



...LET'S KEEP CHATTING

A FCE PODCAST

“Let’s Keep Chatting” was a podcast created by FCE during the lockdown months to support community groups and voluntary organisations in Fife share their work and their responses to the pandemic online.

Over 12 episodes we discuss with guests the impact of lockdown on their organisations, the local communities and the equality groups they worked with. This report summarises the conversations that took place over Autumn and Winter 2020-2021.

FIFE CENTRE FOR EQUALITIES
LKC PROJECT REPORT 2020-2021



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Foreword by Chief Executive

In 2019, Fife Centre for Equalities collaborated with Fife Council Research Team to undertake a study to have better understanding how people who are already disadvantaged and affected by poverty also face additional barriers in accessing anti-poverty measures or initiatives due to their protected characteristics. [Let's Leave No One Behind](#) report was launched in November of the same year.

This report produced a number of conclusions and recommendations:

1. Poverty is an issue that affects all groups, cutting across protected characteristics.
 - Services in Fife should continue to focus on poverty as a recognised priority issue, partnership working where appropriate.
2. Certain protected characteristics are more likely to increase an individual's vulnerability to poverty. These include ethnicity, disability and single parenthood, with affordable and adequate transport and childcare being reported as a significant issue.
 - There is scope to review the support currently provided to these groups. There may also be scope to better involve service users in this process to help identify accessibility and support requirements.
3. The effect of poverty on mental health can be significant, and this can be magnified by concern about the view of others.
4. Some protected characteristic groups, such as the LGBT community, may perceive a stigma against them, feeling that inaccurate perceptions limit their opportunities and hinder efforts to access work or training.
5. Social networks and connections with peer groups allow individuals to support each other and share their experiences, having a positive effect on their mental health.
 - There may be scope for organisations to play a stronger role in providing gathering spaces for such groups, promoting connections between those in need of support.
 - There is scope for services working with protected characteristic groups to strengthen communication and promotion around their work and outreach activities.
6. It is difficult to ascertain the true level of demand on services, as studies have shown that certain groups are less likely to seek support. Young men have been identified as particularly reluctant to come forward.

- There is scope for services to assess service demand and whether any specific group(s) with protected characteristics are under-represented and the extent to which services can be inclusive, such as flexibility and capacity to accommodate reasonable adjustments.
7. Certain protected characteristics are at greater risk of missing out on support and assistance they are entitled to, with language barriers having a significant impact. Ethnic minorities and refugees are at particular risk of missing out on support, due to language barriers and lack of understanding about what assistance is available.
- There is scope for services to assess how such individuals can be supported, with the recognition that such support is unlikely to be confined to normal working hours.
 - There is scope for services to provide targeted guidance in different formats and languages, responding to the fact that the system is seen as complex by many participants, e.g. welfare benefits.

Following on from the report, staff and volunteers came up with a creative way to share some great examples of how organisations and groups in Fife help people who are affected by poverty and highlight how poverty affect people with protected characteristics.

I would highly recommend practitioners who work in anti-poverty initiatives to listen to the Let's Keep Chatting podcasts and make links with the organisations featured in this report. If you wish to collaborate with FCE to explore further how we can alleviate the added impacts that poverty has on people with protected characteristics, please do get in touch.

Nina Munday

About Fife Centre for Equalities (FCE)

Fife Centre for Equalities (FCE), funded by Fife Council, started in 2014 with the **vision** to inspire and enable everyone we work with to take action that makes Fife a more equal, fairer place to live, work and study.

FCE's **mission** is to develop a harmonised approach to build a collective voice to champion equality, diversity, inclusion and social justice. Our **values** are to work with honesty, integrity, respect and transparency, and strive to demonstrate a fully inclusive approach in everything we do. We want everyone we work with to share these values in the belief that they will help make Fife a fairer and more equal place.

FCE has five **strategic outcomes**, they are:

1. Individuals feel respected, safe and have the freedom to lead a fulfilling life where they live, work or study.
2. Individuals and groups feel better connected and are able to contribute to public policy and the planning and delivery of local services.
3. Groups, whether already established or just getting started, have the tools they need to engage with their local community in a positive and inclusive way.
4. Third, public and private sector organisations demonstrate best practice in equality, diversity and inclusion.
5. FCE is recognized as a centre of excellence for championing equality, diversity and social justice.

The Let's Keep Chatting podcast supported us in the delivery of strategic outcomes **Two** and **Three** and under the [Plan for Fife](#) the themes of **Opportunities for All** and **Community Led Services**.

Summary

Three strong themes emerged from the Let's Keep Chatting interviews with community groups:

- During the lockdown, community groups collaborated and **reached out beyond their usual networks**, far more than before the pandemic. Routine interactions between groups went beyond making referrals or signposting towards collaboratively finding practical person-centered solutions. Typically, this involved sharing local knowledge and expertise with each other as well as supporting informal social or voluntary groups mobilise.
- Groups and organisations also describe their experiences as **becoming part of the fabric of their local community** instead of being seen as an organisation that is *operating* in an area or location. As more people and businesses stepped in and helped small local organisations, this created a wider community spirit and helped remove some of the stigma that might have been attached with accessing foodbanks.
- Groups and organisations that delivered support services, food packages and anti-poverty measures also shared the importance of a **collaborative approach for dignity in practice**. In several cases, mobilising around practical action(s) and responding to the immediate needs changed the dynamic from situations where people felt taboos around needing to ask for charity to being involved or part of a community response.

At FCE, we learned that podcasting can be an effective and cost-effective platform for groups and organisations to directly share their experiences, improve public understanding of the work they do and reach out to wider audiences.

The podcasts also provide a snapshot of how organisations in Fife fared during the pandemic, sharing in their own words the challenges they had in adapting to the circumstances and the frustrations and barriers they faced in reaching out to people living in poverty, or facing additional barriers due to their protected characteristics.

Background

In September 2020, Fife Centre for Equalities hosted the [Diversity Week Fife](#) series of events completely online. Along with many organisations that year, when Covid-19 broke out we had to close our offices, switch to remote working and were constantly having to think of ways to keep connected with service users.

Through our conversations with equality groups and through our casework, we became aware of how service restrictions as a result of lockdown had left many Fife communities feeling left out of the communications loops. Throughout the lockdown that has been a lot of information shared through professional online networks, but the face-to-face points of contact were restricted. Equally, we were hearing about how local communities were also self-organising to respond to need where it became apparent.

We chose the theme of **'Count Me In'** as we wanted to give a voice specifically to those that were under the radar, hard to reach or simply easy to ignore. We also wanted to hear directly from grassroots community groups or organisations the work they have been doing in response to need in their community.



Figure 1 Diversity Week 2020 Poster

This is how we started the **'Let's Chat'** coffee mornings during [Diversity Week Fife 2020](#). We hosted informal conversations with [Food for the Future and Leslie Community Pantry initiatives](#), the [Litter Picker Brigade](#), [BRAG Enterprises](#), [SHIELD Fife](#), [Fife College Student Association](#) and the [Fife Interfaith Group](#). Those are all available online.

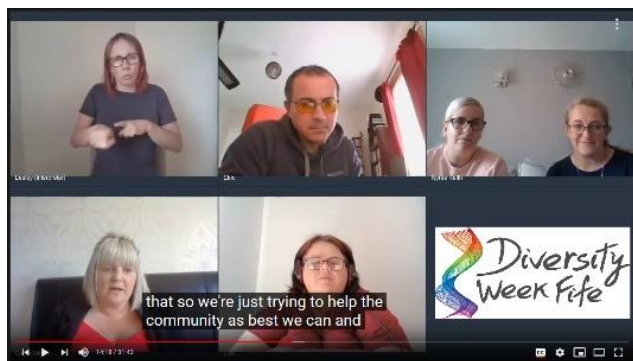


Figure 2 Diversity Week 'Let's Chat'

Despite a couple of hiccups with internet connectivity (!) the Diversity Week online events were well received and that the informal chats were very accessible. We hosted the events with BSL interpreters (thanks to the [Fife Council Deaf Communication Service](#)) and made the videos using closed captions (CC) available on YouTube afterwards so that the recordings could be listened to or watched at any time that was convenient.

In our feedback, was a request that we were 'keep chatting' somehow and the next step for us was to find out how we would approach running a podcast.

Approach

We set up '**Let's Keep Chatting**' immediately after Diversity Week so that community groups or voluntary organisations would have a platform to share directly with listeners the work they were carrying out during the lockdown and tell us a bit about their experience of the pandemic. The podcasts (and videos) would mode of communication for people who might prefer to listen to conversations about the support that exists, or to shout outs to participate and contribute.

We chose to keep the informal format started in Diversity Week so the episodes would be easy to listen to and a complement to the tone of formal guidelines and official announcements that were required to be in circulation for public health and safety. We asked the guests to share the impacts they had noticed on individuals or communities with protected characteristics and people living in poverty, including service users, colleagues or people in their local area.

The 'chats' were set up so that they would take place during the guest's free time or lunch hour. We wanted to replicate the informal conversations that take place between community sector colleagues and volunteers, where discussions around a tea or coffee break would also be useful to find out about what was happening locally in Fife. We also asked how the groups were helping service users and networking to gain ideas and support between organisations.





Figure 3 Let's Keep Chatting Podcast





The recordings were not rehearsed (although we did have to re-record one episode three times due to ongoing connection issues), but we made sure to cover the same common themes in each recording session:

1. The reason why the project or community group was set up.
2. The impact of Covid-19/lockdown on the project or group's work.
3. How the staff or volunteers themselves were coping.
4. If they had noticed specific impacts on people with protected characteristics or living in poverty.
5. What could a listener do to join, take part, or support the group?
6. And at the end, a shout out or promotion of events.

Who took part? – Series 1 Overview





Series 1 was a direct continuation of the conversation we started in Diversity Week and we discussed in more detail issues around **food insecurity**, the impact of being restricted to **staying at home** on **mental health**, for people with **learning disability**, for people from the **LGBT** community, personal safety and **domestic abuse** for women and girls, and also **homelessness** during the winter season.


Date	Organisation		Organisation type	Type or area of work (discussed on the podcast)
10/09/2020	SHIELD (September 2020)		Community group	Foodbanks, food aid, West Fife area
15/10/2020	EATS Rosyth		Charity	Foodbanks, food aid, Rosyth Area

Date	Organisation		Organisation type	Type or area of work (discussed on the podcast)
29/10/2020	Collydean Community Centre		Community Group	Foodbank, Local activities, North East Glenrothes area
12/11/2020	Pink Saltire		Charity	LGBTQ, Fife area
26/11/2020	SAJE Scotland		Charity	Domestic abuse, Fife area
10/12/2020	Include Me!		Charity	Citizen Advocacy, North East Fife area
24/12/2020	Frontline Fife		Charity	Homelessness, Fife area

Who took part? – Series 2 Overview

In Series 2, we noticed how the conversations shifted towards **mental health** and **resilience** – whether for service users, workers or volunteers, families with children and young people. At the end of the series, we looked back and discussed how to record our experiences of the past year and what to look forward to as we **plan for recovery**.

Date	Organisation		Organisation type	Type or area of work (discussed on the podcast)
14/01/2021	ENABLE Scotland		Charity	Learning disabilities, Fife area
28/01/2021	A Veteran's Best Friend		Charity	Mental health, armed forces, Fife area
11/02/2021	Muirhead Outreach Project		Charity	Keeping families together, Glenrothes/Levenmouth area
25/02/2021	Families First – St Andrews		Charity	Supporting families with children (aged 5-16), North East Fife area

Date	Organisation		Organisation type	Type or area of work (discussed on the podcast)
11/03/2021	Fife Voluntary Action		Charity	Supporting local community groups and organisations, Volunteering, Fife area
25/03/2021	S.H.I.E.L.D (March 2021)		Community Interest Company	Foodbanks, clothing aid, food waste management, West Fife area

Key Themes

Note: the section below summarises some cross-cutting themes and a brief summary of organisations that shared with us their experiences. It does not cover all the points that were discussed in the podcasts.

Community needs and COVID restrictions: Balancing Safety and Need.

All the groups we spoke to went through major transitions at the start of the first lockdown in March 2020 and then continued to adapt to changing restrictions and service user needs as time went on. Initial priorities were to retain some form of service delivery while focussing on keeping everyone safe. For most organisations, the lockdown meant for staff and volunteers to work from home (often in chaotic situations) and adapting to communication using online platforms such as Zoom, Teams, Google Meet and other webinars. For some, working from home meant turning their homes into warehouses for food, clothing, phones or laptops, whatever was needed to make up emergency parcels for their service users.

Groups who continued to provide face-to-face contact with service-users had to socially distance and work in pods to adhere to the lockdown rules by using shared spaces but limiting the number of people in a room. Where several services usually operated as drop-ins/open doors, they had to switch to requiring service users to book time slots kept people safe, which also increased admin and the number of staff and volunteer hours required to meet demand.

Funding, gifts in kind, giving time.

Funding has been (and remains) a major concern through the pandemic. While most groups discussed the support they received in kind or through the local community and businesses within Fife, a recurring theme was the short-term nature of most funding arrangements made in response to Covid-19. Another shared concern was the cancellation or limited nature of 2020 fundraising activities and impossibility of planning for 2021 fundraising.

Through the podcast several 'shout outs' were made at the end of the recording, and it was noticeable that most of the call outs were for structural help (premises, workshop spaces, storage spaces) for community groups to organise their work and that at the same time there had been several acts of generosity from individuals and businesses. Callouts for new volunteers were often for people who could help with delivery, networking and for board roles.

Local contact, poverty and dignity.

Many participants delivered emergency food aid to their existing and new service users. Organisations operating in geographic areas (rather than with a specific client group) had to find ways to identify people in need which required going beyond existing networks or forms of communications to make sure the support was available to call within catchment areas. With the restriction to access during lockdown, this meant groups were no longer able to rely on the 'foot through the door' approach which was the preferred mode of contact. Instead, word of mouth or 'friend referral' was used in most circumstances.

EATS Rosyth, a food waste charity, offers free food, that would otherwise have gone to landfill, to everyone living in the Rosyth and Inverkeithing area. Grounded in their principal of dignity in practice, there has never been a requirement other than living in the area to access EATS Rosyth.

Closure of their High Street drop-in hub at the start of the pandemic reduced their initial service to delivery of emergency food parcels. As the recipients could only be identified through referrals or existing members, they felt people who had previously been able to use their service with dignity might now be missing out.





Collydean Community Centre is based in an area of high poverty in North Glenrothes and Collydean. One of the centre's pre-pandemic initiatives was a community larder that made use of food that would have otherwise gone into landfill. Following lockdown their first response was also the distribution of emergency food parcels to people (including families) that were likely to have little access to online shopping. The awareness raising about their services and referrals was provided through their "Community Champions" and networks of volunteers, meaning anybody active in their community from private individuals and groups to the local pharmacist, GP's and health visitors felt part of a wider community action programme that is based at Collydean.

Parcel delivery was arranged through existing volunteers and links into the community, including the Fire Brigade. To focus attention on the stigma around poverty, during the lockdown, staff and volunteers took part in a challenge to live on £1 a day to raise money and awareness of their service as well as just how difficult it is to lift yourself when you live in poverty every day.

S.H.I.E.L.D was created at the very start of the pandemic after the founder found it impossible to donate to the local Foodbank. Respondents to her Facebook post formed a group ready to do whatever it takes to bring food that would otherwise go to waste to people struggling to access food. The volunteers began asking people what they wanted and needed in emergency parcels, aiming to prevent waste and ensure people received food and commodities they could use.

Before long S.H.I.E.L.D volunteers were home cooking meals for 80 to 120 people and desperately in need of larger premises. A local church and the Dunfermline Mosque offered use of their kitchen and halls. S.H.I.E.L.D. now have 40 volunteers and are in the process of formalising their organisation by becoming a CIC (Community Interest Company) and setting up a separate food waste charity. Being a CIC is important because it means people can access their services with dignity as part of the community S.H.I.E.L.D. serve, not as someone in need of charity. With the lifting of restrictions, they plan to launch a café in the Rosyth Co-op aimed at encouraging older people to socialise after the isolation of the pandemic. Services will include a free sit-down meal while a volunteer gets your shopping as well as different types of daytime and evening social events.



Digital Exclusion, Digital Literacy and Poverty

Most participants had to find new ways to stay in contact with their service users. Where poverty was preventing people from accessing services online, all the participating organisations shared with us that they were able to obtain funding and provide equipment. The experiences were more varied in the on-going use of technology or extent of digital literacy.

Collydean Community Centre, for example, were able to apply for not just equipment but also for the initial set up and one-to-one training for people who might have struggled to use the new technology because of barriers such as language.

However, where people had struggled with digital access and/or digital literacy in the period before the lockdown, it was particularly difficult to adapt and change such as for people with learning disability.



Include Me in North East Fife, a citizen advocacy development project working with a wide range of vulnerable adults (partners), aims to link partners with advocates from their local community who are willing to help partners voice how they want to live their lives. Include Me found staying in contact during the early stages of the pandemic particularly difficult.

Many of their partners and advocates are older or had life-long conditions that made learning new ways particularly challenging, did not have access, did not want to have access or found using technology difficult. Staff stayed in contact by telephone and Easy Read newsletters as well as encouraging as many people as possible to try out the new technologies. They applied for funding and were able to provide technology to partners and advocates who were without computer equipment but willing to try out video calling and social media.

Poverty and Homelessness

There was particular focus on preventing homelessness during the lockdown months with policies such as the tenant eviction ban and the additional use of scatter flats. Two groups of people that faced severe challenges during the period were people who had no recourse to public and those that were victims of domestic abuse fleeing to temporary accommodation. While the increase in

number of cases was significant, they were also a rise of much more complex cases where service providers were unsure how to address the distress faced by the individuals.

Frontline Fife aim to prevent homelessness in Fife through education, advice and by supporting people in crisis. Their services are for everyone in Fife and they stress homelessness is something that could happen to anyone as it is not simply a result of not having enough money to pay rent, but a combination of factors such as disability, unemployment, poor mental health or living on a very low wage.



Fife has traditionally had a lower rate of homelessness than the national average but in 2019 homelessness rose by 10% compared to a national average of 3% indicating something has changed. Frontline Fife did not at time of recording have figures that reflected the results of the pandemic but did report they felt the cases that they were seeing were even more complex and requiring even more multi-agency working. At the end of 2020, their team had noticed in Fife was a rise in the numbers of single men using their services in the 16-24 and 35-50 age groups compared to the start of the pandemic. Despite the challenges around homelessness during the winter months, we learnt that more casework was taking place in partnerships with other organisations instead of referring on, introducing a new style of working that is far more person-centred than before.

Experiences of Protected Characteristic Groups

Age: Children, Young People and Families

All families with young children and young people went through the major challenge of homeschooling, with parents or guardians who were also often working from home at the same time. A lot of attention has also been on the impact on learning and grades and how to catch up with curriculum. However, we also learned through the podcasts about the impact on children and young people's mental health due to the loss social contact by those who were not invested in online social networks before the pandemic. Also, we discussed the patterns that crept up during lockdown – such as being always online – and the positive impact on families from breaking the routines and introducing quality time for nurturing relationships.



Families First offers one-to-one befriending services to any child under 16 in North East Fife who faces challenges in life or who might be lonely. They experienced additional service pressure as most volunteer befrienders were St Andrews University students who went home at the start of the pandemic and did not return for the 2020 academic year. The paid staff were under huge pressure to retain existing services and continue to accept new referrals.

Contrary to expectations some children did not like using video calls and social media to stay in contact and even those that did have asked to return to face-to-face meetings as soon as possible. Like many of the other participants Families First regularly called around their service users to ask what they needed and how they were doing and used their links into local businesses and organisations to set up food and toiletries parcel deliveries.

Muirhead Outreach Project supports families in the Levenmouth and Glenrothes area stay together through challenging times. Before the pandemic they worked through an 8-week face-to-face program with families, helping them learn to spend quality time and communicate well with each other. Early in the pandemic they contacted all their families to ask what would help, allowing them to tailor their response, for example some families received play equipment, while others requested food vouchers. The limited access to digital devices was an immediate problem but Muirhead Outreach Project quickly obtained funding for Chromebooks and successfully adapted their 8-week program for online delivery.

Although moving online meant a lot of change for their project, it also opened up new opportunities. The online version of the program is now offered to local schools and will continue to be offered to new families alongside face-to-face activities after lockdown ends. Although Muirhead Outreach Project is solely funded by donations and grants, one area of achievement has been fundraising. They employ a fundraiser, and this seems to have made a huge difference to their media exposure and local awareness, with them making an appearance on STV as well as holding several successful and imaginative funding campaigns throughout lockdown.



Disability and Mental Health

The impact on mental health has been felt across all equality groups, but we learnt through the podcast in more detail about the prolonged impact of lockdown on people who had experienced trauma and for the individuals who had spent much of that time in isolation or shielding. The lockdown had a particularly severe impact on disabled people who rely on personal carers or other arrangement of personalised services as they were limited as well as in high demand, during that period.



A Veteran's Best Friend is a new mental health support and dog assistance charity started during the lockdown months that works exclusively with veterans and rescue dogs. They have a very experienced dog trainer, links with the Dog's Trust and a vet as well as a mental health professional and several people experienced in setting up charities in place. All volunteers are trained in mental health first aid.

Many veterans have very complex mental health problems and have been exposed to trauma far from the normal experience of people outside the military. The charity's aim is to build up to running weekly group therapy sessions for veterans to drop in and have the banter they used to have in the military.

Enable helps families and individuals apply and manage self-directed support (SDS). At the start of lockdown, in addition to trying to carry on as normal, they provided practical help to their service-users such as delivering food parcels to people who were shielding and sourcing personal protective equipment (PPE) to those who needed it. Through the year, the challenges to their service users were facing changed, as some were unable to spend their self-directed support budget and were at risk of losing the unspent funds, while others had their budget cut and needed to find other means of support.

Although many children struggled with home schooling and their families needed help to deal with the new situation, some children preferred being at home and the challenge was to support them back into school, marking a right in **social anxiety**. Despite dealing with different service demands Enable found online working saved on time previously spent in travel. As a result, they have contacted and offered some type of service to all the 100+ people on their waiting list at the start of the pandemic.



(Disability and Mental Health – continued)

Individual Personal **anxiety** rose for both children and young people as for adults from disrupted routines, online interaction and isolation was also mentioned several times in the podcasts, alongside with different experiences of isolation.

The team at **Include Me** also found that the sudden change, loss of normal life and uncertainty around what was happening, led to a huge rise in anxiety in their partners and advocates. One very common worry was based around events if a partner went into hospital, and they spent quite a lot of time early on supporting partners and advocates through the process of updating hospital passports. In addition, as many of their partners and advocates are older or had life-long conditions, it made learning new ways particularly challenging those people who were not already using onlines communications.

Muirhead Outreach Project identified anxiety and loneliness as common factors in the families they worked with before the pandemic and that once lockdown began people's mental health was put under even greater pressure as informal support was harder to access. One aspect of isolation **Families First** share with us was that of children and young people who lived rural locations, where the restrictions on travelling within a short distance from home resulted in feeling even more isolated and lonely.

Pink Saltire reported their community as vulnerable to poor mental health even without the pandemic. The initial findings of the Rainbow Responders survey, August 2020 found 63% of their community classed their mental health as poor or very poor. Separately they have identified very poor service provision for disabled people who identified at LGBTQ+.

Well-being and **positive mental health** was a recurring theme during the interviews and guests several times discussed how important was to have time allocated to switching off digital devices and accessing to the environment and how doing this through a positive hobby or group activity made it more likely. Both **EATS Rosyth** and **Collydean Community Centre** encouraged positive mental health and wellbeing through the practical benefits of growing food, being outdoors and cooking as a social group.



EATS Rosyth have two community gardens, one mainly given over to allotment the other an orchard and garden with beehives. They employ full time gardeners and anyone in the Rosyth and Inverkeithing area is welcome to participate in growing fruit, vegetables and flowers or bee keeping. Their food parcels and food kits always contain fresh produce from their gardens.

Food kits containing step-by-step recipes and all the ingredients needed to cook a meal from scratch can be ordered and picked up from the hub or delivered. They have worked in partnership with many of the new people's pantries opening up, sharing their expertise and encouraging their model of dignity in practice.

Collydean Community Centre also started the Growing Together projet, sending out mini greenhouses, growbags and seeds to anyone who was interested. They worked with Fife Council to start a bike loan scheme and ran outdoor keep fit activities in Gilvenbank Park. Their team managed to encourage much online community participation through running a digital youth club and world cooking classes.

Race, Religion and Belief: Working Across Networks

Many of the participants described the positive benefits of increased links and co-working with community and national organisations during the lockdown, where the links had been 'there in principle' before but not actively used. We heard from our guests how they worked beyond the usual networks, with communities and individuals feeling confident to engage with different networks due to the needs they were responding to.

S.H.I.E.L.D described the new friendships built around offers from a local church and from the local mosque to use their kitchen facilities for making meals and the church halls for storage and making up parcels, bringing people together from the same community who would never normally have met.

Outside Fife, **Pink Saltire**, in partnership with LGBT Unity also identified the needs within LGBTQ+ migrants without recourse to public funds who were living in B&B's in Glasgow. The food provided was usually culturally insensitive and with a budget of £3 a day, face masks and sanitiser were unaffordable, making it impossible for people to keep themselves safe and well. Pink Saltire accessed funding to provide basic services such as sanitary items and care packs. Recognising human contact as vital for wellbeing they also provided mobile phones and data so people could stay in contact with their families.

EATS Rosyth worked alongside Fife Migrants Forum to help Romanian and Bulgarian families who had very little English, talking to them directly to work out what they needed. **Collydean Community Centre** ran English as a Foreign language classes before lockdown. Through these links they encouraged families who had participated in the language classes to lead some of their extremely popular world cooking classes, bringing people together from all walks of life to learn from each other about different cultures.

Sexual Orientation: LGBTQ+ Communities, loss of income and homelessness

Pink Saltire, formed in 2014, initially concentrated on identifying gaps in services for people from the LGBTQ+ community, quickly became involved in Fife Pride events in Fife and beyond. They found LGBTQ+ people living in cities were relatively well supported but there was little understanding of life in rural communities and the islands.

Pink Saltire have always taken advantage of new technologies, with one of their very first public projects based around making short films that could be screened online. They still found home working and purely online contact difficult to manage. Loss of income quickly became an issue. Pride events across Scotland, a key part of their funding, ended abruptly. Although funding was available it was short term and very prescribed, not suitable for funding paid staff.

During the initial lockdown months, Pink Saltire worked on supporting their community with whatever they needed, PPE supplies, laptops, data top-up etc. In August they launched Rainbow Responders a comprehensive study of the way the pandemic affected people in the LGBTQ+ community. Some of their early findings included: 1 in 4 workers in their LGBTQ+ community were key workers; unemployment pre-covid was 3.5% nationally but was 10% within LGBTQ+; and the statistic already detailed that 63% of their community were in poor or very poor mental health.

Frontline Fife also identified members of the LGBTQ+ community living in rural areas in Fife as particularly vulnerable to homelessness. In a recently published report Frontline Fife found 5% of the population identify as LGBTQ+ but a quarter of all homeless people identify as LGBTQ+.



Sex: Tackling Domestic Violence through online support networks



SAJE Scotland deliver the Freedom and Toolkit for Life programmes, both aimed at helping women who are experiencing domestic violence to, identify the tactics of a domestic abuser, reset the boundaries and decide the best course of action for them.

SAJE Scotland shared with us how they had seen an increase in requests for their service, not simply because domestic abuse had risen but because lockdown made existing situations intolerable. Moving online has benefitted their service by removing barriers to access such as, childcare, cost or availability of transport, anxiety of walking into a room full of new people, disability or danger of being caught leaving the house.

Previously limited to face-to-face classes in Fife, the team moved to offering services across Scotland and in some cases internationally. Online or face-to-face, women spend 2 hours a week in the company of the same people, building friendships and confidence. Saje Scotland found the online forum seemed to make it easier for people to continue as a group even once the program had ended. Several groups have held online Christmas parties and other social events together. In common with other participants, long-term funding has been a concern and they are currently applying for crowdfunding and National Lottery funding to keep going.

A shout out: Your Story, Your Community

Our podcast with **Fife Voluntary Action** was a little different from the other podcasts. FVA is the Third Sector Interface for Fife and promotes and supports local community and voluntary action but do not provide a direct service to individuals. They were keen to promote their 'Your Story Your Community' project which aims to gather life stories about experiences during the pandemic. You can find out more about the project and updates through the following links:

- [5min video explaining the 'Your Story, Your Community' project \(extract from podcast\)](#)
- [Share your story \(FVA Webpage\)](#)



Insights and Lessons Learnt

1. **The value of platforms where community groups to communicate freely** (also known as 'civic space')

Let's Keep Chatting provided organisations and community groups in Fife an alternate platform where they could share the work they were carrying through the lockdown, voice out the challenges they faced and learn from each other as they adapted and to circumstances and their service users' needs.

Our intention from the very start was to provide a conversation space, just as if we were having an informal meeting in a café, while following a simple structure and covering important discussion points. By doing this, we gained a more rounded understanding about their challenges through allocating time to 'simply chat' than if we tried to capture this understanding through a survey. As our guests shared laughter and enthusiasm for their work as well as their frustrations on issues that were happening around Fife, they helped paint from their human experience a real and relatable picture of what was happening in their communities.

The snapshot and direct exposure to the work done by community groups has proved useful not only for the groups to promote their work but also funders and researchers who were (and still are) trying to gain a perspective on the covid-19 situation.

Following the podcasts, we also noticed for instance increased collaboration between the food projects, such as EATS Rosyth, Food for the Future, the Leslie Community Pantry and the Glenrothes Foodbanks as a natural progression from the participants learnt more about their organisations and where we could help each other's communities.

2. **The barriers and reach of podcasting/online videos**

Just as our guests and all the people who relocated to makeshift 'offices' at home during the lockdown, we did not have professional recording equipment, business broadband connection or studio environment. However, we found out that it was still possible to carry out and take part in podcast recordings using most current laptops or smartphones. We all experienced digital connectivity issues or some form (service disconnection, or low speeds) but could find workarounds. One of our guests had no internet at work or home but took part by phone while being parked in a location with just enough mobile reception to be able to connect.

There were also low barriers to being to publish the content online with platforms such as Youtube and Spotify which provide storage and make the process relatively easy to share the episodes. Sound and video editing and processing was more demanding

and not suitable for light laptops but does not require expensive software and is easily achievable using only in-built applications. Overall, our experience was that there are relatively low barriers to using podcasting as an engagement and information sharing tool.

As for the reach, we found that recording the interviews as both audio and video interviews made the podcasts reach a wider audience and particularly useful for participants for re-using the content for their own engagement work or service promotion. The different formats made the podcasts accessible to

The YouTube videos had just over **600 views** by 1 June 2021 (for Let's Keep Chatting Series 1 and 2, not counting Diversity Week Let's Chat videos). The podcast page and posts (with their linked spotlight blogs) following the episodes had a total of **2,132 views and listens**. We noticed that most podcasts or videos get 20-50 listens or views initially, and then a still viewed and used as engagement media much after their original publication.

Engagement through our social media also grew each month following publishing the podcasts. On our Facebook accounts (FCE and Diversity Week Fife), our two 2 podcasts where with Fife Voluntary Action discussing 'Your Community, Your Stories' **reaching 3,289 people and engaging 26 people**, and our podcast with S.H.I.E.L.D, reaching **2,400 people** and engaging **79 people**. On twitter, The FCE_Team, FCE_Elric and FCE_Lisa Twitter tweets which shared the podcasts gave just over **3,100 impressions** and **120 engagements** by end the series.

Participant Feedback

How would you use the podcast or episodes?

"Get exposure for our newly formed charity".

"To raise awareness of the organisation, to assist in the recruitment of advocates and to share information with partnership organisations and professionals."

"In order to publicise the work we do at our centre via social media"

About your experience:

"Very nice, made me feel at ease and seemed genuinely interested in our organisation."

"A great way to raise awareness of your organisation and to build on ties with Fife Centre for Equalities."

"The Let's Keep Chatting podcast gave the Centre an opportunity to promote all of the services that we have provided in Collydean and North Glenrothes."

"It was brilliant! It was an honour to be invited for an interview."

"Thank you for the opportunity to take part."

"Very good interview from Lisa and Elric who made me feel very at ease with the whole process."

Appendix 1: The 'Cast'

A few words from Lisa



“Let’s Keep Chatting has been an experience in itself where I have learnt to interview people as well as so much more about local community groups and organisations and the impact they have within Fife. It has given me the chance to discuss and ask questions that I would never really consider doing. Technology has its benefits, allowing me to work from home but the downfall through the whole process has been internet connection. I regularly disappeared throughout Season 1 and the start of Season 2 with Season 2 Episode 3 Muirhead Outreach Project interview taking place 3 times before we were able to get a decent connection. “

“All of these things aside, these podcast sessions have helped groups in Fife to take some time out and reflect on their hardwork and achievements during the pandemic. We have shared ways in which local communities have been able to rally themselves through a crisis and be there for people who may need that extra help and demonstrated that organisations and groups operating through the pandemic were able to adapt quickly to the new rules and learn new skills, especially in technology, while continuing to provide high level service.”

A few words from Elric

“The podcast was really good for keeping connections alive, learning directly about community initiatives and helping to sharing this information out when we were limited to working from home or online. It also made me realise that we need help with media/podcasting more than ever, so I will use this section to make yet another shout out: if you have skills in media production (or would be ready to learn) and would like to help keep the conversations we had going – get in touch. Contact details below!”



And a BIG thank you to the real stars of the podcasts:

Series 1

EATS Rosyth
Collydean Community Centre
Pink Saltire
Saje Scotland
IncludeMe
Frontline Fife

Karen Dorrat and Ethan Daish
Karen Golden
Stuart Duffy
Janet Henderson
Helen Glass
Caryn Nicolson

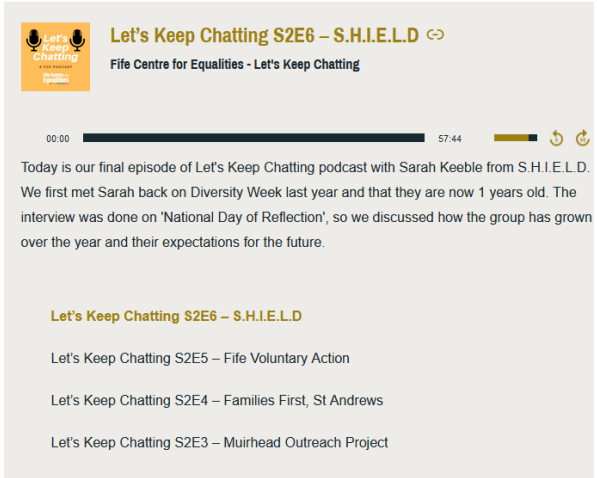
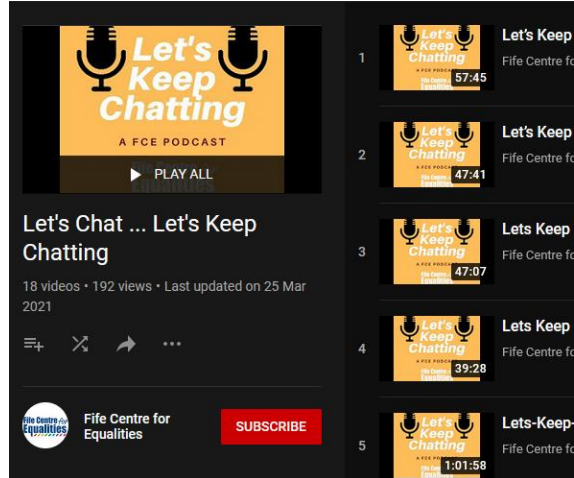
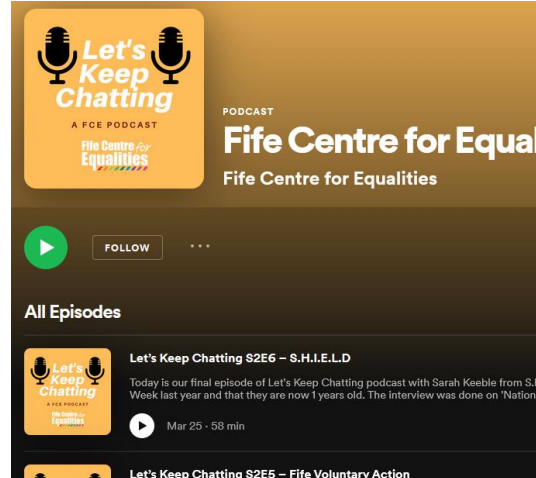
Series 2

ENABLE
A Veteran's Best Friend
Muirhead Outreach Project
Families First – St Andrews
Fife Voluntary Action
S.H.I.E.L.D

Gail Carstairs
Mick Cairns
Stacy Hislop
Morag Coleman
Dave McGrath
Sarah Keeble

Appendix 2: Publishing tools

The podcast was published on Fife Centre for Equalities' [website](#) based on WordPress – this was the main platform for sharing the episodes. We also published the recordings on YouTube to auto-generate closed captions and also shared playlists on Spotify.

FCE Website	FCE YouTube Channel / Playlist	Spotify
		
<p>Let's Keep Chatting Podcast Direct link: https://centreforequalities.org.uk/lets-keep-chatting-podcasts/</p>	<p>Let's Chat ... Let's Keep Chatting Playlist Direct link: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLzXk6OEIgrzLHgB94Oyo4oiwSbi5Sxqal</p>	<p>Spotify Playlist Direct link: https://open.spotify.com/show/3DgyoWB y8HeKVsoELhOsiw</p>

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LinkedIn	https://www.linkedin.com/company/fife-centre-for-equalities/
Newsletter	http://bit.ly/signupfce

