Residential child care services offering a safe and loving place to live, for children who have experienced abuse and trauma.
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About Aberlour

At Aberlour, we are there for children, young people and families across Scotland, helping transform lives for the better. We support them through challenges like living with a disability, growing up in and leaving care, and the impact of drugs and alcohol on families.

We are committed to getting it right for our children by tailoring our services to help each child, young person and family achieve their own personal goals. We offer support at the earliest opportunity – giving children the best possible start in life is at the heart of everything we do.
Our History

Aberlour has a rich history of delivering vital services to vulnerable children, young people and their families.

Since our inception as an orphanage in Speyside in 1875, we have developed a significant reputation for delivering services under the following themes:

Residential and fostering
we provide safe, loving homes for children who have experienced trauma and abuse

Early years
we give babies a brighter future by building confidence in their parents

Recovery
we help parents to recover from drug and alcohol use, poor mental health and domestic abuse, so their children can thrive.

Early intervention
we work with young people and families to prevent their problems from spiralling out of control

Disability
we make life easier for families where a child has a disability

With more than 140 years of experience and learning behind us, our vision is to give every child the chance to flourish and, through this, contribute to building a fairer and more equal society.
Aberlour Sycamore Service - Fife

We have **more than 140 years of experience** in delivering residential childcare for children and young people. It’s in the very DNA of who we are and goes back to our origins as an organisation.

More than 140 years experience

**25** children and young people

5 children’s houses in Kirkcaldy and Dunfermline

accommodating

homely, well-equipped, furnished and decorated accommodation

committed to providing a safe, stable home

Find out more
Aberlour Sycamore Service is our residential childcare service, based in Fife. We currently have five children’s houses in locations in Kirkcaldy and Dunfermline, each one able to accommodate two to seven children and young people, at any one time.

Many of the children we look after have experienced trauma, and have a history of multiple placement breakdowns and we are committed to providing a loving home where everyone laughs, learns, grows in to their future and is cherished always.

We pride ourselves on offering a high standard of accommodation for our children, and somewhere that feels like home, for as long as possible.

Our houses do not look or feel, ‘institutional’ – far from it. They look no different from any other house on the street. Inside, they are homely and well-equipped, furnished and decorated in consultation with children and staff. Bedrooms are individual and personalised to each child, including having posters and furnishings of their choice to reflect their personalities.

We want our children to feel valued, so we make sure the accommodation we are offering is high quality. Our kitchens are all well-appointed and lend themselves to involving young people in cooking and serving meals, as well as taking care of other activities such as laundry.

We offer internet facilities and large TVs in our living rooms, and we offer gardens and outdoor space for children to play. We also encourage children to have visits from their friends and family, and make sure they have privacy and time to enjoy these occasions (where appropriate).

Our houses are at the heart of their communities, close to schools, parks and other amenities. The children we look after are active members of their communities, encouraged to participate in local clubs and groups. We have cars at our properties, so we can transport our children to wherever they need to be.

Our houses are full of love, laughter and all the usual rhythms of family life. It is our hope that when our children move on, they do so with happy memories of their time with us. They are always welcome to come back and visit, and many do.
I stayed in Sycamore from the age of 12 until I was 18. It was the longest time I spent anywhere. Our daily routine was just like any other family. The staff would get us up at 7 o’clock, we’d go for showers, have breakfast and be at school for 9. Then after school we’d come home and dinner would always be on the table at 5. We’d all eat together and sit around the table. After dinner we’d decide what we were going to do that night. Sometimes we’d watch a film or we’d all go in the minibus up to the meadows and play torch-tig. Sometimes I’d go round to my pal’s and spend the night at her’s. The staff at Sycamore taught me how to cook. Every Friday me and the cook would go through the menu for the next week, and we’d decide what we were going to have for dinner and pudding each night. I enjoyed Sycamore really. It was a happy time.
Children who have experienced multiple disrupted placements are often viewed as difficult or even impossible to place. In reality, their behaviour is often a response to trauma or feelings of rejection, abandonment and sadness. These painful feelings can manifest themselves in challenging behaviour and a lack of trust in the adults around them.

We take a **holistic approach** to boosting the physical, emotional and mental wellbeing of our children and young people.

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**Our Practice Base**

All our work with children is informed by:
- child development theory
- neuroscience
- attachment theory
- resilience theory
- children’s rights and participation

We cover specific areas including:
- physical development
- cognitive and language development
- emotional development
- social development
- moral development
- additional support needs

And everything we do is grounded in **love**

We love the children and young people who live with us, and we tell them so every day. We are proud to provide safe, loving and nurturing homes for them, because every child deserves the chance to flourish.
The core element of our practice base is DDP – a therapy designed to help children learn to trust which puts the child at the centre of their relationship with their caregiver.

Created by clinical psychologist Dan Hughes, DDP is often understood as ‘parenting with PACE’:

- **P**layful
  - the importance of shared activities and ‘being in the moment’ with a child

- **A**ccepting
  - unconditional acceptance of the child and their inner life

- **C**urious
  - seeking meaning behind a child’s behaviour in a non-confrontational way

- **E**mpathy
  - ‘walking in the child’s shoes’, recognising and responding to how the child feels at that moment in time

Our staff embody the principles of PACE in all their interactions with our children and young people, all the while showering them with the love they deserve.

Case study ‘Courtney’
Courtney self-harms as a way of dealing with her personal trauma.

In previous placements, she had been put in safe-holds when she self-harmed, and punished by having her room emptied.

Since coming to live at Sycamore, we’ve shown her that we accept her unconditionally, and that includes her need to self-harm. In voicing that to her, we’ve been able to build up a trusting relationship, and now we can talk to her about other strategies she can use, when feeling a need to harm herself. These include adding red dye to ice cubes and using them on her skin to replace cutting.

We are also looking into ways to make her harming behaviour safer, while ultimately working with her to stop the behaviour altogether. We are non-judgemental and accepting of her at all times, and she has benefited hugely from that.
our approach
Our approach to Care planning

As part of our commitment to providing a personalised service to all our children and young people, they each play an active role in their care planning.

First steps
When a child is first admitted to our service, our priority is to ensure they feel safe. We give them boundaries, structures and routines that are flexible yet consistent, and in place to give them the greatest possible sense of safety and wellbeing.

When a child arrives to live with us, they don’t come with a plan and, it’s important that our children are supported to explore their individuality and identity. Therefore, children are full involved in setting their own goals as part of the care-planning process with us. This helps them to feel they are in control of their own lives, and feel responsible for themselves.

‘My Plan’ approach
We take an innovative approach in using “My Plan” which has been designed to be child-friendly and completed by and with the child – making it easier and more relevant for them to understand and respect their own risk-taking, behaviours, health and well-being and to begin to take responsibility for these, leading to positive change.

Each child’s personal plan is tailored to personal outcomes, as guided by SHANARRI indicators; employing a range of methods to both identify what matters to each child and the best ways in which to achieve desired goals, whilst remaining safe – developing appropriate boundaries through experiential learning or using social stories to develop a child’s skill.

A My Plan is a living document and can be accessed by the child, any time they want to see it. It belongs to them and they can update it with new goals, through conversation with their key worker. We work with our children to help them determine what those goals might be, and what steps we can put in place together in order to help them achieve them. Where there is an element of risk associated with a child’s chosen goal, we carry out risk assessments as part of our plan.

Exploring personal aspirations
We use a wide range of person-centred tools and approaches to help children explore their personal aspirations, including graphic facilitation, which allows us to use imagery and illustrations to explore various concepts which might otherwise prove complex in written form. This approach allows us to ensure that what we are collectively working towards is clear and developed together, with all parties understanding their part in the process.

The goals our children and young people choose are wide and varied: for some, it’s about getting back into mainstream school, or saving up their pocket money to buy something; for others it can be going on a holiday abroad. Whatever it is, it’s chosen by them and we support them to realise it.

A further section within the My Plan contains goals set by staff, which ensure that all activity is rooted in what’s safe, achievable and in the best interests of the child.

Our approach keeps children and young people at the centre at all times, supports positive risk taking and ultimately leads to positive outcomes through empowering children to take responsibility for their choices.

Case study ‘Susie’

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Susie is 14 years old and lives in Aberlour Sycamore Service. She has identified that she would like to work as a beauty therapist one day. As part of her My Plan, we’ve helped her to consider what goals she might be able to set to help her achieve this. One of Susie’s goals was to complete an ASDAN qualification in Hair and Beauty and she has now achieved this.

She also makes a regular visit to a local beauty salon where she has a treatment and gets to watch all the interactions that take place there. This gets her thinking about how the staff are talking to the clients and providing them with an attentive service. At home, she gives treatments to the adults for practice. Susie is working well towards the goals she has set out in her My Plan, and we’re very proud of her.
Our approach to Trauma recovery

Many of the children and young people who come to live with us have suffered complex trauma.

This often comes from early life experiences, such as neglect and abuse. However, trauma can also occur as a result of, or be compounded by, placement breakdowns, alongside additional traumatising factors such as the separation and loss of siblings and other family members.

Our first priority

At Sycamore, we recognise that trauma is very individual, and affects different people in different ways. By the time a child or young person comes to us, they will often feel unsafe and insecure in themselves. Our first priority in helping them to overcome their trauma, is to make them feel safe and secure, and to help them trust adults.

We provide an environment with consistent but personalised boundaries. We provide an environment and atmosphere that is supportive, nurturing and appropriately challenging. Our staff are consistently truthful and interested in them.

Next steps

Once we have established a period of stability, we draw on relevant external support, such as that from Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAHMS) or the Centre for the Vulnerable Child (CVC) in Fife.

The need for trusting relationships with staff is vital, in helping a young person get to a place where they feel able to share the trauma, which can be so deep and hurtful. Our interactions with our children is therefore always informed by their individual My Plans. We go at their pace and are always non-judgemental. Then, when they are ready to share, they can trust us to help them.

Case study ‘Lyndsey’

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Case study ‘Lyndsey’
Lyndsey was approaching the age of 16 and was beginning to paint an idealistic picture of what it would be like to return home soon, despite the trauma she’d experienced living there as a child.

We accepted this was what she wanted, and we supported her to go home for visits. We accompanied Lyndsey on these visits and used the journey time to do some careful reflection together. On the way there we talked about our expectations, and on the way home, we talked about how it had gone.

In time, Lindsey made her own decision that when she was old enough, she would not be returning to live with her family full-time. That was an important part of Lyndsey’s trauma recovery – she was able to come to terms with what had happened in her early life, explored it with support from adults from Sycamore and ultimately owned her own decision, to move on in a positive way.
Our approach to

Understanding challenging behaviour

All behaviour has a purpose. When a child or young person displays challenging behaviour, it too has a purpose, as a form of communication.

Challenging behaviour is the way a child tells us their needs aren’t being met. Sometimes it can even be how a child tells us their needs are being met.

The early life experiences of the children who come to be in our care, inform the way they behave when they are older. If a child has spent their early years in an environment where they have had to shout louder or act out in order to get the attention all children need, that attention, whether for the right or wrong reasons, can begin to feel like validation. Therefore, even when that child moves into an environment where their needs are being consistently met by trusted adults, they may still display the same challenging behaviour as before.

Many Aberlour Sycamore staff are trained in Emotion Works, which allows us to work with a young person to understand the feelings behind their behaviour. All too often the behaviour presents as anger – however, careful exploration with a young person can see their feelings mapped out across a whole spectrum of emotion. It may be that they are angry, sad, frustrated or tired – but it may also be that they are happy and excited. What’s important is that we work with them to understand their emotions, as well as what happened immediately before an episode of challenging behaviour, so we can understand the triggers and begin to develop strategies.

All our children have suffered trauma in one form or another. We can’t judge what it feels like, but we can be accepting, curious and empathetic in how we support them to overcome it.

Managing challenging situations

Our staff are trained in de-escalation methods, to help defuse confrontations and challenging situations, before they develop. As with all our practice with children and young people, our approach here is personalised, taking into account the detail in a child’s My Plan. Each child’s personal plan contains information provided by them, about what kind of behaviour from others makes them feel safe, and what helps them most when they are upset.

Our staff are also trained in Crisis Aggression Limitation and Management (CALM) which covers the safe-holding of children for their own safety. However, given any physical intervention carries the risk of retraumatising a child, this is considered a last resort.

A child’s My Plan also contacts information about CALM holds they may be placed in, to ensure that if this does happen, they are prepared for the possibility and they understand why it has taken place.

Here is an example of an entry relating to CALM restraints, from a My Plan:

“What are my agreed CALM holds?”

“I’ve not been held for a long time but we’ve talked through what used to happen. I know that adults will guide me - I know that this only happens when things have become dangerous.”

After any safe-hold, we carry out a debrief. We will consider what happened before, during and after the incident, so there is learning for the team. We will also look at the child’s history of challenging behaviour to understand factors such as trigger times, trigger people, proximity of other young people and the nature of the behaviour. We analyse this information so that we can best focus the support given by the staff team to the child.

Case study ‘Zoey’

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Zoey’s behaviours were fits of rage, angry outbursts, screaming, shouting - real insecurity.

“If you can imagine a temper tantrum of a child at the age of two, then imagine seeing a temper tantrum in a wee girl of 5, 6, 7, 8, that’s how Zoey presented. But when children who have experienced trauma behave like that, it’s because they can’t understand the feelings that they have.

“Some of Zoey’s challenges have been not understanding the full extent of why she was removed from her birth mum and not understanding the damage that was done in those early years. In the years since she came to Sycamore, we’ve tried to create opportunities for her to be able to make sense out of it.

“My hope is that she grows to believe in herself a bit more, love herself more and see what others see in her. If we can help her have some self-belief, she could do anything.” - Aberlour residential worker.

A note from Zoey

“Hi my name is Zoey and I live in Aberlour Sycamore. At first when I came, I remember saying, and I quote, ‘I’m going to behave so badly you’ll want me to leave’. And well two and a half years on, I am still living here and I actually like it. It was one of the best things that happened to me.”

Case study ‘Zoey’

Understanding challenging behaviour

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It’s our job to help our children to manage their behaviours, helping them to understand the impact of their actions and how to take responsibility for what they do. At the same time, it’s also important we recognise that all teenagers are capable of rebelling and being anti-social, not just those who live in a residential children’s service.

Children with a history of trauma can be more vulnerable to feeling a desire to fit in with a peer group. They might not have the same capacity for making and sustaining friendships as other children and this can impact on their behaviour in the community.

Early life trauma and a poor attachment history can mean some children find it hard to interact in social environments, instead existing in constant survival mode. When a child is in control of a situation they feel safe and this can be found in anti-social behaviour.

Our role is to try and help a child see the connection between their actions and the impact it has on other people.

Short break interventions

We have found that therapeutic short breaks for a child and a member of staff that they have an established relationship with, can have a positive effect.

The time away from home and their social environment, reduces stressors and helps a child to feel relaxed, while 1:1 time with a member of staff allows meaningful therapeutic work to take place.

This approach has many benefits:

• It helps a child to understand the implications of their actions and to have conversations about them, without other stress factors being present.
• It helps a child to feel worthy of achieving in life, by giving them space to think about the future and their responsibilities, alongside ours as their support network,
• It helps to rebuild relationship attachments, through creating and sharing positive experiences together
• It gives a child a diary, letter or log of their time spent with their worker, which reinforces their sense of having had a valuable, shared experience
• It allows a child to feel loved and reassured, as the relationships with their worker continues to develop following the shared experience
• It helps a child to form a secure attachment

Within Aberlour Sycamore Service, we consider anti-social behaviour as any activity out in the community that is disrespectful, and has a negative impact on other people. It can incorporate criminal activity such as breaking windows or graffiti, but can also simply be about how our young people interact with others.
Case study
‘Nathan’

Nathan had accumulated 13 criminal charges in six months, and had begun to isolate himself from those who loved and cared for him.

Instead, he sought a sense of identity among his peers as someone who would take part in anti-social behaviour.

The effect of Nathan’s behaviour was too much for him to make sense of and he was unable to regulate the overwhelming feeling of shame from his actions. As he was unable to control his own feelings, this was exhibited in his behaviour within his home environment. He became distant from others around him; he’d lie, steal from others, destroy property and put himself and others in danger due to aggressive behaviour.

The choices he made, meant that his placement was in jeopardy and so a short break therapeutic intervention plan was put in place, to help rebuild his relationships with staff.

Nathan spent some time away from the home, in the countryside with his key worker. This time away allowed him to have a safe place to talk about his feelings, and to create positive memories. It helped him see that he is loved and people care about his future.

After his break, he started to make good choices, ultimately leading to him changing his social circles and developing more positive friendships. His relationships with the adults in his life were re-established and he felt emotional containment. He accepted the boundaries put in place for him and accepted support, when he found it hard to regulate his behaviour.

Most importantly, he wanted to spend time in his own home and simply play.

Nathan is now a young man who takes care of his appearance and appears relaxed and happy. He now believes that people do love and care for him.
Our approach to Supporting family time

For many of the children who come to live with us, their relationship with their families have been disrupted or have completely broken down. Some children will have had no contact for some time.

Of course, there are often good reasons for this, which must be taken in account carefully, as we consider how best to support our children to establish safe family/friends relationships.

Where possible and in the best interest of the child, we will work with them to create a meaningful relationship.

In forming a positive connection with a child’s family, we begin with the initial assessment using the GIRFEC framework. We work closely with the Lead Professional to agree personal and familial aims and objectives within the Child’s Plan; and outcomes recorded on our Outcomes Framework.

We evidence the quality and impact of family time and share with the team around the child for monitoring purposes. This allows us to make changes to arrangements as required, and provide additional support when needed. We work in partnership with the Local Authority and Social Worker plans for family time are also informed by Looked-After Children reviews and Children’s Hearings.

We will consult CAMHS, NHS, education and social workers on specific cases to ensure our approach and strategies are legitimate, and appropriate for that individual case. We will also consult with independent case consultants on a case by case basis where this has been agreed with the Lead Professional.

Our approach to facilitate meaningful, positive, relationships with family members is based on respect, compassion and understanding. It’s not about supervising family contact – it’s about supporting family visits.

Our staff will take a strengths-based, opportunity-led approach to family involvement, by:

• Being open and honest and making sure family members understand the supportive role our staff wish to play
• Supporting families to be listened to and learning from their story
• Asking and understanding what the child wants and needs from the relationship
• Being kind: it is not our role to judge
• Setting clear, understandable boundaries, for both children and parents
• Positive risk-taking
• Using everyday language – no jargon or institutionalised terms, such as “community time” – it’s just going out to play!
• Helping the child build memories for themselves, through the use of photographic journals, letters, emails
• Work with the family and others in the circle of support to build the child’s life story – filling in gaps and moving to a positive future

Family members are encouraged to participate in the child’s activities and daily lives – some parents come to the child’s home for tea, or to join in an arranged activity with their child and staff such as art therapy or baking.

We also have two family flats, joined on to two of our children’s houses. These spaces are designed to be used by the children, when they have visits from their families, which can include overnight stays.

Case study ‘Allana’

Supporting family time
Case study

‘Allana’

Allana is 15 and has lived in Sycamore for the last four years.

She has a brother who is accommodated elsewhere, and throughout her time with us, we have supported them to enjoy a positive, meaningful relationship together. This has included lots of day trips, caravan holidays and regular meet-ups for them, with Allana being supported by a member of staff who loves her.

Meanwhile, Allana’s mum has made some significant changes in her life and has recently begun family visits with her daughter, after nine years. To begin with, we travelled to her home town with her together for a daytrip visit. Over time, that has evolved into overnight visits, in an apartment. Now mum travels to stay in the family flat, for visits with her daughter. As a result of this, Allana is a lot more content and relaxed. She was doesn’t appear to be lost any more.
our service is enhanced by...
Our service is enhanced by

**Aberlour Fostering**

We have an established fostering service with a base in Fife, close to our cluster of residential services. Our foster carers are paid to provide **safe and loving homes** for children, in a family environment, where they get the care, support and encouragement they need to **grow up and flourish**.

Although the children who live in Aberlour Sycamore Service live full-time in a residential service, we can offer them short breaks with foster carers when we think it would benefit them.

All our foster carers are highly trained and have regular access to support from social workers, health advisers, therapists and teachers. They can also access 24-7 support from the team at Aberlour Fostering.
Art Therapy

Art therapy allows a child to explore their artistic process and expression using psycho-dynamic psychotherapy processes in a safe, therapeutic setting.

Art therapy supports:

• Self-autonomy
• Externalising of personal issues
• Development of emotional self-regulation
• The progression of the developmental age and stage of client.

Art therapy can offer a space for young people in which it is both physically and psychologically safe to explore their problems. Being in a “neutral” environment, away from other children, parents or professionals can provide a chance for reflection – it also means that the young person’s opinions can be received in a non-judgemental way. Often a young person can become stuck (as we all can) in a particular role at home or within the ‘looked after environment’ – art therapy offers the chance to break out of that role and express emotions such as anger which may not be appropriate or acceptable to express outside of the therapy room.

Art therapy differs from other psychological therapies in that there is a three-way relationship between the therapist, client and artwork. In this way it offers the opportunity for a different way to express and communicate which can be particularly helpful for people who find it difficult to verbalise their thoughts and feelings. The overall aim is to enable the client to affect personal change and growth through the use of art materials in a safe and facilitating environment.

Creative Therapy

At Creative Therapy we have a variety of art materials, toys and tools to support expression. Art therapy is inclusive to all mediums of expression whether it is drawing, painting, sculpting, creative writing, drama, movement and music. The non-directive approach in art therapy allows the individual to engage with whichever medium is comfortable, at their own pace.

Our Creative Therapy service includes:

• One-to-one art therapy sessions.
• Supervision and consultations.
• Attendance to relevant professional reviews and meetings
• Submission of client reports as part of a multi-disciplinary team.

The Creative Therapies team can also travel to provide services to children and young people, through an external purchasing arrangement.

Our service is enhanced by Creative therapies

In line with our commitment to helping children and young people to overcome trauma, we employ two professional art therapists who offer creative therapies as one of the ways for them to address issues at an early stage.
Our service is enhanced by

**Befriending**

Our befrienders are trained volunteers, who give up a few hours a month to support a child or young person, from Aberlour Sycamore Service. This time together is often spent doing an activity or on an outing.

Our children and young people benefit hugely from the relationships they develop with their befrienders. Often, they come to represent a positive adult role model in their life, who isn’t a member of staff or a social worker. The friendships that form can endure for many years, with many befrienders keeping in contact with their young person well into their adulthood.

A befriender can help a child to develop socially and emotionally. They provide someone for a child to talk to, when they are going through difficult times.

Our befrienders are trained in the approach they take with our young people, which mirrors the practice of our staff. Our befrienders accept the children unconditionally and are empathetic in their interactions with them. The non-judgemental attitude and approach as a befriender is critical to its success.

Our befrienders are also subject to a robust set of background checks and recruitment process, and are supported by Aberlour’s volunteering department.
They can struggle with emotional and social development, and their behaviour can present as challenging. This can all make mainstream education difficult for our children. Scottish Government statistics show that only 5% of care-experienced young people leave school with one or more qualification at SCQF Level 5 or above, compared to 84% of the general population. 4% of care-experienced pupils go from high school to university, compared with 39% of the general population. Care-experienced pupils are also seven times more likely to be excluded from school.

At Aberlour, we offer a Lifelong Learning Service, to help our children and young people to get the most out of their education and the opportunities available to them. Most of our children and young people also have a 1:1 education worker, provided by Aberlour Sycamore Service.

Our lifelong learning and residential teams also work in partnership with the local community to provide fun and stimulating outdoor learning and play opportunities for our children and young people. From the beaches to the woodlands, from canal boats to kayaking, from rockpool ‘guddling’ to whale watching, we are encouraging our children to put down their X Boxes and experience the joy of play.

Our Lifetime Learning Service offers:
- Comprehensive and therapeutic educational support for children and young people of all ages, in conjunction with local mainstream provision, as appropriate.
- Access to a Nurture Hub, a learning environment for children and young people on a 1:1 or small group basis.
- Resources to support learning out-with school, including access to our extensive outdoor learning programme matched to SHANARRI indicators.
- Opportunities to try ASDAN vocational tasters, short courses and the Duke of Edinburgh award.
- Support with literacy and numeracy.
- Support with health and wellbeing, including the use of Emotion Works, a tool which helps children and young people explore their feelings.
- Training for education support workers and residential teams as well as training for staff teams from local schools.
- An overview of all learning by our young people, for reference and use in school meetings, LAAC reviews etc.

Our service is enhanced by our

**Lifelong Learning Service**

The majority of our children and young people have had some experience of early trauma, and many have difficulties with attachment.
Our service is enhanced by our **Lifelong Learning Service**

**Our take on nurture**

The concept of nurture highlights the importance of social environments in the development of children and young people. The environment in which they grow up has a significant impact on their cognitive development and behaviour. A Nurture Hub such as ours, offers the opportunity for children and young people to enjoy and experience the early nurturing experiences they may have missed out on. This, combined with our practice base grounded in Dyadic Development Psychotherapy, allows us to provide a bespoke, personalised service for all our children and young people.

Our Nurture Hub comprises two learning rooms, office, walk-in resource room and we are currently developing a small, calm space for sensory regulation. Our learning rooms are very comfortable environments – one has a kitchenette complete with cooker, fridge, worktops, cupboards and sink, dining tables and sofas. The other has a pair of bespoke learning pods, a sharing work table and chairs, and a play area with beanbags.

The hub is marked out into ‘zones’, with blue and green vinyl flooring which match clocks and window blinds. Our young people move around the zones to experience independent study; 1:1 time; group work; relaxing; play; food prep, cooking and eating together.

Each young person has their educational timetable designed to support their individual needs. Academic work is either provided by the mainstream school, or levels are assessed using our materials and resources. We also have additional learning support resources such as a dyslexia screening kit and toolkits for working with those affected by dyscalculia (difficulty understanding arithmetic); autism; Pathological Demand Avoidance (PDA); Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD) and other related conditions.

The ages of young people attending the Nurture Hub range from 10 to 16, and the amount of time spent there varies between two sessions a week, and full-time, depending on levels of engagement and attendance at school.

We also work 1:1 with our young people within their residential homes, or at our office base in Kirkcaldy. This gives us the opportunity to have therapeutic learning conversations and planned interventions.

**The Boxall Profile**

Each of our young people has an up-to-date Boxall Profile, which provides a framework for assessing children who have social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. This allows our staff to identify the best kind of support for them. We also use these to inform our regular case management meetings and to suggest strategies and approaches for our residential teams and support workers, to help them work effectively with our young people to help overcome the gaps in their development. We produce combined Nurture/DDP plans which guide the approach to learning for each child within our Nurture Hub, or in the school and community.
Our service is enhanced by a **Transitions Service**

Our Lifelong Learning Service also incorporates throughcare and aftercare support – for young people who are preparing to move from our service, and for those who have already done so.

This provision is designed to support our young people during transitions and towards independence.

We tailor this support to individual needs, offering consistent and responsive assistance to deal with the challenges of living independently.

Our workers help young people to develop the skills, knowledge and values of responsible citizenship, build self-confidence, and make informed choices about their future options for living, learning and employment.

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**Case study**

‘Charlene’

“I found out I was pregnant when I was 22. Even though I didn’t live at Sycamore any more, the staff really helped a lot. They supported me to get everything I needed for the baby.

“I see Katrina from the aftercare team at Sycamore, once a week. We usually go out for a coffee or a meal and have a wee chat about the things that are on my brain. She’s easy to talk to. I don’t like talking about those things that happened to me when I was younger, I keep those things to myself. She’s helping me get some counselling now, to help me deal with it.”
How we support our staff
We support our staff through **Training and development**

Having **highly trained and developed staff** is a priority for Aberlour, in order that we are best able to meet the needs of our children and young people.

All new workers receive a detailed induction plan to support their introduction to the organisation, through to specialist training programs for their specific role in delivering a service to children. The effectiveness of our training is monitored on an ongoing basis.

The success of our training and development plans were formally recognised throughout the Investors In People (Gold) accreditation process, with particular references made to our training to support residential child care services. In considering our training for residential services, our assessor noted the following comments from residential workers:

> Aberlour has its own learning and development department which incorporates Operational Trainers, Learning and Development Business Partners and SVQ Assessors and Verifiers. We develop and deliver a range of our own training programmes including e-learning solutions and we provide a significant SVQ programme for all registered workers.

_Aberlour has its own learning and development department which incorporates Operational Trainers, Learning and Development Business Partners and SVQ Assessors and Verifiers. We develop and deliver a range of our own training programmes including e-learning solutions and we provide a significant SVQ programme for all registered workers._

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> That is one thing that Aberlour are great at – giving you training.

> Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy... it is all powerful, brilliant training which has had a huge impact.

> There is a lot of encouragement and energy goes into providing us with the right development to build our skills.
We ensure that we enable our workers to meet their SSSC registration requirements through access to our internal SVQ programme.

Identifying training requirements is an ongoing process through supervision, team meetings, emergent service user needs, performance management and annual reviews. Where a development need is identified, the Learning and Development team work on a consultancy basis either sourcing or developing an appropriate input to meet this need.

We ensure that our workers are provided with opportunities to ensure that they meet their Continuing Professional Development (or Post Registration Training and Learning) requirements – this ranges from attendance at conferences, self-directed learning events and our refresher training programme.

We have a number of partnerships with external training providers across Scotland to ensure that we provide excellent training opportunities for all our staff.

We support our staff through Partnership work.
If you are interested in referring a child to Aberlour Sycamore Service, please contact us for an exploratory conversation:

Call us
(01592) 591 500

Email
sycamore@aberlour.org.uk

Aberlour Sycamore Service
West Bridge Mill, Bridge Street
Kirkcaldy KY1 1TE
What happens next?

Our process usually takes a maximum of seven days from initial enquiry to an agreed transition plan.

1. Initial enquiry is made to the Head of Care who then ensures
   - Admissions made will be based on informed decision making by all partners who must all agree that this is the best possible placement for the child
   - All involved have a clearly agreed understanding of what they want the placement to achieve
   - Ensure our admissions criteria would be met (Child or young person is aged 8 – 21, with the option to extend to 25)

2. Relevant documentation would then be made available to Service Manager, i.e. the Child’s Plan

3. The Head of Therapies, Principal teacher and relevant Service Manager, undertake an impact assessment addressing the following:
   - Particular strengths to build on
   - Needs and behaviours
   - “Fit” – taking into consideration existing children in the house
   - Staff – is there anything specific needed in way of skills/experience?
   - Informed assessment
   - Particular obstacles

4. Service Manager/team would then meet the social worker and any carers involved

5. Meet the child and plan the admission so that the move can be managed in line with their needs; this can involve:
   - A number of visits to the house, possibly beginning with an “empty” house at a time when all other children are at school, and there is minimal staff presence

6. Meet the staff team

7. See the bedroom and other facilities, giving permission to state preferences for paint, posters, furniture

8. Meet the current children in the house

9. Buddy up with another child already living in the house giving some “chat time”

10. Discussion with the Lead Professional to explore if the child could they see themselves living there?

11. If all going well, arrange some overnight stays in the house

Some children in our houses have made also made “welcome packs” for new children coming in – “telling it as it is” and being involved in what happens in their home.
Emergency Placements

Although we do not regularly provide emergency placements, we recognise that sometime children’s needs are extremely urgent. When vacancies allow, these can generally be accommodated with **2-3 hours’ notice**, when the following conditions are met:

- **Accommodating the child meets the Conditions of Registration with the Care Inspectorate**
- **The child or young person is aged 8 – 21**
- **The admission will not place the current children at risk**

In such instances we would then seek to adhere to our established processes for welcoming children in to a house and engage the Lead Professional and family as quickly as reasonably possible.

In the event that the above criteria cannot be met, we would be willing to have discussions with you about what other solutions Aberlour may be able to offer to meet the child’s needs.
a happy, loving home
where everyone laughs,
learns, grows into their future
and is cherished always

If you have any further questions about making a referral to us, or about any of the other information contained in this brochure, please contact our Head of Care:

Call us (01592) 591 500
Email sycamore@aberlour.org.uk

We look forward to welcoming new children and young people to Aberlour Sycamore Service and offering them a happy, loving home.

Thank you!
sycamore service

Residential child care services offering a safe and loving place to live, for children who have experienced abuse and trauma.
How to make a referral to us...

If you are interested in referring a child to Aberlour Sycamore Service, please contact us for an exploratory conversation:

Call us
(01592) 591 500

Email
sycamore@aberlour.org.uk

Aberlour Sycamore Service
West Bridge Mill, Bridge Street
Kirkcaldy KY11TE
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About Aberlour

At Aberlour, we are there for children, young people and families across Scotland, helping transform lives for the better. We support them through challenges like living with a disability, growing up in and leaving care, and the impact of drugs and alcohol on families.

We are committed to getting it right for our children by tailoring our services to help each child, young person and family achieve their own personal goals. We offer support at the earliest opportunity – giving children the best possible start in life is at the heart of everything we do.
Our History

Aberlour has a rich history of delivering vital services to vulnerable children, young people and their families.

Since our inception as an orphanage in Speyside in 1875, we have developed a significant reputation for delivering services under the following themes:

- **Residential and fostering**
  - we provide safe, loving homes for children who have experienced trauma and abuse

- **Early intervention**
  - we work with young people and families to prevent their problems from spiraling out of control

- **Early years**
  - we give babies a brighter future by building confidence in their parents

- **Disability**
  - we make life easier for families where a child has a disability

- **Recovery**
  - we help parents to recover from drug and alcohol use, poor mental health and domestic abuse, so their children can thrive.

With more than 140 years of experience and learning behind us, our vision is to give every child the chance to flourish and, through this, contribute to building a fairer and more equal society.
Aberlour Sycamore Service - Fife

We have more than 140 years of experience in delivering residential childcare for children and young people. It’s in the very DNA of who we are and goes back to our origins as an organisation.

More than 140 years experience

accommodating 25 children and young people

5 children’s houses in Kirkcaldy and Dunfermline

homely, well-equipped, furnished and decorated accommodation

committed to providing a safe, stable home
Aberlour Sycamore Service - Fife

But not only is it our history – it’s also our future. We truly believe in the power of residential care, and recognise it as a positive destination for many children and young people.

Aberlour Sycamore Service is our residential childcare service, based in Fife. We currently have five children’s houses in locations in Kirkcaldy and Dunfermline, each one able to accommodate two to seven children and young people, at any one time. Many of the children we look after have experienced trauma, and have a history of multiple placement breakdowns and we are committed to providing a loving home where everyone laughs, learns, grows in to their future and is cherished always.

We pride ourselves on offering a high standard of accommodation for our children, and somewhere that feels like home, for as long as possible.

Our houses do not look or feel, ‘institutional’ – far from it. They look no different from any other house on the street. Inside, they are homely and well-equipped, furnished and decorated in consultation with children and staff. Bedrooms are individual and personalised to each child, including having posters and furnishings of their choice to reflect their personalities.

We want our children to feel valued, so we make sure the accommodation we are offering is high quality. Our kitchens are all well-appointed and lend themselves to involving young people in cooking and serving meals, as well as taking care of other activities such as laundry.

We offer internet facilities and large TVs in our living rooms, and we offer gardens and outdoor space for children to play. We also encourage children to have visits from their friends and family, and make sure they have privacy and time to enjoy these occasions (where appropriate).

Our houses are at the heart of their communities, close to schools, parks and other amenities. The children we look after are active members of their communities, encouraged to participate in local clubs and groups. We have cars at our properties, so we can transport our children to wherever they need to be.

Our houses are full of love, laughter and all the usual rhythms of family life. It is our hope that when our children move on, they do so with happy memories of their time with us. They are always welcome to come back and visit, and many do.

Case study ‘Charlene’

“I stayed in Sycamore from the age of 12 until I was 18.

It was the longest time I spent anywhere. Our daily routine was just like any other family. The staff would get us up at 7 o’clock, we’d go for showers, have breakfast and be at school for 9. Then after school we’d come home and dinner would always be on the table at 5. We’d all eat together and sit around the table. After dinner we’d decide what we were going to do that night. Sometimes we’d watch a film or we’d all go in the minibus up to the meadows and play torch-tig. Sometimes I’d go round to my pal’s and spend the night at her’s. The staff at Sycamore taught me how to cook. Every Friday me and the cook would go through the menu for the next week, and we’d decide what we were going to have for dinner and pudding each night. I enjoyed Sycamore really. It was a happy time.”
Our Practice Base

We take a **holistic approach** to boosting the physical, emotional and mental wellbeing of our children and young people.

Children who have experienced multiple disrupted placements are often viewed as difficult or even impossible to place. In reality, their behaviour is often a response to trauma or feelings of rejection, abandonment and sadness. These painful feelings can manifest themselves in challenging behaviour and a lack of trust in the adults around them.

**We cover specific areas including**

- physical development
- cognitive and language development
- emotional development
- social development
- moral development
- additional support needs

**All our work with children is informed by**

- child development theory
- neuroscience
- attachment theory
- resilience theory
- children’s rights and participation

**And everything we do is grounded in love**

We love the children and young people who live with us, and we tell them so every day. We are proud to provide safe, loving and nurturing homes for them, because every child deserves the chance to flourish.
Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP)

The core element of our practice base is DDP – a therapy designed to help children learn to trust which puts the child at the centre of their relationship with their caregiver.

Created by clinical psychologist Dan Hughes, DDP is often understood as ‘parenting with PACE’:

- **P** Playful
  - the importance of shared activities and ‘being in the moment’ with a child

- **A** Accepting
  - unconditional acceptance of the child and their inner life

- **C** Curious
  - seeking meaning behind a child’s behaviour in a non-confrontational way

- **E** Empathy
  - ‘walking in the child’s shoes’, recognising and responding to how the child feels at that moment in time

Our staff embody the principles of PACE in all their interactions with our children and young people, all the while showering them with the love they deserve.

Case study ‘Courtney’

Courtney self-harms as a way of dealing with her personal trauma.

In previous placements, she had been put in safe-holds when she self-harmed, and punished by having her room emptied.

Since coming to live at Sycamore, we’ve shown her that we accept her unconditionally, and that includes her need to self-harm. In voicing that to her, we’ve been able to build up a trusting relationship, and now we can talk to her about other strategies she can use, when feeling a need to harm herself. These include as adding red dye to ice cubes and using them on her skin to replace cutting.

We are also looking into ways to make her harming behaviour safer, while ultimately working with her to stop the behaviour altogether. We are non-judgemental and accepting of her at all times, and she has benefited hugely from that.
our approach
Our approach to Care planning

As part of our commitment to providing a personalised service to all our children and young people, they each play an active role in their care planning.

First steps
When a child is first admitted to our service, our priority is to ensure they feel safe. We give them boundaries, structures and routines that are flexible yet consistent, and in place to give them the greatest possible sense of safety and wellbeing.

When a child arrives to live with us, they don’t come with a plan and, it’s important that our children are supported to explore their individuality and identity. Therefore, children are full involved in setting their own goals as part of the care-planning process with us. This helps them to feel they are in control of their own lives, and feel responsible for themselves.

‘My Plan’ approach
We take an innovative approach in using “My Plan” which has been designed to be child-friendly and completed by and with the child – making it easier and more relevant for them to understand and respect their own risk-taking, behaviours, health and well-being and to begin to take responsibility for these, leading to positive change.

Each child’s personal plan is tailored to personal outcomes, as guided by SHANARRI indicators; employing a range of methods to both identify what matters to each child and the best ways in which to achieve desired goals, whilst remaining safe – developing appropriate boundaries through experiential learning or using social stories to develop a child’s skill.

A My Plan is a living document and can be accessed by the child, any time they want to see it. It belongs to them and they can update it with new goals, through conversation with their key worker. We work with our children to help them determine what those goals might be, and what steps we can put in place together, in order to help them achieve them. Where there is an element of risk associated with a child’s chosen goal, we carry out risk assessments as part of our plan.
Case study ‘Susie’

Susie is 14 years old and lives in Aberlour Sycamore Service.

She has identified that she would like to work as a beauty therapist one day. As part of her My Plan, we’ve helped her to consider what goals she might be able to set to help her achieve this. One of Susie’s goals was to complete an ASDAN qualification in Hair and Beauty and she has now achieved this.

She also makes a regular visit to a local beauty salon where she has a treatment and gets to watch all the interactions that take place there. This gets her thinking about how the staff are talking to the clients and providing them with an attentive service. At home, she gives treatments to the adults for practice. Susie is working well towards the goals she has set out in her My Plan, and we’re very proud of her.

Exploring personal aspirations

We use a wide range of person-centred tools and approaches to help children explore their personal aspirations, including graphic facilitation, which allows us to use imagery and illustrations to explore various concepts which might otherwise prove complex in written form. This approach allows us to ensure that what we are collectively working towards is clear and developed together, with all parties understanding their part in the process.

The goals our children and young people choose are wide and varied: for some, it’s about getting back into mainstream school, or saving up their pocket money to buy something; for others it can be going on a holiday abroad. Whatever it is, it’s chosen by them and we support them to realise it.

A further section within the My Plan contains goals set by staff, which ensure that all activity is rooted in what’s safe, achievable and in the best interests of the child.

Our approach keeps children and young people at the centre at all times, supports positive risk taking and ultimately leads to positive outcomes through empowering children to take responsibility for their choices.
Our approach to

Trauma recovery

Many of the children and young people who come to live with us have suffered complex trauma.

This often comes from early life experiences, such as neglect and abuse. However, trauma can also occur as a result of, or be compounded by, placement breakdowns, alongside additional traumatising factors such as the separation and loss of siblings and other family members.

Our first priority

At Sycamore, we recognise that trauma is very individual, and affects different people in different ways. By the time a child or young person comes to us, they will often feel unsafe and insecure in themselves. Our first priority in helping them to overcome their trauma, is to make them feel safe and secure, and to help them trust adults.

We provide an environment with consistent but personalised boundaries. We provide an environment and atmosphere that is supportive, nurturing and appropriately challenging. Our staff are consistently truthful and interested in them.

Next steps

Once we have established a period of stability, we draw on relevant external support, such as that from Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAHMS) or the Centre for the Vulnerable Child (CVC) in Fife.

The need for trusting relationships with staff is vital, in helping a young person get to a place where they feel able to share the trauma, which can be so deep and hurtful. Our interactions with our children is therefore always informed by their individual My Plans. We go at their pace and are always non-judgemental. Then, when they are ready to share, they can trust us to help them.

Case study ‘Lyndsey’

Lyndsey was approaching the age of 16 and was beginning to paint an idealistic picture of what it would be like to return home soon, despite the trauma she’d experienced living there as a child.

We accepted this was what she wanted, and we supported her to go home for visits. We accompanied Lyndsey on these visits and used the journey time to do some careful reflection together.

On the way there we talked about our expectations, and on the way home, we talked about it how it had gone.

In time, Lindsey made her own decision that when she was old enough, she would not be returning to live with her family full-time. That was an important part of Lyndsey’s trauma recovery – she was able to come to terms with what had happened in her early life, explored it with support from adults from Sycamore and ultimately owned her own decision, to move on in a positive way.
Our approach to

Understanding challenging behaviour

All behaviour has a purpose. When a child or young person displays challenging behaviour, it too has a purpose, as a form of communication.

Challenging behaviour is the way a child tells us their needs aren’t being met. Sometimes it can even be how a child tells us their needs are being met.

The early life experiences of the children who come to be in our care, inform the way they behave when they are older. If a child has spent their early years in an environment where they have had to shout louder or act out in order to get the attention all children need, that attention, whether for the right or wrong reasons, can begin to feel like validation. Therefore, even when that child moves into an environment where their needs are being consistently met by trusted adults, they may still display the same challenging behaviour as before.

Many Aberlour Sycamore staff are trained in Emotion Works, which allows us to work with a young person to understand the feelings behind their behaviour. All too often the behaviour presents as anger – however, careful exploration with a young person can see their feelings mapped out across a whole spectrum of emotion. It may be that they are angry, sad, frustrated or tired – but it may also be that they are happy and excited. What’s important is that we work with them to understand their emotions, as well as what happened immediately before an episode of challenging behaviour, so we can understand the triggers and begin to develop strategies.

Managing challenging situations

Our staff are trained in de-escalation methods, to help defuse confrontations and challenging situations, before they develop. As with all our practice with children and young people, our approach here is personalised, taking into account the detail in a child’s My Plan. Each child’s personal plan contains information provided by them, about what kind of behaviour from others makes them feel safe, and what helps them most when they are upset.

Our staff are also trained in Crisis Aggression Limitation and Management (CALM) which covers the safe-holding of children for their own safety. However, given any physical intervention carries the risk of retraumatising a child, this is considered a last resort.

A child’s My Plan also contacts information about CALM holds they may be placed in, to ensure that if this does happen, they are prepared for the possibility and they understand why it has taken place.

Here is an example of an entry relating to CALM restraints, from a My Plan:

“What are my agreed CALM holds?”

“I’ve not been held for a long time but we’ve talked through what used to happen. I know that adults will guide me - I know that this only happens when things have become dangerous.”

After any safe-hold, we carry out a debrief. We will consider what happened before, during and after the incident, so there is learning for the team. We will also look at the child’s history of challenging behaviour to understand factors such as trigger times, trigger people, proximity of other young people and the nature of the behaviour. We analyse this information so that we can best focus the support given by the staff team to the child.
Our approach to Understanding challenging behaviour

Case study ‘Zoey’

Zoey’s behaviours were fits of rage, angry outbursts, screaming, shouting - real insecurity.

“If you can imagine a temper tantrum of a child at the age of two, then imagine seeing a temper tantrum in a wee girl of 5,6,7,8, that’s how Zoey presented. But when children who have experienced trauma behave like that, it’s because they can’t understand the feelings that they have.

“Some of Zoey’s challenges have been not understanding the full extent of why she was removed from her birth mum and not understanding the damage that was done in those early years. In the years since she came to Sycamore, we’ve tried to create opportunities for her to be able to make sense out of it.

“My hope is that she grows to believe in herself a bit more, love herself more and see what others see in her. If we can help her have some self-belief, she could do anything.” - Aberlour residential worker.

A note from Zoey

“Hi my name is Zoey and I live in Aberlour Sycamore. At first when I came, I remember saying, and I quote, ‘I’m going to behave so badly you’ll want me to leave’. And well two and a half years on, I am still living here and I actually like it. It was one of the best things that happened to me.”
Our approach to

Stabilising anti-social behaviour

Within Aberlour Sycamore Service, we consider anti-social behaviour as any activity out in the community that is disrespectful, and has a negative impact on other people. It can incorporate criminal activity such as breaking windows or graffiti, but can also simply be about how our young people interact with others.

It’s our job to help our children to manage their behaviours, helping them to understand the impact of their actions and how to take responsibility for what they do. At the same time, it’s also important we recognise that all teenagers are capable of rebelling and being anti-social, not just those who live in a residential children’s service.

Children with a history of trauma can be more vulnerable to feeling a desire to fit in with a peer group. They might not have the same capacity for making and sustaining friendships as other children and this can impact on their behaviour in the community.

Early life trauma and a poor attachment history can mean some children find it hard to interact in social environments, instead existing in constant survival mode. When a child is in control of a situation they feel safe and this can be found in anti-social behaviour.

Our role is to try and help a child see the connection between their actions and the impact it has on other people.

Short break interventions

We have found that therapeutic short breaks for a child and a member of staff that they have an established relationship with, can have a positive effect.

The time away from home and their social environment, reduces stressors and helps a child to feel relaxed, while 1:1 time with a member of staff allows meaningful therapeutic work to take place.

This approach has many benefits:

- It helps a child to understand the implications of their actions and to have conversations about them, without other stress factors being present.
- It helps a child to feel worthy of achieving in life, by giving them space to think about the future and their responsibilities, alongside ours as their support network,
- It helps to rebuild relationship attachments, through creating and sharing positive experiences together
- It gives a child a diary, letter or log of their time spent with their worker, which reinforces their sense of having had a valuable, shared experience
- It allows a child to feel loved and reassured, as the relationships with their worker continues to develop following the shared experience
- It helps a child to form a secure attachment
Case study ‘Nathan’

Nathan had accumulated 13 criminal charges in six months, and had begun to isolate himself from those who loved and cared for him.

Instead, he sought a sense of identity among his peers as someone who would take part in anti-social behaviour.

The effect of Nathan’s behaviour was too much for him to make sense of and he was unable to regulate the overwhelming feeling of shame from his actions. As he was unable to control his own feelings, this was exhibited in his behaviour within his home environment. He became distant from others around him; he’d lie, steal from others, destroy property and put himself and others in danger due to aggressive behaviour.

The choices he made, meant that his placement was in jeopardy and so a short break therapeutic intervention plan was put in place, to help rebuild his relationships with staff.

Nathan spent some time away from the home, in the countryside with his key worker. This time away allowed him to have a safe place to talk about his feelings, and to create positive memories. It helped him see that he is loved and people care about his future.

After his break, he started to make good choices, ultimately leading to him changing his social circles and developing more positive friendships. His relationships with the adults in his life were re-established and he felt emotional containment. He accepted the boundaries put in place for him and accepted support, when he found it hard to regulate his behaviour.

Most importantly, he wanted to spend time in his own home and simply play.

Nathan is now a young man who takes care of his appearance and appears relaxed and happy. He now believes that people do love and care for him.
Our approach to

Supporting family time

For many of the children who come to live with us, their relationship with their families have been disrupted or have completely broken down. Some children will have had no contact for some time.

Of course, there are often good reasons for this, which must be taken in account carefully, as we consider how best to support our children to establish safe family/friends relationships.

Where possible and in the best interest of the child, we will work with them to create a meaningful relationship.

In forming a positive connection with a child’s family, we begin with the initial assessment using the GIRFEC framework. We work closely with the Lead Professional to agree personal and familial aims and objectives within the Child’s Plan; and outcomes recorded on our Outcomes Framework.

We evidence the quality and impact of family time and share with the team around the child for monitoring purposes. This allows us to make changes to arrangements as required, and provide additional support when needed. We work in partnership with the Local Authority and Social Worker plans for family time are also informed by Looked-After Children reviews and Children’s Hearings.

We will consult CAMHS, NHS, education and social workers on specific cases to ensure our approach and strategies are legitimate, and appropriate for that individual case. We will also consult with independent case consultants on a case by case basis where this has been agreed with the Lead Professional.

Our approach to facilitate meaningful, positive, relationships with family members is based on respect, compassion and understanding. It’s not about supervising family contact – it’s about supporting family visits.

Our staff will take a strengths-based, opportunity-led approach to family involvement, by:

- Being open and honest and making sure family members understand the supportive role our staff wish to play
- Supporting families to be listened to and learning from their story
- Asking and understanding what the child wants and needs from the relationship
- Being kind: it is not our role to judge
- Setting clear, understandable boundaries, for both children and parents
- Positive risk-taking
- Using everyday language – no jargon or institutionalised terms, such as “community time” – it’s just going out to play!
- Helping the child build memories for themselves, through the use of photographic journals, letters, emails
- Work with the family and others in the circle of support to build the child’s life story – filling in gaps and moving to a positive future

Family members are encouraged to participate in the child’s activities and daily lives – some parents come to the child’s home for tea, or to join in an arranged activity with their child and staff such as art therapy or baking.

We also have two family flats, joined on to two of our children’s houses. These spaces are designed to be used by the children, when they have visits from their families, which can include overnight stays.
Our approach to Understanding challenging behaviour

Case study ‘Allana’

Allana is 15 and has lived in Sycamore for the last four years. She has a brother who is accommodated elsewhere, and throughout her time with us, we have supported them to enjoy a positive, meaningful relationship together. This has included lots of day trips, caravan holidays and regular meet-ups for them, with Allana being supported by a member of staff who loves her.

Meanwhile, Allana’s mum has made some significant changes in her life and has recently begun family visits with her daughter, after nine years. To begin with, we travelled to her home town with her together for a daytrip visit. Over time, that has evolved into overnight visits, in an apartment. Now mum travels to stay in the family flat, for visits with her daughter. As a result of this, Allana is a lot more content and relaxed. She was doesn’t appear to be lost any more.
our service is enhanced by...
Our service is enhanced by

**Aberlour Fostering**

We have an established fostering service with a base in Fife, close to our cluster of residential services. Our foster carers are paid to provide **safe and loving homes** for children, in a family environment, where they get the care, support and encouragement they need to **grow up and flourish**.

Although the children who live in Aberlour Sycamore Service live full-time in a residential service, we can offer them short breaks with foster carers when we think it would benefit them.

All our foster carers are highly trained and have regular access to support from social workers, health advisers, therapists and teachers. They can also access 24-7 support from the team at Aberlour Fostering.
Our service is enhanced by

Creative therapies

In line with our commitment to helping children and young people to overcome trauma, we employ two professional art therapists who offer creative therapies as one of the ways for them to address issues at an early stage.

Art Therapy
Art therapy allows a child to explore their artistic process and expression using psycho-dynamic psychotherapy processes in a safe, therapeutic setting.

Art therapy supports:
• Self-autonomy
• Externalising of personal issues
• Development of emotional self-regulation
• The progression of the developmental age and stage of client.

Art therapy can offer a space for young people in which it is both physically and psychologically safe to explore their problems. Being in a “neutral” environment, away from other children, parents or professionals can provide a chance for reflection – it also means that the young person’s opinions can be received in a non-judgemental way. Often a young person can become stuck (as we all can) in a particular role at home or within the ‘looked after environment’ – art therapy offers the chance to break out of that role and express emotions such as anger which may not be appropriate or acceptable to express outside of the therapy room.

Art therapy differs from other psychological therapies in that there is a three-way relationship between the therapist, client and artwork. In this way it offers the opportunity for a different way to express and communicate which can be particularly helpful for people who find it difficult to verbalise their thoughts and feelings. The overall aim is to enable the client to affect personal change and growth through the use of art materials in a safe and facilitating environment.

Creative Therapy
At Creative Therapy we have a variety of art materials, toys and tools to support expression. Art therapy is inclusive to all mediums of expression whether it is drawing, painting, sculpting, creative writing, drama, movement and music. The non-directive approach in art therapy allows the individual to engage with whichever medium is comfortable, at their own pace.

Our Creative Therapy service includes:
• One-to-one art therapy sessions.
• Supervision and consultations.
• Attendance to relevant professional reviews and meetings
• Submission of client reports as part of a multi-disciplinary team.

The Creative Therapies team can also travel to provide services to children and young people, through an external purchasing arrangement.
Our service is enhanced by

**Befriending**

Our befrienders are trained volunteers, who give up a few hours a month to support a child or young person, from Aberlour Sycamore Service. This time together is often spent doing an activity or on an outing.

Our children and young people benefit hugely from the relationships they develop with their befrienders. Often, they come to represent a positive adult role model in their life, who isn’t a member of staff or a social worker. The friendships that form can endure for many years, with many befrienders keeping in contact with their young person well into their adulthood.

A befriender can help a child to develop socially and emotionally. They provide someone for a child to talk to, when they are going through difficult times. Our befrienders are trained in the approach they take with our young people, which mirrors the practice of our staff. Our befrienders accept the children unconditionally and are empathetic in their interactions with them. The non-judgemental attitude and approach as a befriender is critical to its success.

Our befrienders are also subject to a robust set of background checks and recruitment process, and are supported by Aberlour’s volunteering department.
Our service is enhanced by our

**Lifelong Learning Service**

The majority of our children and young people have had some experience of early trauma, and many have difficulties with attachment.

They can struggle with emotional and social development, and their behaviour can present as challenging. This can all make mainstream education difficult for our children.

Scottish Government statistics show that only 5% of care-experienced young people leave school with one or more qualification at SCQF Level 5 or above, compared to 84% of the general population. 4% of care-experienced pupils go from high school to university, compared with 39% of the general population. Care-experienced pupils are also seven times more likely to be excluded from school.

At Aberlour, we offer a Lifelong Learning Service, to help our children and young people to get the most out of their education and the opportunities available to them. Most of our children and young people also have a 1:1 education worker, provided by Aberlour Sycamore Service.

Our lifelong learning and residential teams also work in partnership with the local community to provide fun and stimulating outdoor learning and play opportunities for our children and young people. From the beaches to the woodlands, from canal boats to kayaking, from rockpool ‘guddling’ to whale watching, we are encouraging our children to put down their X Boxes and experience the joy of play.

Our Lifelong Learning Service offers:

- Comprehensive and therapeutic educational support for children and young people of all ages, in conjunction with local mainstream provision, as appropriate
- Access to a Nurture Hub, a learning environment for children and young people on a 1:1 or small group basis
- Resources to support learning out-with school, including access to our extensive outdoor learning programme matched to SHANARRI indicators
- Opportunities to try ASDAN vocational tasters, short courses and the Duke of Edinburgh award
- Support with literacy and numeracy
- Support with health and wellbeing, including the use of Emotion Works, a tool which helps children and young people explore their feelings
- Training for education support workers and residential teams as well as training for staff teams from local schools
- An overview of all learning by our young people, for reference and use in school meetings, LAAC reviews etc

**Our take on nurture**

The concept of nurture highlights the importance of social environments in the development of children and young people. The environment in which they grow up, has a significant impact on their cognitive development and behaviour. A Nurture Hub such as ours, offers the opportunity for children and young people to enjoy and experience the early nurturing experiences they may have missed out on. This, combined with our practice base grounded in Dyadic Development Psychotherapy, allows us to provide a bespoke, personalised service for all our children and young people.

Our Nurture Hub comprises two learning rooms, office, walk-in resource room and we are currently developing a small, calm space for sensory regulation. Our learning rooms are very comfortable environments – one has a kitchenette complete with cooker, fridge, worktops, cupboards and sink, dining tables and sofas. The other has a pair of bespoke learning pods, a sharing work table and chairs, and a play area with beanbags.
Our service is enhanced by our Lifelong Learning Service

The hub is marked out into ‘zones’, with blue and green vinyl flooring which match clocks and window blinds. Our young people move around the zones to experience independent study; 1:1 time; group work; relaxing; play; food prep, cooking and eating together.

Each young person has their educational timetable designed to support their individual needs. Academic work is either provided by the mainstream school, or levels are assessed using our materials and resources.

We also have additional learning support resources such as a dyslexia screening kit and toolkits for working with those affected by dyscalculia (difficulty understanding arithmetic); autism; Pathological Demand Avoidance (PDA); Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD) and other related conditions.

The ages of young people attending the Nurture Hub range from 10 to 16, and the amount of time spent there varies between two sessions a week, and full-time, depending on levels of engagement and attendance at school.

We also work 1:1 with our young people within their residential homes, or at our office base in Kirkcaldy. This gives us the opportunity to have therapeutic learning conversations and planned interventions.

The **Boxall Profile**

Each of our young people has an up-to-date Boxall Profile, which provides a framework for assessing children who have social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. This allows our staff to identify the best kind of support for them. We also use these to inform our regular case management meetings and to suggest strategies and approaches for our residential teams and support workers, to help them work effectively with our young people to help overcome the gaps in their development. We produce combined Nurture/DDP plans which guide the approach to learning for each child within our Nurture Hub, or in the school and community.
Our service is enhanced by a

Transitions Service

Our Lifelong Learning Service also incorporates throughcare and aftercare support – for young people who are preparing to move from our service, and for those who have already done so.

This provision is designed to support our young people during transitions and towards independence.

We tailor this support to individual needs, offering consistent and responsive assistance to deal with the challenges of living independently.

Our workers help young people to develop the skills, knowledge and values of responsible citizenship, build self-confidence, and make informed choices about their future options for living, learning and employment.

Case study ‘Charlene’

“I found out I was pregnant when I was 22. Even though I didn’t live at Sycamore any more, the staff really helped a lot. They supported me to get everything I needed for the baby.”

“I see Katrina from the aftercare team at Sycamore, once a week. We usually go out for a coffee or a meal and have a wee chat about the things that are on my brain. She’s easy to talk to. I don’t like talking about those things that happened to me when I was younger, I keep those things to myself. She’s helping me get some counselling now, to help me deal with it.”
how we support our staff
We support our staff through

Training and development

Having **highly trained and developed staff** is a priority for Aberlour, in order that we are best able to meet the needs of our children and young people.

All new workers receive a detailed induction plan to support their introduction to the organisation, through to specialist training programs for their specific role in delivering a service to children. The effectiveness of our training is monitored on an ongoing basis.

The success of our training and development plans were formally recognised throughout the Investors In People (Gold) accreditation process, with particular references made to our training to support residential child care services. In considering our training for residential services, our assessor noted the following comments from residential workers:

“That is one thing that Aberlour are great at – giving you training.”

“Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy... it is all powerful, brilliant training which has had a huge impact.”

“There is a lot of encouragement and energy goes into providing us with the right development to build our skills.”

Aberlour has its own learning and development department which incorporates Operational Trainers, Learning and Development Business Partners and SVQ Assessors and Verifiers. We develop and deliver a range of our own training programmes including e-learning solutions and we provide a significant SVQ programme for all registered workers.
We ensure that we enable our workers to meet their SSSC registration requirements through access to our internal SVQ programme.

Identifying training requirements is an ongoing process through supervision, team meetings, emergent service user needs, performance management and annual reviews. Where a development need is identified, the Learning and Development team work on a consultancy basis either sourcing or developing an appropriate input to meet this need.

We ensure that our workers are provided with opportunities to ensure that they meet their Continuing Professional Development (or Post Registration Training and Learning) requirements – this ranges from attendance at conferences, self-directed learning events and our refresher training programme.

We support our staff through Partnership work

We have a number of partnerships with external training providers across Scotland to ensure that we provide excellent training opportunities for all our staff.
If you are interested in referring a child to Aberlour Sycamore Service, please contact us for an exploratory conversation:

Call us  
(01592) 591 500

Email  
sycamore@aberlour.org.uk

Aberlour Sycamore Service  
West Bridge Mill, Bridge Street  
Kirkcaldy KY11TE

How to make a referral to us...
What happens next?

Our process usually takes a maximum of seven days from initial enquiry to an agreed transition plan.

Our process

1. Initial enquiry is made to the Head of Care who then ensures
   - Admissions made will be based on informed decision making by all partners who must all agree that this is the best possible placement for the child
   - All involved have a clearly agreed understanding of what they want the placement to achieve
   - Ensure our admissions criteria would be met (Child or young person is aged 8 – 21, with the option to extend to 25)

2. Relevant documentation would then be made available to Service Manager, i.e. the Child’s Plan

3. The Head of Therapies, Principal teacher and relevant Service Manager, undertake an impact assessment addressing the following:
   - Particular strengths to build on
   - Needs and behaviours
   - “Fit” – taking into consideration existing children in the house
   - Staff – is there anything specific needed in way of skills/experience?
   - Informed assessment
   - Particular obstacles

4. Service Manager/team would then meet the social worker and any carers involved

5. Meet the child and plan the admission so that the move can be managed in line with their needs; this can involve:
   - A number of visits to the house, possibly beginning with an “empty” house at a time when all other children are at school, and there is minimal staff presence

6. Meet the staff team

7. See the bedroom and other facilities, giving permission to state preferences for paint, posters, furniture

8. Meet the current children in the house

9. Buddy up with another child already living in the house giving some “chat time”

10. Discussion with the Lead Professional to explore if the child could they see themselves living there?

11. If all going well, arrange some overnight stays in the house

Some children in our houses have made also made “welcome packs” for new children coming in – “telling it as it is” and being involved in what happens in their home.
Emergency Placements

Although we do not regularly provide emergency placements, we recognise that sometimes children’s needs are extremely urgent.

When vacancies allow, these can generally be accommodated with 2-3 hours' notice, when the following conditions are met:

- Accommodating the child meets the Conditions of Registration with the Care Inspectorate
- The child or young person is aged 8 – 21
- The admission will not place the current children at risk

In such instances we would then seek to adhere to our established processes for welcoming children into a house and engage the Lead Professional and family as quickly as reasonably possible.

In the event that the above criteria cannot be met, we would be willing to have discussions with you about what other solutions Aberlour may be able to offer to meet the child's needs.
We look forward to welcoming new children and young people to Aberlour Sycamore Service and offering them a happy, loving home.

Thank you!

If you have any further questions about making a referral to us, or about any of the other information contained in this brochure, please contact our Head of Care:

Call us (01592) 591 500
Email sycamore@aberlour.org.uk