

## Education Children and Young People Committee

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T3.60

Minister for Children, Young People and  
The Promise

The Scottish Parliament

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Dear Minister,

### **The Promise**

On 27 March 2024, the Education, Children and Young People Committee met 37 care experienced young people to discuss The Promise at an event organised in partnership with Who Cares? Scotland. I am writing on behalf of the Committee to highlight the evidence provided to us at the event, which is set out below and in the annexe to this letter.

The Committee was extremely concerned to hear from care experienced young people that they have not seen improvements in the care system since the Promise was made. Whilst some good practice was highlighted, particularly in Shetland, most comments illustrated continued failings in the care system. This included:

#### *Resources and school*

- social workers being assigned heavy caseloads due to a lack of resources and therefore being unable to give care experienced young people the time and attention they need;
- young people experiencing frequent changes in their social worker, impacting on relationships;
- feeling ‘othered’ in school due to a lack of understanding about what it means to be care experienced among both teachers and fellow pupils.

### *Leaving care*

- a lack of ongoing support after leaving care;
- a lack of resources for through-care to support the transition from 16+ into adulthood;
- a lack of supported accommodation for 16-25 year olds and experiences of being placed in accommodation alongside adults with addictions, feeling unsafe in this accommodation, and ending up homeless after leaving care.

### *Secure care*

- young people being placed in secure care due to a lack of alternative accommodation and those with mental health issues being housed alongside young people who are in the criminal justice system;
- a lack of bespoke treatment of young people in secure care and poor conditions, such as a lack of fresh air;
- being placed in secure care can mean moving far from previous accommodation to a place where the young person has no connections.

### *Rights and siblings*

- care experienced young people often not being made aware of their rights or support available for advocacy;
- care experienced young people being separated from siblings at a young age, needing to fight to stay together;
- young people felt contact with siblings continues to be very limited in many cases and is dependent on social workers making an effort to arrange it.

Young people also told Committee members they wanted to see the First Minister and other members of the Scottish Government engage directly with them. They expressed frustration that this is not happening currently. Young people told Members that there is a need for care experienced young people to be listened to and to see change happening as a result. The Committee will do further work on The Promise as part of its work programme in the Autumn but asks for a detailed response from the Scottish Government to the points highlighted in this letter and in the attached notes.

I would ask for a response to this letter by 21 June to allow the Committee to consider it as part of its discussion of its work programme prior to the summer recess.

Kind regards,

Sue Webber MSP

Convener

# Who Cares? Scotland

## Informal Session notes

### Group 1 - Note of discussion

**Participants made the following points:**

#### **Education – what helps in school?**

- At school, some young people had the opportunity to go to “The Base” – time out, a supportive place and learning at a slower and more manageable pace.
- There is a Promise Group at school – a group of pupils who are young carers and those in care; there are 2 periods a week off timetable – away from stress, doing different activities, speaking to others going through the same issues and going on trips for respite.
- In secure school, extra teachers were added so that young people can get access to education and subjects as if they were in a mainstream high school.
- Meetings take place when social workers are working, so the young person is missing out on lessons at school and a right to an education.
- Stigma of being care experienced – people think it is likely that the young person won't do well at school; 'I'm always missing classes for meetings so don't end up in the 'top' class because I have a social worker and miss so many classes.'
- A social worker made a young person choose between education and seeing a parent; the young person didn't want to leave school so didn't see their parent for 5 months. They felt that they didn't have a proper choice and there should be more flexibility; the Promise should be child-centred and listen to what young people are saying.
- There is a lack of support for young people who are close to leaving school.
- Young person feels they are being forced out of school and towards college as there is no resource in the school, but they want to be in school as long as possible. Their only support is the Promise Group, which is great; but leaving school means young person won't be in that group anymore.

#### **Stigma in school – what needs to be prioritised to address this?**

- There is stigma in schools.
- Young people don't want to be treated differently. As soon as teachers know there is social work involvement, young people feel they are treated differently and think the teachers feel the young people have no capability.
- Everyone has the right to an education, but some young people have been expelled; if you have a social worker then teachers think you are a bad kid.

### **Does doing things separately in smaller groups cause stigma?**

- Young people can feel stigma, with other pupils saying things, but there are also some pupils who wish they had the same opportunity to attend separate, smaller groups.
- It can be easier to make friends in a smaller group; it helps with anxiety and lets young people be themselves. The Promise Group is a safe space.
- Support groups for care experienced children should be an option for all care experienced children, as the issue is not the separate support they are offered, but the stigma around being in care or care experienced.

### **Do you feel comfortable raising issues? What support do you get? Do you have an advocate?**

- Most young people do have an advocate but some didn't know if they did.
- Some young people do feel comfortable raising issues, but others don't feel that they are being listened to by adults/staff.
- If something needed to be changed, the young person would need the advocate to be from the outside (another organisation) rather than in the secure unit where they are placed.

### **Where to go after leaving care?**

- There is a lack of resources for those in care and through-care to support young people; there is a need for more people and services to support the transition from 16+ and into adulthood.
- There is confusion about who pays - is it adult services who provide the resources and funding?
- A young person can be left behind or fall through the cracks if they don't engage with the adult services right away; they might not engage as they need time to build relationships and trust.
- The Promise is great, but the through-care isn't working; young people might have a good relationship with their current housing team but if that relationship changes through staff leaving, then it can break down.
- 'I know I will need a transition plan, but I don't know when a social worker will be allocated' and there is an issue with the unknown.
- 'I don't know what is happening or if I will even get throughcare support.' What happens after a young person turns 16, 17 and then 18?

### **Do you think those working on keeping the Promise (such as councils and social work departments) have what they need to help them do this? If not, what do you think they need?**

- The Promise is good, but it comes down to a lack of resources (space available in accommodation) to promote The Promise. If you have a young person with nowhere to go, but doesn't fit criteria for secure, there isn't an accommodation resource for this, and a young person can end up in a secure unit as there is nowhere else for them to go.

- 'I was told "there's nowhere for you to go" by my social worker.'
- Young people gave examples of having multiple (in one case 8) social workers in one year and raised concerns about a lack of staffing.
- Social workers are struggling with big caseloads. To successfully support a young person and meet what is set out in The Promise, social workers should have 5 young people on their caseload but not the 15-20 they have, sometimes more.
- Personality can make a good social worker – building relationships. The social worker is not able to build relationships with the young person as they are moved around, or they leave the profession – 'all social workers do is write reports.'
- Social Workers are dropped from supporting young people due to funding.
- When young people have progressed well, the resource is removed when it shouldn't be.
- One young person was thriving due to the support they received from a social worker, but this support was dropped because it looked like the young person was coping; but they struggled once the social work resource was pulled before proper structures were put in place – no time for transition.
- If a young person asks for something, they can be left waiting for a long time to get an answer.
- The Promise calls for scaffolded support, but it can't be implemented if there's no workforce or social workers are changing all the time.
- Some young people don't have a social worker and they need one.
- Young people need better answers and support than is currently provided. The scaffolding and the support available to young people isn't consistent.
- There are only 3 Children's Rights Officers in Aberdeenshire which causes issues; need more resources (staff).

**There are young people who are in secure care for mental health reasons in a unit with another young person who has committed a serious crime. Can we discuss issues around young people not being separated based on their needs and the reasons they are in secure care?**

- Young people in secure care are constantly waiting for a plan from a social worker; young people are told to regulate their behaviour without support and guidance on how to do it. A young person's behaviour can be used as an excuse, especially if the young person is unable to regulate this.
- One young person said they felt hopeless. They were reviewed every 3 months and always told negative things: 'A day in secure feels like a year.'
- There is a lack of resources to transition young people from secure; we need 1:1 specialist support but either can't find anyone to do the job (not trained) or it's too expensive to hire someone.
- 9- and 10-year-olds are in secure care, with behavioural and learning difficulties. They are living away from their families, but if they had the right support at the right time, they could have avoided being in secure care; timely support is important and needed.

- Young people feel treated like prisoners; one young person didn't meet secure care criteria and they were only there as they were on transition plan and there was nowhere else to go; but in the same unit, there was a 9-year-old (severely autistic) and a 21-year-old waiting to go on remand – all three in secure for very different reasons. Adults don't know or understand what it is like. The ages of young people going into secure seem to be getting younger and younger.
- Secure can be difficult; a young person is in with those charged with attempted murder because there was no space elsewhere; everyone in the secure unit is 'tarred with the same brush.'
- There should be individual plans for everyone, rather than those in secure having liberties restricted due to other individuals living in the secure unit.
- 'In secure accommodation, I feel treated like a prisoner as it is a restriction of liberties, based on the needs of others in the secure unit – one rule applies to everyone.'
- Young people should have more individualised placements.
- The scaffolding isn't working as nothing can be implemented if there aren't the spaces for young people; if there was a specialist unit available other than secure care that would be helpful but there isn't.
- One young person spoke of very violent experiences in secure.
- When you are in secure you get institutionalised; there can be an issue with noise and light which instantly makes young people look different as they wear headphones and glasses all the time.

**What have you experienced since The Promise was made in 2020? Have things changed?**

- Most young people shaking heads: 'No.'
- The Promise Group has been helpful; it helps you connect with other teachers and pupils with different experiences: young carers, kinship care, bereavement, adoptive care.
- There are Promise Groups, but they are not offered to all young people, particularly ones who look like they are coping.
- Support should be open to everyone who is care experienced; just because a young person is doing well it doesn't mean they are doing well mentally.
- It's helpful to meet other young people at regular meetings of a care experienced young people group to discuss issues, removing stigma and labels.
- We need more people trained to provide support; staff need more training to avoid putting young people 'in a box' and the time to build the relationship, rather than social workers changing all the time.
- Teachers need to get trauma informed training and to understand what young people have been going through; classmates don't understand and the young person gets taken out of school all the time, so they feel isolated.
- Relationships with social worker are key; the young person is care experienced for a reason and they need someone who they can trust and be

a corporate parent; there are already trust issues, perpetuated by lack of social work resource where there's no time to build responsibility.

- One young person had stability (looked after by family) but after a bereavement, they ended up with 3 different Social Workers.
- It comes back to lack of resources – not enough social workers, supported accommodation places, training for staff, and generally not enough support.
- There is a need for more social workers, but they need to be trained; you can have a family support worker who is great, relationships can be good but they can't make the right decisions as they are not a trained social worker.
- Contact is now to be called "family time"; the change of language doesn't help. It is hard for young person to hear that language used when they see their relations as there maybe isn't a 'family' relationship there.
- Some young people are happy to go into residential care rather than be in the family home; it's a difficult choice.
- No one prepares you for your birth family finding/contacting you on Facebook. Sometimes the advice is for young person to come off social media; a young person shouldn't have to resort to that.
- Young people need to be prepared for different situations and for the support to be there at the right time; social workers don't have the time or resource for this.
- Group living: places all have different rules and this varies between local authorities.
- Young people need to see the action happening – they won't trust people to do something unless they see the difference; we have not seen change in a long time and so need to see the change.

### **What can be done about the lack of support for carers? What does caring responsibility look like?**

- There is a lack of support for young carers. There are no support systems at school, young people are acting out due to exhaustion, school is causing pressure by adding homework which is a lot for young people with caring responsibilities.

### **What would make a significant difference?**

- When a young person asks a question, it takes ages to get an answer, or the answer is skirted around; no direct answers given about their life. Young people need answers, not just quickly but better answers. Young people need options and decisions explained properly and time to process. Young people have needed to come up with the answer for themselves with little support and others have also had social workers walking out on them.
- People underestimate where the money goes; people make decisions based on money – accommodation can feel like a business rather than thinking about the child.
- More money is needed – more social workers and more places for people, more quality food in care and secure accommodation.

**Question for MSPs: How are you (MSPs) making sure there's still input from young people when working on The Promise without asking them the same questions over and over?**

MSPs made the following points:

- It's about giving voice to young people. We need to listen and feed back what we have heard. We want to avoid repetition. Young people need to see things changing and action being taken.
- It's incredibly important that the service users (care experienced) say what it is that they need. There's a lot of professionals giving support, but we need to hear from young people. Opinions on how young people are being cared for need to be heard. We need to listen to make sure that it is not a tick-box exercise.

**Information provided to Members by young people via post-it notes**

- Some of us need support but we don't know how to ask for it.
- Even though we get told we're getting listened to, nothing ever changes. Like people have said, it's just box ticking for some people. People also think it's our fault we are in care, but people make us feel so dumb for not being with our birth parents.
- We just want our opinions to be thought of. It's our lives not the people who know nothing about us.
- We need more social workers as we don't get the right support from the social workers just now. They don't have time. They need more education and training on different situations and not to put people in boxes to make them look good.
- We need to see change in order to believe you. We want change.
- Question for MSPs – what can be done for the lack of support for young carers in education?
- During this 2-hour session, I felt rushed in our talks. We need more time to talk to get our points across.



## Group 2 – Note of discussion

**Participants made the following points:**

**What can local authorities do for those being informally or formally excluded to support them to stay in school?**

- They should not have an exclusion policy; they should try to understand why the young person is acting that way and give them space to breathe.
- One young person said that the time when they needed most support was when they were younger; the harm they were experiencing was being built upon and it felt like there was no way out.
- How care experienced people are talked about is very important; whilst at school one young person only heard the term mentioned when discussing young offenders.
- One young person was the only care experienced person in their class; there is no information available to teachers and mistakes were made when talking about care experienced people and the system they are in.
- There is a need for more signposting to advocacy services, etc.
- One young person was automatically put into an additional support class with other students who had problems such as drinking, etc because they are care experienced.
- Teachers should be more informed; a lot had no idea what the young person was going through; teachers should listen to the child when they tell them what help they need.
- High School is a toxic place to navigate, and exclusions add to care experienced young people being ostracised.
- Care experienced people are often put in with the 'bad kids'; there is no understanding that young people do not end up in care due to their own actions.
- Care experienced young people should be offered opportunities to do creative work; for example, John Lewis is collaborating with creative care experienced people.
- School exclusions were meant to be ended as part of the Promise; only one council has done that to date.

**Can we talk about how to make sure that people supporting you (e.g. foster carers, social workers) are there for the right reasons. What does good support look like?**

- The work being done in Shetland is 'phenomenal'; problems are dealt with on the day and Shetland is becoming the 'lighthouse' of Scotland by working closely with parents and holding meetings based on what the young person wants; the young person has a say in who is at the meetings and where they take place.
- There is great teamwork in Shetland with care experienced people working closely with parents, schools, police, companies and organisations. There

needs to be a focus on how Shetland can 'bring the light to the mainland.' The best thing is not just to listen but to act to make those physical changes and to resolve issues on the day, like in Shetland.

**There are young people who are in secure care for mental health reasons in a unit with another young person who has committed a serious crime. Can we discuss issues around young people not being separated based on their needs and the reasons they are in secure care?**

**Young people in secure care have limited access to fresh air (for example, due to locked windows). Can we discuss the impacts of this and how this might change in the future?**

- People who are a threat to others are also vulnerable.
- Some people are only put into a secure unit based on what accommodation is available; some people put there that should not have ended up there.
- One young person 'went through hell' going through all the different systems (foster care, residential, etc); they were 20 when they finally got their own accommodation in a place labelled as a hostel which was not properly regulated; nobody listened to them at all.
- Most units are full and people can't choose where they go; people who are vulnerable to abuse are in with others who have abused others (although they are also vulnerable); this has a big impact on young people's lives.
- One young person who was in secure care felt like they had dry skin and a dry mouth due to lack of fresh air; the exercise area was not big enough to get into a full sprint; they needed to get a member of staff to come and change the channel on the TV – 'is that what we mean when we talk about the Promise?'
- There are only 6 secure care units in Scotland; there isn't one in every local authority area.
- Some rural areas don't have secure units; when they were 15, one young person was going out with their best friend every night 'causing havoc' and the police were involved; this was mainly a cry for help and for love. The house managers gave up and put one of the young people into secure care in the South of Scotland, whilst the other young person got to stay in the residential care home in the north. They haven't seen each other since.
- It is important to note how far away the secure care units are; young people sent there have to readjust – they feel hopeless and don't feel like they have family or long-lasting friends, which is really difficult to deal with; this is another contributor to abandonment and connection issues and feeling like they need to move around all the time.
- Young people put into secure units are 'thrown in there like a bag of tatties'; adults are not spending time listening to the child to work out what the problems are. There is no understanding of what a secure unit is; it isn't a home; nobody would want that for their children.
- 'I've never heard a staff member say that someone has moved into secure care as if there is still hope for that kid – everyone clashes with staff in

different ways – but it never feels deserved when a young person gets sent to secure care.’

- Secure care is the convenient answer; one person had worked with a young person who was a violent sex offender; he was sent into secure care but was also vulnerable; there were also young women with experience of sexual violence in the unit. Secure care units are places for punishment *and* safety, but they treat people like a prisoner.
- Secure units can be the same as a young offenders' institute.

**Do you feel that care experienced people know about their rights and can access advocacy? What can be done to make sure that people find out about that?**

- A lot of people don't know about being care experienced even when they fall into that category; it is not talked about at school – rights don't get talked about at all and people don't know what they're entitled to.
- If more people knew about care experience, then there would be less stigma. One young person was introduced to Who Cares? Scotland and learned about his rights through them; however, lots of people are not part of an organisation or aware of their rights.
- Sometimes adults think they know what's best but they need to listen to young people rather than overlooking them.
- One young person had experience of care when they were younger; they were in unsafe circumstances and the police got involved but they were constantly reintroduced to an unsafe environment.
- One young person did not understand their rights when they were younger; their parents contested them being sent to residential care and so they ended up in foster care; the adults are in control and there are limited rights for children.
- One young person struggled with being heard in the unit; their reaction was to start crying but the response of adults was to say 'we'll talk about this when you've calmed down'; the young person couldn't express what was wrong in a way that the adults would listen; they didn't feel listened to.
- Teaching young people about emotions is very important; one young person didn't learn about emotions in whilst in care; you were just either happy or angry and nobody listens.

**What support is needed to help care experienced people at risk of homelessness?**

- When you're coming up to 16<sup>th</sup> birthday there is nowhere to go; you're no longer the state's problem – how is that going to be challenged?
- People are being put into accommodation with alcoholics, drug addicts, ex-offenders or sent back to abusive parents and then ending up on the street; a lot of people enter into adulthood and find that their social workers are 'done with them.'

- One young person's care order ended at 16 years old; they only get £250 per month to pay for everything; they are in education but need to work; they've been living alone since they were 17 with nobody to support them; a lot of people feel helpless and hopeless with nowhere to go.
- University accommodation was made available to one young person, but she had to remind them that it was an entitlement; this should be automatically recognised.
- One young person used to live in supported accommodation for 16-25 year olds which was good, but they had to move into university halls when their course started; they also had to give up benefits when they went into higher education.
- Supported accommodation for the 16-25 age group is sparse; most young people have to go into adult accommodation.
- 'When I was homeless, I was in a 16-25 unit that had bars on the windows and CCTV, and I had very little to live on per week; there was no support from social work; I was trapped – how are you meant to process that as a young person?'
- There is no support when you leave care, so you end up homeless; 'it takes so long to get support that get your flat taken off you.'
- Young people are not prepared for the practicalities of living alone; one young person had to call a friend's dad for help when the electricity went out.
- There is 'constant pressure' to move out of accommodation when you turn 16 to vacate the bed, due to there not being enough young people's centres.
- It is difficult to access scholarships for housing; young people shouldn't have to jump through hoops to access support.
- 'There is meant to be outreach from the young person's unit when you leave but I only had that for one month.'
- Young people should be taught about how to manage their finances; if a care experienced person goes into debt, where is the support?
- Care experienced young people don't have parents to act as a financial safety net.
- One young single parent was told they had to prove that they deserved housing when they met the head of services in Glasgow, 'shouldn't have to prove that you deserve it.'

**What are your thoughts on whether the Promise can be delivered by 2030 and what do you think needs to happen to deliver it?**

- Care experienced young people don't have a lot of financial opportunities when it comes to getting jobs etc as they are focused on stability and getting a roof over their head.
- 'They should give benefits to students who want to progress in education'; being corporate parents is really important.
- 'Doesn't feel that much has changed as I had to provide visible proof at the age of 15 that I was being abused, and it took until age 17 to get my own accommodation.'

- The system in Glasgow to move care experienced people into their own home has completely failed and has collapsed.
- One young person was in a young person's mental health unit for a year but felt that they would not have had access to this if they were in care at the time [they were staying with their parents when they entered the mental health unit].

**How do you think decision makers can best further their understanding of issues facing care experienced people without placing a burden on care experienced people?**

- We've been talking about these issues for years and asking young people about it continuously but nothing changes; what we're saying isn't being listened to.
- Young people's views should be captured in writing and referred to when making policy.
- We need to fix the problem; 'I've been in too many scenarios where I've been overlooked for opportunities or side-lined; some people have stories that could change things for the better.'
- There's an element of spin that things are good but much more work needs to be done. We need to talk more and change the narrative – remove the stigma and let care experienced people know it's safe to share our stories.
- It's always a hard situation being in care – it's never a big success – you have zero boundaries, and nobody is taking care of you; for example, 'you can smoke just don't do it outside the unit; there is no accountability at all.'
- 'I'm considered a success story; people talk about how far I've come but I'm constantly struggling with things.'
- We need to highlight negative situations as growing up in care is not positive – 'it takes a lot of grit to get through it alive.'
- One young person has done work with an author looking at promoting different narratives.
- South Lanarkshire Council holds a 'care day' where people talk about their success stories and about things that need to change, but 'I'm not seeing any direct policy or change through the Promise that is making anything better.'
- 'I've been in 3 different schools in 3 years, and this has not been picked up at the annual South Lanarkshire Council corporate parent event. The Promise is not far enough down the line 4 years on.'
- It is important to educate schools, social workers and carers on what it is like to be care experienced; 'these are sets of people that let me down in the past; I had a teacher who said: "you've done very well for someone like you."
- I only feel proud to be care experienced through Who Cares? Scotland – I shouldn't be ashamed of it.'
- If you speak eloquently and are quiet you get more opportunities – others are written off as they speak in a certain way, etc.
- If we want to influence change, we need to focus on youth work and the support that is available through organisations such as Who Cares? Scotland.

- There is a need to create better culture and media; they are currently only either portraying care experienced young people as heroes or villains.
- At a young age, children shouldn't have to be articulate to get the care that they need.
- A lot of care experienced people have anxiety and won't speak out; it's not fair on young people to be expected to be able to speak out about what is wrong.
- Many people have given up trying to change the care system; it never goes anywhere.
- Care experienced people's opinions are non-existent in the Promise; what is the care experienced people's involvement going to be in the next 6 years?
- One young person missed out on the council tax exemption for care leavers due to his age; 'it's an arbitrary age limit plucked out of the air.'
- The age limit being removed from the bursary available to care experienced people for university is very important.
- The Committee should ask Scottish Government what they think has been successful about the Promise.
- Sharing story brings up trauma; by being care experienced we get very good at talking about our experiences; care experienced people have to be their own advocates as they don't have the support network around them.
- Trauma informed training is needed - being care experienced means that you're exposed to a lot of things.
- Early intervention in families and teaching families how to parent is key – training foster parents how to properly look after kids; young people need role models for care experienced people to look up to and emulate.
- Training foster carers is done in Shetland; care experienced people have a say and there are conference days to teach foster carers how to be a good foster carer – this is very powerful; it happens in Shetland, why can't this happen in rest of Scotland?

## Group 3 - Note of discussion

**Participants made the following points:**

**Can we talk about how to make sure that people supporting you are there for the right reasons and what does good support look like?**

- Making sure that we're telling parents, etc about grants, resource champions, sharing resources.
- Good support should mean safety as well, support can be good in places but can also be lax as there's not enough safety; a hug can mean a lot.
- Consistency is important – different care plans for different places are fine but there's inconsistency e.g. people with a diagnosis (autism, ADHD, complex trauma) receive more care, and other people who have stuff going on aren't getting support they need; you almost need to make yourself more unwell to get the support you need.
- People are moving too quickly to restraint; this is overused in care places.
- Most young people in care act up and then get care but it shouldn't be like that.
- Staff are not giving support when you're really struggling; you could be crying and not getting out of bed, but they just shut the door.
- Young people often don't know the support that is there until it's too late – 'I didn't know Who Cares? Scotland existed until last week.'
- Quality training is needed to ensure a person-centred approach.
- Social workers need to get diagnoses made quicker.
- Poor communication is an issue.
- Lack of resources and support means takes too long to get back into the community.
- It is important to make sure that social workers are showing up, not cancelling meetings, not changing social workers constantly.
- Social workers take new jobs meaning the young person is left without a social worker for 4-5 months, in which time they've lost out on trips etc as they couldn't get risk assessments signed off.
- Social work contracts are too short; they need to be longer.

**Do you feel that care experienced people know their rights and can access what can be done to find out about that?**

**Do you feel comfortable raising things you're not happy with, advocacy etc?**

- People don't know about their rights, 'at the beginning I didn't know what an advocacy worker was.'
- Not all young people are being told what their rights are – what age do you tell people, so they understand?
- An example of a lack of information is not knowing what happens next with a hearing.

- Social workers aren't doing their job properly to enable us to know our rights.
- Social workers have too many cases – e.g. one young person's previous social worker had 30 children/young people and needed to see them all every week.
- Social workers are understaffed for the number of young people coming into the care system – there needs to be a rise in services that can handle the number of young people.
- Young people need to do a lot of chasing themselves.
- There is a training issue with social workers not knowing enough about rights too.
- Advocacy workers are good and know your rights but are only useful when it comes to complaints etc.
- Young people should be able to express their feelings without having to put a complaint in.

**Social worker shortage, are you noticing an impact? Do you see your social worker regularly? Do they change often?**

- 'Yes, my social worker has 30 kids and needs to see them once or twice a week.'
- 'I've had 12 social workers over 4 years; 14 years and at least 15 social workers.'
- More social workers means more judging you from paper, they don't get to know you.
- Social workers don't stay with kids; they get moved to other positions.
- Social workers don't get back to calls, emails, etc.
- It should be person-centred.
- It can lead to more trauma if you have more social workers, more relationships can be more traumatic.
- Siblings are being separated; this is against the Promise.

**Is there an understanding of care experience, stigma, and trauma?**

- [Stirling Champions](#) has done more than social workers, helping a young person appeal disability payments, opportunities to do things that felt impossible before.
- Glasgow has amazing services compared to Falkirk.
- There needs to be a central place to go and see all the care experienced groups for the areas; this could be put on the Government website.
- In school, young people are treated differently because of being in care.
- There should be more training to teach about impact of stigma.
- There should be training packs for teachers and to deliver to young people about how people in the care system are affected.
- Teachers can other you in front of the class, saying things such as: "I'll call your carer."
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## **Are brothers and sisters staying together?**

- No, one young person was separated from their sister and had to fight it.
- 'There were no robust plans to keep me and sister together when I was in care, and she wasn't.'
- It takes a long time to build a sibling relationship.
- It is difficult to process different emotions with different people.
- In the early stages of the Promise this should have been strongly ensured but the young person hasn't seen their siblings in 4 years.
- The age gap of 10 years and 6 years caused a problem where carers were trained within certain age brackets and so siblings were separated.
- Young people have experienced being separated from siblings at a young age, needing to fight to stay together.
- A social worker told a young person's family members something without telling them first, not being upfront and honest – they felt that there is not any point in complaining. An apology letter was sent and it feels like it's sat on a shelf ready to be sent; the young person would prefer a face-to-face meeting.

## **Will the Promise be kept? How can it be delivered by 2030?**

- No - there have been so many opportunities for the Scottish Government and Councils to fulfil it and they haven't; this would all have been fed back to MSPs as decision-makers and you would know this already.
- 'I only learnt what the Promise was last year and have been in kinship care my whole life'; it isn't known about enough as social workers don't want you to know in case you can then see what they're not fulfilling it.
- Kibble tries to stick to the Promise, e.g. monthly young carer voice meetings, but it still doesn't get met.
- Young people are being curtailed by needing to stay in their own Local Council area, so they need to declare themselves homeless.
- It puts young people at risk to make them homeless, breaking the law and denying them the right to a place to live and going against the Promise.
- When you leave care there's no support after, 'I was made homeless for 3 weeks.'
- Young people are being restrained and a safehold is being used when they were just swearing, they could have been asked to simply go to another room.
- When restraints have been used inappropriately there should be a way for the young people to say they have been assaulted - it can cause extra trauma too, next time they could be more inclined to fight back, so this can lead to escalation.
- Restraint is demonstrating the use of violence as a solution.
- There could be an anonymous form to collect evidence of incorrect restraints – but people might even be afraid to fill out an anonymous form.
- In Kibble there are 8 young people to 4 staff, so staff can feel overpowered.
- When the Care Inspectorate come to visit the residentials, carers act completely differently to how they treat young people normally – they're also

given warnings i.e. when a visit happens in one place then it feels like that is shared and another place starts to get prepared.

- 'I strongly feel that the Promise won't get kept.'
- 'After 2030 it will keep getting pushed back and pushed back until they say it's unachievable.'
- Some parts of it will be kept but it will be hard to keep all of it as the Scottish Government has said it will do a lot.
- They promised too much; they should have promised half of it and then they would actually achieve it and would be able to add more in 2030.
- It should be getting done in chunks.
- People need to see it happening to believe it is working and then they will support it more.
- Changes of years/targets isn't helping; we need clear targets and to see those targets being met.

**How are you making sure there's still input from young people working on Promise (question for MSPs)?**

**MSPs made the following points:**

- We'll listen and reflect on what we've heard: "you told us this and this is what we did."
- We will be putting questions from young people to the Scottish Government.
- We will listen to the circumstances of care experienced young people, their hopes, fears, and reflect that to those in positions who can change things.

## Group 4 – Note of discussion

Participants made the following points:

**Can we talk about how to make sure that people supporting you (e.g. foster carers, social workers) are there for the right reasons. What does good support look like?**

- Social work support varies by local authority. While some social workers were helpful, others were seen to be viewing social work as “just a job.”
- Some said they can tell when foster carers were “here for the money.”
- The importance of carers feeling able to provide loving relationships for children and young people in their care was also discussed; it was felt that some carers do not see providing as love as part of their job.
- Social workers wanted to know everything about their lives down to the detail of what they had for breakfast, while young people often did not know anything about their social workers’ lives.
- There is a need for good support to be available at all ages and stages of life; family breakdown can happen at any time.
- Throughcare and aftercare for those approaching adulthood is very important. The current upper age limit for accessing this support is 26; this should be a lifelong entitlement, as parents support their children beyond this age.
- Local authority budget cuts and social work staffing shortages are impacting on support received.
- Contact with social workers had reduced in recent years. One participant said their contact with social workers had reduced from a once a week, in-person meeting to a three-weekly phone check-in. Others agreed they had seen a similar shift.

Features of good support participants talked about included:

- Having a social worker who is easily contactable.
- Support at all ages and stages of life, including after leaving care.
- Carers who see the importance of building strong relationships with young people.
- Carers and social workers who are trauma informed.
- Good support in residential care can feel like family.
- Young people in residential care having a say in choosing their support worker.
- Positive reinforcements for young people, rather than focusing on their mistakes.

**Has there been a change in the way sibling relationships are treated and viewed? What further action can be taken to support siblings to stay together where possible?**

- Improvements are needed to help young people stay with siblings where possible and maintain regular, meaningful contact with them where this is not possible. Splitting up siblings creates further trauma for young people already suffering.
- Recent legislation to help siblings stay together allows social work departments discretion to make their own decisions on sibling contact.
- Social workers “pick and choose” who to help with contact arrangements; “why do social workers have the final say in contact arrangements?”
- Distance between siblings is a problem. Travel to other parts of the country makes it difficult to maintain meaningful contact.
- While there were examples given where contact between siblings had recently started up, this was described as limited (e.g. to once every three months) and dependent on whether social workers arranged it.
- There were also examples where siblings kept apart for years were then placed together with no notice and no reintroduction beforehand.
- Some described their siblings as having different experiences of the care system to their own. These experiences ranged from being much better to much worse.
- Adoption with siblings at a young age was described as a positive experience.

**Do you feel that care experienced people know about their rights and can access advocacy? What can be done to make sure that people find out about that?**

- Some reported not being aware of and/or able to access their rights; “the care system does not listen to our views.”
- While young people’s concerns are recorded when they speak to social workers they often “don’t go anywhere.”
- When staff members/social workers listened to young people’s views they were able to advocate for them and “fight their corner.”
- Many felt able to share their views with an advocate, the advocate was then able to ensure their views were taken on board by others.
- However, some said funding cuts in their areas meant advocacy services were no longer available.

**There are young people who are in secure care for mental health reasons in a unit with another young person who has committed a serious crime. Can we discuss issues around young people not being separated based on their needs and the reasons they are in secure care?**

***Responses to this question also covered residential care and supported living, and proposals in the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Bill that will end the placement of under 18s in Young Offenders Institutions, instead placing them in secure care.***

- Many felt strongly that in residential, secure and supported living, young people should not be placed with people with criminal records; this is dangerous for young people as putting vulnerable people in with those who have harmed “ruins lives.”
- Some group members saw secure care as an easy option for under 18s who have offended.
- The use of safeholds and restraint in residential and secure care has led to lasting trauma and injuries resulting from safeholds and/or restraint; this recreates the abuse young people may have faced at home and in some cases was worse.

### **Experience of care in supported accommodation, residential and secure care.**

- While love and respect are basic human needs, young people in care do not always have these needs met.
- Generally, it was felt that privately-owned residential care was of a higher standard than council-owned settings, though this was not unanimous.
- Some said residential care was better than supported living. They described dangerous situations arising in supported living due to a lack of support and vulnerable young people being placed together with older young men.
- Secure units need to be able to deal with race and the issues it brings up. Training is needed for staff as some young people are treated differently because of their race.
- Good examples of care in a residential setting were discussed. These included: receiving one to one support; support staff helping to build young people up as a parent would; money for activities; pocket money; trips to the cinema etc; and access to food (as some said food could be limited).

### **What changes have you seen or experienced since The Promise was made in 2020?**

- They had not seen a great deal of change since The Promise was made and questioned whether much had happened beyond reports.
- Changes are in motion, but action is needed to move more quickly.
- Social workers are trying their best to make changes with limited resources in a cost-of-living crisis.
- While The Promise is a good idea, some of it was described as “not realistic.” Participants felt the Scottish Government and others should not have made the Promise if it could not be delivered.
- Champions Boards enable care experienced people to speak directly to elected council members and corporate parents in their area. Champions Boards are useful, but funding is being cut or discontinued. Participants also said they don’t know how/if concerns raised at meetings were addressed and that there are sometimes arguments at meetings between Heads of Service about responsibilities relating to keeping the Promise.

### **Do you think The Promise will be kept? What stands in the way?**

- Expectations around The Promise are unrealistic, there will be a rush to implement it and it will not be done properly. Funding cuts and staff being overworked and burning out is a risk to progress.
- Corporate parents need to be made aware of their responsibilities and become more engaged in change.
- The cycle of intergenerational care needing to be broken was also highlighted.

### **What would Who Cares? Scotland Members like to say to Scottish Government Ministers about The Promise?**

- More direct engagement from the Scottish Government is needed; participants want to hear from the First Minister and Deputy First Minister directly and want to know what changes Ministers could list since The Promise was published.
- All MSPs need to be aware of The Promise and ECYP Committee members should speak to care experienced people more regularly.
- Participants want to know what politicians are going to do for care experienced people in their area. Many said they were frustrated with having to repeat their traumatic experiences to politicians who then took no action; this makes them feel numb.
- Organisations only wanted to hear from care experienced young people when it was convenient to them (e.g. when trying to secure funding).