

# Big Hoose Evaluation

A Report for The Cottage Family Centre



August 2023



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# 1: Introduction

This report introduces the Cottage Family Centre and the Big Hoose project and describes the scope and method of the research.

## The Cottage Family Centre

The Cottage Family Centre was established in 1987 to provide support to vulnerable children & families experiencing a range of issues, including relationship breakdown, drug and alcohol issues, physical and mental health issues, poverty, unemployment and poor housing.

In 2005 the Cottage Family Centre completed the construction of a purpose-built centre in the Templehall area of Kirkcaldy. In 2020 an additional family centre in the Gallatown area of Kirkcaldy was established

Apart from the Big Hoose, the Cottage Family Centre delivers a range of services funded by Fife Council:

- **Adult Groupwork** - universal and targeted interventions with adults focused on: parenting skills, child development, confidence, family relationships, financial management, catering skills and healthy eating and healthy lifestyles.
- **Family Services** - advice and practical support to adults referred to the Cottage Family Centre, aimed at strengthening relationships and supporting families who are or have experienced problems with homelessness, drug & alcohol misuse, domestic violence, etc. Support includes: signposting to other services, attending appointments, emotional support and advocating on behalf of the family.
- **Children's Services** - providing childcare for up to 15 children from vulnerable families aged from six weeks to five years whose parent/carers are attending services at the centre. Although registered as a creche, it provides additional services, including work on relationships, interactions with other children and adults, behaviour, development milestones and speech and language development. Childrens' workers also

make referrals to other services. The service provides parent/carers with the opportunity to take part in activities with their child, such as Baby Cafe or Little Seedlings. Finally, the children's service provides respite care for families in crisis.

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The Cottage Family Centre further offers a range of additional services, including:

- **Therapeutic Support Service** for children and young people.
- **Counselling Service** for adults and young people.
- **Dad's Project**, a food growing project for young dads to improve their health, wellbeing, employment and educational opportunities.
- **Adult Basic Education and Information Technology classes**.
- Facilities for **supervised contact** for parents/carers separated from their children, managed by Social Work staff.
- Facilities for **family contact for formal court access arrangements**, managed by Relationship Scotland.
- Drop-in **ante-natal clinic**, managed by NHS.

## The Big Hoose

The Big Hoose<sup>1</sup> was set up in December 2021 by The Cottage Family Centre and Amazon UK, in co-operation with former UK Prime Minister Rt Hon Gordon Brown.

The project distributes surplus products from Amazon and around 30 other local and multinational businesses to vulnerable children and families who need them.

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<sup>1</sup> The project is also referred to as The Big House and Amazon calls it Project Raith. In this study we refer to the project as The Big Hoose.

The products are collected at a dedicated warehouse and donated rent-free to the Big Hoose by local business [Purvis Group](#).

The products are then distributed to vulnerable families by a network of 717 practitioners and charities, who refer their clients in need to the Big Hoose. They complete a concise and simple referral form indicating the goods that are needed and can pick up the goods the following week.

The Big Hoose uniquely brings together local and national businesses, with charities and public sector practitioners to support vulnerable families in need. This approach has been named Multi-Bank<sup>2</sup> and its example is followed in other parts of the UK. A multibank has established in Wigan in 2023 and currently there are further Multi-Banks developed in the Birmingham and Swansea area.

## Scope

This evaluation covers the first 18 months of operation of The Big Hoose, the period 1 January 2022 – 31 July 2023.

The evaluation focusses on two main areas:

1. Process evaluation of the first stage of implementation of the project.
2. The emerging impact of the project on families and practitioners

Following on from this, the study focusses on the future development of the project.

## Our Research Methodology

Social Value Lab has recently undertaken an impact assessment using the Social Return on Investment (SROI) methodology on the first year of operation of the Big Hoose. As part of that study, we undertook two surveys of parent/carers (289 responses) and practitioners and charities (238 responses). It was deemed inappropriate to survey the same cohorts on a similar subject for a second time in a relatively short space of time. Therefore, we have used the quantitative data collected in the SROI assessment in this study.

For this study we have applied a mixed method containing of the following elements:

Desk research: analysis of project data supplied by The Cottage Family Centre.

Semi-structured Interviews with 4 donating businesses.

Semi-structured interviews with 10 practitioners and charities.

Semi-structured interviews with 14 beneficiaries.

Case study interviews with 2 beneficiaries and their referring professional, and 1 interview with a referring professional who provided information on behalf of their client.

Two focus group discussions with the Cottage Family Centre Board of Directors attended by 5 directors.

Three focus group discussions with Cottage Family Centre staff. One focus group with Cottage Family centre management staff, attended by 3 staff members, and two with the Big Hoose operational staff, attended by 5 staff members.

Semi-structured interviews with 10 key stakeholders, including representatives from Fife Council, NHS, Amazon, and local charities.

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**TABLE 3.1 STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT**

Stakeholder	Method
Donating businesses	Semi-structured interview with 4 businesses
Practitioners and charities	Semi-structured interview with 10 practitioners
Beneficiaries	Semi-structured interview with 12 beneficiaries 2 x case study interview
Board of Directors	2 Focus Groups attended by 5 Directors
Management staff	Focus group attended by 3 managers
Operational staff	2 Focus groups attended by 5 staff
Key Stakeholders	Semi-structured interviews with 7 key stakeholders

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<sup>2</sup> How To Survive The Winter, Gordon Brown

## **Acknowledgement**

We would like to express our sincere thanks to Amazon UK to allow us to use the quantitative data collected through the SROI assessment they commissioned for this study.

## 2: The Big Hoose

This Section provides a detailed overview of the outputs of The Big Hoose in the period Jan 2022 – Jun 2023.

### Donating Businesses

In total there are now 39 businesses that donate their surplus products to The Big Hoose. They range from multinationals (e.g. Amazon, PepsiCo and Unilever) to national and local businesses.

In the first 18 months of the project, they donated 1,039,700 products in total.

This means that the number of donating businesses and the number of products donated have been accelerating in the first half of the second year, as shown in Table 2.1.

TABLE 2.1 GROWTH DONATED PRODUCTS

	Jan – Dec 2022	Jan – Jun 2023	
Donating businesses	11	39	
Number of products donated	423,615	616,080	+191%

### Referrals

In the period Jan 2022 – June 2023 the Big Hoose received 86,604 referrals.

The network of charities and practitioners that refer their clients to The Big Hoose<sup>3</sup> has increased to 717. Table 2.2 provides an overview of the referring partners.

TABLE 2.2 REFERRAL PARTNERS

Referral Partner	Number	Increase since Year 1
Fife Social Workers	265	+63
Fife Health Visitors	164	+16
Fife Teachers	152	-
Fife Charities	75	+7
Fife Medical Centres	30	-

Referral Partner	Number	Increase since Year 1
Edinburgh Charities	18	+1
Fife Foodbanks	9	-
Fife Councillors	4	-
Total	717	+87

The number of referral partners has grown as well by 87 in the first half of the second year. The vast majority of this increase (99%) comes from Fife.

Table 2.3 reveals the locality of the referrals.

TABLE 2.3 REFERRAL LOCALITIES

Locality	Referrals
Kirkcaldy	35%
Cowdenbeath	23%
Glenrothes	18%
Dunfermline	14%
Levenmouth	10%
SW Fife	7%
NE Fife	7%
Edinburgh	4%

The referral criteria, the reason why practitioners have referred their clients to the Big Hoose, are shown in Table 2.4.

TABLE 2.4 REFERRAL REASON

Reason	Referrals	2022
Challenges with Cost of Living	56%	26%
Poor Living Conditions	50%	43%
Awaiting Benefit Payments	49%	62%
Loss of Benefits	24%	26%
No Income at all	22%	19%
Care Experienced	20%	15%
Made Redundant	13%	11%

<sup>3</sup> We use the term practitioners for the referring professionals and charities in the remainder of this document.

Other	13%	13%
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As expected, compared to the first year of operation, the cost of living crisis is now the most reported reason for referring people to The Big Hoose, and its prevalence more than doubled from 26% to 56%.

## Number of Beneficiaries

Due to the nature of the referral process, it is unclear how many vulnerable children and families the project actually reaches. This can only be estimated by making assumptions. This led to a wide range of estimates of the total number of beneficiaries in the first year of operation.

The Cottage Family Centre worked on the assumption that 60% of all referrals are one-off and the remaining 40% are repeat with an average of 3 deliveries. This makes the total number of beneficiaries in year 1 an estimated 42,153<sup>4</sup>. This means that on average each referral partner has distributed products to 67 individual beneficiaries.

The SROI study undertaken made a more conservative estimate assuming an average of one donation per month for each beneficiary, leading to an estimation of 4,790 individual beneficiaries. This means on average each referral partner has distributed products to 8 beneficiaries during the year.

The latest child poverty data estimates around 15,000 children in Fife are living in absolute poverty<sup>5</sup>.

Since the start of 2023 The Big Hoose has adapted its referral form to better understand how many repeat referrals there are. This reveals that 25% of all referrals are repeat referrals, meaning that 75% of all referrals are first time referrals.

This means that in the period Jan 2022 – Jun 2023 the Big Hoose has donated products to 72,170 families<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> 57,482 referrals. Total beneficiaries =  $(57,482 * 60\%) + (57,482 * 40\%) = 42,153$ .

<sup>5</sup> Every Child, Every Chance, Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan Fourth year progress report 2021-22, Scottish Government, June 22. Absolute poverty rate is 22%. There are 68,137 young people aged 16

## Reaching the Right People

The referral system used by The Big Hoose is designed for speed and simplicity and based on trust in the professional integrity of the practitioners.

This means, however, that The Big Hoose does not know to whom the products are delivered. This is left to the discretion of the referring practitioner.

Donating businesses are not worried about this lack of information, but some would like to get a bit more information about the end-users of their products.

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*"I don't worry about it."*

*"I'm confident it is reaching the right people."*

*"Certainly the products that we've delivered have all been reallocated to the people who need them."*

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*Donating businesses.*

External stakeholders are aware that there is no data on who receives the products, but they generally have trust in the referral system. It is difficult, however, to be sure that the donated products actually reach the families in greatest need.

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*"They need to pinpoint where the greatest need is."*

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*External stakeholder*

Board and staff acknowledged that they do not have the data on who receives the products.

It is important to stress that there is no evidence or suggestion that the products are not reaching vulnerable families in need.

and under in Fife, meaning around 14,990 (68,137\*22%) are living in absolute poverty.

<sup>6</sup> 86,604 referrals. Total beneficiaries =  $(86,604 * 75\%) + (86,604 * 25\%) = 72,170$ .

## The Cottage Family Centre as Middleman

The Cottage Family Centre brings together businesses that have surplus products and practitioners that work with vulnerable children and families.

Both donating businesses and practitioners do not have any issues with the role the Cottage Family Centre plays. Many commented on the excellent quality of the staff, including the warehouse staff, who they found to be very approachable. Communication is excellent and effective. Many also commented on the way that the staff maintain the dignity of beneficiaries.

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*"It is really well organised."*

*"We've never been turned down."*

*"They are fully aware of our needs."*

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One stakeholder pointed out that businesses would not donate products to a Council-run service.

## The Support of a Public Figure

The former UK Prime Minister, the RT Hon Gordon Brown, who is local to the area has been a patron of The Cottage Family Centre for a long time. He has been instrumental in setting up The Big Hoose and has been a driving force behind its development since.

For donating businesses, the involvement of Gordon Brown has been very important to become involved in the project. Businesses receive many competing charitable demands on their company and the involvement of Gordon Brown gave them the trust that their donations are well used. Also, the passion of Gordon Brown for The Big Hoose has encouraged businesses to become involved.

## The Big Hoose in the Service Landscape

The Big Hoose is seen as clearly addressing a gap in service provision; it is a unique project in the Fife service landscape. There is no other organisation that offers the same support.

There is no evidence that The Big Hoose has a detrimental impact on other organisations

addressing poverty or displaces any existing services.

For food products there is some overlap with foodbanks, but The Big Hoose only offers tinned and dried food products.

For other products, the only alternative would be applying for a grant, which is time consuming, has a long lead-in time and every application has an uncertain outcome.

The Big Hoose is seen as an easily accessible one-stop shop for people working with vulnerable families. It helps practitioners build trust with their clients and enables them to provide alleviation from poverty in a non-stigmatising way.

Practitioners and external stakeholders believe that The Big Hoose is playing an important role in addressing child poverty.

## Practical Issues

The Big Hoose has grown at a pace over the last 18 months, and became much bigger than anyone had anticipated.

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*"We were overwhelmed by sheer needs."*

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This rapid expansion has meant that, at times, all involved – staff, management, and suppliers – have had to adapt quickly and develop policies and procedures as they go. This has been most apparent on the logistics side where, for example, unannounced, short-notice deliveries to the warehouse have forced staff to think on their feet.

This is linked to a developing understanding of supply/demand issues more generally. Not always knowing what items are coming in and when can be challenging for staff. Though there is acceptance that this is unavoidable to a certain extent and simply the nature of the project, not knowing what surpluses will be available in advance can make it difficult to plan and to meet the expectations of beneficiaries. There can also be implications for warehouse space and staff workload).

Understanding of supply and demand has improved as the project has developed and this has been underpinned by strong relationships between all parties. In particular, warehouse staff have developed good working relationships with the practitioners who collect items on behalf of

beneficiaries. As interactions have become more routine, warehouse staff have come to better understand the role of practitioners and the needs of their beneficiaries.

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*"One of the strongest parts of the project is the relationship we've built with collectors."*

*Warehouse staff*

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A lack of a dedicated warehouse manager has proven challenging for warehouse staff. With no single point of contact, information and direction has come from different people at different times, which has led to a lack of clarity at times. However, this issue has been acknowledged and an experienced Warehouse Manager has been appointed.

The Big Hoose takes up a lot of management time, in particular time of the Strategic Manager , which sometimes can be challenging for other services of The Cottage Family Centre.

## 3: Impact of the Big Hoose

This section of the report describes the impact of the programme on vulnerable families and practitioners, and presents three in depth case studies.

### Impact on Vulnerable Families

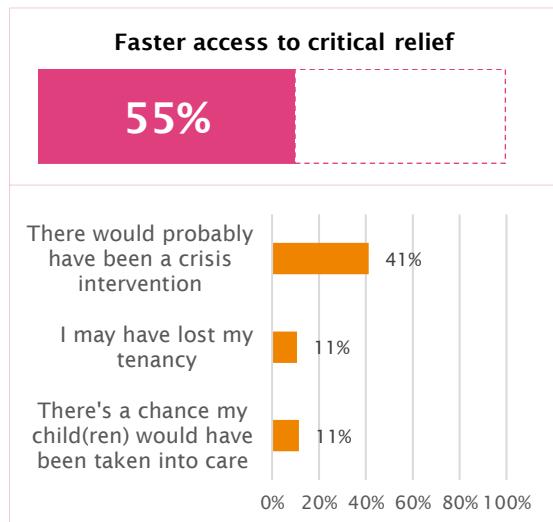
Evidence of the Big Hoose's impact on vulnerable families is taken from parents/carers' and practitioners' survey responses from the original SROI study, supplemented with qualitative data from interviews.

Outcomes were observed for whole families, as well as specific outcomes for children and parents/carers.

### Outcomes for Whole Families

#### Faster access to immediate relief of critical issues

Just over half of parents/carers (55%) said that the support they had received through the Big Hoose had enabled them to deal with critical issues quicker and potentially avoid a crisis situation.



As well as avoiding crisis interventions in general (41% of parents/carers), just over a tenth of parents/carers (11%) reported that support from the Big Hoose had directly averted a breakdown in their tenancy situation or prevented their children potentially going into care.

*"I get no additional money for my child without help from [the Big Hoose] I would struggle so much."*

*"It's helped me avoid a crisis because I could sort my finances out and if I didn't have enough to cover everything, I could get help from the donated items."*

*"If it wasn't for the Big Hoose then I would struggle to feed my family."*

#### Improved access to other support services

More than a third of parents/carers (37%) reported that being supported through the Big Hoose had led to them having better access to other support services for them and their family.

#### Improved access to other support services

**37%**

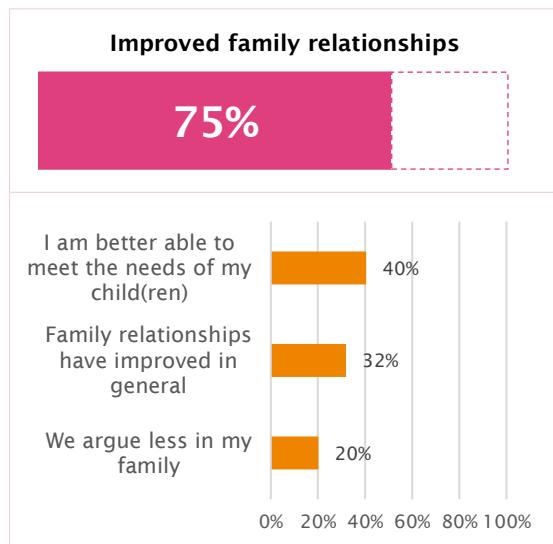
*"We have been able to identify other areas of need because of the more open trusting relationships. We can signpost parents/carers to other support agencies for advice, we can promote our other services such as the uniform shop and free breakfast club."*

*"We have been able to signpost families to other supports. Some were not claiming the right benefits, some needed support with tenancy rights, some needed direction on money and debt advice."*

*Practitioners*

#### Improved family relationships

Three-quarters of parents/carers had observed an improvement in family relationships as a result of the Big Hoose.



Two-fifths of parents/carers (40%) noted that relationships had improved as a result of them being better able to meet the needs of their children. Around a third (32%) reported an overall improvement in family relationships, while a fifth (20%) said that there were now fewer arguments in the household.

*"I've got a 12-year-old who wants all the best stuff and doesn't understand if I say I can't afford it."*

*"[At Christmas] we would've had all this upset of the family and no presents or anything."*

## Outcomes for Children

Parents/carers reported a range of positive outcomes for their children as a result of the support from the Big Hoose.

### Reduced stress and anxiety

Just over two-fifths of parents/carers/carers (43%) noticed an improvement in their children's levels of stress and anxiety, owing to the help they had received through the Big Hoose. Practitioners also reported a positive impact in this regard, with 90% agreeing that the Big Hoose has had a positive impact on children's stress and anxiety levels.

### Reduced stress and anxiety

43%

More than a quarter of parents/carers/carers (27%) also said that their children's confidence or self-esteem had been boosted thanks to the support from the Big Hoose. More than four-fifths of practitioners (83%) were also positive that the Big Hoose had contributed to improved confidence for children.

*"My son has problems managing his behaviour and is receiving other support from Family Centre. When he's not hungry or bored, he's happier."*

### Increased confidence

#### Increased confidence and self-esteem

27%

*"He always comes in [from school] happier now."*

### Increased attainment

A tenth of parents/carers (10%) said that support from the Big Hoose had led to their children doing better in school – for example, by attending more regularly or being better able to concentrate in class. Practitioners also observed an impact on children's attendance (59% of practitioners agreeing) and their ability to concentrate in school (68% agreeing).

#### Increased attainment

10%

*"We helped another family settling into a home after a long-term spell in temporary accommodation in hotels/hostels. Again, the donations helped the family to settle into the area quickly and supported the children (in both cases) into a family routine (and therefore into school)."*

*Practitioner*

### Avoiding taken into care

Just over a tenth of parents/carers (11%) reported that the help they received from the Big Hoose prevented their children being taken into care.

#### Avoided taken into care

11%

*"We deliver intensive support to families at risk of having children removed. By having access to the Big Hoose and the products they supply, it gives us more time to focus on keeping the family together."*

*Practitioner*

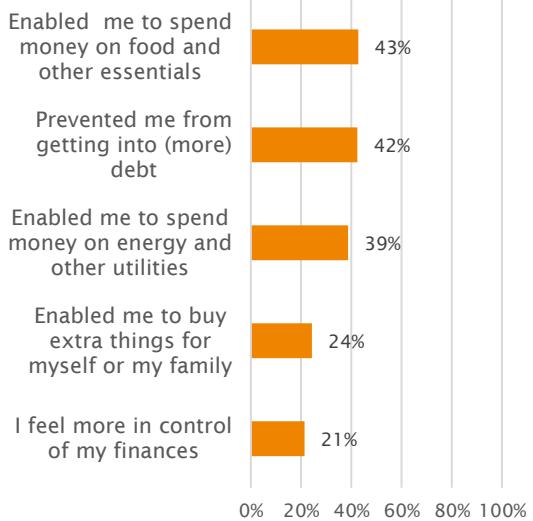
### Outcomes for Parents/Carers

#### Increased financial autonomy and reduced debt

The Big Hoose had a positive impact on the finances of most parents/carers (90%). This was also reflected in the views of practitioners, with 96% observing a positive impact in the financial situation of their clients.

#### Increased financial autonomy and reduced debt

90%



Around two-fifths of parents/carers were able to spend more money on food or other essential items (43%), avoided going further into debt (42%), and had more money to spend on utilities, owing to the support they had from the Big Hoose. Just under a quarter (24%) could now afford to buy extra things for themselves or their family.

*"I was in over £3,000 debt with Scottish Power, worried and stressed over the rise in gas and energy costs. I lost my job in October while pregnant. The donated products have greatly helped my whole family."*

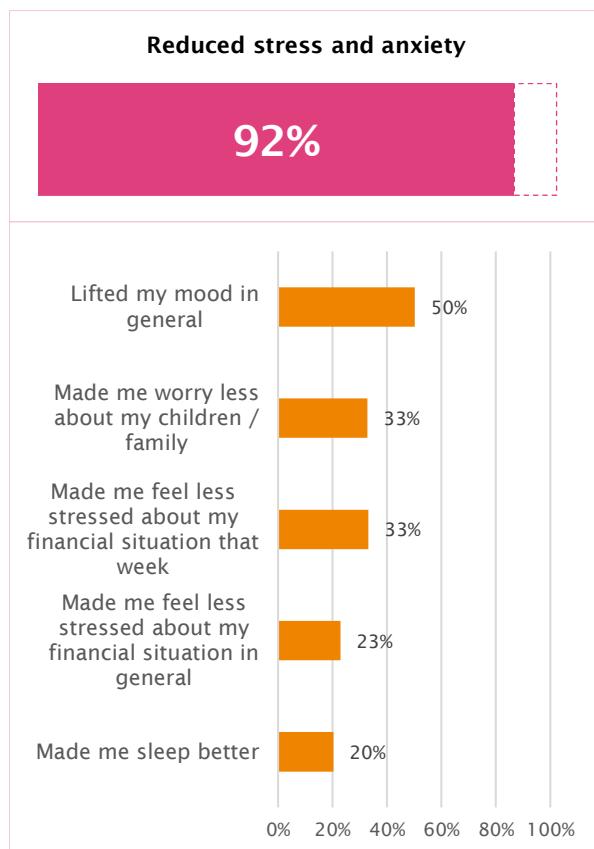
*"I was in a lot of debt and was moving to a council house. The things I got from this [Big Hoose] were brand new and I was able to paint my kids' bedrooms to make my home feel homely with our own stuff. It really reduced my stress levels as I was so worried about having nothing."*

*"I honestly didn't know how I was going to be able to get through the price increases with everything going up, being so in debt, lost my job, pregnant with baby 5, alone. It was a really stressful time for me and my children."*

*"It saved me going into more debt."*

### Reduced stress and anxiety

Most parents/carers (92%) felt that the support from the Big Hoose had a positive impact on their own levels of stress and anxiety.



As well as lifting their mood in general (50% of parents/carers), the help from the Big Hoose had made parents/carers worry less about their family (33%), worry less about finances in that week (33%), and worry less about finances in general (23%). For a fifth of parents/carers (20%), help from the Big Hoose has enabled them to sleep better.

*"Receiving nappies, wipes and toiletries helped take a strain off my finances during a rough time and it helped me not to worry or stress about how I was going to feed my family."*

*"It reduced my anxiety in providing for my family."*

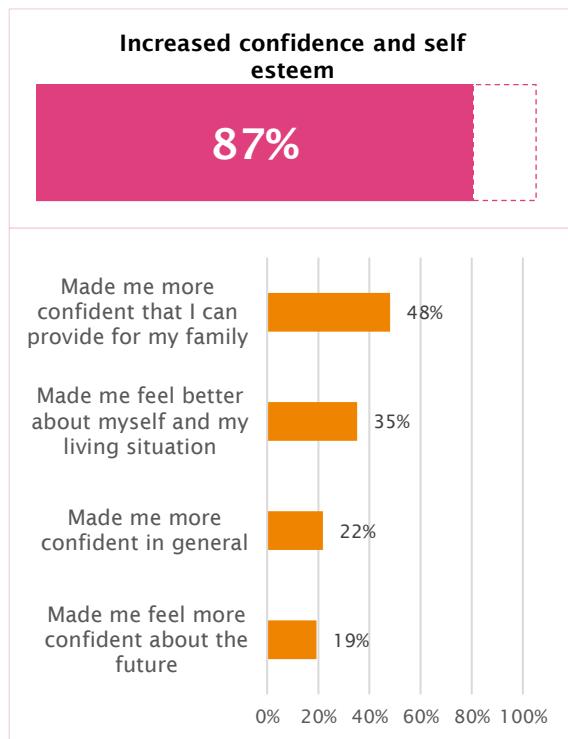
*"My mental health would be suffering so much more without the help."*

*"Happy to know I didn't have to use money from my budget for the things I got from donations and could buy other things. Helped my mood so much and less stressed about life!"*

*"It has enabled a stress to be taken away. I needed nappies and wipes for my children and because I was as able to get these it enabled there to be money for me to eat that week. Without this help I wouldn't have been able to afford to."*

### Increased confidence and self-esteem

The majority of parents/carers (87%) reported an increase in their own confidence and self-esteem as a result of the Big Hoose. Practitioners were similarly positive, with 89% agreeing that they had seen a difference in the confidence and self-esteem of their clients.



Most commonly, parents/carers felt more confident in their ability to provide for their family (48%), with a significant number reporting that the Big Hoose had made them feel better about themselves (35%), more confident in general (22%), or more confident about the future (19%).

*"I don't have to feel ashamed that I can't afford things for my daughter."*

*"It not only lifts my mood, it helps me by seeing another person that day and not being so isolated."*

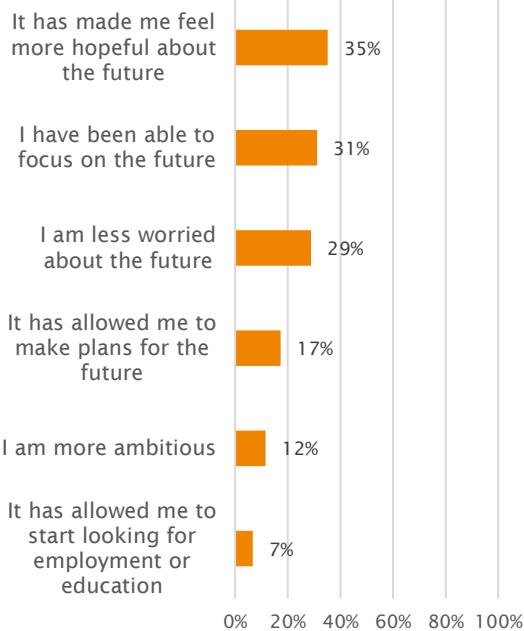
*"We have received from Home Start and our primary school it's been a great help... the work Big Hoose does really help families like us struggling to lift our spirits."*

### Improved motivation and outlook on future

More than four-fifths of parents/carers/carers (84%) said that their involvement with the Big Hoose had improved their motivation and outlook for the future. The same percentage of practitioners also observed a positive impact on their clients' outlook for the future.

#### Improved motivation and outlook on the future

**84%**



Parents/carers reported feeling more hopeful about the future (35%), better able to focus on the future (31%), and less worried about the future (29%). Some also said that the support from the Big House had enabled them to make plans, develop ambitions or start making inroads into employment or education.

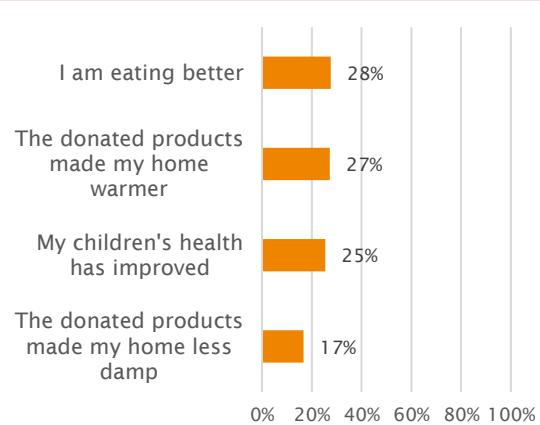
*"I am not worried about next month."*

### Improved physical health

Most parents/carers (70%) noted improvements to their physical health because of the help they had received through the Big Hoose.

#### Improved physical health

**70%**



As well as eating better (28%), parents/carers reported having warmer or less damp homes thanks to the products they had received (27% and 17% of parents/carers respectively). A quarter of parents/carers had observed an improvement in the physical health of their children.

*"The goods and products allow them to live in a cleaner and more comfortable environment. It has allowed children to have clean and well-fitting clothing and has also allowed children to have access to age-appropriate toys and games that aid in them reaching their developmental milestones."*

*"By being able to provide essentials in home equipment, families were able to spend their money on food and were able to start cooking healthy food for the benefit of the whole family."*

*Practitioners*

### Increased ability to focus on work or education

Some parents/carers/carers (7%) were better able to focus on their own work or educational

responsibilities as a result of the support received through the Big Hoose.

**Increased ability to focus on work or education**

7%

## Impact on Practitioners

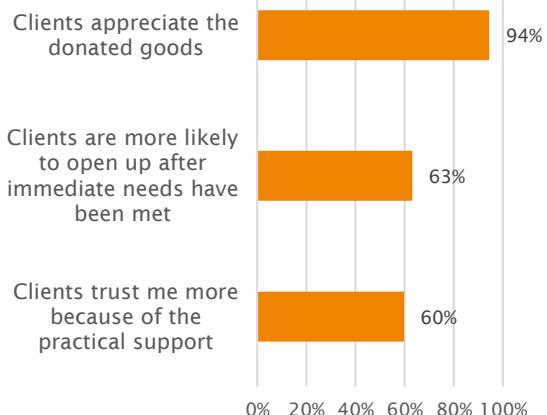
Practitioners who have referred their clients to the Big Hoose for support also reported a range of positive outcomes for their own practice.

### Improved relationship with client

Almost all practitioners (96%) reported that linking clients into the support offered by the Big Hoose had led to an improvement in their own relationship with the client.

### Improved relationship with client

96%



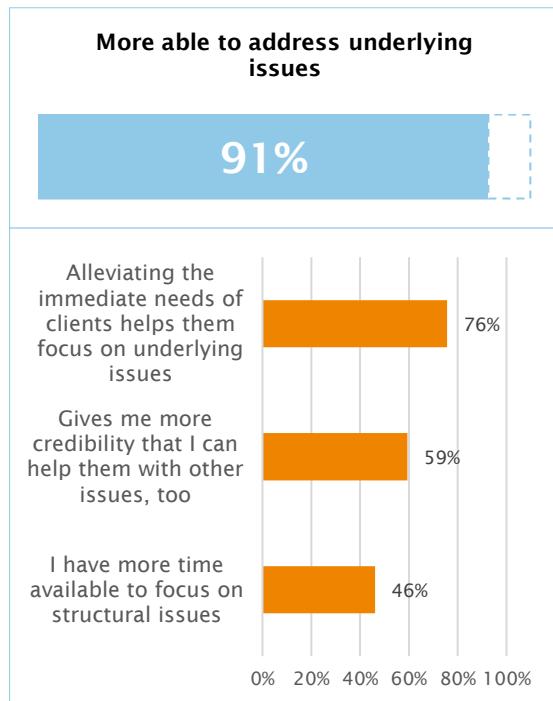
In addition to the appreciation clients had for the donated goods (observed by 94%), the majority of practitioners also found clients to open up more to them (63%) or demonstrate greater trust towards them (60%) due to the positive impact of the support from the Big Hoose.

*"After seeing that we could help in a practical manner and in a very short space of time, our clients are now far more trusting that what we say we will do, we carry out."*

*"It has been a huge success in the way we address and manage cost of living crisis for families. It also has allowed further trust and engagement with the cottage staff and has minimized shame in asking for help."*

### More able to address underlying issues

Most practitioners (91%) said that because of the support clients had received through the Big Hoose, they were better able to work with clients on their underlying issues.



Practitioners observed that dealing with immediate needs through the Big Hoose gave clients the space to focus on underlying issues (76%). The majority (59%) also found that referring to the Big Hoose gave them credibility with clients, allowing more scope to deal with other issues.

*"Our families are closer in communication with us and allow us to engage in more meaningful work with them."*

*"Being able to give practical help and support means that clients will let us know that they are in difficulty instead of hiding their needs. We are able to discuss with clients how they can budget better and how they can plan ahead instead of waiting till they get into debt before asking for help."*

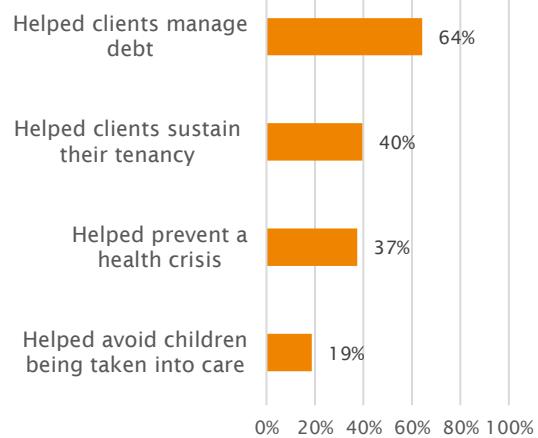
*"It has allowed us to support with smaller provisions and help more clients."*

### Avoidance of crisis situation

For more than a third of practitioners (36%), referrals to the Big Hoose had prevented a crisis situation for their clients.

### Clients have avoided a crisis situation

**36%**



Most commonly practitioners reported that the Big Hoose had supported clients to avoid a crisis by helping them to manage their debts better (64%). A significant number of practitioners also reported a positive impact on clients' tenancies and health, helping to avert crises in these areas.

*"A lot of families in receipt of goods and products from the Big Hoose are living in sustained poverty and struggling to stretch the very little budget they have."*

*"It has helped my clients who have had to set up a tenancy on their own with their children due to domestic violence, or being homeless with a baby, struggling on benefits, struggling with the cost of living, and parents/carers who separate and need to provide for their children on one income."*

*"We have managed to help 58 families in the past week. They have to choose between eating and heat."*

*"We were able to support clients with household items in a new tenancy after fleeing domestic abuse. We were able to provide substantial food parcels which included toiletries and cleaning products. This allowed clients to use other monies on gas and electric. They would have gone without food or heating if we had not intervened."*

*"It has freed up funding that would have had to be spent on these types of goods, allowing my organisation to look at what else is needed within the communities to improve the lives of families."*

### Increased and quicker access to resources

Three-quarters of practitioners agreed that working with the Big Hoose enabled them to access greater resources and in quicker time.

#### Increased and quicker access to resources

75%

*"Over time the response time and items being available has become quicker, and this helps target families quick."*

*"Instead of filling out millions of referrals and requests, I was just able to fill out a very simple form and was able to pick up what needed just in a couple of days for families, providing well-tailored and quick support."*

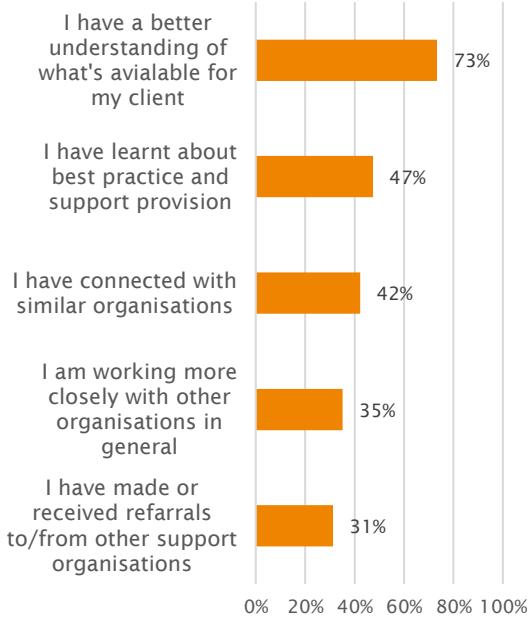
*"I have saved an incredible amount of time not having to source goods from other agencies."*

### Increased collaboration

For the majority of practitioners (81%), the Big Hoose has led them to work more collaboratively with other organisations.

### Increased collaboration

81%



Most commonly this was as a result of having a greater knowledge of other support and services that are available for their clients (76% of practitioners). A significant number have also learnt more about good practice (47%), made connections with other organisations (42%), began working more closely with other organisations (35%), or made/received referrals from new partners (31%) – all as a result of working with the Big Hoose.

*"As we have the Community Shop within the school. Those who are struggling have used the facility. From conversations they have had with our volunteers, I have, where and when necessary, been able to offer additional support."*

*"It [Big Hoose] opens up conversations about other community resources and other support systems out there, whether that's parent/carer baby groups etc."*

## Case Studies

Below the stories of Christine, Brian and Kelly<sup>7</sup>, three parents/carers that received products donated by the Big Hoose.

### Christine<sup>8</sup> - Family Support

Christine lives with her four children in a single parent household since her partner, and the children's father, died suddenly in the family home. This traumatic event impacted each family member differently and Christine was referred to The Cottage Family Centre's (CFC) therapeutic service in 2022. At the time, her eldest daughter Michelle was presenting with behaviours that Christine found hard to manage, including being verbally and physically explosive, and not going to school. The family began attending sessions with their allocated worker to work through their distress, process their collective and individual experiences of loss, and strengthen the relationship between Christine and all her children, but in particular Michelle.

Christine and her allocated worker, Claire, discussed the various stressors that Christine was coping with, which led to a conversation about the family's financial situation. Christine's partner had been the income provider for the family before he passed away and Christine had been struggling financially ever since. She was initially reluctant to ask for help, but when Claire described what the Big Hoose project could provide, Christine agreed that it was something that would benefit her and her family.

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*"It's been a real weight off [Christine's] mind, because she knows that if she's needing something she can just message and ask."*

*- Claire*

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Christine's family has been referred to The Big Hoose a number of times and received donations of cleaning products, food items, sanitary products and other essentials. They have also received one-off items including duvets, duvet-covers and towels. When one of the children had a birthday coming up, The Big Hoose provided extra toys and clothes as gifts for that child.

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*"One of the children has a birthday coming up and we were able to get a bundle of*

*toys. That's the kind of thing that as a parent - I'm a parent myself, and I would struggle to budget for that sometimes and in the back of your mind you think, 'Right, I want to get them something that they really like.'"*

*- Claire*

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Providing for four children is expensive, and without the items she receives from The Big Hoose, Christine would need to make difficult decisions about what to prioritise when spending money. Items like new towels and bedding are so far down the list of priorities that it is unlikely Christine would have been able to afford them. Thanks to The Big Hoose, the family have items that they are proud to own without falling into debt or limiting their budget in other areas. Consequently, Christine has been able to use money saved to organise outdoor activities and trips for them to go on together. Claire emphasised that spending time as a family doing something they enjoy has been vital for this family in their journey through the grief and loss of Christine's partner.

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*"It's allowed her to use what little money she does have to spent - she can keep that for something else, because they do try to spend time together as a family and they do go outdoors as much as they can."*

*- Claire*

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As well as enjoying time together outside, Christine feels better about her home environment too. It is a challenge to keep a house clean and tidy with four children to look after, so having high quality cleaning products to make it easier is a huge benefit to Christine and enables her to create a homely and safe environment for her family more easily. Claire has seen a change in Christine's confidence and mood in the months since she made the first referral to The Big Hoose, and reflected that the support from The Big Hoose means that they are able to do better than just 'get by'.

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*"What I've seen is a mum and a family that have been kind of hidden away a little bit and not really wanted to come out into the world and not felt sure about getting help. And then gradually they've accepted that I*

<sup>7</sup> All names have been changed for anonymity.

<sup>8</sup> All names have been changed for anonymity.

*think they feel really welcomed and comfortable here."*

*- Claire*

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Having The Big Hoose to turn to has also strengthened Claire and Christine's relationship, and given Claire an additional tool she can use to support Christine's family. Claire described the family's excitement when she drops off items, and reflected that being able to provide that for the family also had a positive impact on her own mood. These shared positive experiences have led to Christine being more open with Claire about when she needs support, which means that Claire is able to do her job more efficiently and easily.

*"It's really nice to be in this position with them, especially with everything else that they're dealing with - we can't fix all of that, but we can help in other ways and be a supportive presence."*

*- Claire*

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### **Brian<sup>9</sup> – Dads and Little Ones**

Brian has a one-year-old daughter Casey, with whom he has been attending the Dads and Little Ones group hosted at the Cottage Family Centre (CFC). His family was referred to CFC to help with his wife Stephanie's postnatal depression. Since then, Brian and Stephanie have split up, and Brian is in the process of finding new permanent accommodation. He has moved from a hotel room to a council apartment as a temporary address, and his allocated worker at CFC, Denise, has made referrals to The Big Hoose to help Brian gather the essentials that he needs to feel comfortable and provide the right environment for Casey to spend time in.

Having split up from Stephanie, Brian had no domestic items and reflected that he would need to start from scratch with buying things for his new home. The financial burden that this entailed was daunting, and added further stress to the already unpleasant process of untangling finances during a divorce. Brian wasn't working at the time and knew that the benefits available to single men were limited. Despite wanting to move out of the hotel he was staying in as soon as possible, Brian was worried about how he

would provide for himself and Casey once other expenses such as utility bills were factored in.

*"[Stephanie] has kept all our stuff and I've had to start from scratch which is pretty daunting."*

*- Brian*

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When an apartment did become available for Brian, he phoned Denise and spoke to her about his mixed emotions. The relief of moving away from the hotel was clouded by the stress of how to access basic necessities like toiletries, cooking utensils, and most importantly a cot for Casey so that she could stay overnight. His own relationship with Casey was strong and Brian wanted to make sure it remained so despite him moving out. This meant not only having space for her stay overnight, but also providing toys, blankets, and clothes that would make her feel at home and help her early development.

Additionally, Stephanie was still struggling with her mental health, and Brian needed to provide as much childcare support as possible to help her cope. Maintaining positive communication with Stephanie was crucial as joint parenting responsibilities required them to cooperate, and they were hoping to separate without the need for lawyers. Brian was determined not to take anything from Stephanie's house to save her having to replace items, and he wanted to be able to return Casey to her mum well rested and happy, which was challenging without the right resources.

Having worked with him at the Dads and Little Ones group, Denise had a thorough understanding of Brian's situation and the sensitive family dynamic, which informed her referrals to The Big Hoose. She was able to collect a range of items for Brian and deliver them to his new address, including furniture, cleaning products, toiletries and baby essentials.

*"When he was at the hotel, he'd have very limited time and he couldn't really bring [Casey] up to his room, so it was sort of downstairs or out and about. [...] It took us a few weeks for us to get a mattress, but then he was able to take her back to his own place that he knew was clean and tidy and he had toys and things for her. So, it meant he was able to spend more quality one-on-one time with his daughter"*

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<sup>9</sup> All names have been changed for anonymity.

*[...] and let Casey get used to it because obviously she's only one and she needs time to get used to Mum and Dad not being there."*

*- Denise*

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Brian commented that he would not have been able to afford the items that The Big Hoose provided, and it would have taken months to save up the money to buy them. Thanks to the referrals, he had household items within a few weeks, and could focus on spending time with Casey while she was there. Brian spoke about how important it was to him that he provided the right care for Casey at this time in her life, especially given that he and Stephanie were splitting up. Denise had introduced him to theories about young children's development, and he had gone on to teach himself more about attachment and development in early years. Without the worry of saving for essential items, Brian had a bit more freedom to do activities with Casey when she came to visit, and this gave him confidence that he was doing the right thing, as she was stimulated, learning and continuing to bond with him.

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*"It would have been a slow process, putting away a fiver or a tenner each month. It takes a long time when you're on limited income. I don't want to just sit around the house when Casey comes, and now I can take her out and do more with her."*

*- Brian*

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As well as being important to Brian on a personal level, it was essential that he had space for Casey as he and Stephanie were arranging custody. Knowing that he could reach out to The Big Hoose for items that would make his apartment baby-safe and demonstrate that he was able to take care of Casey took a huge weight off Brian's shoulders.

He noted that the support he received had a significant positive impact on his mood and mental state in general. Denise recalled the stress Brian was experiencing due to having to cope with a number of difficult life events at once, and having no financial or domestic stability. Receiving products through The Big Hoose removed some of this stress, particularly as the

process and delivery of the items was so quick and easy.

As a result, Brian found he was able to concentrate on his future and start thinking about his employment prospects. Brian has a master's degree and was keen to get back into work as soon as possible, but his time had been completely taken up with his family and housing crises. He reflected that he hadn't expected to start thinking about work again so quickly, but he was already in a position to speak to employability advisors and take steps towards employment.

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*"Because he has that space, because he has that household and it's all set up, and he has space for Casey - he couldn't do anything until he had that all ready - now he has that, he knows which days he can and can't work, and he's been working with our employability officer to see about employment opportunities."*

*- Denise*

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### **Kelly<sup>10</sup> – Parent and Child Group**

Kelly has been a part of the Cottage Family Centre (CFC) for a number of years. When her second child, Brandon, was born, she was referred to the Parent and Child group to help her cope with the new arrival, as she had just split up with her long-term partner. Kelly had been financially dependent on her partner and was worried about how she would cope with the cost of a new baby and being a single parent.

Kelly is familiar with lots of staff as she had taken her children to the creche, attended Family Fun Days, and accessed various support groups over the years. Though she was nervous about opening up and asking for help, when she explained her concerns and her needs, the CFC team introduced her to The Big Hoose project and showed her the inventory they had available at the group. Kelly could therefore identify exactly what she needed – and also had the opportunity to request items she wouldn't otherwise have known where available. For instance, a referral was made for Kelly to receive a hoover, which was delivered to her within a few days. She also received donations of baby products such as nappies, wipes and blankets,

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<sup>10</sup> All names have been changed for anonymity.

and cleaning products and other essentials for her home.

The donations Kelly received made an immediate difference to her financial situation. She reflected that nappies and baby wipes are expensive, so receiving these products for free meant she could focus her money on other demands such as paying bills and buying essential groceries for herself and her daughter. As well as helping her to save money on essential products, The Big Hoose provided Kelly with items that she would not have been able to save up for.

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*"I wouldn't have been able to afford these things otherwise, especially the hoover. It allows you to spend money on other things."*

*- Kelly*

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Since moving out of her partner's home, Kelly lived further away from her daughter's nursery and needed to take the bus to drop her off each day. Having the extra cash to make this journey helped make Kelly's days easier and lifted some of the stress that came with separating from her partner. Kelly reflected that overall, the support she received from The Big Hoose alleviated her stress and helped her cope. She was less worried about making sure she had everything her son needed, as she knew she could turn to The Big Hoose in an emergency. The donations also included items that lifted her mood and helped her bond with her children. Kelly mentioned the toys that she had received and commented on the high quality of all the products that had been donated through The Big Hoose.

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*"They really enjoyed the toys and it helps them develop and gives me something to do with them."*

*- Kelly*

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The staff who worked closely with Kelly noted the support from The Big Hoose had helped to ease the stress that Kelly was facing, and this gave her the opportunity to engage more with the support groups she attended. Though she had attended CFC for a number of years, she lacked social confidence and was still apprehensive about taking part and in particular about asking for help. Knowing how The Big Hoose worked and what they could provide encouraged Kelly to open up to the staff a bit more about what she needed. They saw her general confidence grow,

and reported that their relationship with Kelly was stronger as a result of being able to reliably provide practical and material support through The Big Hoose.

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*"Having that support, building up a relationship with a specific staff member, and then coming along to the centre, I think that's really benefitted the family. And I think that now she's at a place where she probably is a bit more confident."*

*- CFC Staff*

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## Environmental Impact

All interviewees agreed that The Big Hoose has a positive environmental impact as well.

### Donating businesses

The environmental impact of some donations is clear, because it diverts the products from going to landfill. For example, the linen goods and paint that is now donated would otherwise end up in landfill.

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*"We've donated 20,000 duvets that otherwise would have gone to landfill."*

*Donating Business*

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For other donating business that would not send products to landfill the environmental impact is caused by extending the lifecycle of products and contributing to the circular economy.

For example, unsold products from Amazon would otherwise either be sold in bulk for rock-bottom prices or be incinerated with Energy Recovery, both solutions with a much greater negative environmental impact than donating to The Big Hoose.

By donating products to The Big Hoose additional packaging and transportation is avoided.

For donating businesses, the environmental impact of the project is important, however, addressing poverty is more pressing.

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*"The key reason we're doing this is to help people. Environmental sustainability is a by-product." And that is absolutely fantastic."*

### *Donating Business*

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The Big Hoose provides businesses with a platform for sustainable re-use of products that have not reached their end-of-life, particularly for products that are packaged in bulk.

For example, one business mentioned a pallet full of mobile phone chargers. In the past this would have gone to landfill or sold at a cutting edge price, probably abroad. Donating this to a charity, which many businesses have done in the past with surplus products, would not be suitable, as no single charity can make good use of a pallet full of chargers. The scale and reach of The Big Hoose means that they can now donate these products.

Some interviewees were concerned that the project could be misused by businesses to get rid of their waste by 'donating' it to the Big Hoose. Although this is a potential risk, there is no evidence of this happening.

### **Referring practitioners**

For most practitioners that refer their clients to the Big Hoose, avoiding waste and environmental impact is important.

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*"I actually can't believe the stuff that would go to landfill, it's unbelievable. Especially clothes and shoes - there's nothing wrong with them."*

*"People hate seeing waste, so that is important."*

### *Practitioners*

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Some practitioners, however, indicated that from their perspective environmental impact is not relevant.

### **Key stakeholders**

Key stakeholders also find environmental impact important, but some are less sure about this. They see the project focussing more and more on alleviating poverty.

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*"It was certainly identified as a key benefit up front, but it's one we've kind of lost sight of, because most of the*

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*concentration has been in the poverty side."*

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### **Big Hoose Board and staff**

The Board and staff are very aware of the positive contributions that The Big Hoose makes to the environment by repurposing products and giving them an extended lifespan.

### **The Big Hoose**

The project aims to become carbon neutral in the future, but it is currently unclear how to measure this.

The Big Hoose also encourages the re-use of donated products by families and practitioners. For example, prams and buggies for twins, that are scarce, are asked to be returned after use.

Some practitioners also return products that they cannot use. One practitioner mentioned they received a large industrial container of food product, that could not be split into portions suitable for a single family. They returned the container for redistribution to a practitioner that could make use of it.

The products that are donated fall roughly into three categories: products useable by families; high value luxury products that are not needed by families and low value products that are not needed by families.

The not-needed high value products are not an issue, they can be sold to support financial independence of the project.

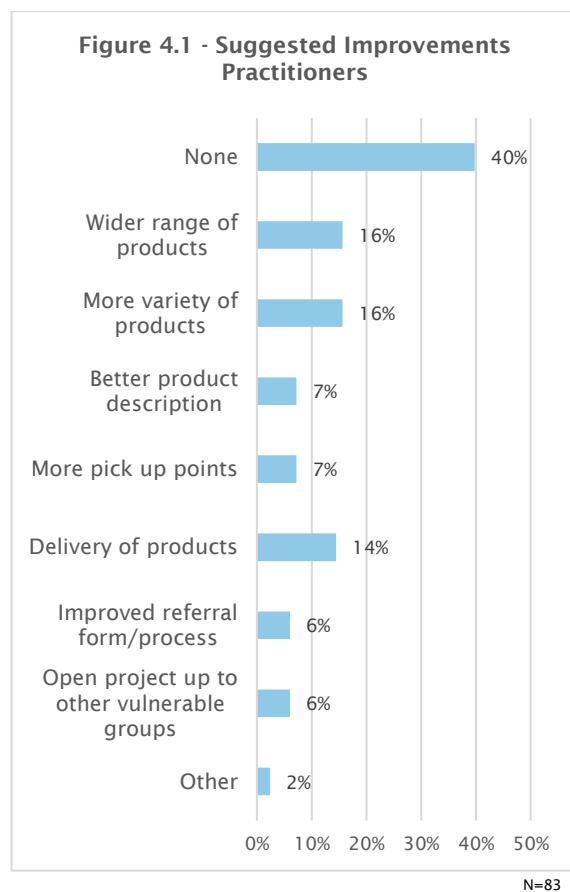
The low value products that are not needed may cause problems. The Big Hoose aims to donate them to charity shops, but they may not want some of the products either. They then take up valuable warehouse space and incur cost, or need to be sent to landfill, which would undermine the environmental goals of the project. This is not a major issue at the moment, however may become more pressing as the project grows.

# 4: Looking to the Future

This section provides the views of donating businesses, practitioners and internal and external stakeholders on the future development of The Big Hoose.

## Improving the Big Hoose

Practitioners referring clients to the Big Hoose were asked if there were any areas the project could improve or if there were any opportunities for future development, which is shown in Figure 4.1.



Four out of ten practitioners (40%) thought that the project could not improve, others (60%) indicated a range of areas for future development.

### The products

Some practitioners would welcome a wider range of products overall, or more variety in the products currently offered through the Big Hoose. Specific suggestions included:

- More food products;
- More cookware;
- Pet supplies;
- More varied selection of bedding and other textiles;
- More varied clothing options;
- Sensory toys for children with additional support needs; and
- White goods/larger electrical items.

A few also commented that more consistency in the goods that are available would be beneficial, as the supply of certain items cannot always be relied upon. In particular, ensuring that there is a continuous supply of essential products/bare essentials like toilet paper, toiletries, personal hygiene products, and cleaning products, was identified as a priority by several practitioners.

Some suggested that the descriptions for items could be clearer at times. For example, it is not always apparent if things are single items or packs (e.g. one pack containing 12 toilet rolls or 12 packs of toilet rolls). Similarly, even where it is clear what the item is, there may be a lack of additional information (e.g., a rug listed with no information on size or colour). Descriptions of unusual items might also be enhanced by having an accompanying picture.

*"Dehumidifier, sounded good but it was a refill and needed the original base."*

*"We got one giant catering tin of beans which we couldn't share out."*

*"I asked for pots and got a poached egg pot and a massive catering pot."*

Some practitioners mentioned some anomalies on the inventory list of products. Sometimes products that are available do not seem to appear on the inventory, and sometimes products that are on the inventory list are not available.

*"I see others collecting items we could use but are never on the inventory."*

*"Only thing that can improve is sometimes items that have been ordered are not received that were on inventory list and clients turn up and we have not got the product."*

### Delivery of products

A common theme in responses was that current arrangements for collection of product were not always suitable. There were several explanations for this, for example:

- Travelling from other parts of Fife to Lochgelly can be time-consuming, meaning a trip to collect items for families can come at the expense of practitioners' regular duties or it doesn't happen at all.
- Some are unable to collect or source alternative transport for bulkier items (e.g. mattresses or furniture). This can result in clients missing out on these items altogether.
- School staff cannot collect during the day.
- Some practitioners are non-drivers or do not have access to a car.

The creation of local hubs/drop-off points in other parts of the local authority and beyond was suggested as a potential solution to the issues described above. Others would welcome a delivery service offered by the Big Hoose directly.

*"I think for collection of the items, if we could arrange hubs or something spread more evenly across Fife as it can be quite hard to find a big chunk of time to get through to Lochgelly."*

*"Transport is an issue as you are located in Lochgelly and we need to use our work time to get there and then distribute goods. It is time consuming. Also, some large goods like mattresses or beds are not accessible as we have small cars so we cannot provide them to the families; this also would be a health and safety issue if carrying them to the houses. Transport would be really beneficial to ease our work pressures and allow more goods transported to families in need."*

*"We cannot order large items such as mattresses, beds, chest of drawers, even*

*large rugs as we cannot arrange delivery. If they could do this, it would be so beneficial to families."*

### Referral process

A few practitioners indicated that the referral process could be streamlined. An online referral from was suggested, with pre-filled fields (e.g. referral partner, client).

*"The Referral form could be condensed. Once a named person for the organisation had signed and completed an initial form, it should be enough for them to sign the request."*

*"It should be for Fife Council on their online referral system. Not working from weekly emails and inventory lists."*

*"On the referral process, once a professional had made their first referral the Agreement can be avoided if there is a logging system that recognises the names."*

*"Rather than complete an agency referral every time it would be better to register once, then complete an inventory request as necessary."*

*"Perhaps the 3 forms we complete each time we reply could be streamlined? I have to print them out, sign them, scan them and send them and 3 of the forms are the same each week, if there was a termly or yearly form for the organisations signature, it would cut the time down to complete potentially?"*

### Going Beyond Fife

There is widespread recognition among donating businesses, and internal and external stakeholders of the opportunity to scale up the project geographically. At present the project is expanding into Edinburgh and there are plans to include Dundee in the near future.

However, there are also number of concerns:

1. The pace of growth is a worry for some. Growing too quickly involves significant risks and any geographical scaling up should be carefully managed.
2. Scaling up requires additional resources, such as warehouses and staff, and causes significant logistical and operational issues:

- Scaling up leads to increasing complexity, such as transport, management of stock and warehouses and coordination between warehouses.
- Single items cannot be distributed between warehouses. Any dispersion of products between warehouses should be per pallet.
- Recruitment of warehouse staff is seen as a challenge. Warehouse staff need special qualities, including the ability to develop and maintain relationships with practitioners and empathy for vulnerable people living in poverty.
- It is clear that Cottage Family Centre cannot be responsible for the distribution of products outside Fife. Therefore, reliable partners need to be found in other areas that share the Cottage Family Centre's values and ethics.
- It will be more difficult to build close relationships with practitioners outside of Fife. This will lead to greater insecurity whether the product will reach the families most in need.
- The cost of living crisis has strongly increased the number of families in need in Fife.

3. Local businesses may not necessarily donate products to a national project.

4. The Cottage Family Centre has the remit to further the interests of children, young people and families in Fife. This is anchored in its constitution. Any geographical expansion requires a change in the centre's constitution.

On the other hand, some interviewees also pointed out that growing the project and involving other people and organisations can also contribute to the longer-term stability and sustainability of the project.

### Focus on Fife

There is a fear that the geographic scaling up of the project will be at the detriment of the people of Fife.

Some interviewees suggested that Fife should have priority over other areas and only products

surplus to requirement should be distributed to other areas.

Some practitioners pointed out that it would be very difficult for them to have to deal with an uneven supply of products.

### Relationship between the Cottage Family Centre and The Big Hoose

Many internal and external stakeholders were not sure whether the Cottage Family Centre is best placed to manage and run a geographically expanded Big Hoose and suggested it become an independent organisation.

A rapidly expanding Big Hoose presents a risk to the core activities of the Cottage Family Centre. There is a financial risk and there is the risk that The Big Hoose will take up too much of the organisation's management time and capacity.

Some interviewees pointed out that growth is a choice that does not necessarily have to be made.

### Extending the Reach

Some suggested that limiting the eligibility criteria to families with children may be excluding individuals also experiencing poverty and in need of the service, perhaps more than certain families that receive support now such as homeless people, refugees, elderly people, or disabled people.

*"I would like the service to be opened up to those in need as well as families that are open to a service. The working poor can be missing out on the support which they need and have no services involved."*

*"Restricting resources to "families" is a failure to address access and equality issues for those who do not live with family, and are still in need."*

*"I would like to see support available for individuals facing financial difficulty as this is the majority of my caseload. I would particularly like to see support for non-custodial parents/carers."*

*"At the moment it is only available if anyone in the household is under 25. To be able to use the project for all the people we work with would be fantastic."*

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This would again require a change in the constitution of the Cottage Family Centre.

## Financial Sustainability

Unsurprisingly, all interviewees agree that financial self-sustainability would be a good aim. There is a realisation that grant funding may not always be available, and it will become increasingly harder to get repeat funding for the project.

Funding for The Big Hoose may hinder the ability of the Cottage Family Centre to attract grant funding for its core activities.

Selling high value donated products that are not required to alleviate the need of vulnerable families is seen as the most viable way forward. There are examples of other organisations that have done this. For example, the British Heart Foundation have raised up to £15m per year by selling high value donations to their charity shops.

Again, many interviewees questioned whether the Cottage Family Centre is the right vehicle to take this forward. This is already understood by the Cottage Family Centre, and the National Family Centre is established for this purpose.

It is obvious that selling donated products requires the agreement of the donating businesses. None of the interviewed businesses expressed any concerns about this.

## Donating Businesses

At present, the right type of businesses are involved with The Big Hoose. As needs change, there may be different businesses required to become involved in the future.

The businesses interviewed were fully committed to the project in the future. Amazon UK, who have been instrumental in setting up the project, is also fully committed to The Big Hoose and the Multibank model.

## Third Sector Involvement

The Big Hoose has a good relationship with the third sector organisations in Fife. However, some external stakeholders suggested that the wider third sector could be involved more in the project

# 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

This section summarises the key findings from the study and makes some recommendations for the future development of The Big Hoose.

From the research the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. The growth of The Big Hoose project is accelerating, both in number of donating businesses, number of practitioners, number of referrals and donated products.
2. The Big Hoose has started to expand into Edinburgh, but this is a slower start.
3. It is unclear how many individual families and children have been reached. An estimation, based on the data submitted on the renewed referral forms indicates this could be as much as 72,000. Although this may overstate the number of beneficiaries significantly.
4. The Cottage Family Centre manages and operates the Big Hoose efficiently and effectively.
5. The support of Rt Hon Gordon Brown is invaluable for the establishment and growth of the project.
6. The Big Hoose clearly fills a gap in addressing child poverty and there is no evidence of it displacing any other services.
7. The Big Hoose creates significant impact for families, children, parents/carers and practitioners.
8. The Big Hoose also makes a noticeable contribution to environmental sustainability by avoiding waste turning up at landfill, extending the usable lifespan of products and contributing to the circular economy.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings of the research, we make the following recommendations:

1. Expansion of the project into a wider geographical area should be carefully managed.

2. Although changes have been made to the referral form, it is still not possible to identify the number of individual families that have received products with great accuracy. This is a result of the referral process that is built on ease of use and trust in the professional integrity of the practitioners.
3. The Cottage Family Centre Board and senior management should have a discussion about how desirable it is to track the destination of the products more accurately. This would involve more admin for both the practitioners and the Cottage Family Centre, more reluctance of practitioners and beneficiaries to use the project and potentially erode the trust relationships that have been built with the practitioners.

There is absolutely no indication that there is large scale abuse happening.

Another complicating factor in establishing the number of individual beneficiaries is the inclusion of 'wholesale distributors', such as Food Banks and schools as referral partners. perhaps, if this is continued in the future, they may be treated as a separate category of donations and not be included in the number of individual beneficiaries.

4. The expressed wishes for a wider range of products, more variety and a continuity of supply, although understandable, is not within the influence of The Big Hoose.
5. Similarly, the setting up of more pick up hubs for products or the delivery of products to practitioners or beneficiaries is not feasible without adding significant cost to the project, and perhaps not the most useful way of using resources.
6. The Big Hoose should investigate the practicalities of improving the product descriptions.
7. The Big Hoose should investigate the possibility of developing an online referral form. This would streamline the process for

practitioners, but will also create significant benefits for The Cottage Family Centre.

8. Opening up the project to other vulnerable groups could be considered, but would go against The Cottage Family Centre's objectives.
9. The roll out of the project beyond Fife should be carefully managed.

Find out more  
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