

Voluntary Sector Children's Services Forum (VSCSF)

"Working together, sharing our knowledge skills and resources to support children, families and communities to reach their full potential."

Wednesday 17 June 2026

10am – 12pm

Via MS Teams

Present:

Eloise Wilson (Chairperson)

CVS Falkirk & District

Laura Jamieson (Minute Taker)

CVS Falkirk & District

Annabel Russell

Go! Youth Trust

Barry Jordan

LGBT Youth Scotland

Beverley Isdale

First 4 Kids

Debbie Hamilton

One Parent Families Scotland (OPFS)

Emma Jackson

Wellbeing Scotland

Jo McCorriston

Falkirk and Clackmannanshire Carers
Centre

Lauren McGregor

Committed to Ending Abuse (CEA)

Melissa Ryan

Self Directed Support (SDS) Forth
Valley

Nariese Whyte

RISE Forth Valley

Sharon Frederiksen

Home-Start Falkirk

Apologies:

Caitlin McKilligan

Sacro

Jayne Brown

Forth Valley Sensory Centre

Lesley Hetherington

NHS Forth Valley

Melissa Condie

Forth Valley Sensory Centre

Sharlene Ramage

Falkirk and Clackmannanshire Carers
Centre

Guest Speakers:

Gillian Millar

Falkirk Council Children's Services

Helena Barrett-Duncan

The Dollywood Foundation UK

1. Welcome and Introductions

Eloise introduced herself, welcomed all attendees to the meeting and introduced the guest speakers.

Members then briefly introduced themselves to the rest of the attendees; Eloise also extended her thanks to Debbie, as this was her last forum meeting before retirement. Eloise highlighted Debbie's consistent attendance of the forum, and thanked her especially for offering her experience and perspective of supporting single parent families across the district.

2. Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held in March 2026 were sent to members for approval by email, and are now available to view on the [CVS Falkirk & District](#) website (linked for your convenience), along with the presentations delivered.

3. Dolly Parton's Imagination Library in Scotland: Helena Barrett-Duncan, The Dollywood Foundation UK

Helena spoke about the [Imagination Library](#), an early years book gifting programme which sends “*free, high-quality books to children from birth to age five, no matter their family's income*”, with background on what this means, why they do it, and how organisations can get involved. She highlighted the 2026 National Year of Reading, and the pertinence of programmes like the Imagination Library, as research shows a significant decline in children's reading habits, which goes on to have an impact on wider literary skills and attainment.

Key points from Helena's presentation (which is available in full on the [CVS Falkirk & District](#) website) are noted below:

- The Imagination Library is a place-based programme, developing partnerships with local communities in the ways which work best for them to support the children in their area.
- Dolly Parton originally started the programme in her hometown in the 1990s; in the 30 years since, the Imagination Library has gifted 300 million books in five countries across the world. It currently gifts 3 million books per month worldwide, and has been running in the UK since 2008.
- Children who are signed up from birth to age 5 will finish the programme with their own collection of 60 books.
- “If Dolly is the heart of what we do, the books are the soul”: all the books are chosen to inspire a love of reading, and to help children and their parents start reading again, to help children love reading and start school with those foundations, and the literary skills they will build on during their time at school, which lead to long term educational outcomes and attainment, and childhood development opportunities.
- Since 2025, each book now also comes with an idea sheet designed to help parents with ideas of “how to bring the books to life”, with songs, craft ideas, and talking tips on how to talk and build those relationships and connection with their child, at any age.
- Evidence shows that reading at home has the power to close the vocabulary gap between children from the most and least deprived areas, increase reading engagement, and can mitigate 30% of the attainment gap. “We know that our programme, the Imagination Library, has the power to help with this.”
- Through the programme, the Dollywood Foundation has conducted research to ensure the Imagination Library's activities are based on evidenced fact; this includes international studies, and the most recent UK research produced in 2022.
 - The UK research, while England-based, found a series of positive outcomes associated with the Imagination Library, including

- strengthening parent-child bonds, improving academic outcomes, and supporting community cohesion through shared capital.
- One of the main findings of this research was the impact of the “nudge factor”: that the books come consistently every month, and complement other book gifting programmes (such as Bookbug).

Helena then went into detail about how the Imagination Library works. As a place-based partnership between the Imagination Library and its community partners, working on a postcode coverage area. The programme’s role is to select and procure the books, manage the delivery process, and ensure the books are received. The team also works with community partners to help them develop and sustain their programme through monthly payments, and promote it to their families. The partners ensure families are signed up to receive the books, and are registered on the book order system.

There is no minimum or maximum size defined for communities. The programme is also not means-tested; this was something Dolly Parton was very keen on when starting the programme, that every child in the community receives a book, regardless of income.

As the community partners are often better placed to know what is needed in their area, the Dollywood Foundation works with them to fund the programme; Helena highlighted that, for example, many rural community groups have access to windfarm funding, local community benefit funds, or corporate sponsorship, which the Foundation would not be able to access. The Foundation can also support applications to larger grants and trusts. Locally, there have been projects run in Avonbridge and Slamannan.

Questions included:

- Is there a way to pay for the books via a one-off, upfront payment? Some organisations are designed so that families would hopefully leave their service before the child is 5 years old.
 - This can be done; the payment goes into the organisation’s Imagination Library account as credit. The monthly payment model is used to ensure that community partners only pay for the books received, but there are recognised challenges around this.
- Could a grandparent pay for their grandchild to receive the books, instead of a community partner?
 - No, as the programme is designed to be a free gift with no cost to families, as part of its aim to help community cohesion.
- Has the Dollywood Foundation ever done national fundraising campaigns to raise funds for the programme? Scouts and Guides, for example, would likely be very keen to support this.
 - Traditionally, community partners did their own fundraising for local programmes, and while this ensures the programme is locally-focused and very responsive, the Foundation recognises the impact on

people's capacity. As a result, it has brought in fundraising capacity in-house to set up a campaign like this, including setting up the infrastructure to run it.

- Helena also expressed her thanks, as knowing there is interest in this is useful feedback.

4. Falkirk's Children's Services Planning Partnership Update: Gillian Millar, Falkirk Council Children's Services

Gillian began with an overview of Falkirk's Children's Services Planning Partnership (FCSP), which is run by the Children and Young People Strategic Leadership Group (CYPSLG) of the Community Planning Partnership (CPP). [Her presentation](#) is also available to view or download online.

The CYPSLG meets every six weeks, and is attended by both Gillian and Eloise (as the representative from CVS Falkirk & District). The group has a statutory responsibility for producing and progressing the Integrated Children's Services Plan (ICSP) for Falkirk District; this drives the outcomes to meet the needs of local children and young people.

The CYPSLG is currently consulting on a new ICSP covering 2026-2029; they are keen to hear from children and young people especially about what matters to them for improving communities across the Falkirk District. The survey is available via [Participate+](#), with approximately 4 weeks left to submit a response at the time of the meeting.

Other highlights included:

- An overview of changes to the CYPSLG governance, including to the oversight board, and an outcomes coordination group which is responsible for quality assurance, reviewing, and auditing the outcomes of the CYPSLG subgroups.
- Updates to the GIRFEC Practitioner Pages, which Gillian encouraged members to view due to the amount of relevant information and resources.
- A Participation and Engagement strategy has been developed, to ensure consistency and continuity across the partnership, as it works to ensure the voice of children is heard, and there is meaningful participation and co-design with children and young people (such as the consultation linked above).
- The 2024/25 report has not yet been finalised, with a September release anticipated, but it highlights the work of the different subgroups.
- The FCSP anticipates an inspection from the Care Inspectorate this summer, after a six month pause in inspections.

Members then discussed the role of third sector representatives from VSCSF on the CYPSLG subgroups, which were previously in place, as this was originally part of the forum's purpose. Members agreed they would like to have this link in place again, with discussion on the best ways to resolve the gaps in communication between the CYPSLG and the forum. Eloise stressed that this forum has to be the space where

updates are shared regularly, and that this should be a collaborative effort (given the wide remit of children's services).

Discussion ended with an agreement to look at the forum's current Terms of Reference and taking the document forward before the next meeting, now that there is a strong, consistent forum membership after a period of change. To support this, the next meeting in September will take place in-person as a working lunch, 12pm – 2pm.

ACTION: Laura to share the consultation in the follow-up email to members.

ACTION: Eloise and Laura to organise the next meeting as a working lunch.

ACTION: Gillian and her colleague Kathy to attend the September meeting with the new ICSP for 2026 – 2029, and the annual report.

5. Member Updates and AOCB

- LGBT Youth Scotland (LGBTYS):
 - At the start of July, LGBTYS will be launching its latest Life in Scotland survey, which informs the [Life in Scotland report](#). This year's survey has been led by a new steering group of young people, and is open to all young people in Scotland who identify under the LGBT umbrella. While it is an in-depth survey, respondents do not have to answer every question, especially any which discomforts them.
 - LGBTYS will also soon be recruiting for a new Forth Valley Youth Worker, who will work closely with Lou Carberry, the Youth and Community Officer. The position will be 12 hours per week, working in Falkirk District and Stirlingshire, with recruitment also beginning at the start of July.
- Wellbeing Scotland: Emma asked members if they knew of available room space for Wellbeing Scotland to continue its one to one support over the summer; members had a number of suggestions for Falkirk District venues.
- Summer Programmes: a number of members spoke about their summer programmes, including [Go! Youth Trust](#) and [RISE Forth Valley](#).

ACTION: Laura to collate venue suggestions and send to Emma.

**Date of Next Meeting:
Wednesday 30 September 2026,
12pm – 2pm, in-person
*venue to be confirmed***

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