Co-designing
Glasgow's
All Age Childcare

Glasgow City Council

GC VS Glasgow Council for the Voluntary Sector

A Quick Guide to

Co-designing with Families

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From the citizens

Was great to feel like you're making a difference.

[I felt] validated. Hopeful about solutions.

These kind of sessions are very good and support the future of the community.

[Taking part] made us feel less alone, more supported and heard.

Project Overview

Co-Designing Glasgow's All Age Childcare was a partnership with Glasgow Council for the Voluntary Sector (GCVS) and Glasgow City Council (GCC) to support citizens to contribute to a future all age childcare system that incorporates childcare, activities and food provision.

This was a targeted, community-based approach to identify and inform what services families need to thrive all year round, including school holidays. We focused this approach on Priority Families: six priority family types identified by Scottish Government as being at higher risk of child poverty.

We worked within three Early Adopter Communities (EACS) identified through the Child Poverty Dashboard: Ward 8 (Southside Central) Ward 14 (Drumchapel/Anniesland) and Ward 18 (East Centre).

We used the principles of the Scottish Approach to Service Design to ensure citizens were supported and empowered to actively participate in designing services.

The outcomes of the project will be shared with key decision makers, at national and city level.

Read the Executive Summary and Final Report here.

Project phases

The initiative unfolded in three phases, and ran from January 2024 to January 2025.

1. Consultation

Engaging over 371 family members through 110 interviews to identify childcare needs, gaps in current services, and community hopes for the future.

2. Service Mapping

Working with providers across public, private, and third sectors to explore existing referral routes, funding challenges, and barriers.

3. Co-Design

Empowering families and organisations to collaboratively design tailored childcare solutions for their communities, supported by interactive training and flexible grants.

Our approaches

Co-Design

Co-design brings together lived experience, lived expertise and professional experience to learn from each other and make things better - by design. Find out more here.

Scottish Approach to Service Design

The vision for the Scottish Approach to Service Design is that the people of Scotland are supported and empowered to actively participate in the definition, design and delivery of their services. Find out more here.

Co-Design Outline

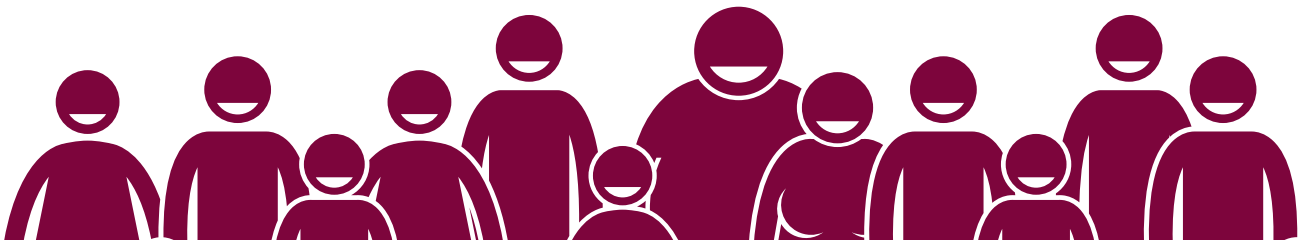
To deliver this stage, a lead partner was appointed in each EAC. The lead partners currently provide local childcare services and therefore can build on existing, trusting relationships with their communities during this project. They are well-placed to meet people where they are at, and support them to co-create solutions to issues in their communities.

GCVS delivered interactive training, covering the key principles and practices of service design, Scottish Approach to Service Design and Co-Design. This training aimed to support those considering taking a lead partner role in the co-design phase, but it was open to all organisations involved, bringing additional value.

To resource lead partners, GCVS facilitated flexible grants of £18,000 per area for costs like staff capacity, resources and a critical reward and recognition component for participants.

In each EAC, the lead partner's role was in designing and delivering an accessible, inclusive Co-Design process for families. Throughout this process, it was important that all participants feel supported, heard, valued, and assured their participation will make a difference. Lead partners were expected to use resources allocated to remove barriers to participation and ensure accessibility.

GCVS provided ongoing support to lead partners during the co-design phase through further training, resources, and mentoring and advice from design experts.



Lead Partner Profiles

Ward 8: Crossreach

Daisy Chain Early Years Project - We are a community based, early intervention project for children under 12, and their families. Our aim is to improve children's health and wellbeing through play and nurture, to strengthen family relationships and to support families to become more resilient.

Ward 14: 3D Drumchapel

We offer a range of both universal and targeted programmes and sessions, focusing on building strong family foundations, promoting self-esteem, developing support networks, enabling positive parenting and child development and promoting improved health and well-being.

Ward 18: Early Years Scotland

We are Scotland's leading national specialist organisation that supports our youngest children from pre-birth to 5 years of age. Our fully qualified Early Years Practitioners work directly with children and their families to deliver our unique Stay Play and Learn sessions in a variety of settings. We work in areas where children and families who have the greatest need, will benefit most from our services.

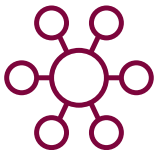
Before

Designing and delivering an accessible, inclusive Co-Design process for families requires a lot of preparation.

Key Components

A clear purpose

Our purpose was to bring together lived and professional expertise to explore solutions to an all-age childcare system in Glasgow.



An understanding of the challenges

A comprehensive consultation was delivered in each EAC prior to the co-design phase. This covered the families, their needs, the services they access, gaps in provision and their hopes for a future all-age childcare system. A parallel service mapping was delivered to understand the challenges and hopes from a provider/professional perspective to ensure a thorough understanding of the challenges families face.

A relationship with families

The model for this project was to resource and support organizations who are embedded in their community and who already have existing and trusting relationships with a diversity of families in their local community.

Assembling a Co-Design Group

Assessing citizen's readiness to co-design

For this project, it was important that the lived experience co-designers recruited had experience of the current childcare system in their community. It was also important that they had good support and were emotionally ready to discuss some of the challenging topics that can arise.

Including experienced staff

The staff delivering the sessions had experience of delivering services in the communities and could bring their professional expertise to the space, and guide the discussions.

Engaging the wider community

It's important to consider who else needs to be part of the work. One of the EACs covered two distinct neighbourhoods, and so the lead partner engaged with a key organization in the other neighbourhood who ran some sessions on their behalf.

Supporting Wider Access

Reduction of barriers to participation

Lead partners were resourced to be able to reduce barriers to participation for the co-designers. They engaged with co-designers in advance of the sessions to understand their access needs and how to remove barriers.

Supporting wider access in this project it included -

- providing a creche for children so people could engage fully
- having the creche on-site so children knew their family was nearby
- having a child-friendly space
- providing culturally appropriate food, drinks and snacks
- adapting activities for non-verbal co-designers
- holding sessions in accessible, local spaces to avoid transport issues
- attending existing groups to 'meet people where they are'
- having staff from similar cultural backgrounds for language support
- having a variety of activities to suit engagement styles
- using ice-breakers and team building to build confidence

A trauma informed approached

There are 6 principles of trauma-informed practice: safety, trust, choice, collaboration, empowerment and cultural consideration. Considering these minimizes the risk of retraumatizing people as they discuss experiences that were potentially traumatic.

In this project it included -

- Hosting the sessions in a familiar space
- having lived experience co-designers in the majority
- having familiar staff with existing relationships with co-designers
- giving co-designers choices about their participation
- giving everyone a chance to be heard e.g. written, spoken
- having staff from similar cultural backgrounds

Session Planning

Training and support for delivery staff

The lead partners were selected for their skills and expertise. To complement this, GCVS ran two training sessions prior to the co-design phase to upskill the staff on service design, Scottish Approach to Service Design and Co-Design. GCVS's Service Design Lead was made available for ongoing support, and there were several group sessions with the lead partners to share learning throughout the process.

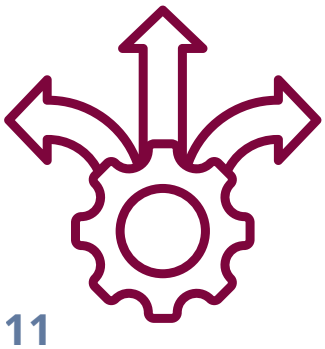
Valuing participants with a reward and recognition policy

Families can make a valuable contribution through co-design, and that should be rewarded and recognized. This should be decided in collaboration with the co-designers to make sure it meets their needs.

Across the three areas this included -

- A voucher for a local supermarket (vouchers do not affect benefits)
- A voucher of their choice
- A family day out to a farm park including transport and lunch
- A group lunch before each session
- Food and drink throughout the sessions
- A pamper session
- A celebration event to bring all the co-designers from each EAC together for a meal and activities

Plan for flexible sessions and outcomes



For effective use of collaborative time, sessions were planned to incorporate specific activities and outcomes. However, this was done flexibly so that staff facilitating could respond to the needs and priorities of the co-designers. This could look like taking more time over a discussion, wrapping up discussions and tailoring activities.

Preparing the Co-Designers

Help co-designers understand the ask

Most of the co-designers had already participated in the consultation, and so understood the context of the work. To prime them further, one organization arranged a phone call with co-designers, and another had a 'welcome session' so co-designers were comfortable and ready.

Sharing key information

In advance of the sessions, it's important to make sure that co-designers have the key information they require including timing, dates and reward and recognition. You may also need consent forms, photography permissions and dietary requirements.

During

Things to communicate to participants at the beginning of the session

Setting up the space

Layout and materials

The space should be welcoming and comfortable. The layout should make conversations easy. For some groups this might mean tables and chairs, and for others it could mean space for sitting on the floor together. The materials needed depend on the activities but a good starting point is

- Pens, paper, post its
- Wall space or flip charts for recording notes and ideas
- Fidget toys and doodle sheets to support anxiety and neurodivergence

While some of the sessions had a separate creche, children were able to be part of the sessions or come and go.

Refreshements

Providing refreshments like tea, coffee, fruit and biscuits helps people feel comfortable and looked after. Two organizations provided a shared meal to help support families and build connections.

Facilitation

Skilled facilitators

Facilitators need to be skilled in working with groups, and responding to emerging needs. Having several staff members who can attend to different aspects of the sessions, such as activities, support, note taking and timekeeping helps the sessions run smoothly. It's important for facilitators to provide reassurance and support throughout the session.

Timekeeping

Valuing people's time means sticking to start time and finish times.

Providing multiple ways to feedback

People feel comfortable sharing it different ways. It's good to have different ways for people to contribute. This can include group discussions where one person feeds back, splitting into pairs or small groups, opportunities for people to write their thoughts down and incorporating some time for quiet reflection.

Recording the discussion

Getting people together to talk about important issues can generate lots of discussion. While it's hard to capture everything, it's important to find ways to record the main outcomes of the discussions. This could look like facilitators writing on flip charts, participants writing their thoughts on post-its or using worksheets that people collaborate on.

Adapting the session

Be prepared to adapt the activities throughout the sessions to meet the participants needs better.

Don't forget!

For many, co-design will be a new experience so it's important to provide reassurance and reminders of the value of their experiences and expertise.

After

Reflecting

Staff reflections

Taking time after sessions to reflect is important for staff to allow them to debrief on challenges and plan adaptions for further sessions. As part of the support to the lead partners, a session was held to debrief on entire project. The outcomes will influence future projects.

Monitoring and evaluation

Anonymous data was collected on demographics of participants. Participants provided feedback on their experiences, which was overwhelmingly positive and hopeful.

Getting creative [was the most positive aspect] and I love problem solving and finding solutions so for me I liked being able to think about solutions in ways to help and know that my feedback may help to make a difference.

Sharing and celebrating the work

Communicating the ouputs

Co-design generates a wealth of rich outputs. To support the dissemination, an overview report and an executive summary was created. This covers the key issues families face, their priorities and specific asks. Local providers gave their feedback on these subjects. These reports have been shared widely across organizations and decision makers in Glasgow.

After

Executive Summary and Final Report

One organization employed an artist to share their key outcomes.

Celebration event

A celebration event was held with families, children, lead partners and decision makers across Glasgow. The agenda included a showcase of the work of each community and a discussion on the experience of co-designing, as well as games, a song and dance and a meal together.

Next Steps

Keep relationships going

Participants at the celebration event were asked if they would take part in co-design again - and the resounding response was YES! Lead partners are looking at more opportunities for their community to be involved in future co-design work. It was acknowledged that expectations may need to be managed around reward and recognition for ongoing work as it is subject to adequate funding.

Ongoing engagment with decision makers

Key findings from consultations and co-design phases have been presented to the Head of Early Learning & Childcare at Glasgow City Council and the Directorate for Children & Families at the Scottish Government. The findings have also been shared with other key decision makers in Glasgow, including the Children's Services Planning Partnership and the Child Poverty Programme, advocating for actionable steps to develop and all-age childcare system. Engagement on this will be ongoing.

Key recommendations for future work

Adequate funding

Key elements in supporting families to share their expertise and experience are training, staffing, access, reward and recognition. This requires adequate funding.

Longer timeframes

Partners in this project recommend a period of 12-18 months for similar projects. This would allow more time for planning and delivering, and opportunities more depth.

You can’t co-design without relationships

A final note

Engaging and co-designing with families requires good relationships with the families and the wider community. Thank you to all the participants and their families.

Thank you!

With thanks to the staff who facilitated the co-design sessions

- Callum Grier
- Elaine Milmine
- Frances Turnbull
- Jacqueline Bulloch
- Laura Divers
- Leo Isac
- Lorna Kettles
- Miriam Rana
- Tanith Diggory
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