

The Zone Initiative Ltd - delivering dynamic childcare, youthwork, training, and employment services to the East Ayrshire community.



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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Title	The Zone Initiative Ltd - delivering dynamic childcare, youthwork, training, and employment services to the East Ayrshire community.
Lead Organisation	The Zone Initiative Ltd.
All Organisations	N/A.
Category	This project has shown some promising results as an effective tool against poverty. However, due to it having no formal evaluation on its entirety of service provision, it cannot be classified as being fully validated and as such has been classified as Promising Practice.
Poverty Impact	Mitigation. Prevention.
Introduction to the Project	
<p>The Zone Initiative Ltd is a registered Scottish charity and company based in Dalmellington, East Ayrshire, serving the Doon Valley and surrounding rural communities. The organisation has been operating for 19 years, delivering locally based services for children, young people and the wider community. The community-based Project provides a range of childcare and youth work services in addition to outdoor free play opportunities for children.</p> <p>The Zone also provides training and employability services, including apprenticeships and accredited qualifications and support individuals seeking skills development and routes into employment.</p> <p>An established community resource (established in 2006), the Zone collaborates with local authorities and third-sector organisations such as local service and recovery networks in East Ayrshire.</p> <p>Through its long-standing presence and range of person centred and community-based services, The Zone operate as a community-based organisation which provides practical support and opportunities for the residents of East Ayrshire.</p>	

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Initial Idea

Who had the initial idea?	The local community identified a need for better service provision in the area.
How did the idea for the project come about?	
<p>Bellsbank Adventure Playground was the original building, opened in 1985. Our afterschool care still runs from this building. This initially came about from the children within the area wanting a safe place to play, develop emotionally/physically/socially/mentally/cognitively etc. Also from the parent’s, due to some of the houses being renovated with scaffolding erected and a child climbing it and falling off.</p> <p>The Zone was established in 2006 again from a need within the local community including youths age 13-18yrs – The original idea for The Zone came from the young people themselves who felt there were no facilities that fitted their needs, they were using an area predominantly used by young children therefore they decided they needed their own space. The young people all live in areas of high deprivation with many from families of 4th generation unemployed.</p> <p>The Young people at the zone have always been vocal in sparking the change required to take their ideas forward .This began with them taking their views to the board of directors because they believe that their voice matters , they spoke to their peers and surveyed them to ensure that everyone had their say on how the project should be shaped.</p>	
Were plans informed by any published reports / papers / research evidence or practice from elsewhere?	Not specified.
Not specified.	
Was anyone else involved in developing the initial idea of the project?	Yes
Active community engagement and involvement of community and family residents.	
Were those with lived experience of poverty involved in developing the initial idea of the project?	Yes
The community (all ages) were heavily involved in The Zone’s formation.	

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Was funding required to support the development of the initial idea of the project?	Yes
Which organisation provided funding?	East Ayrshire Council. National Lottery.
How much was required?	East Ayrshire Council: Vibrant Communities. National Lottery: Awards for All.
What was the specific source of funding?	Original funding totalled, £61,760.
Were specific resources – other than funding - needed when developing the initial idea of the project?	Yes
Staff/Volunteer Time	Original staff, and new youth workers in addition to management committee volunteers.
Facilities / Workspace	The Zone Project during development of the initial idea had to source funding to refurbish an old derelict building in the centre of the village (previously it was the old Chemist and Library) for the Project premises in addition to the use of the Organisational IT facilities.
Equipment	New equipment (pool table, tv's and games consoles etc) beauty product for participants and IT equipment.
Local Knowledge	Local community voices, Council knowledge and input related to planning and funding.
Food and Drink	No

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Did any barriers have to be overcome when developing the initial idea of the project?	Yes
<p>The barriers first faced were what the community perceived the project would look like (stigmatisation of the youth the project was targeted at), and how the community thought the young people would conduct themselves who participated in the Project. This was overcome by speaking to the local community and inviting them in to speak to the young people.</p>	
Did anything in particular enable development of the initial idea of the project?	Yes
<p>Community engagement with parents and youths helped to initiate the original idea for the Project. Local children and Youths ideas enabled the development of the initial Project idea. This facilitated the formation of a young residents and adults Committee.</p>	
How long did it take between having the initial idea and starting the project?	One year from the initial idea (2005 initial idea to realisation of the Project in 2006).
Who made the decision to introduce the project?	Not specified.

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Early Development

Was there a pilot project or feasibility study or test of change?	Yes, had a feasibility study.
What did the Feasibility study. involve?	
Not specified.	
Who was responsible for the Feasibility study.?	
Elaine Stewart was responsible for the Zone until 2024.	
Were those with lived experience of poverty among those involved in the design or delivery?	Yes
The majority of young people involved with the Zone Project have lived experience of poverty and were involved in its development.	
Was funding required to support the Feasibility study.?	Yes
Which organisation provided funding?	East Ayrshire Council. National Lottery.
How much was required?	East Ayrshire Council: Vibrant Communities. National Lottery: Awards for All. CVO: Not specified.
What was the specific source of funding?	Original funding totalled, £61,760.

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Were specific resources – other than funding - needed for the Feasibility study.?		Yes
Staff/Volunteer Time	Staff/volunteer time (30 members of staff now employed).	
Facilities / Workspace	Facilities were needed including a base for group activities and gatherings and IT activities training for community members.	
Equipment	Equipment inclusive of children’s play equipment was required.	
Local Knowledge	Local knowledge was and is still required to run the Zone Project.	
Food and Drink	N/A	
Was the Feasibility study. evaluated?		YES
<p>Informal evaluation. All funders required quarterly reports to demonstrate that the funding was being used appropriately and that agreed outcomes were being achieved. We collected evidence through tools such as questionnaires and evaluation surveys along with Youth Committee feedback. These were completed at the start of the project and repeated every few years. This helps us ensure that we are providing a service that is needed, valued, and wanted by the young people and wider community of Dalmellington.</p>		
Was there evidence from the Feasibility study. that confirmed that it was working / it would work?		Yes
<p>Attendance records were and continue to be collected.</p> <p>Quarterly reports and questionnaires provide evidence that the Zone is providing a community service that is being accessed and utilised by the local community, evidencing a need that the Zone is affectively meeting at the present time.</p> <p>Lived experience feedback from Youth Committee and attendee’s informal feedback.</p>		
Who made the decision to continue with the project beyond the xxx?		
N/A as the Zone continuation of services was not reliant on the outcome of the feasibility study.		

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Was the design of the project proper modified following the Feasibility study.?	N/A
N/A given the nature of the community-based services offered.	

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Accessing the Service and Engaging with Service Users

Are potential users referred to your Service.?	Yes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential Zone users are referred to the initiative through such routes as: • Family nurses. • GP's. • Health visitors. • Local schools. • Social work departments. • Self-referrals from people using the local foodbank (these referrals are for our Family Support Initiative which is funded by the Fairer Futures). • Family members refer their elderly relatives through the Zone's Home Buddy Service. • Parents (after school care). 	
Are there ways, other than referral, that are used to make potential users aware of your Service.?	Yes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social media and organisational websites. • Word of mouth among the community in East Ayrshire. 	
What is the most common way through which users typically access your Service.?	
Self-referral, social work, and schools with schools being the highest for the Family Support Initiative.	

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Do you take steps to keep in touch / reach out to users?	Yes
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Family Support Clients: each family has a dedicated member of staff assigned to them and a support plan is created. We also report back to the organisation that referred the family.• Face to face home visits along with emails and phone calls.• Peer Recovery Group: Daily meetings, workshops, house visit by co-ordinator, and/or welfare checks if a member fails to attend their arranged appointments.• The Zone's youth work supervisor also keeps attendance records and contacts families if they feel a welfare check is required due to individual non-attendance.	

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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?	Yes.
Currently there are two committee volunteers and two young people with lived experience of poverty who have work placements within our gardening project.	
Are people with lived experience of poverty involved in <u>managing</u> the project or in project <u>governance</u>?	Yes
Through the Project Committee.	
Are people with lived experience of poverty involved <u>in any other aspect</u> of the project?	Yes
The Project was designed around a need identified local community members with lived experience of a holistic array of Poverty experiences including Poverty related to the availability of available community spaces and services.	

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Leadership, Governance and Partnership Working

Who is responsible for managing the project?	
Danella Dale – (since April 2025)	
Is this the only responsibility of the person managing the project?	No
As well as being the Project manager, Danella is also the training coordinator and was responsible for setting up the Zone’s training centre.	
What proportion of the manager’s overall workload is given over to this project?	
About half of it.	
Is there a Project Steering or Advisory Group?	No
Who is involved?	N/A
How does it work?	N/A
Are any other governance arrangements in place to review strategy and performance?	Yes
There are governance arrangements in place with quarterly Committee Meetings and when required, emergency meetings.	

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Links to Wider Policies, Strategies and Statutory Requirements

To the best of your knowledge, is the project aligned with national and/or local anti-poverty strategies and priorities (e.g., local authority or health board priorities)?	Yes
<p>The Project is involved in the Scottish government – Fairer Futures Partnership. It is also aligned with East Ayrshire Community Planning Partnership (CPP), East Ayrshire’s Third Sector Interface (CVO East Ayrshire), Scottish Government priorities, and contributing to the Community Planning Partnership’s shared outcomes.</p> <p>The Project is also aligned with Skills Development Scotland’s national policies by delivering Modern Apprenticeships that equip people with industry recognised qualifications, practical skills, and a direct route into sustainable employment and training.</p>	
In your opinion, has the project benefitted from being part of this anti-poverty strategy?	Yes
<p>The Zone’s Family Support Initiative is directly aligned with Scotland’s national anti poverty strategy which prioritises tackling child poverty, reducing socio economic disadvantage, and ensuring that families have access to the support they need. By providing practical help to families affected by poverty, hardship, and addiction, the Project contributes to the Scottish government’s mission to eradicate child poverty, improve wellbeing, reduce food insecurity, and ensure there is ‘no wrong door’ for families seeking support. The Zone’s work reflects the national focus on dignity, fairness, and reducing inequalities of outcome caused by socio economic disadvantage.</p>	
Is the project part of any other strategy?	Yes
<p>The Family Support Initiative is part of the Fairer Future Partnership (the Scottish Government).</p>	
In your opinion, has the project benefitted from being part of this anti-poverty strategy?	Not specified.
<p>Not specified.</p>	
Is the project delivering a service that is a statutory commitment?	No
<p>N/A</p>	

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In your opinion, what has been the impact on the project of having this statutory commitment?	N/A
N/A	

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Funding

Is funding used to support the work?	Yes
Has external funding been secured to support the work?	Yes
Which organisation provided funding?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • East Ayrshire Council. • EG Corra Foundation. • EA – Drug and Alcohol Partnership. • Skills Development Scotland Mas. • SCVO. • Fairer Futures. • Youth Work Network Partnership. • Robertson Trust. • Investing in Communities. • 9CCG.
What was the specific funding stream/source/scheme?	Grants.
How much funding was secured?	Grants.
For how long has funding been secured?	Overall funding from sources: £62,000.

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Is future funding from the same external source a possibility?	Yes, although sourcing and obtaining funding is becoming more difficult.
Is future funding dependent on achieving pre-agreed outcomes or outputs?	Not specified.
What are these conditions?	N/A
Has a specific sum been secured from your organisation to support this work?	No
How much funding was secured?	Zone funding comes through various grants throughout the year.
For how long has funding been secured?	Year on year.
Is future funding from your organisation a possibility?	Yes.
Is future funding dependent on achieving pre-agreed outcomes or outputs?	No (donation based).
What are these conditions?	Supplementary funding is sourced through donations.
What are the future - longer-term - prospects for this work if existing funding sources were no longer available?	
Long term Prospects if funding sources were no longer available is that the Project, unless other sources of revenue were found, would struggle to provide services in their current form.	

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Staffing and Resources

Do existing staff from your organisation contribute toward the work of this project?	Yes
Role: Volunteer/Paid staff	
Are existing staff from the host organisation paid extra (for example, taking on extra hours) to contribute toward the work of this project?	Yes
Extra hours worked: Some staff have had their hours extended to enable their skills to be dedicated to the Zone’s Family Support Initiative.	
Have additional paid staff been employed to contribute toward the work of this project?	Yes
Role: N/A	
Is the post permanent or fixed term?	N/A
Duration: N/A	
Are volunteers involved in delivering the project??	Yes
Role: Volunteers play an active role at all levels of project delivery, strengthening our capacity and community impact.	

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Are specific resources – other than staff/volunteer time and money - needed to support the delivery of the project?		Yes
Facilities / Workspace	The Zone building.	
Equipment	Various equipment inclusive of games consoles, TV, nail bar, pool table, computers.	
Local Knowledge	All staff employed within The Zone are local to the area, with some of them having lived experience.	
Food and Drink	<p>Emergency food packages are provided through our Foodbank along with small online food deliveries.</p> <p>Vouchers for energy costs are also given to families in need, while families with children identified as being in need of help with clothing are given material support.</p>	
Are any of the resources needed to deliver the project provided in-kind, rather than budgeted from project funds?		No
Who provides: N/A		
Were new IT systems, additional software, or upgrades existing software (databases, Apps) required to deliver this project?		No
New PC/Laptops were purchased to enable us to operate the Zone’s, Fairer Future Initiative.		
Was additional training – for staff or volunteers - required to deliver this project?		Yes
Staff have received training to provide current services being delivered. In addition to this, we are currently seeking training in mental health as this is a huge issue within our parents and young people. Staff are also about to start Budgeting Workshops to support families to work within their financial means etc.		

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Monitoring and Evaluation

Do you – or other organisations - collect data on the project for monitoring or evaluation purposes?		Yes
Is there baseline data to describe what things were like before the start of the project?		Yes
We have quantitative and qualitative data, additionally all of our funders collect data via quarterly reporting.		
Is the difference that the project is making measured or monitored by the host organisation?		Yes
Who within the host organisation is responsible for monitoring the impact of the project	Project Manager and Project Co-ordinators.	
How often is the impact of the project monitored or measured by the host organisation	Quarterly	
What methods, techniques or strategies are used by the host organisation to impact of the project	Reports	
What information is collected by the host organisation about the project?		
	Number of users	Yes
	Profile of users	Yes
	Experience of users	Yes
	Outcomes for users	Yes
	Anything else	No
N/A		

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<p>Has the data that has been collected by the host organisation been used to adapt the way the project works?</p>	<p>Yes</p>
<p>We adapt our initiative by using reporting data to understand who is engaging, what needs are emerging, and which interventions are most effective. This analysis helps us adjust delivery hours, refine referral pathways, reallocate resources, strengthen partnerships, and introduce new supports in response to trends such as financial pressures, mental health needs, or rural access barriers. By combining outcomes data with family voice and staff reflections, we continually improve our practice, ensure our service remains evidence-led and family-centred, and enhance our impact over time.</p>	
<p>Has an external organisation been employed to formally evaluate the project?</p>	<p>Yes – The Family Support Initiative has been formally evaluated. MESMA is a quality assurance and improvement software system used by Skills Development Scotland which is a tool we have to continually update.</p>
<p>Who conducted the evaluation</p>	<p>MESMA</p>
<p>Details of the evaluation</p>	<p>Not specified.</p>
<p>What were the key findings from the evaluation</p>	<p>Not specified.</p>
<p>Has the data that has been collected from this evaluation been used to adapt the way the project works?</p>	<p>N/A</p>
<p>ta collected has informed how the zone works. In relation to the evaluation itself and how data collected within the evaluation of the Zone Initiative, no further information has been provided at this point in time.</p>	
<p>Is there an intention to employ an external organisation to evaluate the impact of the project in the future?</p>	<p>No</p>

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Is there an intention to undertake your own formal evaluation in the future to estimate the impact of the project?	Yes
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Impact

<p>To what extent have the aims of the project been achieved?</p>	<p>Making progress toward meeting aims.</p>
<p>What difference has the project made?</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Getting youths off the streets • Helping youths gain useful skills for adulthood • Hosting events for youths to build community • Running the local post office • Providing a food bank • Providing – training for employment. • Providing families with childcare – whilst they work/in-training. • Supporting the elderly with household chores • Supporting the community with our gardening initiative. • Support those who suffer or affected by addiction. • Supporting young people who have dis-engaged from school – currently we have a 15 year old attending The Zone, we are supporting him with his Employability Award, providing a space for him to complete his Nat 5 qualifications and providing him with a work placement in our Gardening Team- This young person has not attend school for 18mths and would not make contact with guidance staff etc. • We also have another 14 year old who is also working with our gardening team (work experience.) <p>Additionally, our Family Support Initiative makes a significant difference to families experiencing poverty by reducing stress, improving stability, and strengthening children’s day to day wellbeing. By offering practical help with finances, forms, housing, and essentials, we remove immediate barriers that keep families in crisis. Through early intervention, emotional support, and building parents’ confidence, we create safer, calmer home environments where children can thrive. For young people, our support improves school attendance, mental health, access to positive activities, and opportunities to learn skills and build resilience. By connecting families to the right services, providing consistent, trusted relationships, and addressing both practical and emotional needs, we help break cycles of crisis and give children and young people a better, fairer chance in life.</p>	

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Have conditions or demand changed since the project was introduced?		Yes
More people have started to use the service.		
Has the project had the capacity to meet these changing conditions and demand?		Yes
More people have started to use the service.		
Has the project changed through time?		Yes
What changed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More diverse population needs and an increase in Poverty levels in the community. • Lack of local resources and funding. 	
Why has it changed	Changes in the socioeconomic and political climate, more diverse population needs, and the negative and lingering impact of COVID on the socioeconomic climate. Rural demographics also made access to other organisational services harder, increasing local demand on The Zone services offered.	
Has the project had any unexpected or unintended outcomes?		Yes
The Zone has developed into one of the 'anchor organisations' supporting the local communities in rural East Ayrshire.		
In your opinion, is the project having an impact on tackling poverty?		Yes
It allows young people to gain SQA qualifications, which in turn strengthens their labour market prospects. It provides young people with a safe place to mix with peers. It also tackles deprivation directly through its foodbank.		

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Learning from Experience

What is working well?	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Community space• Food bank• Community engagement• Supporting families with childcare.• Education initiative.• Increased Family participation and subsequent increase in family well-being.• Helps reduce demand on statutory services by providing community based prevention.	
What, if anything, is working less well?	
Sourcing funding is difficult and demanding.	
What are the key learning points that you'd like to share with other practitioners?	
Involve young people in decision-making.	
Are there plans to develop or expand the project in the future?	No
How easily do you think this project could be replicated in another setting?	
With proper funding this project can be replicated in other settings.	

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