**Welfare Rights in Secondary Schools Project**

**Updated to inc. March 2022 stats / info**

**BACKGROUND**

A partnership agreement between NAC Education, HSCP Children & Families and HSCP Money Matters Team resulted in funding being provided by HSCP Children & Families to fund one full time Welfare Rights Officer (WRO) to deliver welfare rights services for 2 years in 7 of North Ayrshire Council’s Secondary Schools.

**PROMOTION OF THE SERVICE**

Initial meetings with school head teachers commenced towards end of September and a publicity campaign began thereafter. The activities undertaken to raise awareness and promote the service includes:

* Meetings with all school guidance staff, family learning teams, school social workers and school nurses
* Attendance at Parent Council Meetings
* Information session with parents which included evening sessions and attendance at virtual parent’s nights
* Promotion of service via social media inc. animations / graphics
* Promotion of service via local newspapers
* School issuing texts to parents / carers
* Raising awareness of benefits by sharing information with schools to add to blogs, school websites inc. info on Young Carers, Scottish Child Disability Payment, School Leavers, Changes to Universal Credit, Awareness of Council Tax Reduction, etc
* Along with 2 schools, we piloted Microsoft form issuing a link via texts / social media for parents to access the service and receive a call back from the WRO. Since February 14 referrals received and it will be rolled out to all schools
* Sharing of good news stories / outcomes for families who have used service
* Review meetings with schools to provide service review and updates on referrals etc.
* As well as support to families, the WRO has delivered training and provided briefings for school staff on relevant topics

**ISSUES IDENTIFIED**

From the referrals received it became apparent that there was an issue with families claiming Free Schools Meals including uploading the evidence required to support the claim via the online system. Following intervention by the WRO, the claims were processed, and Free School Meals were awarded.

Given the importance of Free School Meals to children and their families we intend to address these issues by producing a Guide for Parents on How to Claim Free School Meals.

**FINANCIAL GAINS**

To date we have secured over £38k for parents / carers which has been generated several benefit claim outcomes including claims & supersessions to Council Tax Reductions, EMA, School Meals, PIP, Scottish Welfare Fund, Carers Allowance, DHP, Income Support and Universal Credit.

**FEEDBACK FROM PARENTS / SCHOOLS**

* Good news stories / outcomes See attachments
* Text feedback from parent – “*the reassurance of advice given, being able to go into employment not worrying about an overpayment of benefit*”.
* Child able to attend school without worrying about how they would deal with cost of school meal if account not updated.
* Pupil assisted to claim benefits in own right and challenge DWP over incorrect decision.
* Comments from senior school leaders - “*This service is invaluable!*“



**NEXT STAGE**

Referrals the service have increased over the last couple of months. It is clear from the referrals received that individual schools have engaged better than others and have already embedded Audrey into the school team.

We aim to continue liaising with each school regularly to build on the relationship and encourage promotion of the service and to focus on those who have not engaged as well as others.

Our presence in schools has been limited due to COVID restrictions and little footfall of parents / carers in schools and with restrictions easing, we hope to have a presence in the schools which will encourage the schools to work with us even more closely to reach the families who require our service. To encourage this, we will be piloting an online appointment booking system.

Money Matters will continue to work with the schools to develop and promote the service, including having awareness campaigns on topics e.g., Free School Meals, School Leavers and the impact on parent’s benefits, changes in the benefit system and young carers etc.

**David Hornell**

**Money Matters Manager**

**April 2022**