



# COMMUNITIES THAT CARE RENFREWSHIRE

## STAKEHOLDER EVALUATION EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

January 2021

From 2016 to 2020, thanks to funding from the STV Children’s Appeal, Who Cares? Scotland delivered the *Communities That Care* project (‘the project’) across Renfrewshire, consisting of local opportunities for Care Experienced people and targeted community education to raise awareness and understanding of Care Experience. In October and November 2020, we spoke to a broad selection of people who have benefitted from the project’s work: Care Experienced people (‘members’); kinship carers; elected members; professionals at schools, colleges and universities; project volunteers; and partner organisations.

This report briefly summarises some of the views and experiences of 40 such people we talked to in focus groups and interviews under the key impact themes of **Education**, **Belonging**, and **Influencing**, and highlights **what needs to happen now** as a result.

## 1. IMPACT: EDUCATION

**Project aim: Communities grow up being 'care aware'. They understand care experience and have positive attitudes towards Care Experienced people (starting with current school-age population in key education clusters and the communities in which they live)**

- The project’s education activities led to an **increased knowledge and understanding** of the term ‘Care Experienced’ and what life is like for people in care was evident across the local community:  
*“I didn’t fully appreciate at first how many children the term ‘Care Experienced’ covered and then obviously discovering how many children in Renfrewshire could be classed as Care Experienced.” (Local Councillor)*
- The people we spoke to talked, too, about the subsequent **improvements in attitudes and behaviour** towards Care Experienced people as a result of this:  
*“...now they [peers] don’t look at you as if you’re weird.”*  
*“It’s broken down a lot of barriers of how people in the community speak to and respect the young people in the community, because they understand more.” (Members)*
- More people in Renfrewshire and beyond became **aware of the work more broadly of Who Cares? Scotland**, and were able to access support and guidance for themselves and others, including advocacy and organisational membership:  
*“[before], there was nothing really there for the young people that had experienced care at some point in their life...I’ve [now] got greater expertise identifying possible support networks and a better understanding what your organisation does and how you can support us.” (Teacher)*
- All of this was possible on a wide scale thanks to the nature of the **Communities That Care education model** – regular ‘upstream’ educational inputs to pupils combined with a regular presence at high schools and primary schools, including drop-ins:  
*“...the kids having that visual person, someone they can speak to. It’s not a leaflet, it’s not on a board. I think that was so important and one of the factors that really did allow for your profile to grow within the school.” (Teacher)*

## 2. IMPACT: BELONGING

Project aim: Care Experienced young people have opportunities to come together with peers with similar experiences. They are proud of their identity and feel they belong in their community.

- Many people the project engaged with did not know they were Care Experienced. Becoming involved with the project has allowed them and others to **embrace their care identity** – learning and reflecting on their experience, letting go of misplaced guilt, and making positive choices:  
*“It made me integrate parts of myself that I didn’t even know were separated. It gave me courage to accept that part of my own story and shed guilt over things in my past that I felt were my fault, that were actually a result of the system and circumstances.”* (Member)
- Coming together with other Care Experienced people with shared experience deepened this understanding of care identity for participants, leading to **increased confidence and feelings of unity, togetherness and ‘family’**:  
*“Belonging has been about bringing me into the Care Experienced family and understanding. I never knew about Who Cares before, it was finding out that I wasn’t alone.”* (Member & volunteer)
- These regular participation groups offered a **safe space** for Care Experienced people and their carers to connect, socialise and have fun, free of judgement:  
*“Going to Millport was like a holiday to us, he [nephew] had never played on the beach before. We [the other carers] also now communicate and look out for some of the kids from the older group.”* (Kinship carer)
- Many Care Experienced people told us about **the power of relationships** they had developed with project staff and volunteers, which made them feel equal, respected and loved as part of a family, improving other relationships in their life too:  
*“It is family. Who Cares? is family. Like a long-term family, forever. No matter how old you are they’re still going to be there whereas our own families come and go whenever they want.”* (Member)
- Linking Care Experienced people into project activities also resulted in **increased access to support**, both directly and indirectly, such as advocacy, support with finance, volunteering opportunities, and employability skills:  
*“Students have definitely benefitted enormously from the project.”* (Head of Student Services, University of West of Scotland)
- For Care Experienced people, carers and project partners, the project’s activities fostered **a sense of belonging to the local community**, which simply did not exist before:  
*“...it made me feel I belonged to the local area. I never felt so connected to an area until I became part of this project.”* (Member & volunteer)
- The members we spoke to told us that the impact **the project had felt genuinely life-changing** for them, altering their life course in a positive way, allowing them to realise and pursue their dreams:  
*“I don’t know where I’d be without Who Cares? I’d probably still be on the path of self-destruction. Now I’ve got a purpose, I’ve got a family and I’ve got a community.”* (Member)

### 3. IMPACT: INFLUENCING

Project aim: Who Cares? Scotland continues to challenge oppressive structures and influence budget & policy decisions which have a negative impact on the lives of Care Experienced people now and in the future.

- The project's activities resulted in many instances of **influencing the professional practice** of partners, schools, colleges, universities and other Corporate Parents, allowing them to become more relationship-based, restorative and supportive in their approach to people with Care Experience<sup>1</sup>:  
*"Without the project we would have had something but not what we have today, that [Care Experience] is on everybody's radar."* (Head of Student Services)
- The importance and impact of Care Experienced voice and **direct accounts of lived experience** is seen by many as a central driver to this, whether through meetings, training sessions and other events such as documentary screenings:  
*"For me it's that real experience...hearing that, it's hard to walk away from that meeting and switch off and think, 'I will just let someone else address that, that someone's else job.'" (Partner organisation)*
- Such lived experience fed into Who Cares? Scotland's **unique approach to influencing**, which several professionals commented on:  
*"As part of the presentation, you had to move around from seat to seat and be with different people and leave all your belongings behind. That was the most powerful thing for me because.... I know how I felt just moving to a different seat and sitting beside somebody I didn't know and leaving my pen...or whatever sitting at the table. It was so uncomfortable...it just gave you the slightest idea of what these children are actually going through and yet you couldn't really imagine it"* (Depute Head Teacher)
- Indeed, members told us that the project has consistently **amplified their voice**, allowing them to influence and shape the world around them in numerous ways, while others told us it had spurred them on to follow suit:  
*"I've seen [the project] as a great opportunity to amplify [Care Experienced voice] in a way – whether that's a council motion or even just instructing officers to meet more regularly with yourselves [Who Cares? Scotland] or the young people."* (Local Councillor)
- Whether via advocacy or participation, all our evidence suggests that the activities of the project **empowers individuals** to seek to influence change for themselves and others as part of the Care Experienced movement:  
*"The project gave me the opportunity and the bravery to go to the right kinds of people, in the uni where Care Experienced students aren't being supported...they still need to go a long way but now they're trying, because I went to the right people."* (Member)
- Lastly, we heard about specific **influences local members have had on both local and national policy** through the project, including the creation of local funds and contribution to the Independent Care Review<sup>2</sup>:  
*"I can see first-hand how you have helped, and if it wasn't for that first 'Listen and Learn that £100,000 fund wouldn't have been there for the young people.'" (Local Councillor)*

---

<sup>1</sup> For a full discussion of specific changes made to policy and practice, please see the full version of this report

<sup>2</sup> As above

## WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN NOW?

Having assessed the project's impact under the key themes above, it is clear that, ultimately, **the impact of the project has been life-changing for those involved, especially for those with direct experience of care who now feel more accepted and included within their communities**. When we asked those involved what they would do differently, or what more could be done to achieve *a lifetime of equality, respect and love for Care Experienced people*, the following were key themes in answers<sup>3</sup>:

- First, **continuation of the project's work in Renfrewshire** was mooted as essential to uphold the impact it has had on education, belonging and influencing:  
*"...things have changed but they aren't solved yet, not everyone knows what Care Experienced life is like. It needs to go on longer as it's important."* (Member)  
*"The kids would fall apart; they would fall apart if the group wasn't here."* (Kinship Carer)
- Second, potential **extension or growth** of the work of the project, particularly with regards to the educational element, was also sighted as necessary several times:  
*"A series of lessons would be good because I think that would have a greater impact on the children."* (Head Teacher)
- Finally, as *Communities that Care* was a stand-alone project, an element of **replication of learning in other areas in Scotland** was seen as essential if the project's aims are to be fully realised:  
*"I think [Communities that Care] should be in every community. It should be in all local authorities, the word would spread and reach even more people. I think it would be really beneficial for other councils to tap into the Renfrewshire project and see what we've done in the past 5 years and see how much of a difference it's made."* (Member)

---

<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that these findings, as well as others, were backed up by anonymous survey data, thus mitigating against potential bias.