Annual Participation Programme 21/22

Sexual and Reproductive Health
17th May - June 25th

Mental Health
5th July - 13th August

Digital Wellbeing
23rd August - 1st October

Care Experienced Parents
11th October - 19th November

Education and Learning
29th November - 21st January

Relationships
7th February - 5 March
The Annual Participation Calendar contains all the opportunities across the year which you can choose to take part in to influence change. These opportunities are based on themes which are important to Care Experienced people and which policymakers need more real-life information about in order to make positive changes. You can take part in these themes by answering a survey, talking through a theme with a worker, getting together in a focus group, or discussing a theme in your local group. It is up to you how much or how little you get involved.

Each of the themes will have a specific time where we will be running participation activities. Please keep an eye out on social media and in your emails from Who Cares? Scotland for links to surveys and dates of focus groups.

We hope that by knowing about these dates in advance you can start having conversations in local groups and with workers about the upcoming opportunities you might want to join in with. This way, even if you are not sure of the topics at first, you can start to feel more confident and comfortable about getting involved when the themes go live.

At the end of each theme the Policy team at WC?S, alongside your National Representative Body, will spend a couple of weeks analysing and writing up reports/ briefings/ position papers/ videos to be sent to the various people in Government, Corporate Parents and The Promise. We will then send you summaries of what you told us, the findings and recommendations via emails and notices on social media. Please keep an eye out for these updates!

Even though these are the themes for 2021, that doesn’t mean that we won’t be continuing to use all the evidence gathered this year to keep influencing these areas for years to come! We will keep looking for opportunities to influence all the previous themes!
**What are this year’s themes?**

**Sexual and Reproductive Health**

We know through our advocacy data that there can be barriers to accessing health professionals and health advice for many Care Experienced people. We also know through previous participation work that many young people find it difficult to talk to staff and carers about periods, sanitary products, and sexual health.

There are lots of things happening in the Scottish Government this year that we hope to influence with your insights into Sexual and Reproductive Health. These include: the new national Sexual Health Standards, ongoing work by the Scottish Government on their Sexual Health Recovery Framework, and the work that’s recently started to stop period poverty. We also have the chance to influence the Pregnancy and Parenthood for Young People Strategy. There is a lot that needs to change and a lot of chances to make that happen!

**Mental Health**

Advocacy data shows us that mental wellbeing is a major issue for the Care Experienced people we support. Also, almost all the care experience participation groups (like Champions Boards, TNT, Oor Clacks Voices etc.) across Scotland have worked on or plan to work on mental health as a priority. Members have also shared through the Membership Survey and at the Members’ Assembly that they would like mental health to be a priority area for Who Cares? Scotland to influence this year.

Because of the impact of Covid on all our mental health, the Scottish Government is prioritising work to improve mental health and wellbeing so we will be presenting your thoughts and experiences to their various strategies and plans. We also have been given the opportunity to feed into Edinburgh University’s research project into the mental health and wellbeing of care leavers. This research, in turn, will help influence mental health and care experience practice for years to come.
Covid-19 has highlighted the inequalities faced by Care Experienced people in terms of their access to digital technology, often resulting in exclusion from the digital world. Advocacy data show us that Care Experienced young people have been less able to participate in formal meetings such as Children’s Hearings. Also, lack of laptops, wifi etc. has affected their ability to continue with education at home during the pandemic. We also know through the ‘Covid-19 Recovery’ theme of last year’s APP, and through our Helpline that members have faced social isolation which has got worse through lack of digital connection.

Who Cares? Scotland is going to be running a project with Edinburgh University on Digital Wellbeing as part of the APP. This will help influence all work the Scottish Government is doing to improve digital access for all.

Advocacy data shows that many Care Experienced parents access advocacy support. We know that this year, due to covid-19, some Care Experienced parents whose children are in care, have not been able to touch or hold their children in arranged ‘contact’. Our evidence on the impact of the pandemic also showed the extreme pressure felt by Care Experienced parents to support their children with education through home-school.

We also know through previous participation work, such as in the Alumni group and at a Mother’s Day meeting with the First Minister in 2019, that Care Experienced parents often feel stigmatised and face multiple barriers to getting the support they need.

We will be influencing in this area by feeding in member views to the Pregnancy and Parenthood in Young People Strategy. The Strategy group have actually chosen to focus on Care Experienced parents this year. This is a really exciting opportunity to create change in the way services and support are delivered. We are also going to link your experiences with Early Learning and Childcare strategies, and the Best Start Programme looking at neonatal services in Scotland.
Advocacy and participation evidence shows us that ‘Education and Training’ are critical areas of concern for Care Experienced People. Issues related to support in school, school moves and access to training and employment opportunities are frequently raised with advocacy workers. Many local groups are also focusing on improving experiences of education for Care Experienced people as a theme this year.

There are several Covid-19 recovery strategies being led out by the Scottish Government to lessen the impact of the pandemic on education and learning. This work focuses on education both in school and for adults. The Scottish Government are also going to address the large levels of unemployment and job insecurity which has resulted from the pandemic. We will be sending all of your insights, thoughts and ideas about education and learning to these various strategies.

‘Contact’ is still the most common cause for advocacy. Moving schools and moving placements also feature highly so we know that the restrictions Care Experienced people often face on their relationships is a key concern. A couple of local care experienced groups have had ‘Love’ and ‘Loved Ones’ as long-standing issues to influence. We have also heard through previous participation work with members, about the importance of positive relationships, including friendships. From last year’s APP evidence on Covid-19 impact, members also told us that they felt less connected with those important to them.

We will be influencing different areas relating to relationships, which links with the implementation of the new rights protecting sibling relationships in the Children (Scotland) Act 2020 and in the ongoing changes being progressed by The Promise – who identified ‘Family’ as one of their five foundations.
There are lots of ways you can get involved and we want to make sure that everyone can participate.

You might want to take part in a

1. **Survey** - We will send out links to an online survey at the beginning of each theme. You can complete it on your own, or you can ask a WC?S worker to do it with you. If you don’t know a WC?S worker, please call Beth on 07980956139 and you can talk it through with her.

2. **Local Group Session** - You can ask your group if they want to discuss one of the themes in your weekly or monthly groups.

3. **Focus Group** - We’ll send dates and times of focus groups (probably on zoom) so you can discuss the themes with other Care Experienced people.

4. **Other work** - You might have a letter, poem or a song about one of the themes you would like to have included in our work on a specific theme. Please send anything you feel is relevant to policy@whocaresscotland.org by the end of the theme’s engagement window (see the calendar above).

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**Member involvement throughout the APP**

**National Representative Body (NRB)**

We want to ensure that the Annual Participation Programme is member-led. The NRB who represent our wider membership will be involved in each theme by:

1. Supporting the design of the survey and national session plans.
2. Co-facilitating national sessions.
3. Supporting local delivery of sessions
4. As the NRB develop, they will also start to come alongside the analysis and presentation of findings – (this will likely be happening in themes later in the year).

**Members’ Assembly**

In future Annual Participation Programmes, we hope that members can contribute to the APP in the earlier stages as well, especially in finalising the themes for the calendar. At the Members’ Assembly in February 2021, we trialled this approach by asking members to rank the final 3 themes from a shortlist of 5, which reflected our advocacy and participation evidence. 16 members took part.
Mental Health was overwhelmingly recommended as a priority theme.

Financial Security was also a popular choice. However, our policy analysis shows that there will be stronger opportunities to influence in next years’ calendar, so we have decided to have Financial Security as a theme for early 2022.

Relationships, Sexual and Reproductive Health, and Holding others Accountable were equally rated.

Due to the stronger influencing opportunities arising for the first two, we have included them in this year’s calendar.

Thank you in advance!

We are really looking forward to hearing from you and we are so excited about the chance to influence on these really important areas. We hope you are too!