



The Impact of COVID-19 on the Care Experienced Community: Information for Corporate Parents

Who Cares? Scotland

June 2020

Introduction

On Monday 16th March 2020, following the UK Government's advice regarding the Covid-19 pandemic, organisations were asked to allow their staff to work from home "where they possibly could". The following day, Who Cares? Scotland changed its operational model, adopting a new approach to supporting Care Experienced people across advocacy, participation and employment. This new approach included the establishment of a Helpline. This helpline seeks to provide a main point of contact and support for Care Experienced people.

Through this new provision, WC?S is continuing to see the significant impact that Covid-19 is having on many Care Experienced individuals. In May 2020 WC?S analysed the data from the helpline and our advocacy work, and published these findings [online](#) - we recommend reading these reports in full.

This document is a summary paper of the above-mentioned reports, containing information that is of particular relevance to Corporate Parents, speaking to their duties and responsibilities. Now more than ever, the Care Experienced community need Corporate Parents and other key partners to step in, uphold their rights and offer practical ways to help.

The key points of this summary can be grouped thematically under the following areas:

- Poverty
- Health and Wellbeing
- Information and Participation
- Support

Poverty

Those experiencing poverty, insecure housing and homelessness have continued to experience significant challenge in accessing support and applying preventive measures during the Covid-19 pandemic. As the lockdown measures and government guidance became more stringent, more Care Experienced people struggled to put food on the table. Many were simply unable to buy food due to lack of money, while others relied on food banks and food parcels.

Many young adults who have very recently left care sought advocacy and helpline support due to the challenges of learning how to live independently during this time. Learning how to budget finances and pay bills has been exacerbated by the need to stay home, alone, paying more on utility bills and having reduced support from services.

A young Care Experienced person moved into a new tenancy in the first few weeks of lockdown. Their cooker was not working on arrival and they have limited lighting, leaving them to rely on candles at night. They did not know what options were available to them in order to solve this and so has spent a considerable amount of time in lockdown, unable to cook nourishing meals.

What can I do?

1. Make time to understand the financial struggles Care Experienced people are facing because of the pandemic. Be aware that many Care Experienced people have faced disproportionate financial difficulty during this time, without necessarily having family and friends to rely on for help.

2. Are you in a position to provide or signpost financial support where needed? Many Care Experienced people are experiencing situations of poverty and material deprivation. It can be unclear about what financial support they can access through their local authority and many local authority workers report that they are over-stretched due to staff shortages and limited funds to lean on.
3. Are you in the position to be more flexible and lenient in the way you offer financial or other support to Care Experienced people? Individuals we are in touch with are being denied funding in some cases due to strict criteria being applied. For example, the Crisis Grants from the Scottish Welfare Fund are being denied to some Care Experienced people due to having applied 3 times in the past year – this is still happening even though we have confirmation from Scottish Government that extra discretion should be applied during the pandemic to the administration of these funds

Health and Wellbeing

As social distancing measures continue, more and more Care Experienced people have felt the impact of social isolation and loneliness, which is having a detrimental effect on mental health.

A Care Experienced person is living in a homeless hostel during lockdown. They do not have a phone, nor do they have any other means of connecting with their network. They rely on hostel staff to keep them updated with news on Covid-19 measures. This lack of connection is significantly impacting on their wellbeing and they are increasingly speaking with anger about the services that exist to support them.

Many Care Experienced people who have reached out to us are also struggling with bereavement and grief, on top of other anxieties.

The kinship carer of a Care Experienced person died as a result of contracting Covid-19. The individual is understandably struggling with the impact of this, which feels enhanced during this time. Their grief is further exacerbated by their inability to afford suitable clothes for the funeral.

What can I do?

1. How can your organisation best support the Care Experienced community with mental and physical health, trauma and bereavement? Consider how you could:
 - a. become more trauma-informed in how you work and deliver services?
 - b. proactively address and provide support for Care Experienced people who have experienced bereavement during COVID-19?
 - c. provide mental health support and signposting to Care Experienced people you connect with or provide services for?
 - d. work to combat social isolation of this community, and invest in connection?

Support

For many Care Experienced people, typical networks of family and friends can be limited or complicated. For this reason, being able to lean on professional support is incredibly important. This may take the form of Throughcare workers, Social Workers, Support Workers, Community Psychiatric Nurses and Psychiatrists – but many of these services are now irregular and operating digitally. The most commonly cited challenge to regular service provision, is education. With many Care Experienced parents and kinship carers utilising the WC&S helpline, it is clear that many are struggling with home-schooling children. However, it appears that those who could be using the emergency education provision, are not aware of their entitlement.

A Care Experienced student is struggling with completing their college work from home, while living with insufficient WiFi and an old laptop. They are concerned that the impacting that lockdown is having on their studies and the potential implications for acceptance to University next year. They currently have a conditional offer and they are very dependent on this term's grades.

What can I do?

1. Be aware that support for Care Experienced people, particularly around education, has been significantly impacted by this crisis. How can your organisation ensure that during the remainder of the Covid-19 pandemic and beyond, education support for all Care Experienced children who need it is a priority?

2. If you are a service provider, how can you ensure you remain open, available and supportive to Care Experienced people who need the support of statutory services more than ever?

Information and Participation

The impact of adjusting to engaging with others and accessing information via digital means, and in many cases being unable to do so effectively due to digital exclusion, continues to impact those we support. Many kinship carers and Care Experienced parents are accessing the helpline as a result of faulty or old equipment. Carers, parents and teachers seem unsure if the school should support with providing replacement equipment. Additionally, some kinship carers have been directed to WC&S helpline by Social Workers, rather than engaging directly with the school for support with laptops and tablets.

A Care Experienced parent attends a Children's Hearing for their child who is subject to a Compulsory Supervision Order. The parent reflects after the meeting that they were anxious about the Reporter and Panel Members seeing their home, which has not yet been decorated or fully furnished. They worried about stigma and the associated impact that this would have on Panel Members' decision making.

What can I do?

1. Be aware that many Care Experienced people face significant digital exclusion. What can your organisation do to fully support Care Experienced people participate digitally?
2. Ensure your processes are inclusive for those who may not have digital access, until this gap can be better addressed.



**Should you wish to discuss the contents of this report, please
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