often the first point of contact for learners. Due to the nature of Action for Children being present in the College, in conversation with Advice, Guidance and Learner Support staff, Action for Children staff are able to access learners who can benefit from the programme.

“ This project has evolved significantly. One of the things about our faculty is we were very, very quick to get Marlyn and her team into our senior management faculty meeting on a Friday morning so they could meet all the curriculum managers and they had the opportunity to hear a bit about the project, so they were immediately immersed in college life and college activity. They never sat as an add on, they’re not an add on, we are complementary in the work and the practice that we do. They give a significant added value and significant added resource which is brilliant.

Maggie Murphy, Glasgow Kelvin College

Action for Children staff receive referrals from the College Advice, Guidance and Learner Support team, in addition to college course tutors – the teaching staff who provide guidance to their students – who are best placed to refer learners; they know the learners best. Since the course tutors were made aware of the programme, referrals have increased.

“ When Claire and Stephen [Action for Children] had the opportunity to come and speak to our faculty members, the information was immediately cascaded to course tutors: the spike in referrals, the spike in questions, the awareness of the project, the understanding of the criteria and the needs of the project just spiked.

Maggie Murphy, Glasgow Kelvin College



It's not only the close partnership of the College and Action for Children that has assisted the success of the STAY programme, but also partnerships with local community organisations and local charities. For example, Action for Children links in with the Urban Fox Programme, a voluntary managed project, providing young people within the East End of Glasgow with a wide range of educational and diversionary activities. *"When we know that they have stuff that we can use, additional vouchers, we tap into relationships that we've built with those guys already. We seek out those kinds of partnerships"* (Stephen O'Donnell, Glasgow Kelvin College). There is whole systems approach that enables STAY to thrive.

“ I like to see STAY as we're filling in the gaps. We work with a lot of external organisations as well to support the young person. Sometimes the referrals I've had, they've had support from external organisations but they're also very limited in what they can do so it's like, we come in and we fill in the gaps. When other organisations, or the College can't do things because of the way their policies work, we come in. That's how I like to think of it.

Aqsa Baig, Action for Children

The Action for Children staff have created a network of organisations to provide material resources, and in doing so, they are tackling multiple issues around poverty: food poverty; period poverty; fuel poverty; and digital poverty. Resources provided enable learning to continue, and the staff are always finding new avenues to get support and material.

“ We beg from everybody to get stuff! For example, there was the wellbeing fund for food parcels during lockdown. We went to Iceland and Semichem and they gave us a warehouse full of stuff. And that's the method we use, we're a charity, so we need to reach out. We engage with an organisation that's a law firm and through that engagement, I have just now written up principles of where they could provide us with support that can support students. It's a wish list that we narrowed down to 10 principles that mention financial support, but there's also bits in there that's about work experience, that's about connectivity, feasibility study ... I reach out to everybody that I can, that's the stuff that goes on behind the scenes. We get support from the Scottish Government as well.

Marlyn Davidson, Action for Children

Working together with local charities allows for the project to be sustainable. *"Resources can only matter where they matter. If we give all our resources out, we won't have that blood bank of resource there for emergencies. So, we reach out to these organisations, we go back and check discretionary funding and make it happen"* (Marlyn Davidson)



Impact factor: direct intervention

The programme provides foundational support to make sure everything's in place for the learner before they begin their learner journey at college, including assisting with college inductions, finance, travel, and other administrative arrangements. A pre-college induction occurs in June. Bringing the care experienced learners to campus before the official start date, helps create a positive and welcoming environment for the learner, and aids retention: learners know where to go to for support before the College year starts. Additionally, STAY provides support with other essential factors that can prevent a learner from accessing education due to health and identity status, such as helping learners sign up to GP practices, and applying for passports, birth certificates, and the Young Scot Card for travel.

“ I'd made referrals for learners to get ID documents that they didn't have. Getting birth certificates which helps them with opening bank accounts, applying for the young person's free bus travel, their student funding applications for college, to get their EMAs, their care experienced bursaries as well. A lot of young people, due to their backgrounds, maybe they've moved around a lot, or maybe are no longer with their families, or they just don't have the document, being able to access that stuff's vital.

Fiona Templeton, Glasgow Kelvin College

Some of the most crucial work provided by the STAY programme is around crisis management, and this direct intervention prevents drop out.

“ Going back to lockdown, quite quickly we realised that a lot of learners we were trying to support didn't have access to devices or internet, and straight away we got a whole bunch of referrals in, and they were delivered to these young people's houses during the restrictions, so they were able to access their college work and continue.

Fiona Templeton, Glasgow Kelvin College

STAY supported a learner who was struggling due to a relationship breakdown negatively impacting their financial situation. The programme helped with utility bills and essential food, enabling the learner to continue to study during a period of stress and hardship. The learner's college attendance improved, in addition to experiencing increased motivation and confidence to continue studying.

“ STAY has been a great support. They listened and understood my issues and worked closely with Action for Children Manager and Maggie from the College to overcome some of my barriers. I can't believe they helped me pay off some bills, got me food and helped to keep me on track. I am looking forward to achieving my qualification and planning the next step of my life.

Anonymous beneficiary, STAY

When emergencies arise, the staff are ready to act. Each Action for Children staff member has a case load, but additional emergency cases emerge. The College and Action for Children staff liaise to ensure support is provided immediately to prevent further disadvantage.

“ We had a learner whose family home was destroyed by fire. Straight away these guys [Action for Children] came in and got emergency supplies for the young person who was one of our students at the time. We were able to get her clothes and emergency food and things like that sorted out. That was the very next day. That really preserved that learner’s relationship with the College and the support available through their team and us. I think we could have easily lost that young person at that point and that didn’t happen because she had somewhere safe to fall back on.

Fiona Templeton, Glasgow Kelvin College

The programme has had additional benefits to the life of the College, such as the mental health support provided through the ‘Walk and Talk’ activity: taking learners out of the College building to ask how they are doing. This service is provided by the STAY programme mentors and is implemented to support learners who struggle with eye-to-eye contact when discussing mental health issues. This function of the STAY programme is filtering into different aspects of college provision.

“ I was delighted to hear that one of the College staff has taken up this approach for learners who require someone to talk to but don’t want eye-to-eye contact. So what we’re doing seems to be working and we hope it will reach much wider going forward.

Marlyn Davidson, Action for Children



Success factor: supporting transitions

The STAY programme not only provides support to learners while they are studying on a college programme but assists with transitions when learners are ready to move on to more advanced courses. The Action for Children staff don’t see people who leave the College as no longer under their care. They also provide assistance for learners beyond the College system. They can find other courses and ways to help the people.

“ If it turns out that college is not for that young person, if they drop out, we don’t say, because you’re not a student anymore we can’t work with you. We will find that young person another destination, another positive, whether that is a shorter-term training course just to build their confidence, whether it’s finding them a job, whatever it is that they want to do next, we will help them get on that path. And it could be that in 10 years’ time they come back to college and that’s the right time for them. So, we do work with the young person and always encourage them to stick to college, but if it isn’t for them, we will support them to find their next positive destination.

Claire Lumsden, Action for Children

STAY supported a learner who was displaying disruptive behaviour at college. With the support of STAY, the learner was able to find a more appropriate destination and continues to stay in education.

“ The STAY worker helped me fix out my situation as the course was not for me. They fixed my money out and helped me with my application to my next course. I was not settled but feel better now and to know that STAY are just a call away is so good.

Anonymous beneficiary, STAY



Success factor: a programme without borders

STAY at Kelvin cuts across boundaries. It started as an initiative to support care experienced learners; now, the programme's remit has extended to any learner identified as vulnerable. No one is turned away.

“ **The other thing about the Action for Children guys is that if we present them with a case, or a young person, or a student, that doesn't 100% fit the criteria, one of the beauties of this project which sets it apart, is that they will look at it. And even if they can't do something exclusively, they will do something indirectly. Where we can give something, we'll give something. And these guys [Action for Children], all the time, respond positively. So, it started initially as just care experienced, and just in three Glasgow colleges, and has significantly evolved.**

Maggie Murphy, Glasgow Kelvin College

The programme is no longer solely about retention of care experienced learners; it's about safety, health, and wellness for any learner considered vulnerable.



Impact factor: community intervention

One of the key benefits of the programme is that it does not operate strictly to the College term time. Action for Children staff understand that learners can become distant from the College over holiday periods. The STAY programme facilitates events over the summer: some specifically for care experienced learners, but also activities for generally vulnerable learners. This additional support maintains the link between the College and the learner all year round.

“ **We don't work exclusively to term time which is a huge benefit to the work we do. So over easter holidays and summer holidays when a student might need that one positive adult in their life, we can be that over that time. If we're not there, they could quite easily fall off the face of the earth and not return to college. But we're there to try and stop that over non-term time. Over term time when the College is closed, we'll check in over the phone, Microsoft teams meetings, texts message chats, we meet in the community, at cafes, libraries. When lockdown was a thing, we were meeting in the young person's house if that was allowed [...] we do go into the community and provide that support.**

Stephen O'Donnell, Glasgow Kelvin College

The impact of the STAY programme at Glasgow Kelvin College extends from the College learner to the family and filters out to the community. The programme begins with the learner and has grown to provide community support to individuals and families living in areas of multiple deprivation. Via the College, STAY aims to provide life and finance support to the community; the impact of the programme transcends the College.



“ A lot of the support we provide it’s not just to do with college work and making sure they attain at college. We provide a lot of support in the community as well. So we deal with support about relationship breakdowns, or if they’re having housing issues, or financial issues, stuff like that. [...] because we do this it transcends further than the student itself; we go into families and provide a lot of family support as well. The family is an extension of the student. We take a holistic approach, looking at every aspect of the student’s life and provide what support we can to ensure the College environment is a better experience for the student and make sure that they’re well supported.

Stephen O’Donnell, Glasgow Kelvin College

“ When you go in to support the student, they’re at the forefront of your mind, the forefront of your intentions for providing some sort of support. We’re not going in with the intention of providing support for the family, but if offshoots from the primary support when you see the circumstances the student may be living in. You see the background that they grew up in [...] when I’ve been supporting students sometimes its financial ... then it’s about providing advice to the parents whether it be advocacy advice about benefits or referring them to foodbanks or pantries and stuff like this. It’s not expected support for families but because it does transcend from providing support to students, we do that.

Stephen O’Donnell, Glasgow Kelvin College

The consequences of the Covid-19 lockdowns extended the remit of the STAY programme further into the community. Action for Children staff delivered tech equipment to ensure learners could continue to access their studies. However, they were delivering not only devices, but food, sanitary products, welfare bags with shaving foam, shavers,

underwear etc. The direct intervention provided to learners during the lockdown isolation periods, also supported the learners’ families, and the community.

“ [...] the whole balance starts with the family, or the care place the young person’s living in, or the street they’re living on. We do our best to just bring them back to life and through giving them that extra blood support we’re able to then build their strengths up [...] we try to make that young person’s life count in every way possible.

Marlyn Davidson, Action for Children

Before the lockdowns, the STAY programme had not previously supplied connectivity. This extension to the support provided, and the structure of how the learners were being reached during the lockdowns, enabled the programme to continue to support learners and their families at those crucial times. Being able to hand the device over to learners at home allowed Action for Children staff to make sure the learners were safe at a time when they couldn’t go to college.

“ The engagement with us, even from a wellbeing perspective, that meant we could check in with them and see how they were doing and was the family OK for food and all these things as well, you know. Just to be able to maintain the communication was vital in those early stages. Allowing them to progress with their college work despite the restrictions and the lockdowns.

Fiona Templeton, Glasgow Kelvin College

The support extended further during the Christmas period and Action for Children staff delivered food vouchers to learners and their families on Christmas Eve.



Barriers/challenges

While the STAY programme has been highly successful at Glasgow Kelvin College, changes in Action for Children staff have created pressure on the smooth functioning of the programme. However, this has not adversely affected the learners at the heart of the programme. The Action for Children staff and Glasgow Kelvin College staff are integrally connected and overcome challenges as they arise in order to continue to deliver crucial support to vulnerable learners.

The main barrier to gaining permission for the roll out of the programme has been around finding a space to work. It is the hope of Action for Children that promoting the success of the STAY programme at Glasgow Kelvin College will encourage other colleges to adopt a similar structure.

“ The biggest challenge has been trying to find a space to work from [in the College] and feeling you’re part of a team. Basically, with Kelvin we’re a family.

Marlyn Davidson, Action for Children

Moving forward

Referrals for the STAY programme at Glasgow Kelvin College continue to grow as more college staff realise the benefit of the programme to vulnerable learners. Consequently, the programme continues to expand, from supporting care experienced learners to other learners in need, and the type of support provided to learners is evolving too.

“ Self-evaluation is important for us. Looking at case studies and identifying recurring themes. If we’re seeing recurring themes around homelessness for example, then that’s what we should be responding to. If that’s what coming to us, that’s what’s being faced by learners on the front line, so it’s about us being able to respond to that.

Maggie Murphy, Glasgow Kelvin College

The impact of the STAY programme has surpassed the expectations of the Action for Children staff.

“ Way surpassed. Our initial intention was to support care experienced learners on a journey. When I came in, I didn’t think there was going to be support to grow, although I had my own agenda of where I wanted to take this, and shape it, and right now, there’s nothing to stop us doing what we’re doing. It’s about growing and looking at what the environment needs, and if a student needs something different [...] we find a different thing that I hadn’t thought would be an issue, that they would come to us with that issue, but we respond to it.

Marlyn Davidson, Action for Children

Funding for the STAY programme is set to continue for a further three years at least, with The Robertson Trust and Glasgow City Council Education Services now providing support in addition to the Glasgow Colleges Regional Board. Glasgow City Council Education support allowed Action for Children to employ three additional staff members to work on the programme. The Robertson Trust's input has allowed for the STAY programme to grow further: *"people are recognising how this is evolving"* (Marlyn Davidson). It is the hope of the Action for Children team that other institutions will see the benefit of the programme for vulnerable learners and that the programme may be implemented in universities and other educational institutions.

“ Glasgow Colleges Regional Board have funded us for another year we expect that to continue. The Robertson Trust is only 6 months into play, so we're going to be around for at least another three years. We're also looking at expanding wider to other local authorities to duplicate what we're doing because it's worked here. We now have the evidence that it has worked. And to make that shine in those areas too. I think in as much as there's been recognition that there was a gap [for care experienced learners]

no one was taking it on board. I think with Maggie [Glasgow Kelvin College] being aware of where those gaps were, and then me coming in and delivering on it, has made the programme such a success. We're not ever going to be short of students that need support. If we take each student, and provide what they need, we can't do much better than that. And I can see this going into universities and wider. I think there's a definite need for this alongside what the College does just now. And the crucial point of any of that is communication, and if we can have open transparent communication, understanding of what's needed then we can deliver on it. That's my ambition. My ambition is that we can have a conversation in 20 years' time when I'm retired and this team here are all flourishing, and we'll be showing our success. That's my ambition. We don't know what's ahead in Scottish government or how it's going to pan out, but if it's within my control it will still be here.

Marlyn Davidson, Action for Children

