

We are family

150 YEARS OF ABERLOUR CHILDREN'S CHARITY



By SallyAnn Kelly OBE

CHIEF EXECUTIVE,
ABERLOUR CHILDREN'S CHARITY

A party, a cake and everyone being nice about you? Who doesn't love a birthday? Birthdays – and our charity's 150th anniversary is a pretty special one – are also a chance to take a breath, however, and press pause, just for a moment. They are an opportunity to look back on how far we have come and ahead to where we want to go.

So this year is a special one for Aberlour. It is a milestone, of course, but a staging post too because, even after a century and a half, our journey is far from over.

Offering care, support and love to children in need was our mission when four little boys were given a home when they needed



one in Speyside in 1875. Since then, what we do and how we do it has been transformed. Why we do it, to offer care, support and love to children in need, however, remains entirely unchanged.

Today, that first house is long gone and the orphanage too, closed in 1967. The charity that emerged from those homes is still here, however, and delivering life-changing, often life-saving, residential care and frontline services supporting children and their families across Scotland.

Aberlour is now one of Scotland's most enduring, significant and impactful organisations in the Third Sector and across our public life. It has improved the lives and life chances of generations of children and this anniversary is a chance to remember our past, be inspired by it and learn from it too. Much of our history should be celebrated and all of it should be remembered.

Our mission is simple but the work we do, and have

always done, to support disadvantaged children, is the opposite of easy. It is difficult, relentless and presents new challenges every day. Shirking those challenges not only fails children but their families and our communities.

Our ultimate ambition is, of course, to be no longer needed. To help build a country where children are protected, where safety nets are strong, secure and supported. We are, sadly, a long way from there. Scotland has far more children growing up in poverty than it should, far more families on the brink than it should, and far more children in care – and needing care – than it should.

Those children, their childhoods and their futures, are curtailed by poverty, their lives circumscribed by inequality. They are more likely to fail at school, their talents untapped and potential unfulfilled, end up in homeless accommodation or the criminal justice system, have poor health outcomes and shorter lives.

It is shameful that so little has changed since 1875, that one of the wealthiest countries, in the world still struggles to protect its most vulnerable. Child poverty is not new and, when Canon Charles Jupp opened his orphanage for those "mitherless bairns" at Burnside Cottage, Aberlour, in March 1875, he was tackling exactly the same inequality, the same squandered potential, as we are today.

What has changed utterly is our knowledge and insight. We now know, with certainty, what will make most difference: parents having more money and the time and ability to build strong and stable relationships with their children. Sometimes, sadly, it just cannot be done but keeping families together wherever possible is always our priority.

Child poverty has, unfortunately, become a catch-all term for policy-makers, two little words that mean so much but, through over use, risk becoming empty shorthand for a crisis so huge and intractable that it is impossible to know where to start. Well, the scale of the crisis is certainly huge but it is absolutely tractable.

There are many pressing social issues including, but not limited to, ill health, mental illness, addiction, unemployment, low paid and uncertain work, poor housing and domestic violence. Poverty,

'We have the strength of family. We are family'



however, underpins almost all of them, makes almost all of them worse, almost always impacting most on those with the least resource to defend themselves or their families.

We know more now. We know how to do things better. The changes made in the last 50 years have been transformational never mind the last 150. Our commitment to evolve, to engage with new research and to learn from best practice is one of our greatest strengths. We follow the evidence and, when the facts change, when our knowledge changes, we change too.

Many organisations are now acknowledging difficult and troubling aspects of their history. There is a lot to be proud of in our history but we must look back with clear eyes. Money from the slave trade helped pay for our first houses, for example, where, as recorded by the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry, a small

number of staff betrayed the trust placed in them and the children they were meant to be caring for.

We have apologised unreservedly to the children failed then and are entirely committed to preventing the same failures now. This is an organisation unafraid to learn from its past, good and bad, but always with the ambition of improving the lives of children.

Closing the Aberlour Orphanage where 6,850 children spent some of their childhood, up to 500 at a time, more than 50 years ago and beginning to open much smaller houses for children needing care is an obvious example.

The aim of creating a stable, family environment for children in need of residential care means our houses have become smaller and smaller again as the years pass. Today, we are moving to a model where there will be a maximum of four, more often three, children in our houses. The key is for them to build trust with the adults caring for them and, for that, smaller is better.

A focus on training and increasing staff's specialist knowledge of child development and trauma is another example of our determination to improve and innovate. Across the Third Sector, Aberlour, with around 700 staff and 400 volunteers, is in the vanguard of change.

We move quickly and try things, with our services now ranging from groundbreaking Mother and Child Recovery Houses offering intensive support for new mums recovering from substance and alcohol problems to specialist support for survivors of domestic violence.

Other services help families secure financial stability offering specialist advice and support on debts and household budgets. Meanwhile, our Urgent Assistance Fund has, in recent years, rushed millions of pounds to families on the brink.

Across 150 years, our charity has shown it is unafraid of change and unafraid to raise the voice of children and young people. Today, that seems as important as it ever has been. There is an idea that charities, particularly supported by public money, have become more reluctant to question policies or make the case for change. That cannot be

said of us. We will be brave for children and when challenging our politicians to do better.

Our current campaign to change how public debt, like council tax, is collected is just one example. Our successful efforts to encourage ministers to write off £2.8 million in school debt is another. There are better, more humane, and less destructive ways to collect – or even cancel – this kind of debt that is needlessly and unfairly trapping so many children in poverty and we will continue to say so.

Our concerns are raised with respect and in the knowledge that issues can be complicated but they are raised all the same. Our work is guided by what we know is good for children and part of that is to help provide governments, on both sides of the border, with the same insight and ambition.

Politicians are, of course, committed to ending child poverty and regularly tell us so. In truth, it would be odd if they were not but it takes more than warm words, good intentions and the right policies. It takes clear, transformative action and investment to deliver change. Poverty is not a choice for children, it is a choice for our politicians: to secure and improve those young lives or to continue talking about it.

Political promises have been made to generations of young Scots that have not been kept, a national shame even more acute because so many of them have only known lives full of betrayed trust and uncertainty.

We live in one of the richest nations in the world and better protecting those furthest away from power and privilege, those living in poverty and struggling to keep their families intact, should not seem like an impossible dream.

It will need commitment and courage but can be done and, until then, Aberlour, always changing, always caring, always brave, will continue to help our children thrive. It is a significant year for our charity and, on a personal note, for me too after deciding to stand down from Aberlour later this year after 11 years as chief executive.

It has been my absolute privilege to lead such an important, impactful organisation supported by such a skilled, talented and committed team. Fittingly, from staff and board members to volunteers and donors, our organisation has the strength of a family.

We are family, have been for 150 years, and will be for many more to come.

'A lot has changed since Wolfie's Brae but so much has not changed at all'

David Robb

CHAIR, ABERLOUR CHILDREN'S CHARITY



After spending my childhood in my village of Aberlour, it seems an odd coincidence yet entirely predictable that I would eventually join the charity named after it. Many decades before that, I remember sledging on Wolfie's Brae, named after Clarence Wolfe, a former dean of the orphanage, founded in 1875.

It closed in 1967, just three years after I was born, and my only memories are of the demolition site, an amazing adventure playground, and then, a few years later, attending the school built there.

My parents, who still live in Aberlour, and others of their generation, have far clearer recollections of the orphanage and how much the children brought to the community. Time passes but somehow those memories remain in the bricks of the place.

I went on to work for OSCR, the Scottish third sector regulator, and began to hear more about the impressive charity named after the village. Later still, I joined the board and only then understood how it had evolved while retaining much of the same DNA.

Our Guardianship Scotland service, for example, caring for asylum-seeking unaccompanied children and the Mother And Child Recovery Houses, are very different to what the orphanage did but, at the same time, share the same mission, to care for children in need.

The orphanage clock tower is still standing and a memorial garden behind it has a plaque with a biblical quote about feeding the lambs. That's what they were doing then, making sure less fortunate children were looked after and fed and that is what we are doing now with the campaign to end school meal debt and our Urgent Assistance Fund.

So many echoes from yesterday can be heard today. The orphanage was innovative and groundbreaking in its day and so too is our work and to be involved is, for me, hugely rewarding. It is a privilege to be a member of the team, this family of fantastic people with skills, experience and a shared ambition to help children and their families across Scotland.

My fellow board members are part of that family, of Team Aberlour, so too are SallyAnn Kelly and her team of senior leaders, our staff right around the country, our dedicated volunteers, and our generous donors. I'm proud to be part of it too.

Our staff are the rock we build on. We work hard to reward and

recognise our people, investing in them and their work. Without them, we are nothing and we were delighted that was acknowledged recently when Aberlour was named one of the UK's 100 best employers by a national newspaper.

We want to recruit and retain the best. Pay and conditions are part of that but it's also about building a team spirit and a culture where good work is encouraged and appreciated.

When I go to staff events, I can feel that spirit, see

their achievements, and appreciate their obvious passion and expertise.

We were also delighted to be named UK Charity of the Year in 2023 at the Third Sector Awards. Now an award might not mean much compared to our life-changing work but, as a recognition of our staff and their skills, it matters hugely.

I was slightly surprised to win against some of the biggest UK charities, but I shouldn't have been because the quality and impact of our work bears comparison with anything being done anywhere by anyone.

The staff would be hamstrung without the support of our donors and volunteers, however. In recent years, we have seen a huge increase in applications to the Urgent Assistance Fund, for example but, thankfully, that was mirrored by the response from donors willing to dig deep, even in difficult times.

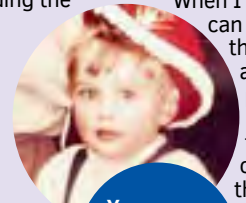
I am still surprised by the amazing generosity of individuals, families, and companies who make donations, often very large donations, quietly, often insisting their generosity remains secret.

Our volunteers are our other unsung heroes. The direct involvement of so many in our services and fundraising is key but the interest and engagement of our voluntary trustees is also crucial. Their selfless support is invaluable and helps ensure good governance and stewardship.

From the very beginning, partnerships and alliances have mattered to Aberlour. As much as the charity does, our family is not an island. We see this most clearly in our campaigning work, where we collaborate with organisations sharing our mission.

That spirit, ambition and collaboration has shaped and steered Aberlour's work for 150 years and I trust it will continue to do so for many more to come.

There will be challenges but this charity will always overcome them. Our work is too important not to.



Young David Robb in village of Aberlour.

'Every child has the ability, and indeed the right, to grow up and flourish in society notwithstanding the origins of their birth'
Canon Charles Jupp, founder of Aberlour, 1875

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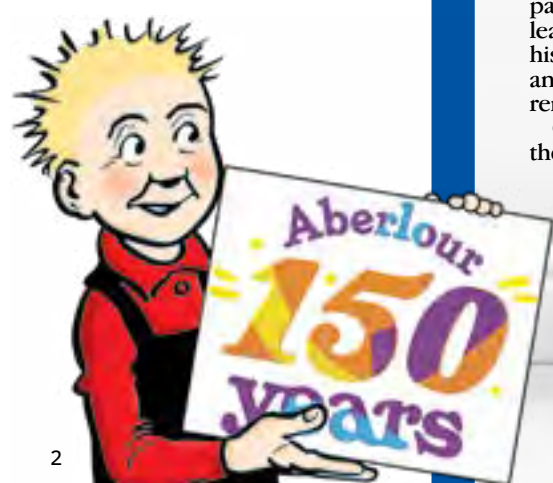
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'It sounds dramatic but that first night changed my life'

Alan Pollock
Youth club alumni

It sounds dramatic but is the simple truth. A youth club changed my life.

The club is run by Johnny Hendry, a legend in Govan, and it is impossible to overestimate what he has achieved with young people growing up there.

His club had a huge impact on so many of us. It was never just four walls and a roof, it was a safety net, a place where young people could find help and encouragement when they might not have found it elsewhere.

It changed my life and, over the years, there have been hundreds, thousands, like me.

I was 16 when I first went in 2008 and mad about karate. I had won a world title in my age group and was hoping to get to Tokyo to defend it but the cost looked prohibitive.

I just remember Johnny being totally engaged as soon as he heard about it, getting sponsorship, publicity, just doing everything he possibly could to help.

In the end, I got to Tokyo and retained my title but my respect and gratitude to Johnny and Aberlour goes far beyond that.

He helped me in all sorts of ways. I wrote my first CV with the help of the club, for example, and was coached for my first interview there.

Johnny was doing it for me but he would do it for every young person that came through the door. He is a force of nature and, when it comes to young people needing help, never stops.

Sometimes life can change in an instant and walking into that club changed everything for me and loads of young people like me.

The voices of Aberlour

Young Scots, staff, and volunteers from across the Aberlour family on the charity's crucial work and life-changing impact



'There is a lot of hope here'

Dawn Ward
Director of children and families

Sometimes, it can be the small, everyday things that stop you short, like watching a mum play with her baby.

That might seem to many of us the most natural thing, but if your parents did not play with you then it is not natural at all. It is a skill to be learned, an achievement.

The women in the Mother and Child Recovery Houses are themselves being cared for in ways that many have never experienced and, over time, that helps build a sense of themselves as loving, capable mothers.

Gradually, we see the women's heads lifting when they realise they can do this, that they can live the life they want to live and be the mothers they want to be.

Our houses in Dundee, and now in Falkirk, care for up to four women and their children, up to five years but mostly babies, in a structured programme designed to help them recover from problematic use of drugs and alcohol, strengthen their parenting, and keep families together.

It is not an easy option and women are very clearly told what to expect and what will be expected of them. It is full-on, a lot is asked of them and it is not for everyone.

Some despite their best intentions are just not at the right stage in their lives but it is too black and white to talk about success or failure.

With new skills and new ways of thinking, we obviously hope the women will recover and care for their children in the long-term.

Whatever happens, their baby spent their first six months with a loving mother, who was doing everything she possibly could to be the best parent possible.

When those babies grow up, they will understand just how hard their mums tried. There is a lot of hope here.

'It makes us better parents. It makes us better people'

Sandra and David
Foster parents

We put a baby monitor in Stephen's room when he arrived with us just to make sure he was okay.

Some mornings, he would wake up before the rest of us and, on the monitor, we'd hear these strange, rustling sounds. When we went into his room, his bed would be empty and we'd find him hiding underneath.

What could a three-year-old boy have gone through that could terrify him like that?

He's just adorable but has issues and can struggle emotionally. He's very affectionate and bright but his development seems delayed.

When he came to us, he was lovely, trying to please with a big smile, but that was a front and, over time, we get hints of what his life might have been like previously. He doesn't like anyone even slightly raising their voice, for example, even in fun. He previously had issues sleeping, nightmares.

Families can come in all shapes and forms but home should be a safe place, secure and stable. If you can help a child who needs a home like that, why wouldn't you?

We get as much out of it as the children. The love we get back, the knowledge that we're good enough for them to trust us and love us and put their faith in us, is so rewarding.

It makes us better parents. It makes us better people.

Names have been changed.

'It might be a swim, a chat or a walk in the park'

Jen La Trobe Volunteer perinatal befriender

It's all about the mums, what they want, what they think might help.

There was one who really wanted to go swimming because that was something she enjoyed before her baby arrived.

So I would bob around in the baby pool with the little one while her mum did some lengths.

I've been a perinatal befriender since 2019, helping new mums who have been referred to Aberlour because they might need some extra support.

I'll do whatever is going to help make things a little easier for them. I'm there to help, to allow her to take a breath and decide for herself how things can work.

It's about listening, not judging,

and giving women space to talk about whatever is on their mind.

I have always had an interest in the welfare of children and enjoy being around babies and children.

When I'm not volunteering, I work mainly in primary schools, introducing children to mindfulness to help with their emotional and mental wellbeing. It is so important to support children in this way.

It's a two-way thing and I get so much from the mums I meet. The training of volunteers is terrific. It is a privilege to be alongside women and their little ones.

We are told that we are not there to "fix things" but to listen, provide a bit of space for the mums to offload and then work out what they

need to do for themselves. We are often working with quite vulnerable women and building trust is important but so is the relationship between the befrienders and our co-ordinator. It's all built on trust, good training and knowing support is there if needed.

It's so important to get the early years right when the babies are tiny, and that ripples right through into adulthood.

It baffles me why there isn't more investment in early childhood. It seems like such a no-brainer when children are our future.



'Welcome to our new house. It's wonderful'

Kim Sibbald
Service manager

Our new house is wonderful. It's been almost a year since we moved in but I remember when it was just an empty plot.

It's probably around the same size as our previous house but only has three children living here, compared to five or six before. What a difference. More space, more room, more relaxed.

We want to offer the feeling of family homes to children and teenagers who need one. That ambition never changes but how we do it is constantly evolving. We

'Welcome to our new house. It's wonderful'

Kim Sibbald
Service manager

are constantly asking how we can do things better, how we can support children better.

Part of that is smaller houses. We have houses across Fife, Tayside and the Highlands, but the one I manage in Fife is brand-new in every way. It is the next step as we move away from the idea of big institutional homes.

It can't be just a house, it needs to be a home for children, their home, a place to feel at ease, relaxed and free to express their feelings. There are other people around if they

want company and plenty of personal space if not. It feels like a family lives here. It's a place to live, laugh and grow.

A house is just bricks and mortar though, relationships matter most. Trust and respect are what counts.

There will always be challenges. Many of the children have suffered trauma and need help to heal but strong, personal relationships help children navigate the challenges and get to a good place knowing they are loved and accepted.

'My son has a life now. I never thought it would happen'

Roisin Gilmour Parent

It feels like a miracle. Three years after the phone rang, I am seeing things I thought I would never see again.

My son, Ashley, 21, who has severe learning disabilities, non verbal autism and epilepsy, was living in a specialist unit in England when I got the call from Aberlour wanting to help us bring him home.

The team had already thrown our family a lifeline once before when they offered us respite care when Ashley was in his early teens.

They kept in touch even though they didn't have to but just because they cared. Then, after all that had happened, they came to our rescue again.

I don't have the words to express how much that meant. The staff are

just another level and allowing us to bring Ashley home to Scotland was literally life-changing for all of us.

What they do is so important and so badly needed. The services they provide, like respite care, can be the difference between families being able to take a breath or burning out.

Slowly, Ashley has been brought out of his shell, out of darkness and into the light.

He has a life now.

This is a boy who never left his bed for nine years. He never had a life and now he is leading a fulfilling life. I never thought it would happen. Aberlour saved our family.

'It's about trust and bravery'
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'Our dancing master was not the type to intrude on our dreams'

Dorothy K Haynes Author

Almost 40 years after growing up in Aberlour Orphanage in 1930s Banffshire, the writer's childhood memoir, Haste Ye Back, bailed its inspirational leader, Canon Clarence "Wolfie" Wolfe.

Wolfie was a forward-looking man, never content to let things stagnate if change was best for the children. Looking back, one sees so many reforms, so many humanising touches. Inevitably, our country-dance classes were one of his ideas.

We were to have a dancing master and us girls were at the age to speculate eagerly about any new male. We pictured him as tall, delicate, palely handsome; a slender young man with wavy hair and flying legs like scissors. Mixed up with this picture was the image of a ballet dancer, someone who would hold us in languorous poses, or lift us lightly to his shoulders, petticoats, pinafores and all.

The boys stamped in soullessly. They scowled and hung back as we changed into our gym shoes, and we decided to ignore them. If they didn't want to dance with us, we would do without them. We would have our instructor all to ourselves.

There was a sudden clapping of hands and we all froze into silence. A second later our spirits dropped. Our dancing master was small, bald and red-faced, a dear, sweet little man but not the type to intrude on our dreams. He was darling, a little sugar plum of a man, but had no sex appeal at all. The reluctant boys began to seem interesting again.

"Now!" he said, in a soft, kind voice. "I want you all to skip in a circle like this!" He pointed his toes and began to trip round as lightly as a piece of thistle-down. "One, two, three. One, two, three!" he twittered, leaping along, his hands holding his coat tails and his head on one side. His little feet twinkled, his hands clapped hopefully, and, clutching our pinafores primly, we followed him.

The boys were not so co-operative.

'School was not working for me. I had to find a new way'

'Children share the same money worries as their parents'

Louise Macdonald Pupil support worker

The pressure on many of the children is constant and relentless.

I'm right there, based in their primary school, and there to help any pupils and their families who might need some extra support.

Their homes may be overcrowded and they will often have far more knowledge about their households' finances than other children and carry that awareness around day after day.

It is a constant strain and they don't have anything to look forward to or things to enjoy.

Their families cannot afford the same days out and treats that other children can expect and the pressure just builds and builds. Poverty takes a

toll on the physical and mental health of children and their parents and then there are the other social issues, linked to poverty, like domestic abuse and issues with drink or drugs.

Pupils will arrive at school cold, wet, tired and hungry. Their clothes and shoes might be inadequate for the weather. I have a rail of clothes in my office to offer children if they need a jumper or a winter jacket or whatever.

Their home lives may be cramped or more chaotic and are often sharing the same anxieties caused by a lack of money affecting the mental health and wellbeing of parents.

The priority is to offer them any practical help available but also to

relieve the pressure a little, to give them the space to talk.

They might want to chat about what is going on with them but often simply enjoy the chance to talk and think about something else.

Just that simple opportunity to talk about themselves and the things they enjoy doing, or are good at, can help.

School is often a safe space, away from what can be difficulties at home, and that is why it can be so important for children. The impact of lockdown, for example, when schools were closed was particularly felt by pupils who rely on the routine, safety and support.

I'd already come to feel that my time in the music industry had run its course and when given the chance to reassess what I wanted to do with my life, I felt a real connection to Aberlour and wanted to be part

of what they do. Three and a half years ago, I was offered a job with the early intervention team in the family support service and I embraced the opportunity.

My role focuses on helping disadvantaged children under 12 but, while the focus is on them, the work often involves the whole family.

It's all about that relationship and working with them, listening to them – being curious and non-judgmental.

Every day is different but it's always about being there for the families so they can

'It's about realising young people's potential'

Ben Coghill Family support worker

Like it did for so many people, the pandemic changed everything for me.

I had worked in the music industry for almost 20 years, as a DJ, promoter and an agent, and lockdown upended that overnight. I was off work for almost a year and a half and started volunteering as a befriender with Aberlour.

I'd already come to feel that my time in the music industry had run its course and when given the chance to reassess what I wanted to do with my life, I felt a real connection to Aberlour and wanted to be part

of what they do. Three and a half years ago, I was offered a job with the early intervention team in the family support service and I embraced the opportunity.

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Every day is different but it's always about being there for the families so they can

'It's about trust, bravery and change'

Angie Rennie Perinatal befriending co-ordinator

We talk about being brave at Aberlour and, often, that means being brave enough to say, OK, this is happening, what do we do now? Brave enough to say, yes, let's go, let's try something new.

We are always looking at what we do and asking how we might do it differently, do it better? The start of our perinatal befriending service is just one example but a good one.

There had been a lot of referrals for family support for mums with toddlers but we were being asked to help with things that had often started

earlier with issues around perinatal mental health. Issues that might have been picked up in pregnancy or the baby's first year had been missed and we realised that particular support for mums at that particular time was missing.

We began perinatal befriending, offering new mums who might be struggling, a trained car, someone to talk to. We started in Forth Valley and have gone from strength to strength.

It was very much, let's do it, let's get it going, and it has been very successful, helping

Danielle Parks

Teenager

I was having a difficult time at school and at home. I wasn't happy and couldn't imagine it getting better.

Eventually, it was one of my teachers who noticed something was going on and that's when Aberlour started helping me, offering support.

My relationship with my mum was really difficult and causing a lot of problems in my family and Aberlour helped with that. We were constantly at each other's throats, arguing all the time and were just trapped in a cycle of fighting and shouting.

Our relationship is so much better now and that just wouldn't have happened without my support workers. Gradually, I started to see where my mum was coming from, the other point of view.

They never took sides though, just helped us see there were valid points on both sides.

My support worker would never suggest I was wrong to feel the way I did. They helped give me a little space, time to breathe away from my mum.

They would visit, or take me for something to eat or a wee drive, just a change of scene, making sure I was OK. They would mostly just talk about what was going on with me, how things were. They would talk to my mum and just help us talk to see the other side and work things out. They let me talk and to have someone actually listening to me made the difference. It felt like someone was in my corner.

Aberlour encouraged me to think about where I was going and how to get there, kind of push me along. It felt like a new start.

Names have been changed.

'Aberlour's ultimate ambition is that, one day, it won't be needed'

Fiona Duncan

Independent strategic adviser, The Promise

One of the best, most important things, about Aberlour is not just the work it does itself but the work it does in partnership.

Immediately after I was appointed to chair the Independent Care Review, SallyAnn Kelly, the charity's chief executive, was in touch to ask how it could help? It was right there from day one, an amazing partner offering support – to ensure children and families could take part and tell their stories.

It is a fantastic collaborator and understands that, even if it can do something successfully on its own, it is better to bring others in, to share knowledge and improve practice.

Competition for funding can sometimes make organisations protective about what they do, and reluctant to share with others, but Aberlour is thoughtful and generous, always putting what is best for children first.

It listens to children and families and puts them at the heart of decision-making which is exactly what is required to #KeepThePromise.

Its ultimate ambition is that, one day, children and families will not be in crisis so will not need its support. The choice between families thriving and your organisation thriving sounds like an easy one, but it takes courage to say so explicitly.

That attitude is why Aberlour is a trailblazer, unafraid to do the right thing for Scotland's children and families and bold in how it does it. It is the definition of leadership.

It is five years since the Independent Care Review concluded and The Promise was made. Ever since Aberlour has been determined to do all it can to ensure it is kept. There is still a long way to go and we need leadership, bravery, and collaboration more than ever.

We need organisations like Aberlour.

Professor:

We all need a box full of memories

Expert on why we must protect snapshots, certificates and childhood bits and bobs for care-experienced young Scots

For many of us, the lucky ones, it is just there. Those of us fortunate to spend our childhoods with our parents will often still have a box full of memories in their loft or under the bed in our old room.

Perhaps it isn't a box, perhaps it is a battered holdall bursting with old photographs; school report cards; our first toys; first shoes; a baby tooth in a matchbox wrapped in cotton wool; a certificate for swimming; medals for netball; badges and ribbons; all the other bits and bobs.

It might not have been opened for decades. We might not have thought about it for longer but we know it's there. Memories we can touch. Our childhood in a box.

Professor Ruth Emond, of Stirling University, believes those boxes and bags do a lot more than gather dust. They give us a sense of ourselves, who we are and where we came from.

Children who have not had such luck, who needed care and support when their parents, for whatever reason, could not cope, do not have those memories and Emond

has been working with Aberlour Children's Charity to help change that.

Along with colleagues in Germany, a research project was launched to detail how residential children's homes capture and look after information relating to children, not only the formal and administrative detail but the often forgotten everyday things, the small delights, the fun.

After Aberlour donated its archive to Stirling University, the research team began cataloguing and analysing the information collected between 1920 and 1980.

Emond, a professor in social work, said: "Adults who have accessed their care records will often say the information on file is incomplete and too often about the paperwork process.



Boys from the orphanage have fun at the Falls of Linn, near Aberlour, in the 1960s and the beauty spot today.

"Of course, the formal information about decision-taking should be retained but we were more interested in what was kept relating to the day-to-day lives of children, about how they lived, the things they did.

"There is a whole other part of childhood memories that is not about being in care, it's about going to gymnastics, or who your pals were when you were six. That's the kind of information, we were interested in."

The huge archive of Aberlour records, now spanning a century and a half, was a gold mine for the research team and remarkable not only for what was there but what was not.

Emond said: "There was a hospital at Aberlour, for example, and often the medical records give a more illuminating



Children and staff at Aberlour orphanage smile for the camera in a snapshot from 1949 seen in colour for the first time, main, and, above, an edition of the magazine and other memorabilia in the archive now gifted to the University of Stirling, and Julie Craig, who works in Intensive Family Support, with Omar Ibrahim, of Youthpoint, join the fun at an Aberlour 150th birthday party in Glasgow in April, above.

account of children being children than the drier administrative files.

"We would get a glimpse of them having fun, climbing trees in the orchard or whatever, because one would fall and break their arm and end up in the hospital. These were often the places where the children's accounts were recorded in their voice."

The Aberlour magazine was also a useful source of information. Primarily written for donors and potential donors, the monthly pamphlet celebrated activities at the orphanage and often featured letters from old boys and girls looking to reconnect with childhood pals.

Emond said: "The children's voices are in there, carefully curated and selected, but they are there.

"The children used to call the magazine The Blue Liar, and were obviously aware

it was a very sanitised version but their lives were still recognisable in its pages.

"We started with the assumption that information being held for children now would be better than then. That is true in some ways but not others.

"In the past, there was often an author's voice in the records, a personal opinion, a tone, but we seem to have moved to a more bureaucratic style of record-keeping."

The research is intended to help care providers ensure they are not only keeping records but keeping memories.

Children in care might not be fortunate enough to have a parent stuffing their childhood memories into a box so carers must.

Bespoke software shaped by the research now allows carers and children to create a digital album, a video

memory box, that can be accessed and added to through the decades. Designed by the research team, it is now being piloted by Aberlour.

How much involvement children themselves should have in the information kept by care providers and how it is recorded can be contentious.

Emond highlighted work to ensure children growing up in care know their family history and are actively involved in the records that are kept about them. However, she added: "We were surprised by how many of the young people we spoke to felt the responsibility for keeping that information and objects from their childhood rested with the adults.

"They were saying 'no, my pals don't have to look after their own photograph albums, why should I?'. That is completely understandable.

"Another issue is that children are expected to take whatever memory objects they have, photographs, certificates, whatever, with them when they leave care.

"Many said that was too soon. They would tell us they just want it to be kept in the equivalent of the loft for a few years, until they get sorted.

"That's not surprising because it is exactly the way other children feel. Parents keep this stuff for you. My mum still has my school reports tucked away somewhere and I'm 54.

"We might be busy in the here and now but we know this stuff is safe and also, importantly, that someone cares enough about us to hold onto all of these things. The challenge for us is to create that for young people in care."

"Children leaving care may not have a single photograph of their childhood."

The researchers realised many children leaving care feel they have nowhere to return to, that the option of "going home" during years of transition into adulthood, when young people will often leave home and move back, is not there for them.

Emond said: "We found in the archive that the orphanage had a house that young people could come back to.

"There was this idea that you could go home, which feels so innovative today.

"Our understanding of experience changes over time as our understanding of the world changes and memory objects are a way of orientating us. Objects hold significant memories and are a way of saying to another person this is who I am and this is the life I have lived.

"It's not just the photograph or whatever the object is, it is the story around them.

"We spoke to one young person who told us about the image of herself in a photograph but also about how her dad had printed it out and had held it.

"That almost meant more to her than the photograph itself.

"In the older archive, we have lovely handwritten notes. Contemporary notes written on a computer lack that personal touch.

"So, nowadays a letter or card from a child's mum might be scanned and saved but, many years later, actually holding the bit of paper that their mum once held is a different sensory experience.

"There is thinking to be done about technology and what might be lost as well as gained."



Aberlour's Winter campaign, above, shows how poor bedding and damp homes can sabotage children's school days. Aberlour's David Grant, inset below.

A voice for change:

Poverty is the thread running through corrosive social issues undermining the lives and life chances of young Scots, according to Aberlour Children's Charity.

One in four children are growing up in poverty in Scotland as the leading Third Sector organisation works to ease the immediate impact on young lives while campaigning for effective long-term action.

David Grant, Aberlour Director of Growth and Marketing, said: "Helping children and their families in the here and now is our priority but there must be a wider mission too. We must help lift families out of poverty permanently."

"Poverty underpins so many social issues affecting children and one will be connected to another. "Hungry children living in damp housing, sleeping on broken beds and wearing inadequate clothes are more likely to be ill and less likely to do as well as they should at school.

"Potential is untapped and opportunities are lost. Families will be more stressed, more anxious, more likely to have problems with substance use, more likely to endure domestic abuse and more likely to break down."

He added: "This isn't

How Aberlour campaigns for a fairer Scotland

theoretical knowledge for us. We have a practical, working knowledge of poverty and how it exacerbates so many other issues.

"Poverty is definitely, without doubt, the root cause of multiple challenges facing many families."

The charity has described how a single unexpected bill that better off families can manage could be potentially catastrophic to those on the brink of crisis.

In recent years, Aberlour has worked to build knowledge and understanding of how poverty can sabotage families among politicians and policy-makers while promoting practical steps to ease the toll on children.

An ongoing campaign highlighting how the collection of public debt, like council tax arrears, is trapping families in poverty is only a recent

example of the charity offering expert insight and strong leadership to help shape policy.

Grant said: "There is no magic bullet but there are things that can be done, effective reforms that can be made to make a practical difference to families.

"Our day to day work is helping families overcome immediate challenges but we must aim to do more than that.

"We are expert, credible and insightful on these issues and have a responsibility to raise the voice of the children and families we work with.

"It's not only about changing things in the short term but about sustaining that change and that quickly leads to things like education, training, employment opportunities and better housing. It's

about the next step, about what happens after we have helped a family through an immediate crisis to prevent another then another."

"What's the next step?"

The charity's campaigning zeal, supported by landmark research led by Morag Treanor, professor of social policy and inequality at the University of Glasgow, has led to significant measures with ministers' cancellation of £2.8 million of school meal debt last year being an obvious and recent example.

She said: "The charity has expertise at every level and there is an obvious commitment and enthusiasm for making change happen.

"It could easily keep its head below the parapet and avoid saying anything

that might upset politicians and policymakers but that is not Aberlour's way.

"It is brave and clearly committed to commissioning research that can provide the detail and rigour needed to properly make the case for reform.

"It wants hard evidence of what is happening to families living in poverty and why, with a clear purpose to change thinking and influence policy.

"For someone like me, that kind of support and engagement is hugely encouraging. For families, it can be life-changing."

'We want to give young people the best start'

By Natalie Don-Innes
Minister for Children, Young People and The Promise

The first minister has been clear that the Scottish Government's top priority is to eradicate child poverty, but we cannot do this alone.

It will take partnership working between government, local authorities, the third and private sectors to achieve this important goal. Aberlour Children Charity's efforts to help children and families play a crucial role in this partnership.

We want to give all children and young people the best start in life. Hearing their voices, and those of families we work with, is the only way to ensure support is person-centred and driven by their needs.

Support needs to be transformed from crisis intervention to delivering preventive whole family support. Aberlour has been at the forefront of this work including their pioneering Mother and Child Recovery Houses, a service which was the first of its kind in Scotland.

If we want to deliver for children and young people, then we must deliver on The Promise. With five years to go I am confident that The Promise can and will be kept – but it is through the work of organisations like Aberlour that the impact of Keeping the Promise will be felt by the children and families that need the change most.

Aberlour has demonstrated the real change that partnership working can deliver through work with the Scottish Refugee Council to deliver Guardianship Scotland. It plays a crucial role in supporting unaccompanied asylum-seeking and trafficked children and young people across Scotland.

Delivering for children and young people has never been more important, something Aberlour has been doing for 150 years. Behind the huge achievement of reaching 150 years are countless children and families who have benefitted from Aberlour's support.

Of arguably even greater importance is the enormous beneficial impact that Aberlour has today, and will continue to have, on children, young people and parents across Scotland.

1 in 4
children in Scotland live in poverty

240,000
young Scots grow up in poverty

1 in 5
families worried about having enough food



**HAPPY 150TH BIRTHDAY FROM
SCOTLAND'S FAVOURITE FAMILY TO
ABERLOUR CHILDREN'S CHARITY!**

**THE
BROONS**

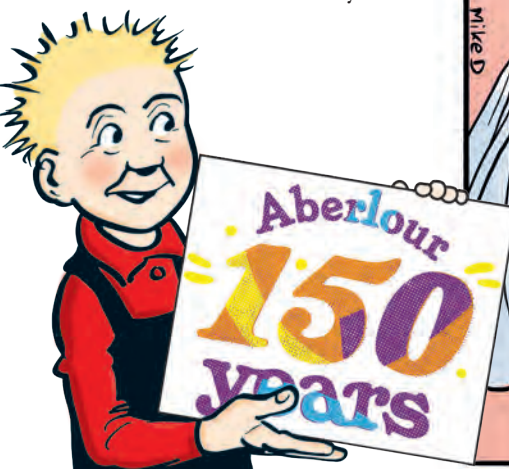
aberlour
scotland's children's charity

Aberlour 150 years

BIRTHDAY!

aberlour
scotland's children's charity

The typography is inspired by a font used in a historical Aberlour pamphlet, for example, with the letters made heavier to echo the sturdiness of the support offered to disadvantaged children and families over the last 150 years.



The story so far

1875

The beginning

Canon Charles Jupp, with support from philanthropist Margaret Macpherson Grant, establishes Aberlour orphanage in Speyside. It begins in Burnside Cottage, home to just four boys.

1885

The development

The orphanage expands to accommodate up to 100 children, featuring wings for boys and girls and a central school block. Later far-sighted innovations include a nursery, farm and swimming pool.

1930s

The challenges

The orphanage suffers two major fires in 1931 and 1937. Luckily, no lives are lost but rebuilding is extensive.

1950

The nursery school

In 1950, the orphanage acquires The Dowans estate, converting it into the Princess Margaret Nursery School, officially opened by Princess Margaret in 1953.

Professor hails happy childhood in orphanage

'I had nothing and no one. Suddenly, I did'

David Divine remembers his days at the Aberlour orphanage with a keen, detailed memory but none so vividly as his last.

"You never knew, you see, no notice at all," he said. "You were told if you needed to know and no-one needed to know they were leaving. We would just vanish."

"You got a small suitcase. It didn't hold much but we didn't have much. A clean set of clothes, shorts, a shirt, pants, and that was it. I had my piggy bank too. I loved putting pennies in and counting them in bed at night. It seemed like such treasure but was really nothing at all."

A photograph of the same battered, brown case features on the cover of Aberlour Narratives of Success, a book written by Divine almost half a century after leaving the Highlands in 1964, aged 11, for less happy years with a foster family in Midlothian.

Part memoir, social history and a moving, powerful testament to the resilience of children, the book recounts the history of the orphanage before charting the lives of some of the boys and girls after they left Speyside.

Divine, who went on to university before successful careers in social work and academia on both sides of the Atlantic, said he has never cried so much as when researching the book and understanding how Aberlour had given others like him the tools to build a life and find happiness.

He said: "We were very damaged but many of us went on to have successful lives, whatever that meant for each of us."

"One of the men I spoke to measured success in his garden, not in degrees and books and big jobs but in caring for plants and watching them grow."

"That struck me. It was a lesson for me. It's about what is in your heart, what makes you feel good about yourself and, speaking only for myself, I left Aberlour

with the capabilities to identify that and drive towards it."

Divine arrived at the orphanage at 18 months old and spent almost 10 years there, one of 6,850 children to live there from 1875 until it closed in 1967. He says he found a family there.

He was placed in care after being born in 1953 in Edinburgh. His mother white, his father a black American airman once stationed nearby.

"I was a scandal, a horror for my mother's family. They ousted her and they ousted me. I literally had nothing, I literally had no-one, and Aberlour gave me something and somebody."

"It gave me food, shelter and affection. It gave me a family and I was happy there."

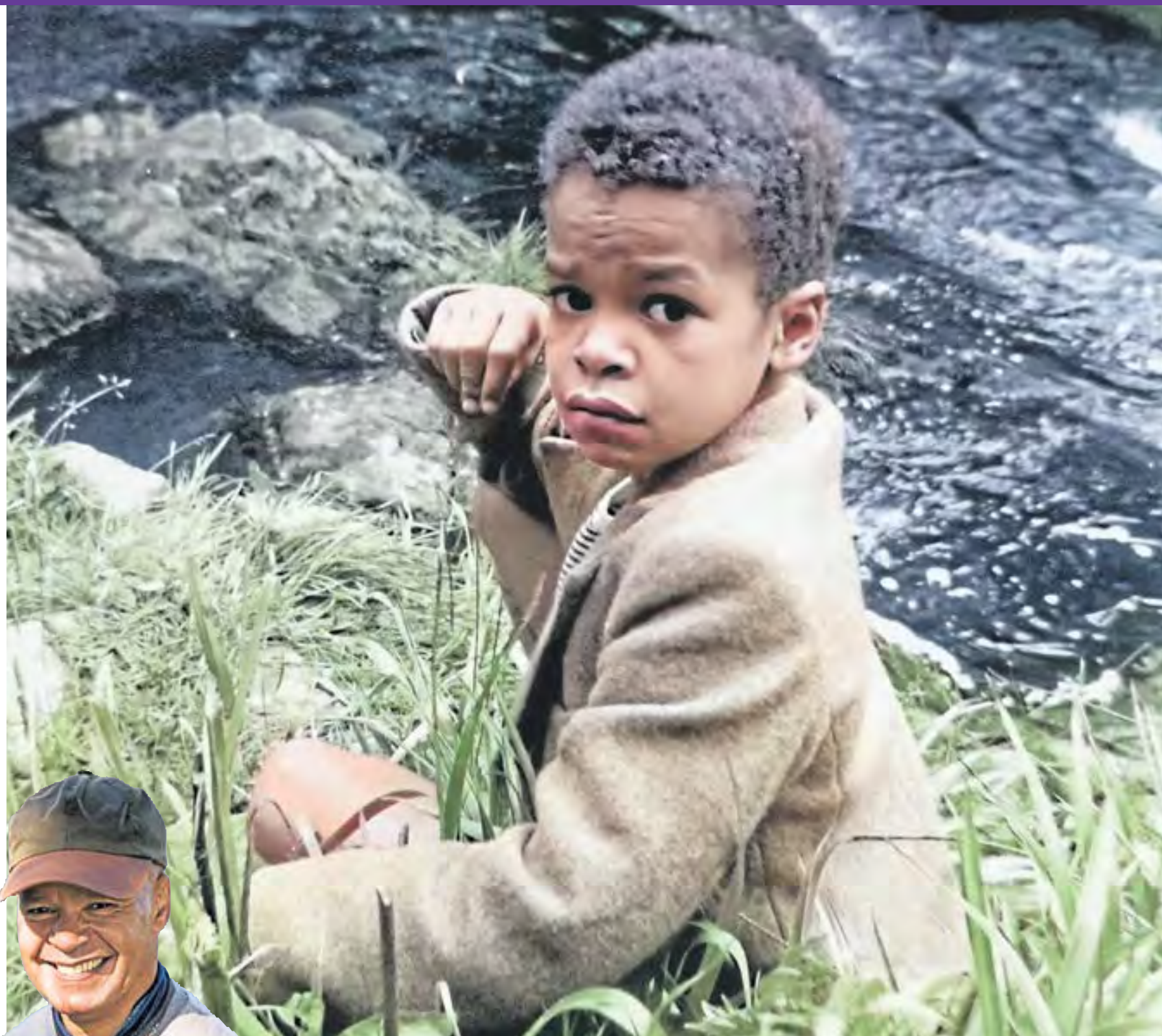
"I felt loved there, nurtured, and I'd never, ever had that before. In some ways, they were the happiest days of my life."

Divine believes his recollection of life at the orphanage are clear-eyed not rose-tinted and acknowledges other children may not share the same, largely happy, memories.

"There is no doubt there could be sadness and bleakness and, we now know, incidents of abuse but that was not my experience. All I can say is that was not my experience and that's not what I found at Aberlour. What I found there was the only place in the first 20 years of my life where I actually felt nurtured, loved, cared for and valued."

"For me it bordered on paradise because of the staff, who clearly cared for me, like my house mother, Auntie Phyllis, the other children, the surroundings."

After studying at Edinburgh University, Divine launched a successful career in social work becoming Britain's first black social services director in 1987 in the London borough of Brent before joining The Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work. He left



Britain for a professorship at a Canadian university years ago and now lives in Nova Scotia, but has lost none of his reforming zeal or passion to improve the life chances of children in need.

Aberlour orphanage closed in 1967 as residential care homes became smaller, less institutional and, whenever possible, children were kept with their families.

Divine said the change in direction improved care for many children but their fundamental needs remained unchanged.

He said: "The idea that closing these big homes and moving care to smaller units would somehow remove all the challenges was wishful thinking."

"The same challenges remain and

good, caring staff are still the key. The positive stories told by people once cared for in these big homes, people like me, have undoubtedly been overshadowed by the stereotypical idea of them as these Dickensian institutions mired in abuse and misery. The danger is that we don't look back with clear eyes and lose the chance to learn some very valuable lessons on how to build new, loving families for children in care."

"Many of those lessons could be learned in the orphanage."

Divine understands why such large institutions were closed but insists size matters less than quality of staff and insists a nurturing, ad hoc family in care is

better than none or parents incapable of delivering love and support.

He said: "I would absolutely say that I found family at Aberlour, I found a home where I had none. In many of the most important ways, it still feels like home."

"The size and condition of any residential home matters but it does not matter as much as having staff who are on a mission to offer the children there every possible support."

"It does not matter as much as having care providers who are driven by helping those children to identify what a successful life might look like for them and help get them ready for it. We need to be having those conversations to find



In snapshots seen in colour for the first time, eight-year-old David Divine sits beside the Falls of Linn, Aberlour, in 1961, main; enjoys a day at the Moray seaside with pals from the orphanage; and, inset, returns to Aberlour in 2012.

out what children value, what they want to achieve and how."

"There must be a partnership between the child and adult carer, and that demands well paid, well trained, well led, skilled and committed staff."

He admits those conversations did not happen at the orphanage.

He said: "No, we were essentially told what our futures would be. We had no part to play and did as we were told."

"However, we were chronologically young but, because of our experience, ancient with wisdom and knowledge."

"We needed all that wisdom to navigate through life because we had nothing. Without that ability to navigate and the knowledge of where we needed to be, we would have got nowhere."

"It's about survival but people don't like that kind of language."

"There must be more to life than survival, they'll say, but when you have nothing and no one, survival skills are what matter. How will I, with no-one, navigate through life?"

"Things like education and good jobs are part of that, but are these the things that have value for children? What do they believe would be a valuable life?"

"We need to talk to the children, discuss their ideas of a successful, productive life and, most importantly, help convince them it can be achieved."

Divine visited Scotland, and Aberlour, regularly before Covid and plans to return for events marking the 150th anniversary of the charity, named after the town where he spent a happy childhood.

Speaking from his home in Canada, he said: "At 71, I have nine grandchildren, three loving adult children and a partner, and we all love each other and help each other, care for one another."

"I know how fortunate I am to have someone who cares for me and children who love me. I am very grateful."

1967

End of era

The orphanage closes after housing 6,850 children as the charity transitions to smaller homes, including houses in Aberdeen, Stirling and Kirkcaldy.

1969

The relocation

The charity moves its HQ to Stirling with an operations hub in Glasgow shaping teams and services before the Aberlour Child Care Trust is created in 1978.

2010s

The evolution

Aberlour becomes one of the largest and most influential children's charities in Scotland, building on its skills and expertise while supporting research into issues sabotaging the lives and life chances of young Scots.

2020s

The innovation

Expanding and innovating, Aberlour pioneers new, landmark services including Mother and Child Recovery Houses while an Urgent Assistance Fund rushes emergency payments to families on the brink of crisis.



Boys from the orphanage turn out in tartan in the 1960s.

2025

The 150th Anniversary

Aberlour marks a century and a half of offering care, support and love to disadvantaged children, young people and families with a year of special events, highlighting its work while raising the voice of young Scots in successful campaigns to ease the toll of inequality on children and their families.

Changing tomorrow's lives today

The services delivering life-changing love, care and support to young Scots

The mission is simple, but helping disadvantaged children and families towards a brighter future is complex, challenging, and potentially life-changing.

Not all children are born with an equal opportunity and every Aberlour Children's Charity service is driven by the ambition to

with disabilities get the best, most engaging support; from rushing financial assistance to families on the brink of crisis to supporting interventions when the challenges cannot be overcome and children can no longer safely stay at home.

Service teams tailor their work to each child and family, working towards shared goals, building strong, caring relationships, and helping ensure the United Nations Convention for The Rights of The Child is a reality for every child.

Lynne O'Brien, Chief Officer of Children And Families, said a thread of care and compassion runs through all of Aberlour's work with every service underpinning Scotland's commitment to The Promise to transform the lives of children and to keep them safe, respected, loved and with their families whenever possible.

She said: "Our teams across Scotland deliver a huge range of services but all of them are working to ensure every child has an equal chance of happiness today and tomorrow."

"Every day, in many different ways, our skilled teams help and support children, young people and their families to live their best lives and enjoy their best futures."



Aberlour's Lynne O'Brien.

improve the lives and life chances of young Scots.

The diverse work ranges from delivering residential and fostering care to supporting the recovery of families affected by alcohol and substance use; from easing pressure on families at risk in the early years to ensuring children



Residential care

There are currently seven houses in the service and each provides a safe and loving home to children unable to live with their families. The five houses across Fife and two in the Highlands are at the heart of their communities, close to schools and parks, and provide secure spaces where children can heal and grow. Strong relationships and trust between adult carers and young people are the foundation of the service while the charity takes care to "hold the hands of those who hold the hands".

Shona Quin, a clinical psychologist and independent consultant to Aberlour, said: "My role is around supporting the adults. When they feel fully supported and nurtured, they are then much more able to support and nurture the young people."

"To be surrounded by adults that are well and enjoy their work is massively significant in terms of the experiences young people have."



Family support

It does exactly what it says on the tin but, in services across Scotland, Aberlour ensures families get the right support, at the right time, for as long as it is needed.

The teams are flexible, the help bespoke. From service to service and family to family, support is delivered how and when it is needed most, from early morning to late at night and weekends too. No two

families are the same, each has different needs, and Aberlour tailors its work to meet them all.

The trauma-informed, seven-days a week support can be one-to-one or include the whole family, and takes place everywhere from home, school, cafes, or community centres.

The support might be needed for all sorts of reasons, from poor emotional health to domestic abuse, from

sudden financial difficulties to looming homelessness, but, with sympathy and without judgement, workers spend the time to understand what children and their families need to thrive.

The priority is to build close, trusting relationships over time but, when crises strike, the family support teams are ready to respond with urgency and practical, impactful help.

Disability services

The charity's range of bespoke services for young Scots with learning disabilities, autism or more complex physical and health needs, includes staffed accommodation and wide-ranging support packages to short breaks for young people.

All the charity's spaces are safe and accessible, where children feel

emotionally and physically secure while being encouraged to take part in activities. At home, school or in their communities, children are encouraged to explore interests, develop skills, build relationships and, most of all, have fun.

The residential services provide safe but relaxed environments for a child to come and stay for a short

break that can offer their families a rest from their caring role.

It might only be a few hours, or a few nights, but for those caring for children and young people with disabilities, the chance to pause and take a breath can be life-changing.

Fostering

For 20 years Aberlour has recruited, trained and supported foster parents allowing them to provide safe and loving homes for children.

The charity's team helps the young people and their carers build strong relationships that often last a lifetime. Everything is shaped by the children and their families but fostering, sometimes challenging, always rewarding, has allowed countless young Scots to flourish.

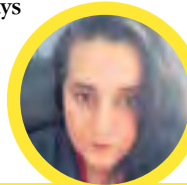
Natasha Wallace, right, now 35, was the first girl to be fostered in the Aberlour

service 20 years ago and says it changed her life.

She said: "I used to wonder what might have happened? Where I might have ended up? Would I be in a good situation?"

"I don't think about that now. I know who I am, know who my family are, and know they have my back."

"I would encourage any potential foster carer to give a child the same opportunity. If successful, that child has a family for life and knows someone loves them. That is such a huge thing."



Guardianship Scotland

A century and a half after Canon Charles Jupp set up a home for "mitherless bairns" in Aberlour, the charity he inspired offers a haven for lone, sometimes orphaned children, fleeing terror, famine and war.

This statutory service provides Guardians to all unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, victims of trafficking or at risk of trafficking after their arrival in Scotland.

Supported by the Scottish Government and delivered alongside the Scottish Refugee Council, Guardianship Scotland helps raise the voices of children with no one to speak for them, to protect their best interests, ensure their rights are upheld, and help them build secure new lives in Scotland.

Catriona MacSweeney, Service Manager, said: "It is hard to imagine what it must be like to arrive alone, in a strange country, with no one to turn to and no one to care for you."

"These young people are so far from their own, with none of the support and help from family and friends that we take for granted."

Perinatal mental health

When one in five women suffer mental health problems during pregnancy or after having their baby, the need for perinatal befriending is compelling and time-critical. Aberlour has pioneered services offering emotional and practical support to new mums, often vulnerable, disadvantaged and at risk of being overwhelmed by parenthood.

Volunteer befrienders in Forth Valley and Lothian are trained to listen not judge, to empathise not impose, and, building relationships over time, ease mothers' feelings of isolation, improve their mental health, help them strengthen bonds with their babies, build connections in their communities, and empower them to raise their families.

Liz Nolan, Director of Children and Families, said: "Around one in five new and expectant mums will experience perinatal mental illness and services like ours are vital for families across Scotland to support women, partners and their babies. Our dedicated services support new mums struggling with anxiety, depression and isolation during pregnancy and after their baby is born."

"Women tell us the combination of emotional and practical support for them at home and in the community has changed their lives and, sometimes, saved their lives."



Mother and child recovery houses

The rehabilitation and community services helping women recover from addiction and trauma while keeping their families together has been hailed by experts and, more importantly, the mothers.

The residential support allows mums to stay with their young children while receiving life-changing help to tackle issues with alcohol

and substance use and strengthening parenting skills. So far there are two Mother and Child Recovery Houses – in Dundee and, more recently, Falkirk – providing nurturing and loving spaces for women and their babies during their recovery journey.

Both are supported by the Scottish Government and, opening the house in Falkirk in September, Mental

Wellbeing Minister Maree Todd said: "This house will allow women to access residential rehabilitation services and keep their family together."

"We know there is a strong link between women having children removed from their care and risk of drug-related death. Treatment is more effective when families are kept together."



Help every child have a brighter future

One in four young Scots are growing up in poverty but with your support we can be there for them for as long as they need us

www.aberlour.org.uk

