

# Maximise!

Income - Wellbeing - Attainment - Potential

# 2019-2020 IMPACT REPORT



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**Projects like Maximise! rank among the best and highest impact approaches seen anywhere in the UK. To end poverty, it is essential that the innovation and progress made in this area is built upon in the coming years, with high quality advice, advocacy and wellbeing support embedded in key public services in all parts of the city and available to all communities.**

**Edinburgh Poverty Commission**

## Maximise! is supported by:



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# FOREWORD - FROM THE MAXIMISE! TEAM

Since 2017 we have been working hard in our schools, communities, and family homes. We have also worked hard to work together to find new and different ways of combining the best approaches of Children 1st and CHAI to create a way of working with families that is community-focused, flexible, and trauma-informed. This is usually in response to meeting a new family – each one unique and with their own ideas about what they need to get on in life. What is all too common though, is seeing the day to day reality for children and families living in poverty in our city.

When we meet families for the first time, we make sure we are welcoming, that we are glad to see them, and understand the courage it can take to ask for help. We often support families who feel embarrassed and have been pushed from pillar to post looking for assistance. We offer free, impartial, and confidential help that is kind. When families feel safe, we can talk more about income maximisation, money worries and housing difficulties.

We see the effects of stress and anxiety on parents and carers and how this impacts children's learning, development, and sense of belonging.

We make sure that families are listened to - that getting to school, family relationships, and yes, being happy! form the core of our support to children, young people, and their families.

Covid-19 meant doubling our efforts to stay connected. Our training and employment support for parents and young people will never be more crucial and comes with many new challenges. Despite that, our support keeps itself rooted in aspiration - reminding those we support that we all start from a different place and we all have different dreams. We understand that every journey into employment is different. Our aim is to walk beside parents on their path.

That message is one that we and all our amazing colleagues in Maximise! share with each other and keep returning to - that we walk alongside, encourage, and believe in families. That everyone should experience kindness, fairness, stability, and hope.

**Nikki, Val and Beth  
(and Jude, Stella, Tony, Erin,  
Catherine, Sidra, Vicky, Esme and  
Geeta!)**



# ABOUT US

Maximise! is a Family Advice and Support Project delivered in partnership by **Children 1st** and **CHAI** (Community Help and Advice Initiative), supported by NHS Lothian, the City of Edinburgh Council and Capital City Partnership.

The families who access Maximise!, as well as the schools that accommodate the service and the community networks that it connect in with are all key stakeholders in the partnership - essential to its purpose, value, and effectiveness.

Maximise! takes a child-centred, family minded approach to tackling child poverty in Edinburgh, offering family support, advice, and employability via one single gateway within each of Edinburgh's localities.

The service is embedded within school clusters, and more recently, within early years centres, making it easily accessible to families in need of support.

Holistic, community-based advice and support is provided to parents, children and young people who are, or are at risk of, experiencing poverty to overcome the barriers that families experiencing poverty face in achieving at school, work, home and in the community.

In Scotland, children from low-income households do significantly worse at school than those from better-off homes. It is recognised by the Scottish Government that a gap exists in the progress made between children from higher and lower income families - this is referred to as the 'attainment gap'.

Data shows that Edinburgh's attainment gap is more pronounced than that of other areas in Scotland.

The whole family support approach that Maximise! takes aims to improve families' financial resilience and health and wellbeing, as well as increasing children's positive participation in school life and education attainment to reduce the attainment gap experienced by lower income families.

Maximise! began in one school cluster (six schools) in South East Edinburgh in 2018. An Advice Worker, Family Wellbeing Worker and Employability Worker were based within the school cluster for one year, offering a whole family, trauma-informed and person-centred approach via one single gateway to address the complex issues that often impact families who are affected by poverty.

Offering a multi-disciplinary service with one single entry point eliminates the need for families to be passed from pillar to post. This reduces the risk of repeated assessments, referral processes and potential negative experiences for families experiencing poverty.

Following the success of the pilot of Maximise! in the South East, additional funding was received, allowing the service to expand to all four localities in Edinburgh.

Maximise! is now embedded within the following school clusters: Liberton, Leith, Craigroyston and Wester Hailes.

More recently, funding was secured to develop Maximise! Early Years, the service work with families where there is a child aged between 0-5 years and will be embedded within the following early years centres: Moffat, Greendykes, Craigmillar, Fort and Granton.

“It's been so important knowing that we won't be homeless and have our flat secured.”

Quote from Parent





# THE MAXIMISE! MODEL

The Maximise! Model is made up of a strong, integrated team of three staff in each locality cluster offering advice, employability and family wellbeing support.

Families can select the areas of support they engage with and they can move through and engage with the model of support in a manner and pace which suits their situation.

The school-based cluster model in Maximise! facilitates flexibility and network building, which has proved critical for adapting to COVID-19 social distancing policies.

Every practitioner in our Maximise! Team identifies **'building relationships with families'** as central to their practice.

Research conducted by The University of Edinburgh found that across each strand of Maximise! service delivery approximately **70-80%** of practice time involved relational efforts to build, or in many cases re-build, individual confidence and trust in others.



**The Maximise! Model of Support**

Research findings highlight the effectiveness of the Maximise cluster model, as well as intensive family support approaches more broadly, for delivering emergency social services to economically distressed communities.

## MEASURING IMPACT

**In measuring our impact we consider:**

- The aims and values of our work
- The impact of the service on families whole lives - what's changed?
- Integration with schools and local communities
- Partnership approach
- The voices of the families we support and the team delivering that support.

This report will look at the impact of the Maximise! service for families in 2019/20 as well as the response and renewal of Maximise! during COVID-19.

## WHAT WE DO

Poverty rarely has one single cause - a range of factors including rising living costs, low pay, lack of work and issues around accessing and receiving social security benefits mean that some families don't have enough resources to meet the cost of living.

Maximise! understands that families who are experiencing poverty are typically dealing with a multitude of issues.

This section breaks down the specialist roles that the team surrounding the family fulfil.

## Advice



### Offering families support with:

- Financial Health Checks and Income Maximisation
- Welfare Rights
- Crisis and Debt Management
- Housing Issues
- Budgeting Help
- Service Cost Comparison of (gas, electric etc.)
- Advocacy and representation across a range of social welfare issues including housing, social security, employment and debt.

## Family Wellbeing



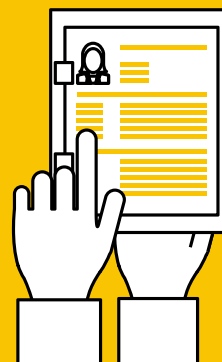
### Offering families support with:

- addressing the wider issues that often impact families affected by poverty
- stabilizing families and increasing independence.
- establishing positive routines and structure for the family
- addiction issues
- housing and homelessness
- parenting skills
- social interactions
- physical and mental health issues and disabilities

## Employability

### Offering individuals support with:

- increasing confidence
- looking for employment
- applying for jobs
- CV's and interview preparation
- accessing training, education and/or volunteering
- progression within work
- in-work support



## COVID-19 RESPONSE

The aims of Maximise! remain unchanged by the crisis - improving families' financial resilience and health and wellbeing, increasing children's attainment and their readiness to learn.

These aims only come into sharper focus as the team continue to support families during this COVID-19 crisis and consider the additional barriers and layers of adversity faced by families living, or soon to be living, in poverty.

## Flexibility

Flexibility and fluidity are key parts of our integrated model, enabling the different disciplines within the team to learn from each other.

Family Wellbeing Workers have grown more aware of specific practical and financial questions to consider when assessing and addressing need, meaning there is a greater capacity to assist Advice Workers with tasks such as information gathering with families.

Advice and Employability Workers have trained in trauma-informed approaches, enabling proactive use of appointment time to build trust and engage with the mental and emotional wellbeing of parents and their children.

# ANNUAL IMPACT SUMMARY

**569**

APPOINTMENTS  
ATTENDED

**£667,975.00**

OVERALL FINANCIAL GAINS  
FOR FAMILIES

**77**

INDIVIDUALS  
ENGAGING WITH  
HOUSING ADVICE /  
TENANCY SUSTAINMENT

THE FAMILIES SUPPORTED  
HAD A TOTAL OF

**901**

DEPENDANTS

FOR EVERY £1 INVESTED  
AN ESTIMATED

**£30-£39**

OF RETURN IN SOCIAL AND  
ECONOMIC BENEFITS

**153**

LARGER FAMILIES  
SUPPORTED  
(3+ CHILDREN)

**37**

CARE EXPERIENCED  
FAMILIES ENGAGED

**197**

LONE PARENT FAMILIES  
SUPPORTED

**97**

BLACK AND MINORITY  
ETHNIC (BME) FAMILIES  
SUPPORTED



# DISTANCE TRAVELLED FAMILY SUPPORT

5 KEY RECORDED OUTCOMES  
ACROSS 63 FAMILIES.  
(251 CHILDREN AND ADULTS)



## **Young people/families have improved financial stability and improved family relationships.**

For families this looked like access to essential items e.g. food, toys, clothes, a bed. For children this included less shouting, stress at home, better sleep. More play, activities, and connection.



## **Child/Young people better engaged in education.**

Supported to learn, achieve, attain. For Maximise! this means READINESS to learn and improved conditions to learn. Food in bellies, reduced conflict at home, connectivity and tools for home learning environment.



## **Parent/Carer has increased resilience.**

Able to seek and accept support from others.  
Better able to cope with difficult events.



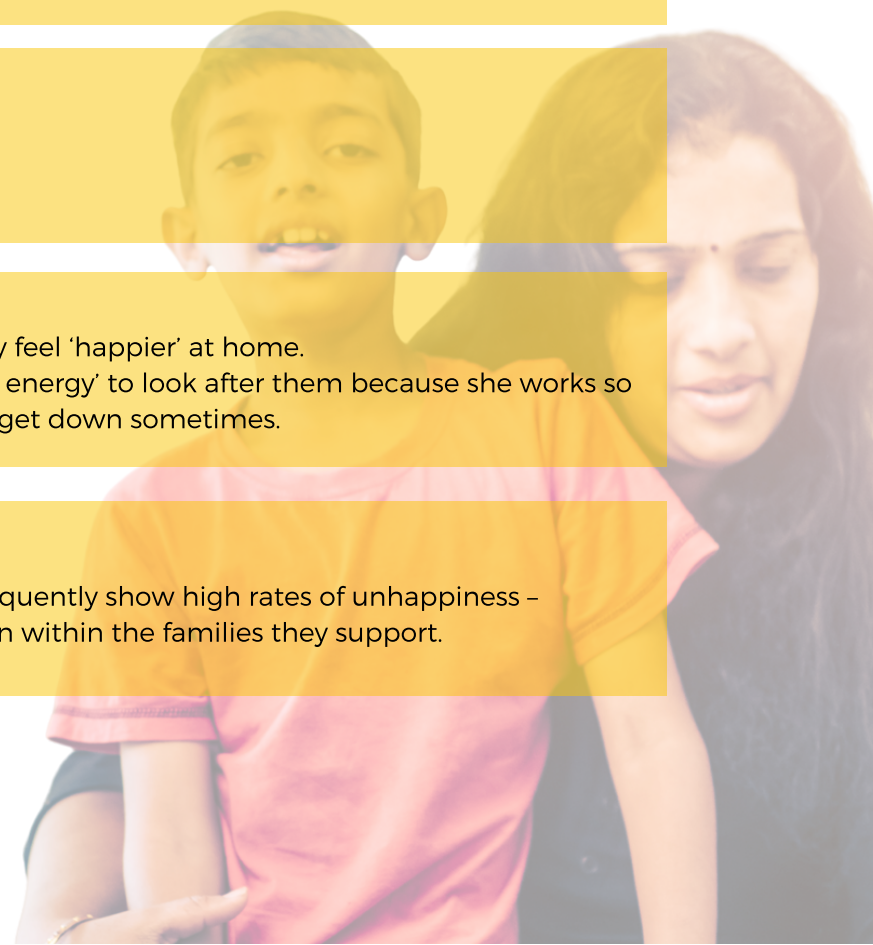
## **Listening to children's views, experiences and wishes.**

One child asked their Family Wellbeing Worker to help their family feel 'happier' at home. Another child wished their mum could be given 'break' and 'more energy' to look after them because she works so hard. She wished her step-dad 'more confidence' because he can get down sometimes.



## **83% of children and young people are happier.**

Children living in families suffering from poverty and inequality frequently show high rates of unhappiness - Maximise! has impacted positively on the happiness of the children within the families they support.



# THE MAXIMISE! APPROACH DURING COVID-19: FROM RESPONSE TO RENEWAL

Maximise! creates cultural space for effective, trusting relationships and social networks to evolve with families; between team members; and with wider communities and resources.

The University of Edinburgh conducted independent research on The Maximise! service, with a focus on how frontline practitioners in children and family support services are mobilising social networks in response to COVID-19. This report can be found [here](#).

The findings outline how integrated practices in the Maximise! model allow greater scope for team adaptation to emerging and increasing needs which each strand might not withstand or respond to effectively on its own. The Maximise! Model allows each colleague and cluster team to:

- 'build' intentional, shared efforts to get to 'know' a child family in their trusted setting.
- 'hold' a situation in crisis – sharing learning and the challenge of transitions between support areas.
- 'ensure space' for individual and family choice and change - at their pace, on their terms, and with the child's experience at the centre.

The research conducted both pre and during COVID-19 has highlighted the necessity of re-evaluating the impacts and effectiveness of the 'refer-on' culture that can be pervasive in support delivery.

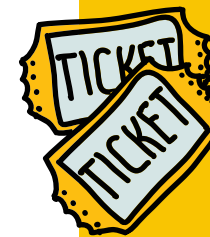
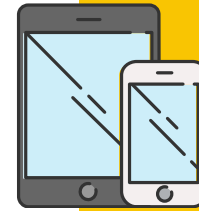
## Challenges and learning for the Maximise! team included:

- Several families that were considered high risk, who at the outset triggered anxiety for frontline staff, fared much better than expected. This led them to respect and learn from expressions of resilience and strengths that they can encourage throughout future transitions.
- Other families emerged with significant needs who have not come to the attention of support services before. This led Maximise! to recognise gaps in service delivery and design and develop more opportunities for families to express need.
- The greater autonomy in frontline practice has been positive in meeting the needs of families during COVID-19.
- Community-orientated culture and ease of access to support is vital going forward.

Maximise! retains the same strong accountability to quality practice and expertise, working towards good outcomes in each respective support area and working together to ensure that there is a consistent emphasis on delivering an intensive, trauma-informed, person-centred response.

# ADDITIONAL PRACTICAL SUPPORTS DURING COVID-19

- **42** digital devices secured for families, enabling school work, job searching, college learning and reducing social isolation.
- **£5322,00** additional financial gains for families via Aberlour's Urgent Assistance Fund.
- Furniture and essentials secured for families - one family supported to furnish child's room.
- Activity jars for families enabling the chance to bond and have some fun.
- Family days out - tickets to theatre shows and cinema supplied to families.
- Support with food, bills and fuel.
- Partnership with Maison Bleue and Choices for Change Project in South West Edinburgh - **100** high needs families identified and **7,200** meals provided to these families between June - August 2020.



## CARE EXPERIENCE

The term 'care experience' can reflect many circumstances. For a child or young person this could mean living with extended family or friends, with foster carers, or being adopted. It could mean living at home with family but with a requirement that a social worker is involved to provide support.

These experiences can be necessary to ensure care and protection and can benefit children and young people in many ways. However, in spite of the well-intentioned nature of decision-making about a child's care, their experience can be challenging and is not always a positive one.

Care experience, whether positive or negative, can influence the lives of many as they grow into adulthood and become parents and carers themselves.

We know that changes are needed to the way children and parents with care experience are supported. The independent voices of Scotland's recent Care Review tell us this and it is our job to listen carefully and to respond compassionately.

We know from growing experience and research that poverty and hardship can impact on a child or young person's attainment (Treanor, 2012).

The greater the level of poverty, the wider the gap in opportunities and educational outcomes. This gap is even greater for those with care experience. We know that good advice can relieve stress and reduce the anxiety that financial hardship or instability can cause.

We also understand that accessing advice and support can be emotional and is not always an easy step.

# OUR CARE EXPERIENCE PLEDGE

**In The Promise, the Care Review identified five foundations for change, with recommendations to transform how Scotland cares so that all children grow up loved, safe and respected.**

**Maximise! is here to highlight and promote the right of all children and families, especially those with care experience, to have access to supports that recognise trauma, reduce stress, and enhance readiness and opportunity to learn.**

**Maximise! is here to ensure that housing, debt, or financial worries do not become additional stressors in family life where a child is living separate from their birth family or where plans are being considered for them to move or return.**

**Maximise! is here to work alongside families and local partners to ensure advice appointments are available and actively offered to more families with care experience.**

**We will ensure this comes alongside an offer of family wellbeing support or employability support where this makes sense for the family.**



# SPOTLIGHT ON CARE EXPERIENCE: FAMILY CASE STUDY

01

## ROUTE TO SUPPORT

Maximise! work alongside a family with three children, two of whom were previously in kinship care with their grandparent. All children now live back with mum. Life circumstances, including a job loss and reliance on Universal Credit, led to mounting debt and rent arrears, and a referral to Maximise! through school.

02

## CIRCUMSTANCES

Over time, the parent's relationship became strained, often made harder by stresses at home about money. An assault took place at home that amounted to domestic abuse. There were worries for the children's safety and that they would witness this and be placed at risk. Dad moved out before lockdown and the children were placed on the Child Protection Register. Life at home was becoming increasingly pressured for everyone.

03

## ENGAGEMENT

Maximise! Advice Worker and Family Wellbeing Worker contacted mum, dad, school, and the family Social Worker. Agreement was given for Maximise! to be part of the Child's Plans and Core Group to build relationships with each family member and support family needs.

04

## ACTION PLAN

Following an initial appointment with the Maximise! Advice Worker and introduction to the Maximise! Family Wellbeing Worker during lockdown, the family agreed that a weekly walk, getting out of the house, spending time together and exploring new ways to play might be helpful. Increased time indoors and frequent arguments between mum and eldest daughter meant homelife remained tough.

05

## FAMILY AIMS

Maximise! supported the family to create goals that they would like to work towards. Mum wanted to work on her relationship with her daughter who, in turn, wanted more protected time with mum. Dad wants to work on his relationship with his partner and to be able to better handle stress at home.

06

## WHOLE FAMILY APPROACH

Maximise! involved dad and listened to his frustrations and feelings about what had gone wrong and behaviours he now regrets. Dad returned safely back home with a clear plan in place. He has now found work that he enjoys but this can be sporadic and short-term. There is now hope that the Employability Support Worker can explore work and training that could lead to greater stability and meet goals dad wants to achieve.

07

## ON-GOING SUPPORT

Maximise! continues to support the family to have a stable home, healthy relationships, and open communication. The team hope to recommend that the children are removed from the Child Protection Register soon. The family are also helping the team to develop a resource for other families called a 'Resilience Box'.

A young girl with long dark hair, wearing a white shirt and a blue backpack, is holding the hand of an adult. The background is a soft-focus outdoor setting. A semi-transparent yellow banner is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing the title text.

# INDIVIDUAL LOCALITY IMPACT 2019/20

**Maximise!**  
Income - Wellbeing - Attainment - Potential

# SOUTH EAST LOCALITY LIBERTON CLUSTER



## ADVICE

- 117 parents received welfare advice
- 165 appointments were attended
- 19 care experience families engaged with advice
- 13 families engaged with housing advice/tenancy sustainment
- £180,000.00 financial gains in the South East



## FAMILY SUPPORT

- 17 families received family support
- 22 adults and 29 children received family support
- 1 care experienced family engaged in family support



## EMPLOYABILITY

- 24 people received employment support
- 41 employability sessions attended
- 2 people progressed into employment (sustained for 4+ weeks)
- 3 people progressed into education and training
- 2 people progressed into volunteering

## South East Case Study

A parent referred herself to the Maximise! Employability Service after receiving a leaflet from her children's school. She had been out of work for over 7 years having taken time out to bring up her children.

The Employability Worker was able to support the parent to create a new CV which led to a discussion about volunteering as a way of gaining more recent work experience.

The parent was supported to progress into a volunteer role and was keen to look for paid employment alongside this. The Employability worker suggested that a Youth Work Assistant role might suit her interests and availability. A position in the local community had recently been advertised and together they applied for this.

The parent was offered an interview for the position and following some interview preparation, she attended the interview and was offered the job the same day!



# NORTH EAST LOCALITY LEITH CLUSTER



## ADVICE

- **67** parents received welfare advice
- **100** appointments were attended
- **9** care experience families engaged with advice
- **14** families engaged with housing advice/tenancy sustainment
- **£87,829.00** financial gains in the North East



## FAMILY SUPPORT

- **11** families received family support
- **9** adults and **18** children received family support



## EMPLOYABILITY

- **13** people received employment support
- **28** employability sessions attended
- **3** people progressed into education and training
- **1** person engaged in Activity Agreement

### North East Case Study

Two teenage brothers were referred by school. Their mum received an advice appointment to ensure they were in receipt of all relevant housing and welfare benefits. The family were starting a new life after having experienced domestic abuse.

The impacts of this experience were still affecting the family and they were referred to the Family Wellbeing Worker for support.

The brothers displayed aggression towards one another which was impacting negatively on their home and school life. The boys were supported to engage with one to one sessions and take part in reflective whole family sessions to explore the impacts of their experiences.

Since family support was put in place, aggression levels have reduced and the family remark there is a greater sense of 'peace' at home. Both the parent and the school have noticed changes in the behaviour of the boys. The family are now able to enjoy time together and socialise with each other.

Alongside emotional support, a crucial part of stabilising this family's situation came from linking the family into practical supports within the local community. The parent has now moved into employment and she was supported to access free clothing for the workplace.

# NORTH WEST LOCALITY CRAIGROYSTON CLUSTER



## ADVICE

- **105** parents received welfare advice
- **143** appointments were attended
- **5** care experience families engaged with advice
- **31** families engaged with housing advice/tenancy sustainment
- **£205,878.00** financial gains in the North West



## FAMILY SUPPORT

- **15** families received family support
- **14** adults and **18** children received family support



## EMPLOYABILITY

- **34** people received employment support
- **70** employability sessions attended
- **1** person progressed into employment (sustained 4+ weeks)
- **4** people progressed into education and training
- **1** person engaged in volunteering
- **6** people completed a vocational or work placement

## North West Case Study

The Maximise! NW Advice Worker is providing continuous support to a parent that has a court action to evict her and her family from their home. The case has been continued twice – a success, despite court action ongoing. The parent has been supported to make regular payments towards rent and arrears.

Maximise! supported another NW family who had a serious mice infestation in their home.

Both the Advice Worker and Family Wellbeing Worker were involved in supporting the family to access advice on this issue, acting as advocates to get the issue resolved for the family.

This intervention has allowed the Maximise! workers to build positive relationships with the family and offer further support to improve inner-family relationships.

# SOUTH WEST LOCALITY WESTER HAILES CLUSTER



## ADVICE

- 92 parents received welfare advice
- 161 appointments were attended
- 4 care experience families engaged with advice
- 19 families engaged with housing advice/tenancy sustainment
- £218,430.00 financial gains in the South West



## FAMILY SUPPORT

- 14 families received family support
- 11 adults and 19 children received family support



## EMPLOYABILITY

- 41 people received employment support
- 64 employability sessions attended
- 3 people progressed into employment (sustained 4+ weeks)
- 6 people progressed into education and training
- 1 person engaged in an Activity Agreement
- 1 person completed a vocational or work placement

### South West Case Study

A large family who had moved to the UK from abroad with several young children were struggling on one minimum wage income for the household. The family income was £1000 a month, while housing costs were £650 per month.

The family were due to pay £600 council tax and were struggling against fuel costs - averaging £40 spend every 4-5 days the family were reducing their use of heating despite the cold temperatures

The Maximise! Advice Worker completed a benefit check and found that the family were eligible for Child Benefit and Universal credit. The family's Right to Reside Status was checked to make sure that immigration status would not be adversely affected by claiming public funds.

The claim was not straightforward due to a surge in applications caused by the Brexit deadline and difficulties processing the mother's National Insurance Number.

The Advice Worker persisted and as a result, the N.I number was fast tracked, cutting the families waiting time by several weeks.

The family were supported to negotiate manageable payment plans for bills and helped to access grants for food, warm clothing and heating costs.

The Advice Worker applied to Best Start Grants for the children and placed the family on the list for council housing due to overcrowding. One of the parents is now being supported to progress into training and education.



# What people are saying about Maximise!

**"I feel brave enough to make changes for me and my child knowing I have the support of the Maximise! team"**

Quote from parent

**"The parent described being able to access the service through the school as 'completely life changing'..."**

Quote from Acting Depute Head

**"The parent...has started college this week which is something she has wanted to do for a decade...she is absolutely delighted."**

Quote from Acting Depute Head

**"My child is far more confident and gets far more involved in school. Such a positive improvement!"**

Quote from parent

**"I will ask questions about the family's emotional situation, how they're coping, what the situation is with the children. I wouldn't normally ask those questions, but in Maximise! we do. I'm trying to explore every avenue possible to see, is there a need? Is that something that we're missing?"**

Quote from caseworker

**"...the stress of moving during shielding...would be stressful for anyone, let alone a person with anxiety. Thank you...for being with us and supporting us. Everything we are trying to do is to...make sure as a family we feel safe and that the children can be happy"**

Quote from parent

**"I know the parent has really valued Maximise!'s support which has really benefited the family particularly during lockdown. I have been so impressed with the service and how it reaches out to families who are struggling and contributes towards positive outcomes for children and their families."**

Quote from Family Social Worker

**"Maximise has been an invaluable support. Having this amazing resource to offer at Craigour Park Primary School has been hugely useful. You can instantly see the relief on the faces of parents when they learn they have impartial support to navigate often complex processes."**

Quote from Depute Head Teacher

## WHAT'S NEXT?

Maximise! continues to build upon the progress and relationships made within the first year of the expanded service with families, schools and both local and national services.

The team continue to work flexibly, tailoring support to family requirements. The ongoing crisis response requires a coordinated and renewed emphasis on those most at risk or in need.

This group includes: children who are Looked After or Accommodated, children with disabilities and additional needs, Black and Minority Ethnic families - with attention to interpretation and language needs, families with no recourse to public funds, lone parent families, large families, those seeking to enter the job market, and those unemployed with childcare responsibilities.

Maximise! is committed to ensuring the voices of those most impacted are actively sought, heard and acted upon.

Maximise! believes that improved and sustainable wellbeing outcomes are enjoyed when systems are developed that respectfully reach out, hold, respond to and travel with families in their lived experiences of poverty.

Maximise! Early Years launches within North East and North West Edinburgh - Maximise! Early Years will contribute to the learning under The Edinburgh and South East Scotland City Region Deal Intensive Family Support Service.

A 'Social Return on Investment' report, supported by The Improvement Service will provide an analysis of the Maximise! project capturing the broader value of the service. Early analysis of the project suggests that every **£1** invested returns a social and economic benefit of between **£30 and £39**, but this is only a very small part of the impact created.

The University of Edinburgh are working with the project to conduct a social network analysis of the service which will detail the impacts of the project in relation to the relationships that are developed through it.

Maximise! will link in with the Choices for Change participatory budgeting project, engaging Maximise! families by providing the opportunity to identify priorities within their local communities and develop a PB project to address these.

## GET IN TOUCH

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