



# COVID-19 REPORT

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

This is a report of the work undertaken by Step by Step in Moray in response to Covid-19. Step By Step in Moray, a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO SC042246), supports families who feel isolated or vulnerable in Moray.

Thanks are due to everyone who gave their time to answer questions and help Step by Step in Moray evaluate its adapted service provision from 23<sup>rd</sup> March onwards.

## **2. SITUATION**

Prior to lockdown, Step by Step supported 121 families and 138 children aged 0 – 3. As the Covid-19 situation developed, Step by Step held its final group in Winchester House on Monday 16<sup>th</sup> March. A “Walking Group” met on the morning of Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> March after which it was decided to stop all sessions. Staff started working from home on Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> March and Step by Step officially vacated its office in Winchester House on Friday 20<sup>th</sup> March due to forthcoming restrictions.

## **3. WHAT WE DID AND HOW WE DID IT**

### **Online Group Chats**

9 x Weekly Group Chats were established on Facebook and commenced on Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> March in place of the usual First Steps and Step by Step Groups at Winchester House and St Leonard’s Hall. These chats were led by Family Workers, followed familiar group timings and structure, and always included a creative activity, story, song and signposting to useful information. The group chats were left open so families remained connected and able to support each other throughout the week. One of our peer volunteers in particular was a regular contributor to the group chats, answering questions, offering advice and signposting as appropriate.

*“This is what I miss about the group (at Winchester House) - being able to share and off-load. So thankful you have done this chat ❤️”*

### **One-to-One Support**

All our 121 families continued to receive 1:1 support from Step by Step through individual conversations (telephone, texts, messenger, e-mails), shopping, deliveries and funding application referrals and support. Of particular note were the efforts of Step by Step staff in ensuring that our families experiencing financial difficulties sought help through various funds such as Moray Emergency Relief Fund, One Parent Families Scotland and the Flexible Food Fund. Staff would also go shopping and collect essential items for those families shielding or unable to travel.

## Partnerships and Collaborations

Key to Step by Step's response to Covid-19 were the partnerships and collaborations in order to provide wide-ranging support to our families. These have included:

- Moray Food Plus – 20 Referrals, Collections, Deliveries
- REAP Scotland - 35 Vegetable Grow Packs Delivered
- Arrows / Quarriers / The Bow Café - 252 Community Meals Delivered
- Elgin Community Council - 10 Care Packages Delivered
- Moray Baby Bank – 2 Referrals, Collections, Deliveries
- Moray School Bank – 1 Referral
- Moray Women's Aid – 1 Referral
- Forres Area Community Trust – 2 Referral
- Forres Area Credit Union – 1 Referrals
- tsiMORAY Forums - Zoom Meetings for Updates and Information Sharing

## Funding

Additional funding was successfully sourced for operational costs as well as families in need:

- MFR Cash for Kids (£2310 - 66 x £35 Tesco/Asda Vouchers Distributed)
- Community Wellbeing Fund (£19400 Emergency Funding for Operational Costs)

*"Just a wee note to say thanks again for the voucher, it helped so much. It helped me feel a little less guilty for being a failure as a parent as I have been able to plan some decent, healthy meals for the kids for the next week. They were delighted with all the "good fruit" as they get fed up with apples and bananas."*

*"We took the kids down to Tesco to get them things with the gift card. It well cheered them up and made them really happy; they still have some money each as they didn't want to get too much lol. Thank you, it was really nice getting to see them being happy and not worrying and getting a treat xx"*

## 4. FEEDBACK

### FAMILIES

A Survey Monkey Questionnaire was available to all our 121 families in order to assess the impact of Step by Step's response to Covid-19. A total of 59 responses were received with the results detailed below:

**1. How many children do you have?**

24	1
19	2
16	3+

**2. How has your household income been affected by lockdown restrictions?**

4	Increased
23	No Change
32	Decreased

**3. Have you felt supported by SbyS during the lockdown period?**

58	Yes
1	No

**4. What has helped you the most? (tick as many as you want)**

51	Facebook Group Chats	6	Advised to contact organisations e.g. MWA, REAP
27	Individual support from staff	12	Funding/Grant application support
24	Support from other parents/families	19	Tesco/Asda vouchers
36	Shared play and creative activities	13	Moray Food Plus deliveries
26	Shared songs and stories	20	Meal deliveries
22	Shared information	21	Gardening packs through REAP Scotland
9	Referred to organisations e.g. MWA, REAP	0	Other

**5. Has the lockdown period affected your relationship with your child(ren)?**

27	Yes
31	No

**6. Has the lockdown period adversely affected your health and wellbeing?**

39	Yes
19	No

**7. How has the lockdown period affected your health and wellbeing?  
(Please tick as many as you want)**

0	Covid-19 Symptoms	35	Low Mood
40	Anxious	29	Weight loss/gain
39	Stressed	18	Insomnia
29	Lonely	0	Other

**8. How do you rate the support you have received from SbyS overall? (low - high)**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
0	0	0	0	1	2	6	8	4	38

**9. How optimistic are you feeling about the next 12 months? (low to high)**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2	0	4	5	12	9	13	4	1	9

**10. What are your expectations from SbyS in the next 12 months?**

**Please comment as appropriate**

To hopefully be back up and running as normal again;  
 Continue their good work providing community support;  
 To keep us updated on changes happening, and to keep doing what you're doing;  
 I expect that they will continue to endeavour to find as many ways as possible to help those in need;  
 Not sure;  
 Hopefully get back to seeing everyone again as we are all missing the company and chats;  
 I really hope that groups will be able to resume in some way, although I appreciate that they may need to be very different in format. Maybe even more use of the outdoor space, more walking groups;  
 Keep doing what you're doing! Bring back groups when it is safe to do so, even if just outdoors;  
 I fear we won't get to return as wee one starts nursery in January as turns 3;  
 Right now it's hard because we are in phase 2. I don't expect to be back till maybe Halloween time, maybe even Christmas. I know they'll follow government guidelines and they will do their best to help all the parents and children to the best of their abilities;  
 Continue to help to support if they can;  
 Hoping the groups will be able to start up again within 12 months;

I'd like to think that we will all be reunited soon enough but until then I enjoy our group chat sessions and venting our frustrations;  
Would be lovely to meet up outside when it's feasible;  
Keeping up the amazing work;  
I don't know;  
I don't know. I'm worried that by the time the sessions start again my child will be too old to attend;  
To continue to be a support;  
To continue to reach out and support when needed;  
Whether group starts back or not I definitely know everyone will be there to support regardless;  
Hopefully see everyone soon. I love going to step by step. I look forward to having this to go to every week as my only day off during week from work;  
Continual support through messages to do a catch up;  
Hopefully (when allowed) getting the group properly up and running again so the kids can get back to socialising;  
Hopefully we'll be able to return to group on a Tuesday as I miss the adult social aspect and Maisie misses all her friends! However I know it will be difficult with 10 babies and toys etc.  
Even if we started out going for a stroll round the park, even if it's socially distant. Packing our own snack and tea etc and just having a stroll and a blether until we're able to all be together inside;  
I don't have any;  
To be able to attend group in Forres when it's safe enough to do so. Being a new Mum during all this has been really stressful and would really have benefited from face to face support from staff and other mums;  
Hopefully to still get some support especially through the summer until my daughter goes to nursery in august;  
To help me feel less anxious around people and to let my baby learn and explore with other babies;  
Hoping to be able to attend group again in the future;  
Just keep doing what you're doing! Been attending for 4 years now and have always loved it. The staff and support are amazing;  
Keep doing what they're doing. They are helping as best as they can in this situation;  
Just carry on as they have been doing. They are always amazing support;  
To continue same support;  
Continue doing a great job;  
Get support to get through this horrible time;  
I would hope to see the group up and running again. Missing the social aspects of meeting other adults;  
Hopefully to be as kind and supportive as they have been over the past few months;  
Hopefully get back to playgroups;  
Information about when we can start to attend group again;  
Keep doing what they're doing as they're doing an amazing job;  
Lots of outdoor play;  
To continue the support they are already giving;  
Continue doing the fantastic job you do;

Hopefully we will be at group as my daughter needs the introduction from kids;  
For groups to be back running - fingers crossed;  
The class to start up again soon;  
Support and help my sons relationships grow;  
Back to 'normal' ASAP. Facebook support has nothing on face to face;  
Hopefully to continue to support;  
Hope that step by step can continue to help support families and maybe one day get back to some sort of normality;  
Keep in touch as don't know how groups will work;  
I don't have any expectations, just can't wait for them to be able to open again.

## **STAFF**

Staff remained connected through Zoom Team Meetings, e-mails, messages and occasionally meeting to collect and deliver essential items for distribution. A Feedback Form was issued to all 7 staff members who all responded as detailed below.

### **Q1. What has worked well?**

It has been great being able to carry on working from home using the laptop to provide the activity every week for our family's online groups and Facebook page. Sharing the potential learning opportunities for babies, toddlers and parents in written format means it is there as a reference, and hopefully that's useful for some of the parents/carers. Sharing links and suggested stories within an electronic document is a plus – other useful reading, stories and songs are a click away. I also feel having zoom team meeting every fortnight has worked really well - a chance to hear how the team, families and volunteers are doing and get updates and direction from Gareth.

Group chats have mostly worked very well. Some families who weren't coming to group (in Elgin) became active on our online chats. The online chat was often used out with group time for families to support each other. Even if people weren't joining in chatting, I could see that they were there observing the chat, therefore receiving any information passed on from myself, but also getting advice/information from others.

Online chats, online staff meetings, online birthday greetings.

The group chats have worked well for many of the Mums and have helped to keep staff informed on how families are coping. They have also helped us continue the core work of supporting isolated and vulnerable families through an exceedingly difficult time in all our lives. It has been good to see Mums supporting each other, evidenced in the group chats and out with the chat times on the same forum. I am also aware of this peer networking support through conversations by text/messaging/phone conversations with Mums. I also note

that we have got to know some Mums much better than we were getting to know them in face to face groups which is certainly something I did not expect to happen. The motivation, inventiveness and positivity of the staff has been tremendous throughout this entire period. The MFR Cash for Kids vouchers, Bow café meals, the Reap packs, support from Moray Food Plus, Babybank, Schoolbank and all the various funds we have been able to access or point the parents in the direction of have certainly enhanced the service we have been able to offer.

No office politics to contend with. Less interruptions, peace and quiet to work = better managing workload, less stressful and more confident in my work. Hours can be more flexible, therefore able to enjoy afternoon family walks = destresses and better mental state and having family fun. Also, working smarter and working better with clearer head.

No shoulder pain due to even floor and work desk, and correct posture.

Group dynamic has changed with on-line chats = the quieter ones in face to face group have become the chattier ones online, bringing about new friendships.

For the first 3 months the on-line group chats were working well with chats lasting the hour and a half and families supporting one another.

I have made an office space at home allowing my family to know not to disturb me when I am at my desk haha!

Improved IT skills, and more confident with using my computer.

Groups chats have worked well, keeping in touch with families. Communication between workers at Step by Step has been great. Meal and voucher deliveries. Lots of help and support from elsewhere e.g. MERF. Getting to know families.

The way in which we adapted our services to provide continued and wider-ranging support to families has been excellent. Also, working closely with other organisations has really benefitted our families. The availability of funds both for Step by Step and our families has been a great help.

## **Q2. What hasn't worked well**

It's difficult to say what hasn't worked well. I have missed the interaction with, and feedback from our families, as that is how I would normally measure the success of the activities and story time. When I'm in Winchester house I can observe how parents are interacting with their children. I feel that carrying out the group activities is not just about having a keepsake to take home. More than that, it's a time for families to interact, share and support each other in a smaller group in a relaxed setting. The distraction and fun element of the activity often results in parents sharing their concerns, asking for advice or talking about their own experiences in a very positive way with the volunteers and myself.

Some people have needed more physical contact. The single mums especially have struggled, however there is nothing we could have done about that. There is the potential for written words to be misunderstood or taken the wrong way. I don't think this has happened however. Workload at times became stressful and



not doable in my 20 hours, so went over, but have mostly managed to claim those hours back, on less busy weeks.

ICT updates and general housekeeping. Trying to help staff via video chat has been quite hard. Recommend we have an ICT expert come to the office (once they are allowed) to check and update all computers/laptops.

Not seeing the families face to face or observing the children for this now prolonged period isn't helpful and means we are missing signs of developmental delay or poor attachment for example and therefore unable to signpost to appropriate support or apply early interventions. This is particularly so with those who have not engaged well with the group chats, who are probably the most vulnerable families. No meaningful role for volunteers. The activity sheets have been helpful and a good start in the early days of lockdown but if we are to continue with on line services partially or fully I think we need to find other ways of keeping families engaged with storytelling, action songs and craft activities. I think It has been unfortunate but not critical that the play worker has not been involved in the group chats or had regular contact with the families.

Too near my kitchen = snacking too much. Latterly, group chats have become very quiet with not many engaging in these resulting in more one to one chats taking place = More challenging workload to keep in contact with families, and be their individual support, and this takes more time. New families who had not long started groups before Lockdown have not engaged the same as the families who I have already built a trusting rapport with = harder to build this sort of relationship online. With no interaction with others it can become quite lonely.

Sometimes think an hour and a half can be a bit long for online groups, parents are busy with possibly more than 1 child, doing other things and maybe don't have time to chat. But don't feel there is anything that hasn't worked well.

Lack of face time with everyone – missing the families; no specific role for the majority of our volunteers; not able to immediately discuss work-matters with other staff members; can be difficult to judge how everyone is through e-mails, messenger etc.

### **Q3. What lessons can we learn that can be taken forward?**

That Step by Step has carried on supporting our families through online groups and Facebook page. Developing and getting better at ways to 'push' out support to families, if and when appropriate, in addition to bringing families to Winchester House, such as delivering food and providing more of an 'online' community. Maybe that is something we can still carry on doing even once we are back to normal.

I did wonder if alongside a group session, we could continue the online chat for those that don't come – however I gave it more thought, and don't think that is a good idea as it may encourage people not to bother coming. Also it would mean me (family worker) being stuck to their phone during group – not good.

I think what we have done is great, it has worked really well from my point of view, I don't think we could do anything different. Perhaps some PPE for delivering items, (I had my own, so not an issue for me). Volunteers joining group chats would be really helpful.

How important face to face support is. Seeing people is good for everyone. Do we need to offer a full snack rota when we get back? Can we work from home more often? Especially in Summer holidays to save on childcare costs. How much we rely on social media for doing our job.

We have a good team and can work in different ways. Some parents respond differently when they are not in the physical group situation. For some this has been incredibly positive, and we have got to know them better. If we do decide to continue with online work, I think some learning would be beneficial, certainly for me regarding online safety, security, and etiquette.

No real need to be in the office, as all office work can be done from home. Our service is more adaptable than first thought. Although the face-to-face groups are more beneficial, online groups also allow our families to interact with each other... even out-with group times. With no interruptions within the busy office environment work tasks can be carried out quicker and more efficiently – working smarter.

No comments.

Working more from home may be an option for staff. Also, continuing online group chats may be a good way of keeping our families connected, particularly those that can't always attend group sessions. Continued support to our families through meal deliveries, ongoing referrals, help with funding applications etc may be areas that require more focus. Finally, more outdoor activities may be required to allow our families to meet up again in a safe, socially distanced way.

#### **Q4. Any Other Comments?**

I've missed being with the families, but I've also missed my friends the volunteers. While in lockdown I've tried to keep in touch with volunteers just by text or phone call. Strange for everyone to begin with, as time has gone on some of our volunteers who live on their own have become a bit lonely and some even nervous. The small gesture of the odd text or phone call I feel has really helped to raise their spirits. Chatting about SbyS I have heard how much they too have missed the families, and how SbyS is a big part of their lives and weekly routine. I have also received loads of fun, kind messages of support from them and I feel closer as a result, seeing them as my friends.

Well done everyone.

Support from Gareth and Margaret while working at home and home schooling has been fantastic. No pressure from them at all. It has made this whole system a lot easier for me. Ready to come back now!

No other comments.

I have found working from home to work better for me, as I now feel more confident in my working capabilities, and less stressed (Well, most days :-D).

The staff have been so supportive, I still need to ask a good few questions and not sure of everything yet and there's always someone to help me. Also been very accommodating to my home life situation.

The flexibility of staff and adaptability of our services has, I believe, shown Step by Step in a very positive light and we should all be justifiably proud of what we were able to achieve during these challenging times.

## **VOLUNTEERS**

Volunteers received messages, telephone calls, fortnightly updates and were invited to join Facebook Group Chats. Families and staff also compiled a You Tube video to celebrate our volunteers during Volunteers' Week in early June.

*"Thank you so much for the BEAUTIFUL You Tube video! It was so kind & thoughtful of you all & I appreciated & enjoyed it very much. Like you, I am greatly looking forward to the day when we can all be together again. Sending love to you all."*

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*"Thank you so much for the lovely video. It certainly brought a tear to my eye as I miss you all very much. What a lot of thought and work went into that. Surely we'll see you soon. Thank you again."*

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*"Thank you for your emails, they are much appreciated. Well done to you and all the team. You have all worked so hard during this crisis."*

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## **OTHER ORGANISATIONS**

Feedback was sought from other organisations by e-mail and are detailed below.

*"REAP were pleased to have set up collaborative working with Step by Step before Covid-19, and we were just about to start community sessions with some new funding we've accessed when lockdown began. We contacted Gareth to understand how our two organisations were changing our work, so that we could best work to support Step by Step clients throughout lockdown. Gareth's approach is always very collaborative and client centred, and we worked out that a good thing could*

*be getting bespoke packs of seeds, potatoes, netting and an instruction leaflet out to families growing at home – some for the first time. Gareth publicised this through his networks and 35 families took up the packs, posted out. As we knew we'd be working into the future with Gareth, we've delayed filling in our recording forms for our funders, and instead asked for photos from families. We've received some great pictures back through Gareth. We also offered to look after the garden at Step by Step so that families will have a harvest to come back to when groups restart, which we've done. We are looking forward to meeting the families and children face to face as lockdown eases. Step by Step have been our best collaborative partner at this difficult time."*

*Manager, REAP Scotland*

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*"The Covid lockdown has provided us with an opportunity to work with organisations that we would not usually come into contact with and we are pleased we were able to assist Step By Step in providing meals for families who could benefit from a little extra assistance at this time. Your support during this time has been much appreciated, as was your clear, prompt communications allowing us to be able to provide the appropriate service to you and your families. It has been uplifting to see how so many services such as yourselves have been able to adapt to the current climate and provide for those in need – it almost seems a pity that it has to come to an end as the feeling of a community rallying round has certainly shone through and those who have received the support would surely benefit from it on an ongoing basis. Thank you for your support, hard work and enthusiasm during this time from all of us here at Arrows and The Bow Cafe."*

*Lead Worker, Arrows*

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*"Step by Step have been a friendly and efficient agency to Moray Baby Bank. You have been easy to work alongside with good communication throughout each referral."*

*Leader, Moray Baby Bank*

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## **5. CASE STUDIES**

Julie (not real name) first attended Step by Step in summer 2019 with her daughter and a family worker from social care. Her daughter was in foster care at this time and Julie was having supervised contacts. Julie had been to Richmond Hill in Aberdeen post birth, but this was ended early due to concerns. Through court, Julie fought to try get her daughter back.

During her time at Step by Step, Julie has shown to be attentive to her daughter's needs and the peer support in the group setting has helped greatly with this. Very quickly Julie gained more and more unsupervised contact and by October

her daughter was fully in her care. Julie's attendance at group continued to be fairly consistent with Julie stating how much she enjoyed attending and how much she felt that the group supported her.

Just prior to Lockdown, Julie was having a lot of trouble with the carer of her 2 older children who is planning to take them abroad to live; Julie has lots of contact with them, doesn't want them to move and is currently pursuing this through the court. She lives in a small 1 bedroom flat and is also struggling with bad neighbours. Her Social Worker is helping Julie to get a move.

Since Lockdown a Step by Step Family Worker has been providing Julie with continuing and increasing levels of emotional support as well as a significant amount of financial help; Julie struggles with day-to-day budgeting and regularly ends up in debt through spending lots of money on her daughter. Rising costs due to Covid-19 have accentuated this problem. Step by Step has helped with grant applications to the Moray Emergency Relief Fund, Moray Food Fund and One Parent Families Scotland. Step by Step has also provided Tesco vouchers through MFR Cash for Kids funding as well as collecting and delivering Moray Food Plus packages and baby items. Finally, our Family Worker referred Julie to Forres Action Community Trust for further advice and support.

Throughout the Lockdown period, our Family Worker has remained in contact with Julie's Social Worker who, in turn, has a good relationship with Julie. Julie is looking forward to returning to her Step by Step group post Covid-19. Until then she remains a regular contributor to the weekly Facebook Group Chat and keeps in contact with the Family Worker through private messaging.

*"I will now be able to do a proper shop at the weekend and get her some of her favourite snacks. Thank you so much for all your help. You really have been amazing."*

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Mary (not real name) and her husband were both already on a low income before becoming furloughed from their employment as a result of Covid-19. This left them with a significant financial shortfall. They have 3 children aged 6, 3 and 18 months. The eldest has ADHD and ASD and the second eldest presents similar behaviours, posing further challenges during lockdown as Mary had to cope with limited resources at home for home schooling and sensory play. Applications were printed and sent to Mary for the Family Fund, allowing her to receive money to buy the home schooling and sensory play resources needed for her boys. Other resources such as food packages, meals, gardening packs and vouchers were provided through Step by Step to further support Mary and her family.

*"I would like to start by thanking everyone at Step by Step. Over the past 13 weeks it has been an extremely difficult time for most people financially and emotionally. Being able to still have our online group chat once a week has helped me so much emotionally. When I am at a loose end with things to keep the kids entertained you*

*are there to provide me with ideas and activities to keep them and myself going. The REAP seeds we planted have given the kids a sense of pride while learning important life lessons and learning to be patient. A massive thank you for checking up on ME and asking how I'M doing and being someone to support me on the hardest of days. Financially we have been hugely impacted by becoming furloughed and if I'm being frank, Step by Step are the reason we have managed to avoid debt, by helping with food parcels we have been able to allocate our money to the important household bills, keeping a roof over our head and a warm house. We were nominated for a 3 course meal to be delivered to us, this brought us together as a family without the stress of myself having to cook, we could all have a little treat and 'night off' this put the household in high spirits. There was a point in the 13 weeks where I struggled to afford clothes for the kids and they desperately needed them. Yet again you were there to help, by offering Asda vouchers so I could get my shopping then the money I saved I was able to order new clothes for the kids. We are extremely grateful for all your help and support, it's true what they say not all heroes wear capes!!"*

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A mother and her 10-month-old baby daughter started attending Step by Step at the beginning of this year. Mum is married and has a 12-year-old child from a previous relationship. In the early days Mum appeared very anxious and was a little embarrassed by the large size of her daughter. Mum explained that she had begun weaning this beautiful, happy baby too early. Step by Step was able to reassure Mum and support her with food parcels from Moray Food Plus which allowed her to buy more fresh fruit and vegetable for the family. Our model of serving fruit and vegetables at snack time was helpful to this family.

It emerged, after a few weeks of regular attendance at group, that all was not well at home due to the husband and father of the baby being abusive. Mum went to Moray Women's Aid but did not have the courage to leave the marital home with both her children until mid-April during lockdown. MWA were able to provide temporary accommodation and the family has recently moved to a new home.

Mum has participated well in the group chats from the start of lockdown, always coming across as chatty and upbeat. Meanwhile, I have been able to support her on a one to one basis using text and messenger. She has shared all sorts of concerns; she was very anxious for example about attending for baby's immunisations with how things would work and regarding PPE. Throughout lockdown, Mum has been proud to send pictures and videos of baby both privately and on the group chats. Her daughter is developing well and looks to be happy and in good health. Mum is particular about keeping to a routine with meal and snack times, nap and bedtimes. She has also maintained fruit and vegetable snacks and her daughter is now far more mobile and less overweight.

Mum was extremely anxious about moving to her new home but was awarded the community care grant to help furnish it. The family are now settling into

their new surroundings. When chatting Mum comes across as happy and far less anxious. She is very open, and I know she trusts me.

*"I'm a 32 year old mum of 2. The oldest is 13 and youngest is 16 months. I joined Step by Step a few months back. I was told about them by my health visitor as she knew I was really anxious about baby clubs. I'm a very shy person and was scared to meet new people. When I met the staff at Step by Step I was made to feel so welcome and reassured. I was even given hugs. The other mums were nice. Every Thursday would genuinely be the highlight of my week. I really loved my time there, and my daughter did too. After a few months of me coming to Step by Step, I confided in them about the domestic abuse I was suffering at home from my husband. I was treated with respect and I felt like I could tell them anything. They made me feel safe and like I had someone to listen. When I left my husband and fled to Moray Women's Aid Step by Step continued with the support, which I am grateful for. They were amazing. They've helped me during lockdown too. They've checked on me regularly and, knowing that someone is there for either advice or just a chat, is truly priceless. They've done a lot for me and I have made some lovely friends with mums within the group and the staff. I would now be lost without them."*

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Amy (not real name) is 28yrs old and a single parent to 3 children aged 8, 6 and 3. She lives in Elgin and has been attending Step by Step for 8 years. Amy suffers from ongoing mental health issues and regularly receives counselling, organised through Step by Step, in order to address her anxiety and depression. She recently started volunteering with Step by Step, offering peer support to other isolated, vulnerable parents. In addition, she works part-time in order to support her young family but, unfortunately, Covid-19 has meant that she is now out of work and losing £300 per month. MFR funds has enabled Amy to purchase food, toiletries and games to ensure the short-term requirements of her children are met during the ongoing lockdown period.

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Lesley and Ian (not real names) have 2 children aged 4 years and 2 years. They live in Elgin and have been attending Step by Step since their eldest was a matter of weeks old as Lesley struggles with the challenges of family life, suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and Borderline Personality Disorder. Ian works as a chef and Covid-19 has resulted in a significant loss of earnings due to lockdown. MFR funds enabled them to purchase food and toys for their children.

*"Thank you so much for the vouchers. The children got some toys for the garden and our cupboards are now stocked up for them also."*

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## **6. CONCLUSION**

Step by Step's response to Covid-19 has been agile, adaptable and widely praised within the community. In a time of great uncertainty, Step by Step provided familiarity, routine and support to 121 families and, in doing so, strengthened its relationships with other public and third sector organisations. Of particular note has been the effectiveness of online group chats as a way of connecting Step by Step families, sharing ideas and information and providing peer support throughout lockdown and the subsequent easing of restrictions. In addition, the situation has highlighted those families in poverty and in need of greater support such as emergency funding, foodbank referrals or help to purchase essential items. Furthermore, staff have adapted well to alternative ways of working, particularly operating from home, and certain aspects of Step by Step's response to Covid-19 may be incorporated into future working practices. However, the role of volunteers is one area for further discussion as many were shielding and, therefore, unable to provide customary levels of support to Step by Step families and staff. That said, the role of Step by Step during these most challenging of times has been significant, necessary and greatly received by families across Moray.



