

Lifetime guarantee

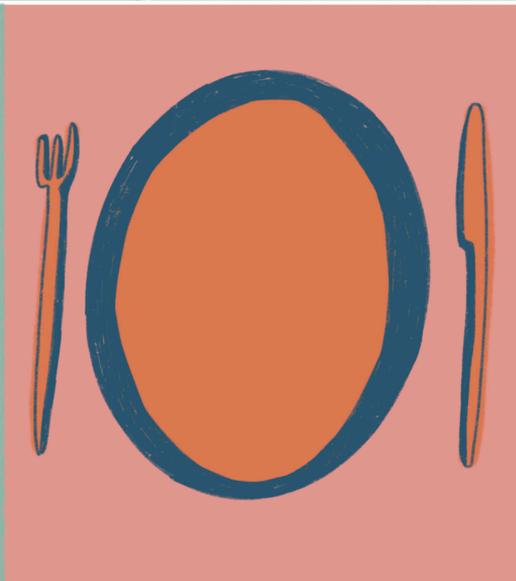
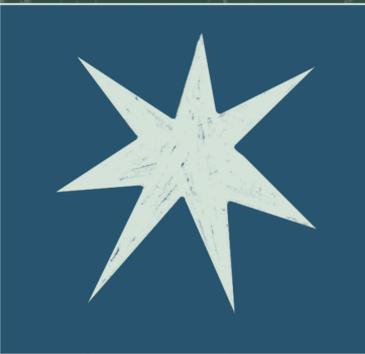
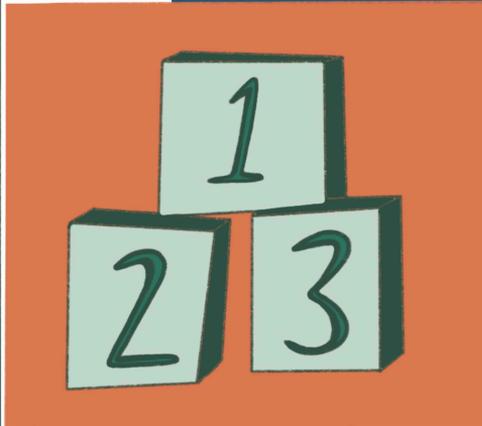
*Kenny Murray on equality,
love and support for Care
Experienced people*

The only way is up

*Could extending the school
starting age be a new chance
for young children?*

Expert panels

*How the power of comics
can unlock literacy*



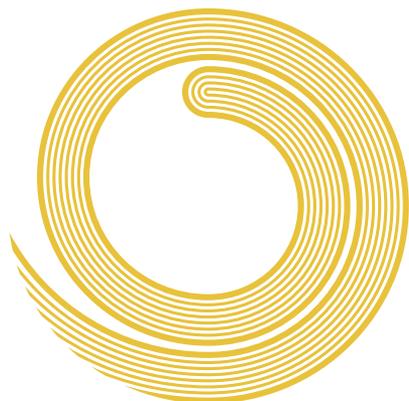
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Welcome

As we head into winter the nights are drawing in, the days are getting colder and there is continued anxiety over what the months ahead have in store. The cost-of-living crisis continues, with each day seemingly raising more questions than answers, not to mention ongoing political instability and uncertainty.

But while we try to tackle the new challenges that have arisen, we mustn't forget the old ones; those that persist or have been exacerbated by recent turmoil. This edition of *Insight* considers issues facing some of our most disadvantaged communities, from Care Experienced people to families facing homelessness and those contending with childhood trauma or disadvantage. Crucially, there are recommendations for change.

It feels an enormous task. But if the last few years have taught us anything it is that there is strength in numbers and working together towards a common goal. I hope the conversations started here will help us do that.



Jennifer Drummond
Editor

@Jen_drum

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jen Drummond'.

In this issue

Upfront

- 4 **Members' community** *Latest news, partnerships and viewpoints*
- 5 **Bulletin** *Updates from across our membership and network*
- 6 **ECA Collaboration** *Meet the Edinburgh College of Art students who've illustrated this edition*
- 7 **Personal reflection** *Sandra Mitchell, Mediation Manager, Resolve*

Changemakers

- 8 **Interview** *Kenny Murray on championing lifelong support for Care Experienced people*
- 12 **Feature** *MCR Pathways on transforming futures through mentoring*
- 14 **Arts Magic Torch Comics and the sequential storytellers unlocking literacy**

Perspectives

- 18 **Dr Lynn McNair** *explores the opportunities of a later school starting age*
- 20 **Gary Walsh** *considers the future of the ACEs agenda in Scotland*
- 21 **Alison Watson** *on investing in long-term housing security*
- 22 **Policy analysis:** *is there progress on mental health, ask Amy Woodhouse and Kaydence Drayak*
- 24 **Books** *The Social Distance Between, by Darren McGarvey*
- 26 **Books** *Representation Matters: Becoming an anti-racist educator, by Aisha Thomas*

Learning, projects & participation

- 28 **ILF Scotland** *How the Transition Fund creates new opportunities for young disabled people*
 - 30 **Home and Belonging** *Reflections and recommendations from the project*
 - 33 **Child Protection Training** *Learning takeaways for future practice*
 - 34 **Members' Spotlight** *Q&A with Social Work Scotland*
 - 35 **The Witch's Finger** *Comic strip by P6 and P7 pupils from Inverkip Primary*
- Cover: **Mary Buchanan**

Insight

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With thanks to Magic Torch Comics for creating a brand new comic strip for this edition. See page 14.

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To contribute to *Insight* or enquire about subscribing, contact Jen Drummond:
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Members' Community

Conversations and knowledge exchange at our Forum

Many thanks to members who joined us at our 27 September Voices Forum focussing on support for the Early Years. The event featured presentations from Public Health Scotland and Parenting across Scotland on the impact on services of the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis.

Feedback from the event included:

"This has been really useful. Thanks ever so much for the conversations this morning – and for all of the research shared!"

Jessica Smith, Children's Parliament

"Thanks for all the knowledge shared and the small group chat – super interesting and motivating."

Sara Vanatta, Save the Children

Our next Voices Forum is on Tuesday 24 January 2023. You can find out about future meetings and all your member benefits by logging in to the Members Hub on our website:

childreninscotland.org.uk/membership/membership-login



Partnering with Yopa

We are pleased to be entering a new corporate partnership with award-winning Scottish estate agent Yopa, to support our work and the activities of our children and young people's advisory group, Changing our World.

Yopa joins the RS Macdonald Charitable Trust as our current corporate partners. If you are interested in discussing a corporate partnership, please contact Tracy Hope: thope@childreninscotland.org.uk

Welcoming new members

A warm welcome to new members joining Children in Scotland since the last edition of *Insight* was published in May 2022. Joining us are: Befriend A Child; Better Lives Partnership; Early Childhood Ireland; Edinburgh Children's Hospital Charity; Finn's Place; Home-Start Perth & Kinross; Leaps and Bounds Nursery – Edinburgh; Respect Me; Shared Lives Plus; Signpost; St Mirin's Out of School Club; and thirtyone:eight.

Shortlist nomination accolade for *Insight*

Insight has been shortlisted in the 'Customer / Member Publication of the Year' category of the PPA Scotland Awards 2022. We are absolutely thrilled to be recognised alongside a number of other prestigious publications and will be keeping fingers and toes crossed for the announcement of the winner on Wednesday 30 November.



Thanks for sharing!

Thanks to members who've fed back on our editions so far. Send us your thoughts on issue 3, or what you would like to see in issue 4, by emailing editor Jen Drummond: jdrummond@childreninscotland.org.uk

Bulletin

In each edition of *Insight*, we hear from members about their news, events and innovative projects

Light entertainment from Perth and Kinross

'The World Without And The World Within – Sunday Talks With My Children' (pictured below) by Nathan Coley has been installed in Cutlog Vennel, Perth, as part of the local council's plans to create a permanent light trail within the city centre.

The words in the artwork and its title reference a quote from Sir Patrick Geddes, the Scottish polymath, town planner and pioneer of places for communities to live, work and thrive.

Launching the installation, Coley said: "I'm delighted to be launching a new permanent sculpture in Perth – a city geographically and historically in the centre of Scotland, now the home to a new illuminated text work with the word 'WORLD' in the middle.

"Geddes attended Perth Academy, and I'm sure he would have been delighted and intrigued to find me appropriating his words to this end."

Low energy bulbs have been used and a council spokesperson said the installation's daily running cost would be around 80p.



Hot Chocolate brews warmth and laughter

Dundee youth work organisation Hot Chocolate Trust's fundraising campaign in the 'adopt a ...' series is just genius. Supporters are asked to adopt Robbie the radiator, Pogo the printer, Linda the light – the fixtures and fittings that make the city centre hub the lifeline for young people that it is.

A brilliant example of homemade, grassroots fundraising and very funny indeed. Watch the videos here: hotchocolate.org.uk/adoptashark

16 Days of Active-ism for global campaign

Glasgow Women's Aid is encouraging its supporters to 'Walk, run, swim or cycle 16 miles' from 25 November - 10 December, as part of their '16 Days of Active-ism'.



The global campaign was launched by the Centre for Women's Global Leadership (CWGL) in 1991

Feminists around the world mark the 16 days, run annually from November 25 (International Day Against Violence Against Women) to December 10 (International Human Rights Day) to call for the elimination of gender-based violence.

Pictures, progress and messages of encouragement can be shared with other fundraisers through the charity's Facebook group.

To sign up and create your fundraiser, visit the 16 Days of Active-ism JustGiving campaign website: glasgowwomensaid.org.uk/16days/

If you have a suggestion for a project, service or resource to feature on the Bulletin pages in our next issue, please contact Catherine Bromley:

cbromley@childreninscotland.org.uk by 28/2/23

Gambling Education event set to inspire

Fast Forward is to host the inaugural Scottish Gambling Education Conference on Thursday 24 November at the Scottish Storytelling Centre, on the theme of 'Inspiring the Next Steps'.

The conference is free, and is intended for anyone who works with children, young people, or families.

To find out more and to register visit: eventbrite.co.uk/e/419410466997

New Chair starts at Edinburgh Young Carers

Edinburgh Young Carers has appointed Jess Wade (pictured below) as Chair of their Board of Trustees.

As CEO at Carers of East Lothian and Coalition of Carers in Scotland's Co-Convener, she brings to the board extensive knowledge of social care policy and practice.

On her appointment, she said: "Edinburgh Young Carers does such incredibly valuable work in helping young carers to realise their rights, so it is a genuine privilege to have the opportunity to take on this role."



Voices, values and visualisation

Over autumn 2022 we continued our creative collaboration, started for issue one of *Insight*, with fourth year Illustration students at Edinburgh College of Art. The group of 33 students were asked to respond to four pieces of editorial, then developed and discussed their work across three sessions with our Communications Manager Chris Small and Designer Angus Doyle. Below, the students whose pieces have been chosen for publication explain how they responded to the brief they were given, the process they followed and – from patchwork to digital painting – the methods they used.



Mary Buchanan (Cover):

“Using the different themes in the magazine and the values Children in Scotland holds dear, I patchworked together images relating to the articles and issues in this edition. Motifs such as the building blocks and coloured pencils refer to conversations around play-based learning, while the home and dinner setting hark back to the cost-of-living crisis. Having created a childlike collage using texture and materials I relate to the early school years, I hope the cover conveys a familiarity and tactility that encourages the reader to take a look inside.”



Ruby Tait (Personal Reflection, page 7):

“When illustrating my main goal is being able to successfully portray an emotion to the reader. Creating a portrait for Sandra meant trying to communicate the emotions she brought into the article. She talks about the value of listening to others; I wanted her to come across as actively engaged as she put so much emphasis on the role of a good listener. The beads of conversation surround her as she lends an open ear to whoever approaches, and a smile resting on her face reflects her positive outlook to mediation.”



Zoë Brown (‘Playing for keeps’, page 18):

“I enjoy using a blend of traditional painting techniques and digital refinement as it gives me the freedom to manipulate my sketches, while keeping the visual energy of hand-drawn textures. When researching for the comment article, I learnt about the value play-based learning has in improving social and physical skills in the lives of young children. I wanted to represent this concept with an interactive children’s toy. The twisting, intertwined wires of the bead maze also highlight the complex process of altering early years policy. I often encounter these toys in waiting rooms, which inspired me to use this imagery to link to the sense of slow progress towards change.”



Catie Gordon (‘Follow the light’, page 22):

“I wanted to create something that conveys hope within a community, especially with the winter drawing in. I felt that an image of lanterns would give a feeling of warmth and togetherness in the dark. I’ve painted them floating towards the sky to represent the work Children in Scotland does to lift up young people’s lives. Each layer is painted separately to build up the glowing effect. Originally this was created as an option for the front cover, but I think it was a good choice for it to be included with the article [about mental health] so that it can complement the theme more specifically!”



Shihui Shen, (‘Home is where the heart is’, page 31):

“I usually work on my illustrations digitally, but the initial sketches are always done with pencil on paper as it allows me to explore options quickly without any pressure for it to look good. Recently, I’ve been trying to add more textures to my digital illustrations to achieve an interesting blend of a digital and traditional look. For this illustration, I wanted it to imitate the texture of colouring pencils, capturing the playful nature of the medium. I hope to depict the journey and growth of a care experienced young person and convey a sense of comfort and belonging with the use of a warm and muted colour palette.”

Thanks to Mary, Ruby, Zoë, Catie and Shihui, all the students who produced work, and Harvey Dingwall, Programme Director – BA (Hons) Illustration at the ECA. Look out for the group’s illustrations being shared on our website and social channels in early 2023. For further information on the project, email Chris Small: csmall@childreninScotland.org.uk

Sandra Mitchell

Mediation Manager, Resolve

A very powerful and necessary part of the work I do is truly listening to people and ensuring that they feel heard. Building trust and developing relationships is absolutely fundamental to our mediation services. If I don't truly listen, how can I understand each individual story or account, and why and how the people involved feel aggrieved?

But there is an art to being able to truly listen. There is an art in clearing your mind and focusing on someone else's words and feelings. To giving someone your full attention and really hearing what they are saying. You will know the feeling. You're talking to someone, and you can tell from their body language and distant look in their eye that they are not really listening to you. That they are more interested in an audience than a conversation, and they are simply waiting for you to stop talking so that they can have their turn.

Now, in a modern digital era, an age with multiple and instant distractions, listening is even trickier. How often have you been talking to family, friends or colleagues and seen them glancing at their phones or texting? Or you've sat in an online meeting or video conversation only to see the other participants checking in on their emails whilst you are speaking. How does that make you feel? Maybe you've been the guilty party. I'm sure we all have.

The Dalai Lama famously said, *"when you talk you are only repeating what you already know, but when you listen you will learn something new"*. By truly listening, we are trying to see the world through another person's eyes and understand their emotions. This can't happen if we are constantly distracted. It will also stilt the conversation as we send all sorts of subtle nonverbal cues

that we aren't fully invested in what they are saying. Listening to each other takes time and in this accelerated world, time is often a commodity that runs in short supply.

Empathic listening is the ability to feel with someone else not just sympathise with them. This means being able to hear and appreciate their issues – even if we don't agree with them. As mediators, training to listen is a core and continuing aspect for us. It is a key skill vital to our work. We are taught from a young age how to speak, tell a story and how to get our points across. But we don't really teach people how to truly listen.



True listening build bonds and relationships, encourages trust and gives people the opportunity to hear something that they have never heard before in the safe space created by a mediator. Sharing of words and experiences and the acknowledgement of someone else's experiences and point of view is the basis to so many successful agreements. As a mediator, it is so rewarding to witness.

I hear it when people call us for the first time. When someone finally feels listened to, and because we have really heard them, we can start to forge a path forwards. These breakthroughs, this progress and the feedback of people finally feeling listened to, is our measure of success.

So the next time you are in conflict with someone, I would urge you to think about the story you are telling but be prepared to listen to the other story being told. In a world of conflict, big and small, the simple act of focusing our attention and not just listening but really hearing what others are saying, could make a crucial difference. ●

Find out more about Resolve mediation: [resolvemediation.org.uk](https://www.resolvemediation.org.uk)

“*In a world of conflict, really hearing what others are saying could make a crucial difference”***”**

Illustration:
Ruby Tait

“The Promise
should represent
culture change,
not a moment
in time”



Kenny Murray, Director of Influence and Engagement at Who Cares? Scotland, talks to us about why lifelong support for Care Experienced people is vital – and how accountability is key

Interview by **Jennifer Drummond**

Since the late 1970s, Who Cares? Scotland has been a source of support, a champion of rights and a powerhouse of progress for Care Experienced people throughout the country.

The charity has passionately pursued legislative change and was instrumental in ensuring the right to remain in care extended upwards to the age of 26, as outlined in the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014. It is the driving force behind an ongoing campaign to recognise Care Experience as a protected characteristic and played a key role in the Independent Care Review, leading to the establishment of The Promise.

Who Cares? Scotland is committed to ensuring that the voices of Care Experienced people are listened to. Advocacy is a crucially important part of their work. A recent development of their advocacy service has been the introduction of a helpline available to anyone of any age who is Care Experienced, recognising that the challenges of having been in care can be carried well into adulthood.

It has had significant influence in challenging stereotypes through work with leading media outlets on their representation of Care Experienced people and was involved in a sensitivity read of the popular Tracy Beaker TV series. The charity encourages Care Experienced people themselves to challenge misrepresentation – or better yet, provide their own alternative.

Who Cares? practices what it preaches. A national representative body, made up of Care Experienced people, guides

its work and the Who Cares? Scotland board has strong representation of Care Experienced people.

Writer, campaigner and media consultant Kenny Murray embodies all of this. He is open about his own experience of being in care and the frustrating lack of progress since he left the system 18 years ago, arguing that, whilst policy change is welcome, the real progress needs to be cultural and societal, encompassing how Care Experienced people are treated, represented and supported throughout their lives.

Transforming the narrative

Jennifer Drummond: How important is it to change how we talk about Care Experienced people – and how do we do that?

Kenny Murray: When we talk about people with experience of care we talk about the issues they face. It is too easy to go down the road of stark statistics and the most drastic of outcomes; actually that's counter to challenging the stigma. If you lead with the statistics and the negative language, what you end up with is a society that misunderstands Care Experienced people. For us, that's evident in the news and entertainment media. We've done some really good stuff and have changed the narrative in a very tangible way – but it's still work that is ongoing.

It's also about the personal relationships that people have. If you don't have a relationship with a Care Experienced person or an understanding of that, what you might need to lean on to fill the gaps of your understanding are representations that aren't necessarily reflective. For Care Experienced people who can feel isolated and lonely at times, it is important that they can see themselves in some form of expression. But for a lot of people, what they see is something that just doesn't really reflect their lives. I think it speaks for itself that when you see these representations of Care Experienced people's lives that are good, they are written by Care Experienced people. The way people flock to them, the way people hold them dear, is really self-evident.

Careless, a book about a young girl who has grown up in care and falls pregnant at a young age, and then needs to decide what she wants to do next, is a great

“If you lead with the statistics and the negative language, what you end up with is a society that doesn't understand Care Experienced people”

example. It's a really profound, powerful book because it takes what would be a statistic around care and teenage pregnancy, and turns it into a very real story with very real choices. I think the fact that [the author] Kirsty Capes is Care Experienced means it is a much better representation.

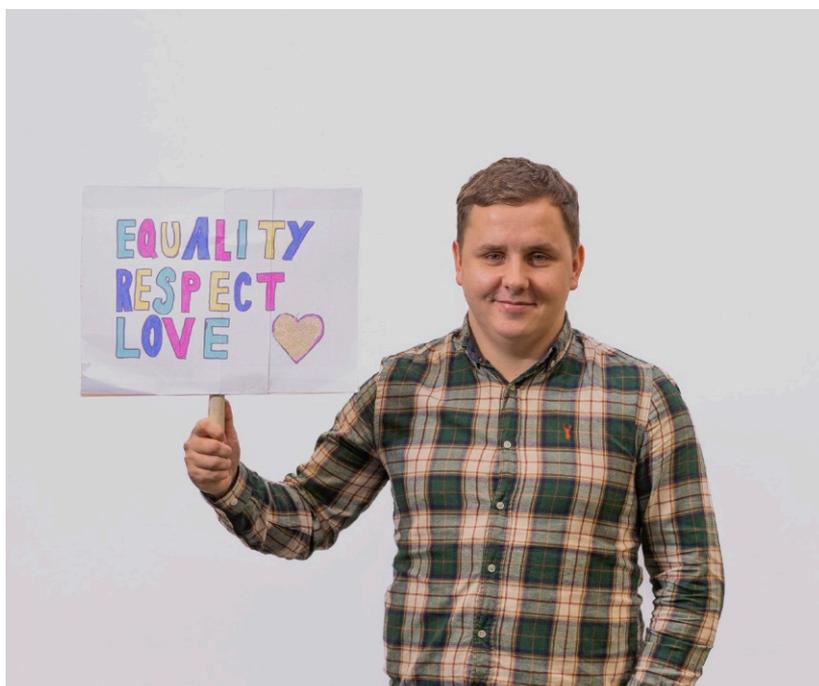
Lifelong support for Care Experienced people

JD: Who Cares? Scotland campaigns for lifelong support for Care Experienced people, aware of the long-term impact, stigma and inequalities of spending time in care. How do we change the view that you can age out of care?

KM: The 1997 Utting Report laid bare the vision for corporate parenting and Frank Dobson MP essentially launched a version of corporate parenting [the same year] with the argument that any child or young person deserves the kind of support that any decent parent would provide them. People from all across Scottish civic society have a responsibility to try to make sure they are looking after the needs of Care Experienced people who are their children, so to speak, through corporate parenting legislation duties.

However, the part it hasn't got to yet is understanding that everybody in society has a responsibility for everybody else. If we all support one another, we can all thrive. People need to realise that Care Experienced people need support beyond 9-5, and beyond the ages of 16, 21, 25 or 26. Care experience has a lifelong impact and there are lots of ways we see that in terms of the average age of leaving home or the role the bank of mum and dad plays in people's lives. If people are struggling, they can reach out to mum and dad. Care Experienced people don't necessarily have that. So, it's about extending that parenting duty to be beyond an age.

We campaign for a lifetime of equality, respect and love. We truly believe in that lifelong element of it – people should have support for all of their life. We've had countless inquiries and reviews before the Independent Care Review, we have The Promise Scotland, we have lots of work being done to try to understand what doesn't work and we've got plans to change it. But the longer those plans take to implement, the more people age out of it.



Opening page and above:

Kenny Murray photographed at Who Cares? Scotland's Glasgow offices, October 2022, by Phil Wilkinson
philspix.com

JD: There is currently a petition lodged with the Scottish Parliament regarding extending support for Care Experienced people. If this is progressed, what will that mean in practice?

KM: The petition is from Jasmin-Kasaya, one of the representatives on our national representative body. We want to make sure that Care Experienced people are supported to be active citizens in their own lives so we have provided Jasmin with a platform to share that petition, but it's all Jasmin's work. That's everything she lives and breathes as a Care Experienced person.

[In terms of the petition] language is important because it helps us understand what services people access. A really popular term in the service side of the sector is 'care leaver'. But Care Experienced people aren't drawn to that term. What a care leaver is a very specific group of people. If you are a care leaver you were in care on your 16th birthday and you are entitled to support. It's a service provision thing, it's not an identity, whereas 'care-experienced' is an identity.

There are a lot of people who are taken off their Supervision Order before they reach their 16th birthday. Some people want to come off because the stigma of having social work involved in their lives is so large, but it means they lose an extra 10 years of support that they could be entitled to through the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, through Throughcare and

Aftercare provision, because they don't have care leaver status. You could have been in care from the age of two to 15-and-a-half and you are off your Supervision Order and not entitled to any support. You could have been in care for three months before you turn 16 and you are entitled to a full 10 years of support. It's so arbitrary that it is hard to understand sometimes.

What Jasmin's petition represents is an opportunity to widen the scope of support that we offer. The Promise talks about a scaffold of support. It's all very well and good having scaffolding around a building to hold it up until it's repaired, but if you can't get in to the building in the first place because of an arbitrary age cut-off then you have to just stand there looking at it.

The potential of The Promise

JD: Who Cares? Scotland has played a pivotal role in ensuring representation in some key national inquiries and conversations, such as the Independent Care Review and, latterly, The Promise. What do you want to see happen next?

KM: People are clamouring to listen to Care Experienced people, but there are different types of listening. The type of listening I am most interested in is active listening, where people listen to Care Experienced people, respond and then do something. We are trying to live that at Who Cares? Scotland and we are trying to help other people live that.

But I am worried people hear the word listen and assume it is a consultative exercise; that they just need to say 'ok, we've heard you', and then move on. The Independent Care Review listened to lots of Care Experienced people. It created The Promise and Plan 2021-24 as a blueprint for change. Listening to the voice of Care Experienced people has created so much opportunity for change and now it's time for the change to happen. But you can't stop listening.

One of our major pieces of work is to understand our advocacy data because it is a live pulse of what is really happening for Care Experienced people. Lots of people are keen to understand whether The Promise is being kept and how it is being implemented but there is nobody really collecting that information in any significant way. Our advocacy allows us to understand what's happening for a good portion

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of the Care Experienced population in Scotland. We understand where people are having their rights upheld, and where people are having to fight. For me, that's our next stage. We are keen to help Keep The Promise, so over the next while will be making sure that advocacy is the foundation on which the scaffolding of the hope and change is built on. Care Experienced people's voices were there at the beginning and should be there all the way through.

JD: Your *Paving the way* report, published in June 2022, shares the views of Care Experienced people in response to the Scottish Government's Promise Implementation plan and calls for a Promise Bill. Can you tell us more?

KM: What people are keen for is accountability. People want to know who is accountable for Keeping the Promise. Everywhere you see the words, it's preceded by a hashtag. That's telling me that we are trying to set a conversation. It's great to have the conversation, but the next step is finding out who is accountable for it. We are hoping [a Promise Bill] would identify responsibilities and who holds them, because at the moment I don't think it is clear.

My role as Director of Engagement and Influence is about taking our evidence and data and making sure that [the impact] is understood across Scotland, in every local authority and on a national level. Every political party supports The Promise – but that was the last parliament. There is a whole new parliament of MSPs and we are really keen to do work with them to help them understand what it means to Keep The Promise.

We are keen to work with people in every local authority: every elected member and every decisionmaker, to help them understand that The Promise shouldn't be considered a moment in time but should represent a change in culture as to how we deliver care. ●

Find out more about the work of Who Cares? Scotland by visiting whocaresscotland.org

The petition to extend after care for previously Care Experienced young people and remove the continuing care age gap is currently under review by the Scottish Parliament's Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee. Monitor its progress at:

petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1958

On the right track

As MCR Pathways celebrates reaching more than 100 schools, founder *Iain MacRitchie* reflects on how its approach to mentoring is helping young people build motivation, confidence and resilience

MCR Pathways grew from dissatisfaction at what was, and a drive to change what is. We firmly believe that no young person should be determined by their circumstances. Specifically, we wanted to address the huge gap in life chances and outcomes for disadvantaged young people and their peers, helping them realise their full potential.

Launched in 2007, our school-based mentoring programme was delivered in St Andrews' RC Secondary School in the East End of Glasgow, providing dedicated support to care-experienced young people in the school. Thanks to the support of the then-Director of Education at Glasgow City Council, as well as a growing evidence base, over the next decade the programme expanded across the city. Through a revolutionary partnership with Glasgow City Council, it was rolled out across all city secondary schools in November 2017.

Now, we work in over 120 secondary schools across 18 local authorities, reaching more than 4,000 young people. We expect that number to rise to over 5,000 by the end of this year. We are in talks with several local authorities, have recently joined with schools in the Southeast of England and have been invited to share our story and our model as far afield as Norway.

We work with children and young people as they transition from primary school and until they leave secondary. Each secondary school we work in has a designated Pathways Co-ordinator who identifies and



supports those who will benefit from the programme. For the first two years, the young people work with the co-ordinator in weekly group work, before one-to-one mentoring begins in S3.

We know that what we are doing works. **An independent three-year evaluation undertaken by ScotCen Social Research and published in 2020** established the dramatic impact of the MCR Pathways' pioneering programme.

The report highlighted statistically significant differences between those who participated in the MCR pathways programme and those who did not, revealing 81.6% of mentored care-experienced young people left school for a positive destination compared to 56.3% of non-mentored leavers.

In addition, 87.7% of students achieved one or more SCQF Level 5 qualification, compared with 66.8% of their non-mentored peers. It also found that providing support for young people with

attendance issues increased their engagement and encouraged them to stay in school beyond the age of 16.

We firmly believe in the power of relationships and can see first-hand the difference our programme is making. We saw it in our very first school and we see it in the schools we work with now. Young people have embraced the opportunity to be mentored, heard and not judged. They have taken control over developing the programme further, making sure it really focuses on what makes a difference. For many, this is the relationship-based approach, and the relationship that develops with their mentor. As one person explained to us, her mentor believed in her, trusted her and was there for her when no one else was.

MCR will always be focused on potential and helping young people find, grow and use their talents. We are never deficit-based. We don't tell mentors

“The real power is in the strength of the relationships forged and the often life-changing impact these have”

about the young person's past. Avoiding judgements being made helps ensure the mentor has to listen first and get to know the young person on their terms. Relationship-based mentoring is powerful. The benefits to our young people are transformational and the impact on our mentors is not far behind.

By pairing care-experienced and otherwise disadvantaged mentees with trained and carefully matched volunteer mentors, our programme helps students believe in themselves and their talents and benefit from increased confidence, improved attainment and positive post-school destinations. The real power though is in the strength of the relationships that have been forged, and the long-lasting, often life-changing, impact these have.

Our mentors aren't someone's parent, counsellor or teacher. They are volunteers. They turn up every week simply because they care. The focus is on relationships, active listening, empathy and building trust. They all come before any advice. ●

Left:

Three young people who were part of MCR Pathway's Young Talent Programme. Photograph: John Linton

Right:

Charis (left) and her mentor

Dr Iain MacRitchie is founder of MCR Pathways.

To find out more about their work, or sign up to become a mentor, visit:

mcrpathways.org

“If it wasn't for meeting each week, I don't know where I would be”

Amie and Mandy's story

Prior to being introduced to MCR Pathways' Young Talent programme, Amie couldn't imagine her life beyond school, saying *“I had no time or energy to think about it. I was living a life not my own but as a carer, a wage earner, a housekeeper.”*

After being introduced to MCR's Young Talent programme and her mentor Mandy, Amie grew in confidence. Mandy recalls: *“Secondary school and your teenage years are such an important part of anyone's life. To share an hour each week to help a young person is so rewarding. Relationships really matter and are, at the end of the day, what we all rely on at any age.”*

Mandy continues: *“I had no idea how much I had to offer a young person or how desperately they might need just a little bit of guidance. Some hope and belief in a better future.”*

For Amie, the future is now looking bright. She left school, went to college and is now at university. Reflecting on the impact of having a mentor, she says:

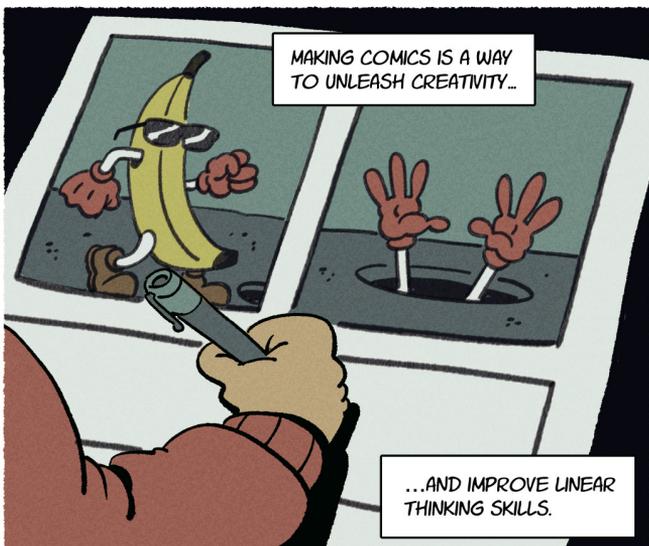
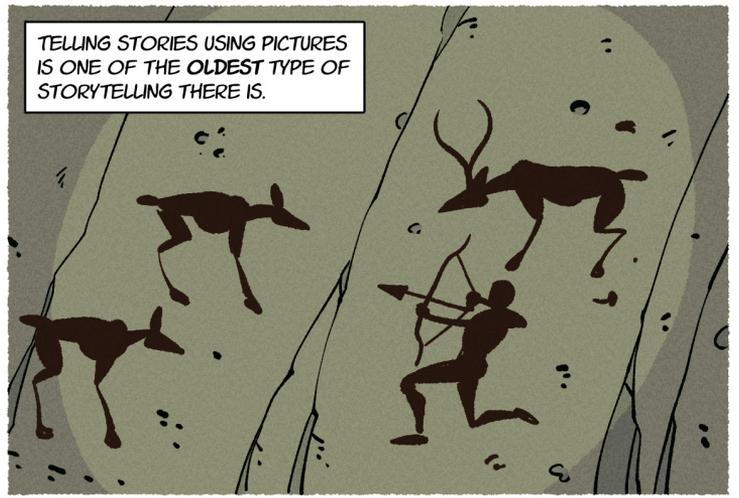
“If it wasn't for meeting each week with Mandy, I don't know where I would be right now. She gave me the confidence to see where my strengths were, what I enjoyed and the opportunities I could pursue. It was great to know that she kept coming back because she cared and wanted to, not because she had to.”

“When I was first told that I had been matched with Mandy that day, I didn't just gain a mentor but I gained a lifelong friend.”

For Mandy, the experience was equally life-affirming: *“It wasn't long into our relationship before I realised that helping Amie was really helping me too. Looking back at just how far she has come and knowing I had a hand in changing her perspective on life means the world to me.”*



WHY READ COMICS?

Arts

The *pow!* factor

Comics can unlock a love of literature. Now they're supercharging school literacy projects across the country. **Catherine Bromley** talks to one of the pioneers taking them into the classroom and, left, Magic Torch Comics explain their power in panels

Time was that comics were considered weird, subversive, almost dangerous outsider art. One hundred years on from the first comic ever created and boosted by the Marvel universe taking root in the mainstream, comics are still just as weird and wonderful, full of fantastic characters living lives that we can only dream of. And while they remain reassuringly subversive, they now also support young people to engage in literacy and art projects in new and innovative ways their teachers could never have imagined possible.

Paul Bristow, one of the founders of Magic Torch Comics, tells us about comics and sequential art being co-opted by schools in Scotland as vital tools in 'making stories happen'.

Supporting young people to tell their stories

"It wasn't done on purpose, initially. It was 2016. Magic Torch Comics had just started and I had just had a book published – a superhero story – and I was doing author visits in schools as part of the promotion. I was visiting all of these primary classes, reading them a bit of story, and then we would do an activity. The activity was 'let's all make a comic character'. That was kind of how we would finish the session. The energy was brilliant. It was lovely and I thought, 'I think there's something in doing more with this.'"

Paul's background in community development made him realise that Magic Torch Comics wouldn't just be a stable for artists and writers creating amazing, original comics. It would also

be a way to support people of all ages, starting with schoolchildren, to find their own way into writing and creating through reading comics.

Reflecting on this early experience of introducing young people to comic art, Paul says: *"The teachers would come up afterwards and say, 'Oh, XYZ doesn't really engage or hasn't been interested. He's loved this, he's been looking forward to this.' Or, 'She's a brilliant wee artist, but she doesn't normally show us that'. There was something in it that you were able to tap into for the kids that weren't really engaging in other ways. Some of those young people did read and create their own comics, and for others it was like the first time that they'd picked up comics, but immediately it was 'ah right!, I like this, this works for me.'"*

What's so cool about comics?

"There's an immediacy in the medium. There's something about a comic which, for some readers, for some young people can seem less intimidating than say a chapter book."

But he feels the real beauty of it is in the act of consuming a comic; the sense that as you move between the panels in any piece of comic art, you are telling the story. Because of the breaks between the panels, *"half of the story is happening in your head. The gaps allow you to be such an active participant. That, I think, is just amazing"*.

Helping making sense of reality

What Paul really loves about his job is helping educators (and pupils) understand the nature of sequential

“*There's an immediacy in the medium. For some young people it can seem less intimidating than a chapter book”***”**

Opposite:
Why Read Comics?
Story by Magic Torch Comics; artwork by Norrie Millar, created exclusively for *Insight*



what it is they do, the point and the purpose of it. The rest of it, the story itself, the characters, the situations, was all from the young people themselves. They sort of worked that out and how they wanted it to look. The idea of things happening simultaneously until the walls between the panel broke down, that was all them. We are just there to help them realise that. I'll show you what the possibilities are, and I'll show you the different options that are there for us to create stuff. But ultimately we'll go with what you're interested in and what you want to create."

As well as supporting literacy and the creative arts, comics have another valuable lesson to teach our young people: that it's ok, good even, to be different. "It's just this really joyful experimental medium," explains Paul. "The folks who tend to be most into it are young people who are, in one way or another, on the fringes in classes and in schools. Comics as a medium sort of celebrates that. Comic art has often been created by folk who are on the fringes, and it's always been thus. When you're at school, you know that way you can feel weird but the chances are that what makes you seem weird, that's your superpower. When I was at school reading comics and writing stories, that was considered weird. But now I'm lucky enough that it's my job so I take the time to talk about it in schools because I want young people to realise there's a different way of doing things. That thing that you think is a problem for you is probably one of the coolest things about you." •

storytelling. From their first forays into workshops with primary classes, Magic Torch Comics has built a programme of year-round participation and engagement activity in schools, community groups and organisations across Scotland. As well as workshops for young people, they run CPD sessions for professionals. Schools are encouraged to get in touch directly. Magic Torch can then identity comics as a medium to help a class explore a chosen topic or use comics as a route into exploring issues they need to process or make sense of.

Paul shares a recent example, where Magic Torch Comics was able to help a peer-to-peer mental health support project in a high school. "The young people in the group all wear the red badge and that's kind of to let other young people know that they are mental health ambassadors. The idea was that Magic Torch would get that group together so they can tell a story to share

Above:
Extract from *Mental Health Ambassadors (2020)*. Story by Saint Columba's High School; artwork by Catriona Laird

Right:
Filmmaker and comic creator Etienne Kubwabo, whose *Beats of War* features Scotland's first black superhero



To find out more about Magic Torch Comics and book activity for your school or organisation, visit:

magictorchcomics.co.uk

Read another strip from Magic Torch Comics, *The Witch's Finger* by Inverkip P7/6 pupils, on page 35



Left:
 Extract from *Ninja Monkey Mayhem* (2020). Story created by Barnardo's Nurture Group; artwork by Katherine Hemmings.

Paul Bristow says:
 "The young people involved in writing this did not want there to be words. The direct quote was, 'We want the words to happen in your head'. We always use this as an example of 'there's no words, but there is story happening!'"

Thinking outside the box: other great comic creators working to support literacy, inclusion, equality and diversity in schools

Etienne Kubwabo

Filmmaker and comic creator Etienne Kubwabo (pictured, left) is the mastermind behind Scotland's first black superhero. Based in Glasgow, his comic – *Beats of War* – has been inspired by Etienne's own experiences of coming to Scotland as a refugee and looks at the barriers faced by people who immigrate to a new country.

mileawayfilms.com/etian-universe

Dekko Comics

Dekko produces educational comics which turn school curriculum key stages (approx. age 8-12 yrs) content into engaging strips, smashing motivational barriers to reading and learning and helping young people with autism and dyslexia. Lots of free, downloadable resources are available on their website including their mental health and wellbeing guide. dekkocomics.com

Metaphrog

Award-winning graphic novelists Sandra Marrs and John Chalmers were at the forefront of promoting comics in schools. The Franco-Scottish duo create comic adaptations of classic fairy tales and continue to tirelessly promote the medium of comics, travelling regularly to talk about their work. metaphrog.com

For information about accessing support for author book visits through the Scottish Book Trust Live Literature scheme visit: scottishbooktrust.com/writing-and-authors/live-literature

Playing for keeps

After an SNP vote to up the school starting age to six, *Lynn J McNair* tracks how the change came and the opportunities it could bring children

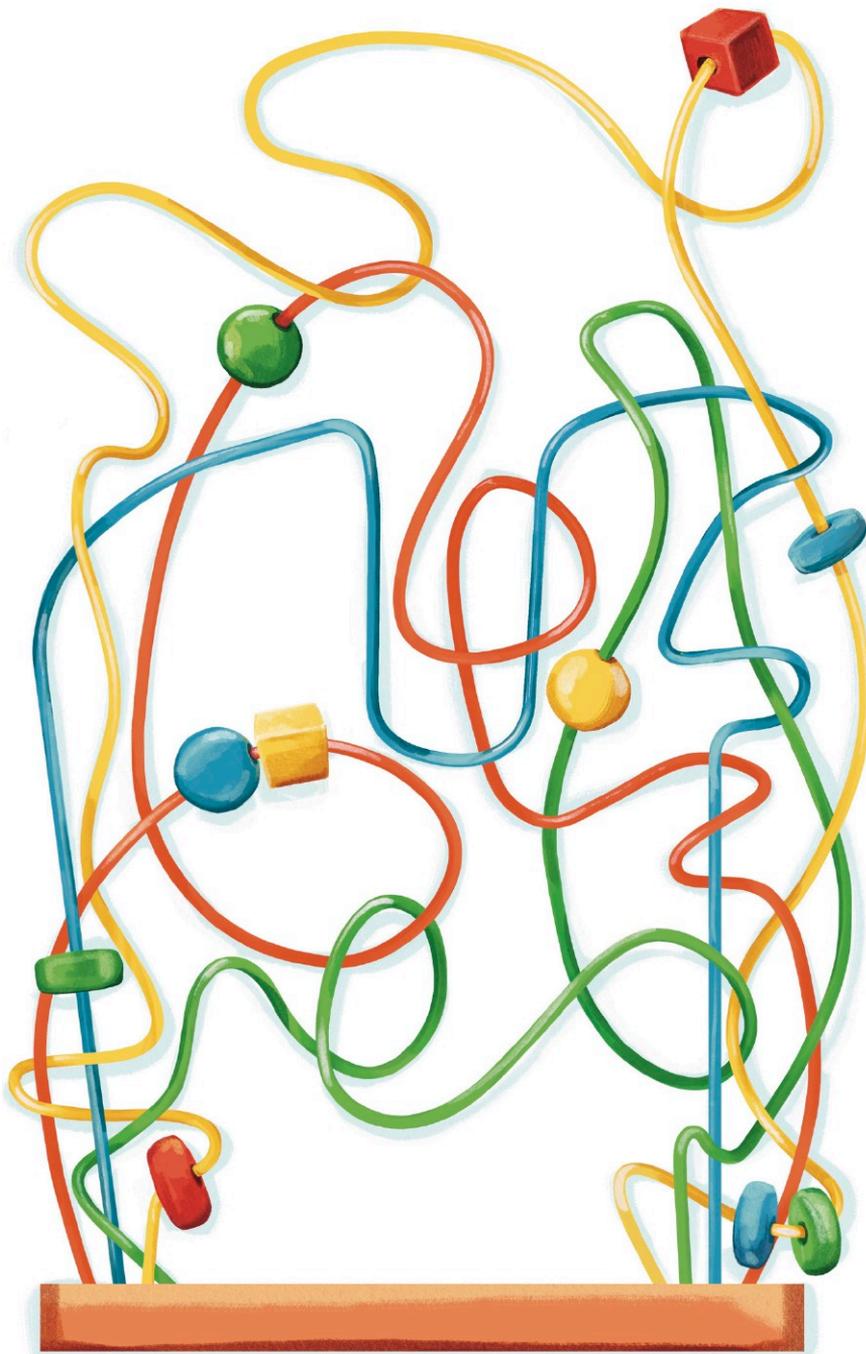
In 2009, I had a fruitful (and passionate) discussion with a significant Children and Families leader from one local authority. This leader, someone I respected very much, invited me to share my hopes for early childhood education. I provided my aspirations for the early level of the *Curriculum for Excellence* to mirror nursery, with play being the main medium for learning. I envisaged both early years practitioners and teachers working alongside each other, respectful of the skills and expertise each other possessed.

As a Froebelian trained practitioner, I believe learning does not proceed in a linear way; it is unique, situational, creative, unexpected, personal, eventful, capricious, emergent, collective and inspirational, as Tina Bruce has said. This is in contrast to technological understandings of learning as impersonal, routinised and goal-oriented.

Some years ago, I carried out doctoral research on listening to young children's perspectives on their transition to P1. My PhD was titled '*Rules, rules, rules and we're not allowed to skip*'. Ruby, a five-year-old child who had been in primary one for six weeks, said these words in response to an adult asking: "How's school Ruby?" The thesis was born from observing many young children (and often their parents) struggling with school starting age at 4.5 – 5.5 years. My research was carried out in one Scottish early childhood setting and four primary schools. Analysis of the data illustrated that the perspectives of children and their families were often silenced by policymakers, bureaucrats and professionals. Children were expected to become acquiescent and adjust to the coercive practices of the school institution. As one five-year-old boy asked:

'Why are all the doors locked? I don't feel free... I am not in charge of me anymore.'

Raising the school starting age has become the subject of



vibrant discussion for Scottish educators. Since its 2015 launch, Upstart Scotland – a campaign for a play-based kindergarten stage – has been relentless and hugely successful in encouraging others to listen. Its chair, Sue Palmer, said to me recently:

'... play is the best vehicle for developing social / communication skills, self-regulation and a sense of personal agency... introducing formal teaching of literacy / numeracy skills too early can cause many children to feel confused / distressed / ashamed because they can't understand the tasks required of them. If children 'play up' in these circumstances, they're in danger of being labelled as having 'behavioural problems.'

What Palmer highlights was echoed in my research, including in an interview with a five-year-old boy called William:

'And... and... em because, because if you don't do it [writing] neatly you don't get to go into a different class like... like... like if you do that 10 or 20 times you have to stay in class up to next year [said with emphasis] for the rest of the year.'

'Did the teacher say that to you?', I asked.

'We just knew...', he replied

Palmer goes on to explain: *'So most children try very hard to comply and please the teacher, which means they're constantly anxious about failing and learning is no longer a joyous experience – their feelings about school therefore become negative and the foundation upon which they build their literacy / numeracy skills will always be shaky.'*

I certainly cannot envisage William ever enjoying writing after his frightening experience, even if it was only his perception.

In May 2018 Patricia Anderson and Diane Delaney set up a Facebook page, 'Deferral Support Scotland' (later to become the Give Them Time campaign), the goal of which

“*One five-year-old boy asked: 'Why are all the doors locked? I don't feel free ... I am not in charge of me anymore'”*

was to inform parents of their legal right to defer school entry. Then, there were two procedures which parents had a right to if they did not wish their child to start school. The first was an *automatic deferral*, where parents of children with January and February birthdays could apply to have school entry delayed. A nursery placement was subsequently provided for another year.

The second option, the *discretionary deferral*, was more complex. For example, parents were informed that government funding would stop, resulting in the parent bearing the financial consequences of their decision. If their deferral application was successful, parents would be encouraged to use private childcare. This would of course be perfectly fine for children who attended private settings. However, children (and their families), settled in local authority settings would need to transition to another, unknown, childcare source. This extract from my thesis illustrates the challenges some parents faced:

My deferral request was denied for technical and impersonal reasons. In the end his age was stronger than my concern for his emotional well-being. I can't find a nicer way to describe what happened because even though I read their reasons I can't understand why they chose what they chose... to make such decisions. I appealed. In the rejection papers it was clearly written it was my right to appeal, but clearly not to have my voice heard and considered outside the strict parameters...How can one parent talking with her heart stand against that? [the education committee – all strangers to the parent] not because I felt

against them, but they seemed to have been against me. I had the impression they struggled to even look at me. I left the meeting with the understanding that the power they had given me with the right to appeal came with the deception of knowing I had been a guest in their territory, where only their rules had weight. (Parent communication).

However, while sadly not in time to save this child and parent, policymakers, influenced by Upstart and Give Them Time, have now put their support behind a kindergarten stage. Of great significance, on 10 October 2022 at the SNP conference, it was announced:

'Conference recognises the body of international evidence in favour of play-based early years education... notes that children in European countries who attend play-based kindergarten till six or seven enjoy higher levels of health and wellbeing... further notes that Scotland and the UK are outliers in Europe in starting formal education at four or five, and acknowledges that since international PISA comparisons began, countries with later school starting ages have performed better... and acknowledges the views of parents...Conference therefore calls in the Scottish Government to introduce a statutory play-based kindergarten for three-six year olds...' (SNP, Party Conference, October 2022).

Exciting times lie ahead. ●



Dr Lynn J McNair is Lecturer (Early Childhood Practice and Froebel) at the University of Edinburgh

Illustration: Zoë Brown

Are political and commercial interests threatening the future of our once celebrated ACEs agenda?



The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) model came to prominence in Scotland in 2018. A combination of activities such as screenings of the film *Resilience*, press articles, a large conference in the SECC and associated social media campaigning captured the attention of many, including policymakers, commentators and practitioners.

The intention was to highlight the prevalence of ACEs, the potential long-term detrimental impacts to health and wellbeing posed by them, and the importance of positive and secure relationships in countering those risks. This was a successful intervention that, according to the promoters at least, had gained the status of a 'movement' that promised real and lasting change. Scotland was being championed as the first 'ACE-Aware Nation'.

One of the indications of policy-level commitment to this agenda was the establishment of a **Cross-Party Group (CPG) in the Scottish Parliament on the Prevention and Healing of Adverse Childhood Experiences**.

However, it was revealed recently that the CPG has received a series of resignations, including the convenor, Scottish Conservative MSP Sue Webber, her predecessor SNP MSP Rona Mackay, SNP MSP Karen Adam and Dr Suzanne Zeedyk, developmental psychologist and one of the main protagonists of the ACEs promotional activities mentioned above. At the time of writing, the CPG appears to be in a state of flux without a convenor, deputy or secretary to take the work forward. This begs two questions: what has happened and where now for the ACEs agenda in Scotland?

The first question can perhaps be answered if we look again at the original critiques of the ACEs agenda. Academic publications raised two fundamental concerns. The first was a lack of clarity on what constitutes an ACE, given the initial model itself only recognises 10 specific ACEs. Poverty and racism, for example, are not recognised, nor indeed is any form of social inequality. It is striking that the CPG resignations seem to centre on the topic of 'what counts as an Adverse Childhood Experience?'

“*Cross-Party Group resignations seem to centre on the topic 'what counts as an Adverse Childhood Experience?'*”

The second major concern related to the question of 'who is promoting this and why?', linked to how the ACEs 'movement' might be driven in a way that made it vulnerable to commercial and political interests. I referred to this in my own critique as 'policy entrepreneurship' and suggested that the ACEs CPG was intrinsically weak on this front from the outset.

Indeed, one of the originators of the model wrote a paper stating the ACEs model and its main methodological feature, the ACEs 'score', was never designed for any purpose other than population-level studies (*Anda et al, 2020*). It was clear from the beginning that the application of the ACEs model beyond the purposes for which it was designed is inherently flawed by a lack of clarity about 'what counts' and a vulnerability to being co-opted by a set of interests that should not be driving the agenda.

The question of 'where now' needs to address those two issues. The main strategy should be avoiding the ACEs 'model' altogether – and therefore the pitfalls of policy entrepreneurship that come with it. •

Gary Walsh is a PhD Researcher and Tutor at the University of Glasgow.



Policy to protect tenants is welcome, but we need systemic change to bring security for children



Everyone is anxious about this winter. How could you not be? The cost-of-living crisis has stretched household budgets to breaking point. In that context we were happy to see the Scottish Government take positive action to protect tenants by guiding the emergency Cost of Living (Tenant Protection) Scotland Bill through Holyrood.

By severely restricting rent increases and tightening the rules around evictions until at least the end of March next year, these measures will provide some comfort and security to vulnerable people when they need it most.

However, Members of the Scottish Parliament must not be allowed to rest on their laurels when it comes to housing. There are many people who this Bill won't help. So much more needs to be done.

Earlier this year it emerged that 8,635 children in Scotland are stuck in temporary accommodation. That's a record number. To put it in some context, there are more children in Scotland in temporary accommodation than there are primary school pupils in Stirling.

“Decades of underinvestment in social housing has led directly to the disgraceful number of children in Scotland with nowhere permanent to call home”



Too often these children are finding themselves stuck in places which are completely unsuitable. We know that spending time in temporary accommodation can have serious, negative consequences for children. It affects their physical and mental health while also seriously disrupting their education. Fundamentally they are being denied their right to somewhere safe and secure to call home.

The word “temporary” is also often misleading. We’re not talking about a period of a few days or even weeks. On average, across Scotland a child will be in temporary accommodation for 289 days. In parts of the country that figure is much higher. In Edinburgh for example that figure is 678 days.

These are just the average figures. Shelter Scotland has seen individual cases of families being trapped in temporary accommodation for years. In one particularly heart-breaking story,

a child’s bike which they received as a Christmas gift had to be put into storage when her family became homeless and moved into temporary accommodation. Years later the family are still stuck in “temporary” accommodation and the child has far outgrown that little bike she never got the chance to ride.

The only viable, long-term solution to ending Scotland’s housing emergency is to urgently increase the supply of social homes. Decades of underinvestment in social housing is what has driven us to this point and led directly to the disgraceful number of children across Scotland with nowhere permanent to call home.

Shelter Scotland will continue to urge the Scottish Government to use all available options to tackle our failing housing and homelessness system by spearheading a new Scottish Housing Emergency Action Plan. We’re calling for the plan to be focused on three key priorities which have been identified as critical: buy and build 38,500 social homes by 2026, fully fund local authority homelessness services and guarantee the right to a permanent home for everyone who becomes homeless.

There is no time for tinkering round the edges, only long-term systemic change can provide the homes and security that Scotland’s children need. •

Alison Watson is Director of Shelter Scotland.

Find out more about their work, or get advice, at:

scotland.shelter.org.uk

Follow the light

With another mental health strategy in development, we can't afford to become jaded by the journey – too many lives depend on keeping our promises, argues *Amy Woodhouse*



In September, Children in Scotland submitted its response to the Scottish Government's consultation on a Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy for Scotland. With a background in mental health research, I've seen a few mental health strategies come and go in my time. Some have had more ambition and vision than others.

I joined the Scottish Development Centre for Mental Health when the National Programme for Improving Mental Health and Wellbeing was in full flow. It was an exciting and hopeful time for mental health policy in Scotland. The programme kickstarted a number of national initiatives we still know today, such as See Me, Scotland's national programme to end mental health and stigma, the Scottish Recovery Network and Choose Life, Scotland's national

strategy and action plan to prevent suicide. It also supported the less high-profile Heads Up Scotland which focused on the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people.

At the time, many of us, myself included, felt the programme and its investment, was going to make a significant difference to how Scotland responded to the mental health needs of its population. Our approach to mental health policy was dynamic, ambitious and world-leading.

It has now been 16 years since the National Programme ended and I'm left wondering what has improved or deteriorated? And, fundamentally, what do we see as the real purpose of a national mental health strategy?

There is a lot to take heart in from the draft strategy consultation paper produced by the Scottish Government. It recognises that mental health is inextricably linked to poverty, disadvantage and discrimination and that a national mental health response needs action to address poverty and inequalities. It includes a focus on wellbeing as well as mental ill health and recognises that good mental health for all is an important goal. It also emphasises the importance of experience and how co-production should feature throughout service design and across delivery.

Over the years, other strategies have said all these good things as well. And yet, here we are in autumn 2022, highly aware of the significant stressors facing children, young people and families, the same families

who have lived through a global pandemic and are now in the midst of a cost-of-living crisis plunging many into poverty. We are deeply worried about the rates of mental health problems amongst children and young people, yet we still don't have a mental health system that is able to adequately respond to the level of need around us.

Even more frustrating is the fact that we possess the knowledge, evidence and understanding of what works. We all know that more emphasis on early intervention and prevention is needed. But, 10 years on from the Christie Report, a significant shift towards early support is yet to be made.

So what is the point of a mental health strategy? Maybe a fairer question would be: do we place too high an expectation on our national strategies? A strategy can't predict global pandemics or runaway interest rates. It has no control over national finances or how immigration policies affect the workforce. But it can set a vision, a shared understanding of the needs and priorities of the Scottish population and provide a route map for how these should be addressed.

The power to really make meaningful progress in achieving this vision lies with those who can impact change.

We need a shift to outcomes-focused budgeting so that fiscal decisions are based around what will give us the best chance of achieving our shared ambitions. We need human rights protections through the incorporation of international conventions such as the UN

**“
The young people we
work with increasingly
recognise their right
to good mental health
and have the language
to talk about this, free
from stigma or shame”**

Convention on the Rights of the Child, so that the public's right to good mental health and to live free from poverty and discrimination is protected. We need skilled and knowledgeable decision-makers who understand how to achieve system change locally. And we need a culture that values people, understands the importance of relationships and nurtures citizens from birth. This goes far beyond mental health support services.

However, I am reminded that the children and young people we work with are increasingly recognising their right to good mental health and have the language to talk about this free from stigma or shame. They can see how the system has often failed them and know they deserve better than this.

It is adults' responsibility to act on what they tell us. To not allow ourselves to become jaded or pessimistic when facing slow progress and to keep battling on for what we know is needed – even if it is what mental health strategies have been pledging, repeatedly, for years. ●

Illustration:
Catie Gordon

Amy Woodhouse is Children in Scotland's Head of Policy, Projects & Participation

Read our response to A Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy for Scotland on our website:

childreninScotland.org.uk/consultations-and-calls-for-evidence/



**Changing
our World**

“We need accessible and customised services”

Kaydence Drayak, an MSYP and member of our youth advisory group, on how to stop mental health problems from spiralling

Changing Our World (CoW), the children and young people's advisory group for Children in Scotland, has identified four 'hot topics' to focus our work on. One of these is mental health. We have discussed concerns about waiting lists, as well as the stigma that still exists around having mental health issues. We want there to be support that is easily accessible and available as early as possible for young people. If young people can get support sooner, they can better tackle their mental health issues and prevent them from spiralling.

Children in Scotland has been supporting the Scottish Youth Parliament (SYP) to conduct its community-based, mental health services investigation. Commissioned by the Scottish Government, SYP evaluated community mental health and wellbeing services for 5–24-year-olds. This evaluation primarily focuses on the views of children, young people, parents and carers on the services available. Children in Scotland has supported this work by helping the MSYPs who are conducting the research to record the views of young people.

We were provided with some training, ideas on how to consult with young people to gather views and we attended some of the consultations. We have now finished the information gathering phase and have started analysing the data. Early indicators suggest that, for the most part, the services have had a positive impact. An initial summary report has been sent to the Scottish Government.

I also participated in the One Good Adult project run by NHS Education Scotland and the Mental Health Directorate for the Scottish Government. Within this project, young people identified that just having 'one good adult' that you can talk to can make a big difference to a young person's mental health. As part of the project, we created a job description for what 'one good adult' needs to be like. There were many agreed qualities, including needing to be supportive, open-minded and approachable. Vitaly, they also must respect and try to understand young people.

These projects are important because children and young people need to be listened to in order to improve their mental health support. I'm really proud that I was a part of them.

My hope is that there will be a better understanding of what children and young people need to support their mental health and that there are accessible, available and customised services, co-designed with children and young people.



Find out more about the Changing our World advisory group on our website:

childreninScotland.org.uk/changing-our-world

Separation anxieties

Peter Kelly considers issues of class and power at the heart of Darren McGarvey's latest book, a stark analysis of the gulf between those making decisions and those who are impacted by them

Darren McGarvey is a man with a lot to talk about. His latest book, *The Social Distance Between Us*, covers everything from the structure of land ownership in the UK to the impacts of homelessness and addiction, educational inequality, political participation, welfare reform, meritocracy and much else besides. But fundamentally it is a book about class and power.

These are themes that will be familiar to anyone who has engaged with McGarvey's previous work, be it his columns in various newspapers and magazines or his work as a documentary filmmaker. Drawing on his considerable knowledge and experience, particularly from his BBC series *Class Wars*, he considers not only the consequences of class inequality in the UK but what the factors are that sustain, perpetuate and justify that inequality.

At the heart of his analysis is the idea of 'proximity gaps'. It is the distance, he argues, between those who make decisions and those who live with their consequences that is central to the problems our society faces. It's this that leads to the acceptance of thousands of drugs deaths every year or which permit the development of a social security system that actively contributes to the immiseration of those it is supposed designed to support.

I'll admit, I was sceptical about the thesis when I started reading. But McGarvey makes a compelling and persuasive case. For example, when looking at the political structures in the UK, where we make decisions about what and who matters, the declining proportion of MPs that come from working class backgrounds, and the disproportionate numbers that attended private school or who are landlords, has real consequences. We have a political

“*His anger, frustration and contempt for the systems that lock so many people into poverty is palpable*”



structure and culture that is increasingly remote from most working class people. It shows in the decisions that are made, particularly in relation to welfare.

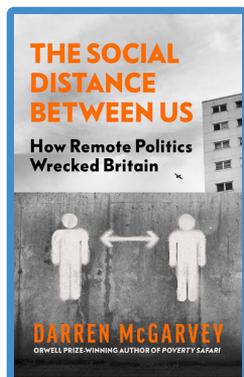
It is not just in political representation that the corrosive impact of proximity gaps is seen. It is in the privatisation of our social security system, which has led to an increasingly punitive approach where those responsible show little understanding or empathy for those who call on it for support. McGarvey's anger, frustration and contempt for the systems that lock so many people into poverty is most palpable in these sections of the book. These are feelings that readers should share by the end of it.

Despite writing about some of the most searing of social problems, McGarvey's style is engaging and accessible. This is not an academic tome about poverty and inequality, although it is clearly well researched and evidenced. What makes the book different, and perhaps more important than others covering the same topics, is McGarvey's connection to the issues under discussion.

Throughout, he reflects on his own experiences, whether of social security, working with offenders, producing documentaries, addictions or even his own changing class location. He is also able to bring to life the experiences of those he speaks to in ways that show the real consequences of the proximity gaps. These are not simply case studies, used to illustrate a point. They are people that he cares about. It is their experience, as well as his own, that fuels his analysis and radicalism.

There are some aspects of *The Social Distance Between Us* that can rankle. Some of the terms of debate are not as clear as they could be. 'Working class' and 'poverty' are too often conflated in a way that does not help his analysis. References to the 'poverty industry' also need to be clarified. Does it include all those community-based initiatives that are rightly praised in the book? Or the drugs services that have practically helped people who need help? Such an important and pejorative concept needs more explanation.

Lived experience as a means to bridge the proximity gap is an area that is referred to throughout but could be developed. The 'Interlude' section that links the first and second acts of the



book starts to flesh out how direct 'lived experience' could be used to 'open up social policy formation and analysis' – but it could go further.

McGarvey's warning, however, against using lived experience to 'validate prior assumptions' or for 'political expediency' is well made. As he says, this leaves lived experience becoming merely 'another means by which value is extracted from the poor and transferred to the affluent'. Many third sector organisation would do well to reflect on this.

Given the breadth of the topics tackled in the book, it is helpful that the recommendations that bring it to a close are focused and deliverable. They include the abolition of private education, the expansion of trade union membership and compulsory voting. These are undoubtedly radical proposals, but also ones that could start to dismantle the damaging divisions that exist in our society.

The Social Distance Between Us further establishes Darren McGarvey as one of the UK's most incisive, engaged and reflective social commentators. More importantly, it leaves the reader with a sense of the urgent need for change, as well as an understanding of some of the key steps that will make that change more likely. ●

“
McGarvey's warning against using experience for political expediency is well made”

Peter Kelly is Director of The Poverty Alliance. For more details of their work, visit: povertyalliance.org

The Social Distance Between Us by Darren McGarvey is published by Ebury Press. Available now.

Calling all agents of change

Representation Matters sets out a clear path for educators to build a curriculum that is more representative of their learners – and an ethos that addresses our true history, writes *Nuzhat Uthmani*

Aisha Thomas' book has a clarity of purpose that guides the reader through the steps necessary to become an anti-racist educator and truly understand what that means.

Starting with reflection, it encourages practitioners to understand their own identity and position within their educational environment. Educators are also gently urged to think about their personal experiences, drawing on their own lived experience and racial identity and how this has helped or hindered their experiences in life so far. Without this personal reflection, we can't fully understand the complexities of racism and its manifestation in our society. We all must accept our responsibility in motivating change from within our own spheres of influence.

This basis of reflection is core to the book, with Aisha posing questions for the reader to consider rather than just headings of chapters. For instance, should we talk to children about race? In my own lived experience, growing up as a minority ethnic child in Britain, if you are young enough to experience racism, to experience a sense of 'othering', then you are old enough to learn about it. There is a significant section on understanding racial trauma and the impact it can have on young people trying to thrive in a system that has not been created with them in mind. I would urge all schools to consider this when developing their wellbeing policies.

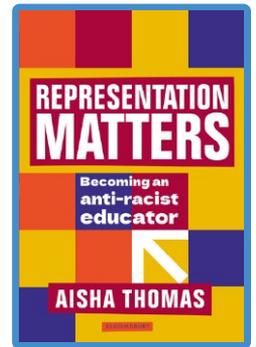
Aisha also provides a poignant observation about promoting the 'right' role models to our young people. When we think of role models we automatically consider those who have made a name for themselves in wider society. But perhaps we don't need to look beyond the classroom. The need to push for a diverse workforce in teaching is vital in providing learners with role models who understand and share their lived experiences and can show solidarity with the challenges they face. Representation matters indeed.

It is vital to point out that anti-racist practice is not just about improving your knowledge. It is in fact about your commitment as a person of influence in the lives of young people to bring about positive change.

To support this, Thomas considers steps to take when setting out an action plan to do this, including a reminder of the legal obligations to meet the needs of the Equalities Act 2010 as well as teaching standards that require us to challenge stereotypes and bias. But her emphasis is on the power of an action plan to start your school on a journey of creating fairer and more equal spaces for your young people, whilst allowing reflection about what works and what can be improved along the way.

Finally, a valuable inclusion in the book is the voice of many practitioners from different sectors who share their experiences. The variety of backgrounds included in these voices means there will be someone to identify with so you can feel supported to reflect on your position and effort to bring about improvements.

This book is essential reading for educators who understand that the way we have always done things is not good enough and are willing to be agents of change. •



“*Anti-racist practice is about your commitment as a person of influence in the lives of young people*”

Nuzhat Uthmani is an Acting Principal Teacher in Glasgow, Chair of the EIS Anti-Racist Sub Committee and Founder of Global Citizenship Education in Scotland.

Representation Matters: Becoming an anti-racist educator, by Aisha Thomas, is published by Bloomsbury and is available now.



Upcoming webinars

Strengthening Scotland's children's sector workforce is one of our key priorities. Here's a summary of some of the learning opportunities we have coming up in Winter 2022-23.

Feedback, questions or suggestions? Email events@childreninscotland.org.uk

Nov 23 **Distressed not 'difficult' – supporting distressed behaviour in children**

Nicola McAllister | Wednesday, 23 November, 10.30am-12.30pm

Hosted by child behaviour specialist Nicola McAllister, this session translates recent findings in neuroscience into practical approaches, exploring how we can be proactive and make small changes to equip children with the skills they need to meet the demands of everyday life.

Dec 6 **The teenage brain: implications for behaviour and learning**

Jan Montgomery | Tuesday, 6 December, 10.30am-12pm

Learn more about the adolescent brain, how it develops and teenage decision making as well as how best to ensure your young people receive the support they need to become healthy and happy individuals.

Dec 8 **Child Protection Lead training**

Barnardo's | Thursday, 8 December, **repeated on Thursday, 2 February** (both 10am-3pm)

This interactive training will provide learners with the skills and knowledge required to carry out the role and responsibilities of the Child Protection Lead.

Find out more about this training from an attendee at our October training – Learning Focus, page 33.

Jan 24 **Creating inclusive settings: engaging neurodiverse children**

Three Sisters Consultancy | Tuesday, 24 January, 10.30am-12pm

This session will explore neurodiversity and its effect on an individual's experience of the world. Learn more about different types of neurodiversity and how neurodivergent children and young people may experience barriers to learning, participating, and communicating with practitioners and peers.

Jan 31 **Autism and communication**

Three Sisters Consultancy | Tuesday, 31 January, 10.30am-12pm

Learn how to better support the children and young people you work with through exploring tools and practice to create a more accessible and inclusive environment in this short morning session.

Mar 21 **Person-centred pathways: helping children be masters of their own future**

Jan Montgomery | Tuesday, 21 March, 10.30am-12pm

Discover how to best support children and young people in understanding where they are in life and what they want to work towards – whether it's in relation to their education, relationships, health or care.



“Start with what young people love and what they want to do”

The Transition Fund, distributed by ILF Scotland, is creating new opportunities for a generation of young disabled people by supporting them to pursue their passions

Words: **Iain Wilson**

When the Covid-19 pandemic hit and forced everyone inside, it quickly brought about a collective understanding of how vital our social and societal links really are. In fact, after just a few clicks on a search engine you'll find numerous medical studies and reports showing how the lack of social relationships during lockdowns has negatively impacted on people's health.

But for many disabled young people, the lockdown wasn't the first time they found themselves without the social links or relationships that we now acknowledge as vital for good health. This is especially true of young disabled people who are transitioning into adulthood when the sudden loss of the safety and security of school or regular social contact can result in a real downturn in mental wellbeing and self-esteem and leave young people feeling isolated.

The Transition Fund tries to address this by helping young disabled people with the transition from school to adulthood. It aims to enhance young peoples' independence and confidence by providing grants to fund activities that will help them become more

engaged and active in their community and spend time with other young people.

ILF Scotland, who also distribute the Independent Living Fund to recipients in Scotland and Northern Ireland, launched the Transition Fund in December 2017. Since then, it has provided more than 5,000 grants to young people aged 16-25 years living with a disability, impairment or mental health condition.

The beauty of the fund is that it doesn't start with what a young person is unable to do – it starts by focussing on what they love and what they want to do.

For Ryan, that passion is music. A college student from Largs, on the Ayrshire coast, Ryan's autism meant he had trouble expressing himself and had limited opportunities for social interaction outside his family. He applied to the Transition Fund to purchase a piano and to enable him to take trombone lessons.

His step-mum, Vicky, noticed a significant difference in Ryan since he received his new piano:

“Music is a language that speaks to everybody, and for Ryan, that's his main method of communication with people. Since Ryan started getting back into music, he has become a totally different person and

“*Having access to a piano is helping me to express myself. It's important that people who are disabled get the same opportunities as everyone else”*

Ryan

Opposite:
Ryan Johnstone by Phil Wilkinson

definitely more involved in life.” Ryan agrees that it has made a big change. He now feels happier and more confident in himself and has big dreams to make his love of music into his career:

“Having access to a piano is helping me to express myself. It’s also helping me to study an HNC in music and a diploma in piano. I would like to study a degree in music performance at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. I’m also learning to play the trombone. Playing with my local brass band makes me feel more sociable – it gets me out of the house and I really enjoy it.” But it’s his final statement that really hits home. *“It’s important that people who are disabled get the same opportunities as everyone else.”*

Someone for whom that statement could not be truer is avid drawer, Emma. Emma, who has a speech impairment,

learning disability and Downs Syndrome, faces a range of disabling barriers in life. As a result, she has developed routines which help her with her understanding of daily tasks.

Communication challenges can make it difficult for others to interact with Emma, meaning her social circle is largely based on close family members. The iPad Pro, pen and keypad she received through the Transition Fund allowed Emma to draw and create, while also helping her understanding of her surroundings.

Emma enjoys the art capabilities of the iPad pro, while talking to Siri (the virtual assistant on Apple devices) helps her to find out all sorts of information. Technology is incredibly powerful in allowing people with limited social opportunities to meet and interact with others in their

community. Emma loves to feel connected with the outside world and feels the iPad lets her do this. Emma’s dad summed up the family’s experience:

“From our viewpoint, the fund has been a gateway for Emma into a world of information that she was previously excluded from. It has been a game-changer in giving her parity with her peers.”

Remember that joy we all felt when the world started to open up for us after the pandemic? How we felt when the things we’d previously taken for granted were available to us once again? That’s the feeling the Transition Fund wants to replicate. By awarding young disabled people grants to follow their passions, we hope that their worlds start to open up with lots of potential – and they’re ready to get out there and take it on. ●



Iain Wilson is the Self-Directed Support Manager for the Transition Fund

For more information, or to apply for the Transition Fund, visit ilf.scot/transition-fund

Home is where the heart is

Many care-experienced young people have painful stories to tell about insecure accommodation, tenancy breakdowns and isolation. A Children in Scotland project with Staf aimed to change that by testing out new rights-based approaches to housing. Now it's time to act on the findings



Words: Chris Ross

The importance of home can't be overstated. For many of us, it is where we think of when we are tired or need rest. It should be a place where we feel happy, secure and safe.

However, for many care-experienced young people, that's not always the case. Evidence tells us that transitioning into a first independent tenancy can present significant challenges for this particular demographic. Many tenancies break down. Rates of homelessness among those with care experience are worryingly high. It is yet another area where we do not get it right for this community.

The Home and Belonging project looked to challenge this. Initially managed by the Life Changes Trust, it funded 11 projects to explore innovative ways of providing housing support to those with experience of care as they moved into their first home. It looked to improve experiences of home, connections in the community and experiences of transitions from care. It also aimed to explore how collaboration and co-design could support this, all while identifying practices that could be shared more widely.

Some funded projects trialled embedding relationship-based practice in housing support through life coaching or peer flatmate approaches. Others explored how feelings of home and belonging can be fostered in the wider community. Ultimately, all of this was aimed at identifying ways of improving outcomes for young people with experience of care as they move into their first homes.

Over the last three years, we have worked closely with Staf (Scottish Throughcare and Aftercare Forum) to evaluate the impact of the initiative. We are excited to now be able to share these findings.

The role of lived experience

Lived experience has been at the heart of the project. In Year 1, we worked with three young people with experience of care to develop our approach. They helped identify how the evaluation would work and build our initial thematic framework. In Year 3, we employed a Project Assistant with experience of care to support the development of our methods and be involved in the final analysis. Aimee's contributions have been key to ensuring the findings and recommendations are grounded in concrete calls that will make a difference for young people with experience of care. (Read Aimee's article about the project on page 32).

This has once again reaffirmed the value of adopting rights-based approaches. By embedding the views of people with experience of care we have been able to deliver a stronger evaluation. It has rooted our



“**Power must be passed from adults to young people. We know the transformative impact this can have, so let’s support it to become the norm**”

findings, and our recommendations, in what people with experience of care need and have a right to hold as their own.

Key findings

The initiative has provided a range of necessary and valued support across its three-year lifespan. Through our evaluation, we’ve seen new practices and a reaffirmation of the value of things we know work well. Achieving this in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic is impressive and we applaud all the funded projects for how they have adapted and continued to provide vital support.

The importance of ongoing relationships has been at the core of work across the projects. Building meaningful relationships has been key to young people engaging with services, accessing support and opening up about the issues they face. Support for people with experience of care must be grounded in relationship-based practice, young person-led, available seven days a week and on a long-term basis. We’ve also seen how channeling finances directly to young people to identify what they need and want in their house has improved their sense of empowerment and ownership. And we saw how co-producing spaces explicitly for young people with experience of care can foster a sense of community, connection and belonging.

There has been a novel approach to the way the corporate parenting board is delivered in Shetland, with young people now directly involved in setting the agenda and identifying areas of work. We believe there is potential for continued embedding of participation and the passing of power from adults to young people so they can be involved in decisions

about their lives. We know the transformative impact this can have: let’s support it to become the norm. As well as highlighting positive interventions, our evaluation also considered the gaps in provision for young people with experience of care as they move into their first home. Too often projects were supporting young people to get new homes up to an acceptable standard of furnishing and décor before they could move into them. There needs to be much greater consideration of how a higher standard of housing can be provided and maintained.

Focus on reform

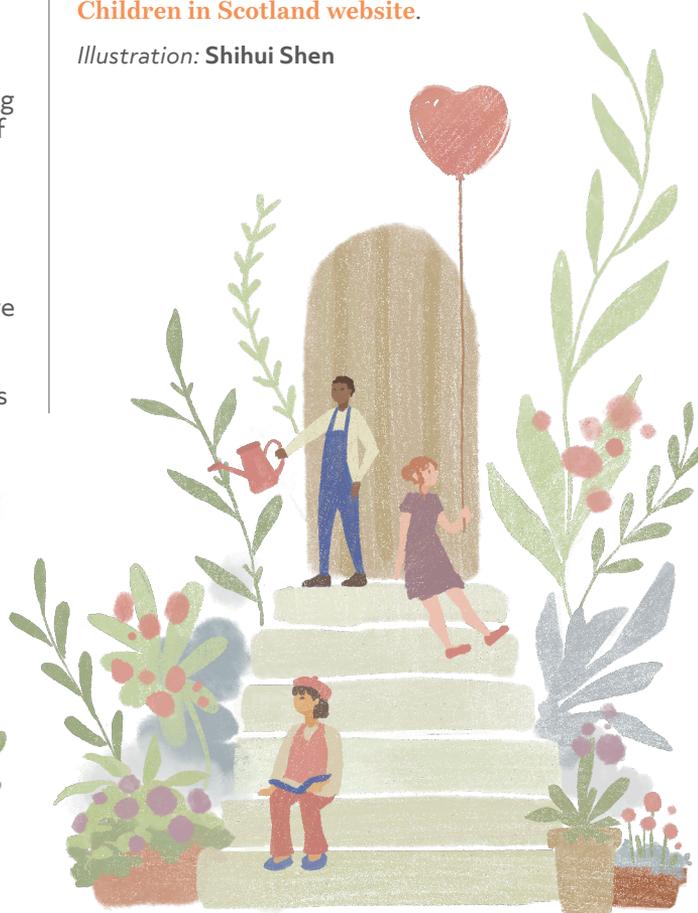
The initiative has brought into focus our shared responsibility to Keep The Promise to young people with experience of care. Implementation of The Promise has been challenging, with systemic barriers impeding progress. Similar issues were faced across the Home and Belonging funded projects. If we want to realise our ambition and meet our commitments to care-experienced young people, together we must reform policy and practice.

Young people know what home and belonging looks like to them. We need to listen and act to ensure they experience it. •

Chris Ross is Senior Policy, Projects and Participation Officer at Children in Scotland.

The **Home and Belonging** final evaluation is now available on the [Children in Scotland website](#).

Illustration: **Shihui Shen**



“Relationships will blossom”

Aimee Thorpe on what she’s learned from Home and Belonging



I joined Children in Scotland in January 2022 as Project Assistant on the evaluation of Home and Belonging. I worked collaboratively and independently to help collect and analyse data from project staff and young people for the Year 3 final report. Working with Children in Scotland on such an important initiative has exposed me to a whole new world. It has been so insightful to see the hard work that goes into these types of projects.

One of the most exciting things to come out of this report for me is the changes to the corporate parenting board in Shetland through the work that the University of the Highlands and Islands and WhoCares? Scotland developed in their project. It represents a massive step forward in involving young people with experience of care in decision-making. Co-production is vital when making changes within any community. Working directly alongside those who have experience of care when making these changes will ensure decisions are informed, relevant and not tokenistic. This is such a powerful change, and it is perfectly realistic that it could be rolled out to local authorities across Scotland.

It has also been interesting to see the success of things like peer flatmate schemes. This approach, trialled in East Lothian, has allowed two young people with experience of care to move into their first home, living with a volunteer who attends the local university. It appears to be a really positive way to ensure young people with experience of care have the support they need, provided in an informal and genuine way. The approach allows people to build real relationships that are not based on someone being paid to work with you. Relationships in care can often feel manufactured, so having the peer flatmate scheme provides support and allows naturally occurring relationships to blossom.

On a personal level, involvement in this has developed my communication skills and I’ve become more confident. I’ve maintained contact with all the funded projects and helped deliver sessions with young people and staff. Visiting two of the projects in person has been a particular highlight. Meeting such diverse and amazing groups of young people and being able to see how the projects have personally impacted them has been absolutely inspiring.

I have learned so much and I cannot wait to see the positive changes that are to come! ●

Aimee was Project Assistant – Policy, Projects and Participation with us from January to October 2022



Supporting the Third Sector Project

The Supporting The Third Sector Project is funded by the Scottish Government Strategy and GIRFEC team and hosted through Children in Scotland.

The project’s ambition is that the Third Sector is a strong partner in Children’s Services Planning. We do that through working closely with Scotland’s Third Sector Interfaces (TSI) and facilitating the TSI Children’s Services Network to ensure that local third sector organisations are involved strategically in national and local policy and practice developments.

For more information about the project, please contact:

girfec@childreninScotland.org.uk

[@STTS_Project](https://twitter.com/STTS_Project)

Voices Forum

Bringing voices together

Children in Scotland’s Voices Forum bring together the diverse knowledge, skills and experience of our members to seek solutions for the most pressing issues affecting children in Scotland today.

Jan 24 Join us for the next meeting of the Voices Forum on Tuesday 24 January 2023, 10am-12pm

Email Parisa to book your place: pshirazi@childreninScotland.org.uk



Leading from the front

As part of the **Learning Focus** series, we share one delegate's experience of our Child Protection Lead training, led by Barnardo's, and their thoughts on how it will inform future work

Words: Robert McKinnon

Attending the Lead Child Protection Training from Children in Scotland, and delivered by Barnardos, was a great opportunity to listen to fellow professionals working in different fields in the sector.

In the past I have always undertaken this training with colleagues from out of school services. Nine times out of ten, we will come up with similar responses, especially when looking at scenarios involving younger children. What I found most valuable was the way staff who work with young people respond to child protection. There were such inspiring individuals on this course who work in this sector. They have a wealth of knowledge and it was a pleasure to collaborate with them in the workshops.

I had attended the training before. However, Child Protection is crucial in my role, so it was great to refresh my knowledge. It also made me think about how I can update our procedures around keeping children as safe as possible. I have now begun to look at the National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland 2021 and will be adapting our own policies to make sure they sit alongside the best practice highlighted in the training.

At our next monthly staff meeting, my staff will be given feedback from this training day. We already have a strong focus on protecting the children we

work alongside. The training has highlighted one or two areas we can improve on as a staff team. All staff will be given an opportunity to attend child protection training; it is vital they keep their own knowledge up to date. The course also emphasised documenting all concerns concisely and how all the small things involving a child often come together to provide greater insight into what might be happening in their life.

Throughout, the course felt relevant and engaging. The trainers delivering it quickly built

up a good rapport with the group and showed great knowledge of the areas highlighted within the training. An emphasis was placed on the group sharing their experiences. This kept me engaged as I could then relate it to my own practice. My service is only a small organisation, so it was helpful to find out there are sources of support available to me if required.

Overall, I found this training very interesting and useful and would definitely recommend it to any professional who plays a lead role with children. ●



Robert McKinnon is Service Manager at Pollokshaws Afterschool Service.
f @Pollokshawsafterschoolservice

Robert attended the Child protection Lead training in October 2022.

Dec
8

The next **Child Protection Lead training** will be held online on Thursday 8 December, 10am-3pm, repeated Thursday 2 February.

To find out more and book your place, visit:
eventbrite.com/o/children-in-scotland-20206726841
or email events@childreninscotland.org.uk



Members' spotlight

Each issue we profile one of our member organisations, highlighting their work and how they are contributing to improving children's lives



Profile: A membership organisation representing social workers and other professionals who lead and support social work across all sectors.

At your 2022 annual conference, social work professionals reflected on 'what the profession needs to enable people and families to thrive'. What do you think are the opportunities and the challenges?

Vivien Thomson, Children and Families Policy and Practice Lead, Social Work Scotland:

Social work operates in a context of challenge and crisis in both individual lives and wider society, so challenge and opportunity are not foreign to us.

Currently, there are so many diverse factors combining to create an environment that is almost unmanageable – a national recruitment crisis across all social work and related areas, a cost-of-living crisis affecting the people we work with and our profession, many legislative and policy changes, and the impact of the pandemic on the level of need and demand which continues to ripple outwards.

In the policy landscape, the GIRFEC refresh, The Promise and related action plan, and possible developments around a National Care Service are giving an increased profile to social work. These, while bringing their own pressures, also provide opportunities to return to some of the core values of social work around relationships, respect and human rights.

What are the changes in policy and legislation that we need to see to support social work and social care professionals?

Investment is key. Our *Setting the Bar* report published in June highlighted many of the challenges facing social workers. These need attention now. We cannot wait. We need to give immediate attention to supporting the people supporting children and families and individuals. That means investing in training, support and development for workers.

What has been the key learning for social work and social care in the last 12 months?

Social workers, their managers, and those providing social services kept going through the pandemic, protecting individuals and delivering critical social services. Now we face improvement expectations, new legislation and a proposal to fundamentally change the context within which we work through the National Care Service Bill. Our response to the bill consultation has robustly asked for a 'pause' to the tight timescale

in order to fully consider options and enable proper time for co-design with a currently exhausted workforce and service users.

What we have learned is that we have some amazing social workers, managers and providers of social care; that it is not possible to deliver excellent social work and social care without similarly excellent care of our workforce; that change is needed to achieve what The Promise, our workforce and our children and families are telling us needs to happen; and that the underinvestment over many years in the core social work service must be turned around.

Why is membership of Children in Scotland important to you?

Your wide membership and remit, covering all aspects of children's lives, allows us to keep informed about policy and practice across disciplines and contributes to enabling a collaborative approach to our work as the social work leadership organisation in Scotland. We view you as a valued partner in the drive to create the 'good childhood' we all want for Scotland's children. ●



Above: The Social Work Scotland team at the Scottish Social Services Awards in 2021 (Vivien Thomson is pictured standing far right).

Find out more about Social Work Scotland at: socialworkscotland.org

Interview by **Catherine Bromley**

The Witch's Finger

AT THE BACK OF THE PLAYGROUND, THERE'S AN OLD GATE.



BEHIND THE GATE, THERE'S AN OLD TREE, THAT USED TO BE A WITCH.



SHE STRETCHES OUT HER BRANCHES, DOWN TOWARDS THE GATE.



AND EVERY YEAR, THE CHILDREN DARE THEMSELVES TO REACH OUT AND TOUCH THE WITCH'S FINGER.

EVERYONE LAUGHS NERVOUSLY, NOT QUITE TRYING TOO HARD TO REACH.



BUT EVERY SO OFTEN...



...SOMEONE WAKES THE WITCH.

AND THE GAME IS OVER FOR ANOTHER YEAR.



Safe and secure...



It's very important for parents and carers to **be aware of** hazards to their children when it comes to wrongfully consumed objects, which can lead to choking, accidental poisoning or the ingestion of items such as **button batteries**.

Responding to this mounting concern, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) has launched its Safe and Secure campaign nationwide.

The campaign, which was launched alongside the Office for Product Safety and Standards (OPSS) #NilByMouth initiative, aims to reduce the number of incidents involving the ingestion of button or coin batteries in the household.

These batteries are small, flat and circular so can be easily swallowed. They can be found in various devices such as watches, electronic toys, calculators and remote controls. They have the potential to seriously harm or prove fatal if swallowed because of the significant damage they can cause to internal organs.

The Safe and Secure campaign also focuses on other ingestion-based dangers such as small toys, magnets or other items that have faulty or loose parts.

High-strength magnets can be found in toys, puzzles and some craft and fashion items such as fake piercings and can cause horrific damage to the body if swallowed.

Many young children also sadly end up in hospital after swallowing something poisonous. Household cleaning products should always be stored in their original containers, lids replaced and all products should be put away safely immediately after use. It's also vital to make sure that all medication is stored in a lockable cupboard out of the reach of children.

RoSPA's new Safe and Secure webpage offers guidance on how to be mindful of potential risks as well as how to respond if you think a child has swallowed a button battery.



accidents don't have to happen

To find out more...

please visit: [rospa.com/safe-and-secure](https://www.rospa.com/safe-and-secure)