

How-to Guide

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

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CONNECT Service



Title	CONNECT Service
Organisation	Dundee City Council (Council Advice Services)
Category	Fully Validated
Poverty Impact	Reduction, Prevention, Mitigation.
Introduction to the Project	
<p>CONNECT is a community-based service that is part of Dundee City Council Advice Services. It offers assistance to anyone needing help with income maximisation, benefit form completion, benefit issues, and budgeting. Rather than requiring individuals to visit advice workers, CONNECT brings its services directly to the community. CONNECT workers operate in eleven outreach venues and four secondary schools across the city. Through drop-in sessions and community engagement, they support individuals in need by helping to increase their income and providing holistic advice to address inequality in Dundee.</p>	

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Initial Idea

Who had the initial idea?	
Gregory Colgan – Chief Executive of Dundee City Council	
How did the idea for the project come about?	
Although Dundee is a relatively small city, residents of different areas often remain within their own neighbourhoods and rarely travel into the city centre. Consequently, people from Dundee’s schemes often did not seek support, as advice services were only available in the city centre. The service was initially introduced to mitigate the effects of the Welfare Reform Act, which brought changes such as the bedroom tax. An outreach-based approach was developed to help residents navigate these changes more effectively, create opportunities to increase their income and mitigate the worst effects. The idea behind CONNECT was to bring the service directly to communities, ensuring that as many people as possible could access the support they need.	
Were plans informed by any published reports / papers / research evidence or practice from elsewhere?	
No	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not specified.	
Was anyone else involved in developing the initial idea of the project?	
No	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Alison Honeyman, who was the Team Leader of the Council Advice Service (Welfare Reform) at the time, developed the concept for the service in collaboration with community workers across different areas of Dundee.	
Were those with lived experience of poverty involved in developing the initial idea of the project?	
No	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not specified.	

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Was funding required to support the development of the initial idea of the project?			
No		Yes	✓
Please provide details of the funding that was used to support the development of the initial idea of the project.			
Which organisation provided funding?	National Lottery		
How much was required?	Not specified		
What was the specific source of funding? (e.g., particular grant or policy)	Not specified		
Were specific resources – other than funding - needed when developing the initial idea of the project?			
No		Yes	✓
Please provide details of the resources that were required when developing the initial idea of the project.			
Staff/Volunteer Time	Staff time for identifying areas with the highest deprivation and people needing assistance. Staff working as CONNECT workers across the city.		
Facilities / Workspace	Community facilities (e.g. local library, community centres) that were accessible and known to people in the respective areas and could be used as outreach venues for the drop-in clinics.		
Equipment	Equipment to help fill out forms, like computers and laptops (provided by the Council).		
Local Knowledge	Community workers gave insights into which facilities were best suited for advice staff to be based in. It was also important to understand the services and activities available in each area and get to know key stakeholders and the needs of the people in the areas.		
Food and Drink	Not specified.		

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Did any barriers have to be overcome when developing the initial idea of the project?	
<i>No</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<p>Although not a direct barrier, the coordination of timings and availability at community venues required careful planning. With several advice agencies operating in Dundee, it was essential to ensure that the scheduling of advice services at each community venue was evenly distributed throughout the week. For example, if one agency operated at a venue on a Tuesday, another would attend on a Friday.</p>	
Did anything in particular enable development of the initial idea of the project?	
<i>No</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<p>A detailed mapping exercise helped to identify suitable venues in different areas for CONNECT workers to operate from. This process was guided by the local insights of community workers already active in Dundee and shaped by feedback from community members.</p>	
How long did it take between having the initial idea and starting the project?	
<p>The CONNECT Service was initiated within a year.</p>	
Who made the decision to introduce the project?	
<p>Gregory Colgan.</p>	

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Early Development – Pilot Project or Feasibility Study

Was there a pilot project or feasibility study?	
No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Yes, a pilot project	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yes, a feasibility study	<input type="checkbox"/>

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Accessing the Service and Engaging with Service Users

Is there a referral process?		
	No	
	Yes	✓
<p>CONNECT has several referral pathways due to its broad remit as a public service. These include an advice line, an online form available through the Integrated Substance Abuse Team, referrals from the NHS and the midwifery team (BadgerNet), and referrals from other council departments such as social work and education.</p> <p>In addition to supporting two or three clients per week in outreach venues, CONNECT workers each manage a side project related to their area of expertise, ensuring that specific target groups are engaged with the service (e.g. health visitor or midwife referral pathways, substance misuse service pathways). The two CONNECT workers based in secondary schools also receive referrals from guidance staff and attainment officers.</p> <p>People needing assistance can also self-refer by contacting the CONNECT team via email or telephone or by visiting the outreach venues.</p> <p>Other organisations can refer individuals in need of advice through email or telephone as well.</p>		
Is referral the only way that potential clients are made aware of the project?		
	Yes	
	No	✓
Other than referral, how do potential clients come to know about the project?		
<p>In addition to the referral pathways and drop-in sessions, CONNECT staff actively engage with the community, for example, by participating in local events. Furthermore, two CONNECT workers are based in secondary schools. Because of their presence, people get to know about them and the services they offer first-hand.</p>		
What is the most common way through which users typically access the service?		
<p>The focus is on face-to-face interaction and outreach in the communities.</p>		
Do you take steps to keep in touch / reach out to service users?		
	No	
	Yes	✓

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The foundation of the CONNECT service is its outreach-approach. While the CONNECT workers also utilise social media and the internet, their primary focus remains on face-to-face communication.

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Working with People with Lived Experience of Poverty

Are those with lived experience of poverty involved in <u>delivering</u> the project?	
No	✓
Yes	
Are people with lived experience of poverty involved in <u>managing</u> the project or project governance?	
No	✓
Yes	
Are people with lived experience of poverty involved <u>in any other aspect</u> of the project? <i>If so, please describe below.</i>	
No	
Yes	✓
<p>The Dundee Fighting for Fairness (DFFF) collective, made up of individuals with lived experience of poverty, plays an advisory role in various City Council services and projects. For example, in the Fuell Well scheme, which supports Dundee households facing fuel poverty with their energy costs, DFFF members have provided input on the criteria for awarding Fuell Well grants.</p> <p>Although this project is not directly part of the CONNECT Service, it forms part of the broader work of the Council’s Advice Services and contributes to the CONNECT programme. Additionally, DFFF is actively involved in decision-making through Dundee’s Fairness Leadership Panel. Established in late 2021, this panel was created to advance the work of Dundee’s Fairness Action Plan, which is the city’s commitment and strategy to tackle poverty and inequality.</p>	

Leadership, Governance and Partnership Working

Who is responsible for managing the project?		
Kenna Balion,		
Is this the only responsibility of the person managing the project?		
	Yes	✓
	No	
Is there a Project Steering or Advisory Group?		
	No	✓
	Yes	
Are any other governance arrangements in place to review strategy and performance?		
	No	
	Yes	✓
<p>The Fairness Leadership Panel provides strategic oversight for all initiatives aimed at reducing poverty in Dundee, including the work of the Council’s Advice Services and the CONNECT service. The panel is a collaboration between individuals with lived experience of poverty, represented by DFFF (as mentioned above), and key organisations and groups across the city. DFFF, supported by Faith in Community Dundee, ensures the inclusion of community voices and expertise, drawing on its origins in the Dundee Fairness Commissions. The panel’s work is funded jointly by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and Dundee City Council, ensuring its continued contribution to the city’s poverty reduction strategies.</p>		

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Links to Wider Policies, Strategies and Statutory Requirements

In your opinion, is the project aligned with national and/or local anti-poverty strategies and priorities (e.g., local authority or health board priorities)?	
Don't know	
No	
Yes	✓
<p>CONNECT is a key part of the Dundee Advice Strategy, which encompasses the work of Dundee City Council Advice Services (of which CONNECT is a part), alongside other advice agencies such as Dundee CAB, Brooksbank Centre and Services, SCARF, and Aberlour. The strategy outlines how these advice services work together to provide a holistic approach to support and make the process as simple and streamlined as possible. Since its inception, the partner agencies have strengthened their connections with other networks and coordinated the delivery of advice within a mixed economy (see Dundee Advice Strategy Update Report 2022, last visited 15.01.25).</p> <p>Dundee City Council is committed to meeting the Scottish Government's national target of reducing child poverty to less than 10% of children living in relative poverty. The Dundee Advice Strategy plays a vital role in these efforts, with front-line advice work positioned as central to achieving this goal, particularly through focused partnership collaboration.</p>	
In your opinion, has the project benefitted from being part of this anti-poverty strategy?	
Don't know	
No	
Yes	✓
<p>The Council Advice Strategy conceptualises the cooperation of different advice agencies in Dundee, ensuring a streamlined and easy process for service users. Due to being part of the anti-poverty strategy, they are part of the Advice Workers Forum in Dundee where all agencies involved meet every couple of months to discuss updates and share news. This is a good tool for networking and collaborating on projects. One such example is the Pension Credit uptake campaign they have undertaken - in partnership with Dundee CAB and Brooksbank.</p>	

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Is the project part of any other strategy?		
	Don't know	
	No	
	Yes	✓
the Advice Workers Forum in Dundee.		
In your opinion, has the project benefitted from being part of this strategy?		
	Don't know	
	No	
	Yes	✓
As above, being part of this strategy means they can work collaboratively with other advice agencies to ensure the needs of the general public are met.		
Is the project delivering a service that is a statutory commitment?		
	No	✓
	Yes	

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Funding

Has external funding been secured to support the work?		
	No	✓
	Yes	
Has a specific sum been secured from the host organisation to support this work?		
	No	
	Yes	✓
Please provide details of the funding that was used secured from the host organisation to support this work?		
How much funding was secured?	Approximately £300,000 per annum (staffing costs for six full-time workers plus one team leader).	
For how long has funding been secured?	Not specified – it is a core service.	
Is future funding from the host organisation a possibility?		
	Don't know	
	No	
	Yes	✓
Is future funding from the host organisation based on pre-agreed outcomes or outputs being delivered?		
	No	
	Yes	✓
They have to ensure KPIs (wait times, financial gains, clients seen) are met in order to justify this project. They draw upon previous outcomes too.		

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What are the future - longer-term - prospects for this work if existing funding sources were no longer available?

Outreach clinics would need to close and the wider team would have to take on the work currently being undertaken by CONNECT. It would add additional pressures upon other advice agencies. Wait times would likely increase which could have a detrimental impact upon the general public.

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Staffing and Resources

Do existing staff from the host organisation contribute toward the work of this project as part of their broader work for the organisation?	
No	
Yes	✓
CONNECT is a mainstream service with six full-time CONNECT workers offering advice via outreach and community networking and one team leader.	
Are existing staff from the host organisation paid extra (for example, taking on extra hours) to contribute toward the work of this project?	
No	✓
Yes	
Have additional paid staff been employed to contribute toward the work of this project?	
No	N/A
Yes	N/A
N/A: CONNECT is a mainstream service with six full-time CONNECT workers offering advice via outreach and community networking and one team leader.	
Are volunteers involved in delivering the project?	
No	✓
Yes	

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Are specific resources – other than staff/volunteer time and money - needed to support the delivery of the project?			
No		Yes	✓
Please provide details of the resources that are required to deliver the project? <i>If not needed, please add N/A</i>			
Facilities / Workspace	Office space in outreach venues (currently 11 across Dundee) to host drop-in clinics. Two CONNECT workers are operating from four secondary schools in Dundee.		
Equipment	Internet access, computers, pens, and pencils to help with filling in applications and claims. Legislative sources including CPAG and Disability Rights handbooks.		
Local Knowledge	Involvement and networks within the community to increase outreach, know about events and build trustful relationships is essential. Training materials and CPD of a specified amount of hours per year.		
Food and Drink	No.		
Are any of the resources needed to deliver the project provided in-kind, rather than budgeted from project funds?			
		No	
		Yes	✓
All resources are provided in kind as it is a mainstream service. The vast majority of outreach venues are Council community centres. With CONNECT being approached to host sessions in other venues, all other facilities are used free of charge.			
Were new IT systems, additional software, or upgrades to existing software (databases, Apps) required to deliver this project? .			
		No	
		Yes	✓
Technology for CONNECT is mostly provided by the Council. However, they have had to gain access to new systems such as BadgerNet for things like NHS referrals.			

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Was additional training – for staff or volunteers - required to deliver this project?	
No	
Yes	✓
They developed initial staff training, which is maintained via refresher modules. Where necessary, they will undertake new modules (i.e., if a new benefit comes in). Additionally, they engage in continuing professional development (CPD) for a specified number of hours each year.	

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Monitoring and Evaluation

Is there baseline data to describe what things were like before the start of the project?		
	No	
	Yes	✓
At the start of an advice session CONNECT worker conducts a benefit check with the client to see which kind of support they need (e.g. form filling or income maximisation). This process provides baseline data on the client’s economic situation.		
Is the difference that the project is making measured or monitored by the host organisation?		
	Yes	✓
	No	
Who within the host organisation is responsible for monitoring the impact of the project?		
Kenna Balion, Team Leader. Craig Mason, Senior Manger. Anthony Carr, Head of Customer Services and Digital.		
How often is the impact of the project monitored or measured by the host organisation?		
Weekly by Team Leader in terms of case monitoring. Yearly on a more strategic level in measuring KPIs.		

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What methods, techniques or strategies are used by the host organisation to measure the impact of the project?

Impact is measured collectively with other advice agencies as part of the City's Advice Strategy. Data to measure impact is collected regularly through the CONNECT staff who also have KPIs (wait times, financial gains, clients seen).

At the beginning and end of each advice session, the CONNECT staff conducts a benefit check. These benefit checks ensure that the clients receive all the support they are entitled to and their income is fully maximised. Through this process, financial gains, household make-up and demographics, and interactions with other service providers, e.g. NHS, are monitored.

As part of the sideline projects (e.g. midwifery and health visits), CONNECT also sends out evaluation sheets to ask clients what their financial and social circumstances are and if they have improved since they have been in contact with the CONNECT worker.

What information is collected by the host organisation about the project?

Number of users	Yes	✓	No	
Profile of users	Yes	✓	No	
Experience of users	Yes	✓	No	
Outcomes for users	Yes	✓	No	
Anything else	Yes	✓	No	

They currently use client's feedback to calculate the social return on investment.

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Has the data that has been collected by the host organisation been used to adapt the way the project works?		
	No	
	Yes	✓
Based on data, they move resources where they are needed the most. They have withdrawn from outreach venues where there is continually low to no demand and moved these resources to areas where there is higher demand. This is continually monitored.		
Has an external organisation been employed to formally evaluate the project?		
	No	✓
	Yes	
Is there an intention to employ an external organisation to evaluate the impact of the project in the future?		
	Don't know / no current plans	
	No	
	Yes	✓
Is there an intention to undertake your own formal evaluation in the future to estimate the impact of the project?		
	Don't know / no current plans	
	No	
	Yes	✓

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Impact

To what extent have the aims of the project been achieved?	
Fully met	✓
Making progress toward meeting Aims	
Not making progress	
<p>CONNECTS aims of being out in the community and assisting people in Dundee in maximising their income have been fully met: The CONNECT team offers weekly advice services in eleven venues across the city. On average each CONNECT staff has three appointments in each of these venues, resulting in approximately 33 clients receiving support each week. CONNECT has enabled clients to maximise their income, evidenced through financial gains. In the year 23/34 financial gains in Dundee totalled to £3,099,492.30. Council Advice Services generated £12,100,000 with a third of the overall gains coming from CONNECT.</p>	

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What difference has the project made?

CONNECT has made a significant impact on people living in poverty in Dundee, helping to close the attainment gap and maximise income for individuals and families. The CONNECT Service has supported numerous people experiencing poverty by increasing their income through assistance with benefit applications and other services. By prioritising personal, face-to-face interaction at clinics and drop-in centres, the CONNECT team has built strong relationships within the Dundee community.

Since its inception, the CONNECT Service has expanded its reach, establishing referral pathways with the local NHS and midwifery board and securing a presence in several Dundee schools. CONNECT workers look at the family's situation, maximise the income, ensuring that they get everything they are entitled to and seek additional support via grants and charities (e.g. for washing machines and school clothes). The impact of this work is evident: for instance, in one year alone, a CONNECT worker based at a secondary school helped clients achieve financial gains totalling nearly £600,000.

This increase in income has empowered individuals in deprived areas of Dundee, giving them greater financial choices. One client, for example, called Kenna to share how a CONNECT worker's assistance had enabled him to receive backdated pension credit. With this additional money, he planned to install flooring in his home, improving his living conditions.

While income maximisation is the primary focus, the CONNECT Service has also improved the overall well-being of people living in poverty. Being embedded in the schools, CONNECT not only improves families' financial situations but also children's overall life situations and opportunities in life. Children can get involved in different groups and gain access to a washing machine, school clothes, beds, etc. For instance, one parent reported that their child was struggling academically. After receiving help from the CONNECT team with income maximisation and benefit claims, the parent was able to reduce their working hours, which resulted in improved academic performance for their child.

These examples demonstrate that CONNECT not only helps individuals and families maximise their income but also provides holistic support, enhancing the lives of those in deprived areas of Dundee.

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Have conditions or demand changed since the project was introduced?	
No	
Yes	✓
<p>Demand for the CONNECT service increased during the pandemic but has since returned to pre-pandemic levels.</p> <p>Inspired by the success of Financial Inclusion Support workers at Bellahouston Academy in Glasgow, one secondary school approached CONNECT to request similar assistance. In response, a CONNECT worker was co-located at Morgan Academy. The success (financial gains of £600.000 for families in one year) sparked interest from other schools, resulting in two CONNECT workers now being based in four secondary schools across Dundee.</p>	
Has the project had the capacity to meet these changing conditions and demand?	
Yes	✓
No	

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Has the project changed through time?	
	No
	Yes
What changed	<p>They started being based in secondary schools in Dundee. With more and more schools hearing about this offer and wanting the same, two CONNECT workers are now based in four secondary schools in Dundee.</p> <p>In February 2024, the CONNECT service has expanded its offering to include targeted efforts to increase Pension Credit uptake, aiming to reach eligible individuals through tailored drop-in sessions for dedicated application support in different outreach venues.</p>
Why has it changed	<p>Changes were driven by outside influences such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the Cost-of-living crisis.</p> <p>The decision to locate CONNECT workers in secondary schools was inspired by the success of Bellahouston Academy in Glasgow, where placing a Financial Inclusion Support Officer resulted in £400,000 in financial gains for families of students (see CPAG: Financial Inclusion Officers). Following this success, a secondary school in Dundee reached out to CONNECT to request similar assistance.</p> <p>The focus on Pension Credit uptake was a response to widely reported statistics revealing that pensioners account for a significant share of the billions of pounds in unclaimed benefits annually.</p>
Has the project had any unexpected or unintended outcomes?	
	No
	Yes

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In your opinion, is the project having an impact on tackling poverty?	
No	
Yes	✓
<p>For some people, travelling into town is not easy—whether due to being accustomed to staying within their neighbourhoods, limited mobility caused by disabilities, or care responsibilities. CONNECT’s outreach work makes it possible to reach and assist individuals living in poverty or at risk of poverty across different areas of Dundee. The service ensures that people throughout the city can access advice services, improve their financial inclusion, and maximise their income—contributing to efforts to tackle poverty citywide.</p>	

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Learning from Experience

What is working well?

Following the Pandemic, they managed to re-emerge and integrate back into the community. This took some time to become established again, however, with perseverance, they were once again back to being incredibly busy. Initially, they moved back into the community as a drop-in; however, due to demand, they have had to move to appointments only. This works well as this ensures they are able to give their clients more time, ensuring they meet their expectations.

They also work well with other teams, departments and agencies throughout the city for the good of the clients, also making the customer journey as smooth as possible. In 2016, CONNECT moved under the remit of Council Advice Services and this brought the Welfare Rights and CONNECT teams working closer together, upskilling both teams.

What, if anything, is working less well?

Changes to benefit legislation, more complex enquiries, Universal Credit migration is posing some complex issues. Additional demands from external influences such as the Cost of Living crisis.

What are the key learning points that you'd like to share with other practitioners?

Patience and Adaptability Are Key: One important lesson learned during the pandemic was the value of patience and testing what works. When community venues were closed, it took time for people to return and start engaging with CONNECT workers again. Rather than assuming “it doesn’t work anymore,” the team remained patient, and demand for the service has since rebounded significantly.

Consistency Builds Trust: It is essential to be consistent and offer regular, reliable services so that clients view CONNECT as a dependable source of support. Gaps in availability—whether due to temporary closures, staff leave, or sickness—can disrupt this trust, making regular presence critical.

Building and Maintaining Strong Community Roots: Effective outreach requires active engagement with the community. Simply being present in a community centre and expecting people to come is not enough. CONNECT emphasises the importance of proactively building relationships—speaking with community workers, engaging with local groups, and collaborating with school and family engagement workers in the area. Establishing and maintaining these connections is vital for long-term success.

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Are there plans to develop or expand the project in the future?	
No	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
Depending on funding and further success of CONNECT in the existing secondary schools, it may be conceivable to scale the service to other schools across Dundee. For scaling additional staff would need to be employed.	
How easily do you think this project could be replicated in another setting?	
With some research and engagement to create relationships within the community, availability of venues and staff there should not be a reason why it could not be replicated in other local authorities.	

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