



**WHO  
CARES?**  
SCOTLAND

**EQUALITY | RESPECT | LOVE**

# WHO CARES? SCOTLAND

## Annual Report 2022

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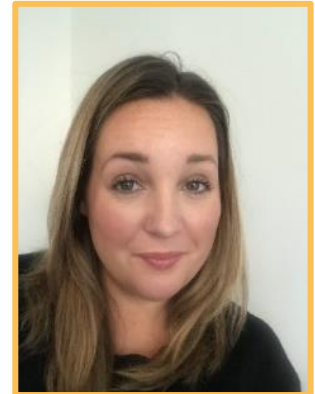
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## FOREWORD

It's no understatement to say that the period of our Strategic Plan 2018-2022 represents one of the most significant eras for the Care Experienced community in Scotland.

Ground-breaking policy commitments were secured; the Independent Care review listened to more than 5,000 voices as part of its three-year root and branch review of the care system, and The Promise was published, outlining a route map for transformational change.



We supported an increasing number of Care Experienced people of all ages to have their voice heard and their rights respected via our independent advocacy service, which continued to grow and reach new local authority areas.

During this period, we also saw engagement across the care community deepening as a burgeoning movement formed and became established. We celebrated key moments in our calendar – Care Day and Care Experienced Week – and then watched in delight, as these milestones were marked and championed in countries across the world.

Care Experienced people campaigned tirelessly, raising their voices and demanding nothing less than a lifetime of equality, respect and love for one another, and for those yet to be born. They supported each other with friendship and solidarity, elevating one another to share each other's messages in so many, wonderful ways. Chants on the streets of Glasgow; powerful accounts of lived experience shared in parliament and even the UN; creative works of poetry, artwork, theatre and short films ... this community has given so much of itself, and our world is richer for all of it.

None of this would have been possible without the significant investment in Care Experienced people, from funders including the Scottish Government, Local Authorities, corporate partners, trusts and foundations and individual donors.

This report focuses on our achievements with the care community in 2022, set against the backdrop of the 2018-2022 strategic planning period of the organisation. We emerge from this period a stronger organisation which has developed new ways of connecting, listening, representing and upholding the rights of the care community. And we recognise that whilst huge progress has been felt in the last five years, we still have much work to do before we can say with authority, that we have achieved our vision of a lifetime of equality, respect and love for Care Experienced people.

Louise Hunter

CEO, Who Cares? Scotland

**RIGHTS**

## INDEPENDENT ADVOCACY

Every child has the right to their voice being heard in decisions made about their lives (UNCRC Article 12). Access to independent advocacy support is a fundamental aspect of getting young people's voices and views heard. We work one on one with a young person to help them have a say in what is happening to them and hold those responsible for upholding their rights to account. We empower them to understand their rights and make informed decisions on matters that influence their lives. We strive to provide advocacy that helps young people feel respected, included, listened to and understood.

We're independent to any care services they might receive – this is crucial because we want young people to be supported and understood with no conflict of interest.

Our independent advocacy service is funded by local authorities and, more recently, by the Scottish Government via the Advocacy in Children's Hearings contract.

Over the strategic planning period we have provided independent advocacy to more Care Experienced people, year on year, enabling even more children to realise their rights, but the concerns we are supporting young people with have remained consistent. The 'top five' advocacy issues for both 2018 and 2022 were: Maintaining Relationships, Moving, Education & Training, Finance and Living Environment.



## OUR RIGHTS BASED APPROACH

We take a human rights-based approach to our work. Our advocacy service is explicitly based on upholding and promoting the rights of Care Experienced people. Recent improvements to our data gathering processes means that we are now able to demonstrate the breadth of rights we have supported Care Experienced people to realise through independent advocacy.

By holding duty-bearers accountable, we empower the rights-holder, through participation in decisions affecting their lives, to put forward demands based in legislation and international human rights treaties. Our datasets presented within this report are therefore enhanced by this additional layer of detail, which we will continue to analyse and learn from. We will use this richer, rights-based evidence as the foundation on which we inform and influence policy and practice and hold duty-bearers accountable.

In the past year we have supported children under five and children and young people who are unable to express their wishes due to complex communication difficulties, lack of understanding or an assessed lack of capacity (where no instruction or views can be obtained). In these cases we provide **a model of non-instructed advocacy** to ensure their rights are promoted and protected throughout the children's hearing process.

We regularly invest time and resource to develop and upskill our team of advocates. This is done through our annual advocacy conference, formal training and informal spaces where advocates meet to learn from and support each other. In 2022, Who Cares? teamed up with CLAN Childlaw in a strategic partnership that allowed for a series of legal case clinics for advocates. Through this series, advocates were able to learn about and discuss new legislation, updates to guidelines and practice, with a focus on the unique role of the advocate within these processes.

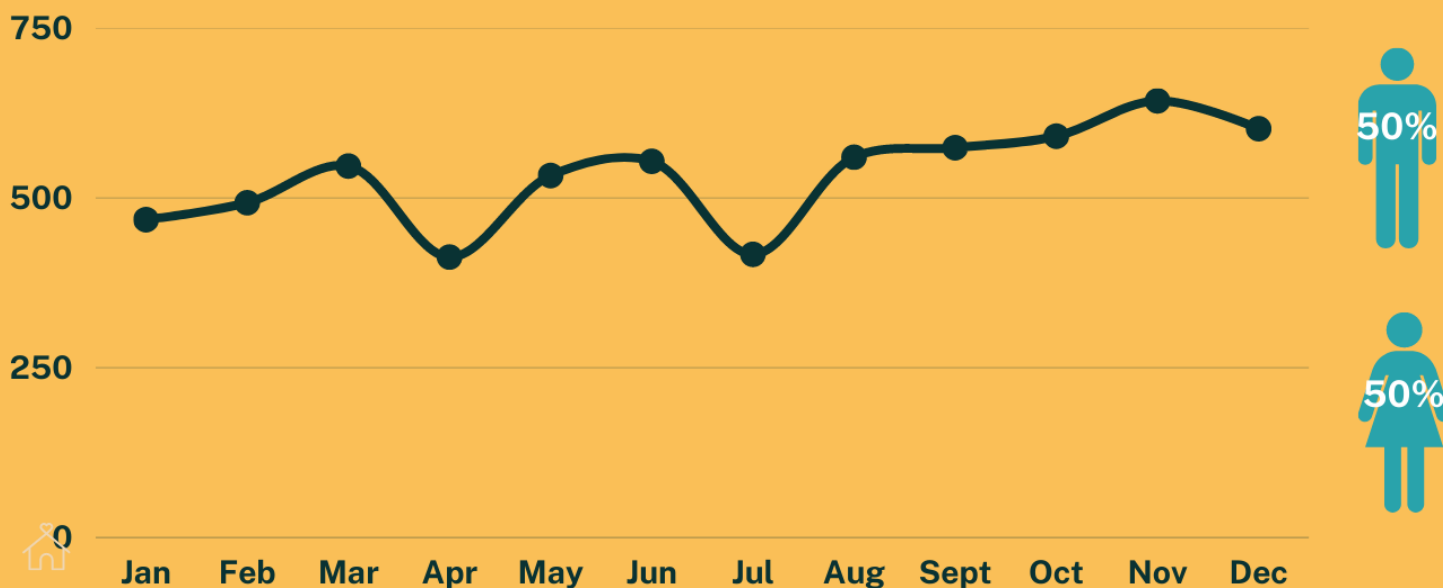


# Advocacy - Support

The information below gives an overview of the characteristics of people receiving an advocacy service from us and the actions taken to support them.

Timeframe: January to December 2022

## PEOPLE SUPPORTED BY MONTH



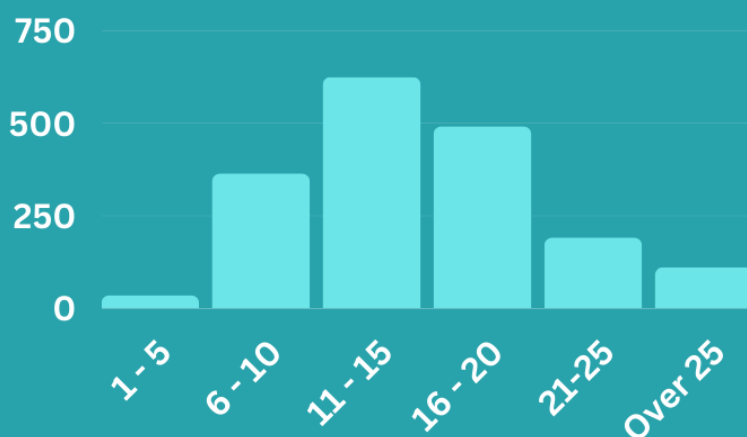
## HEADLINE NUMBERS

Total individuals Supported **1813**

Issues Raised **5762**

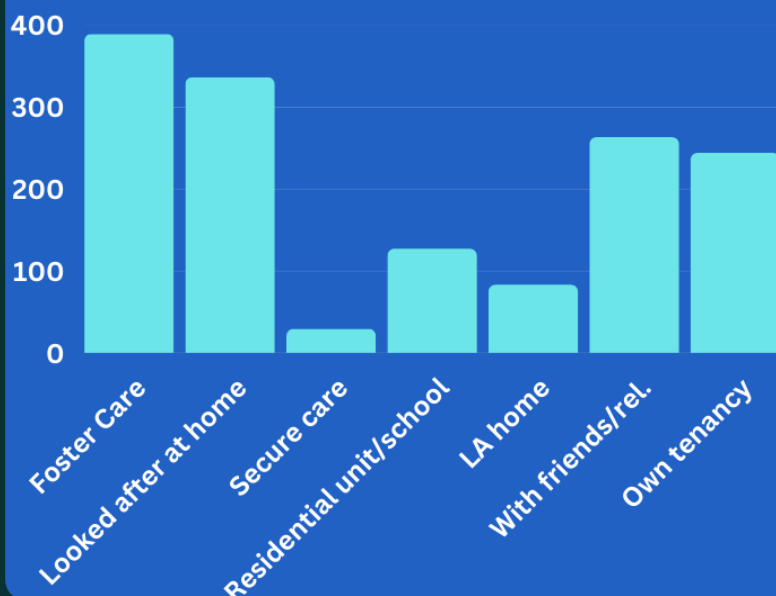
Issues Concluded **5257**

## AGE OF THOSE SUPPORTED

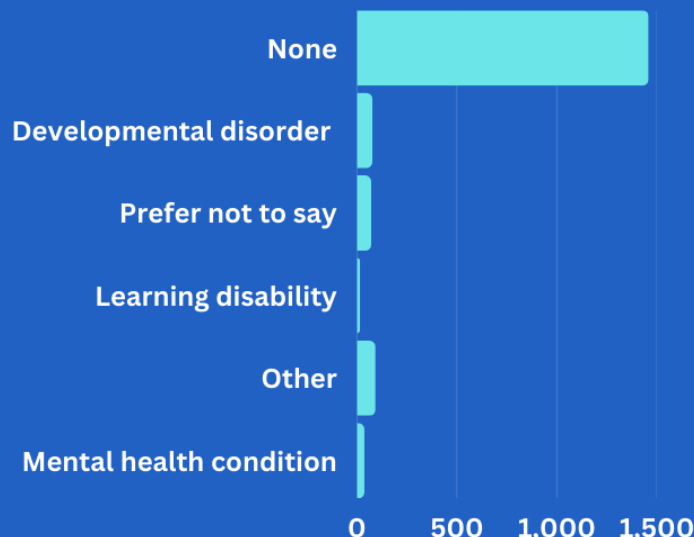


## FURTHER DEMOGRAPHICS

### Care Location



### Disability



# Advocacy - Rights

The information below gives an overview of the lived experience and demonstrates the breadth of rights we have supported Care Experienced people to realise through advocacy.

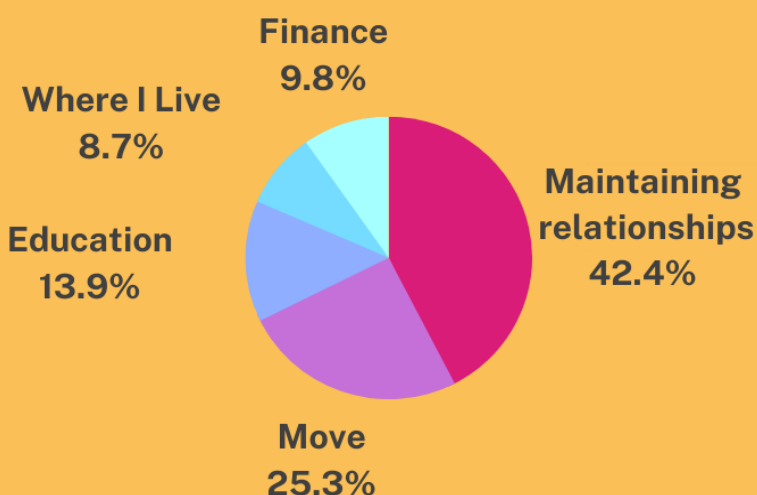
Timeframe: January to December 2022

## ADVOCACY SUPPORT AT 4,676 FORMAL PROCESSES

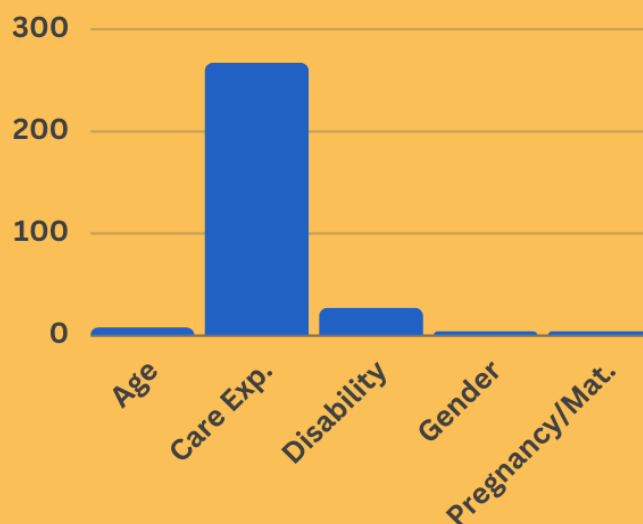
- Meetings related to Children's Hearings
- Looked After Reviews
- Care planning meetings
- Courts
- Adoption and Permanence Panels
- Return to school meeting
- Child protection case conferences
- Pre-birth Child Protection case conferences
- Core Group meetings
- Meetings around the Child
- Placement meetings
- Continuing care review meeting

## MAIN THEMES OF ADVOCACY ISSUES RAISED

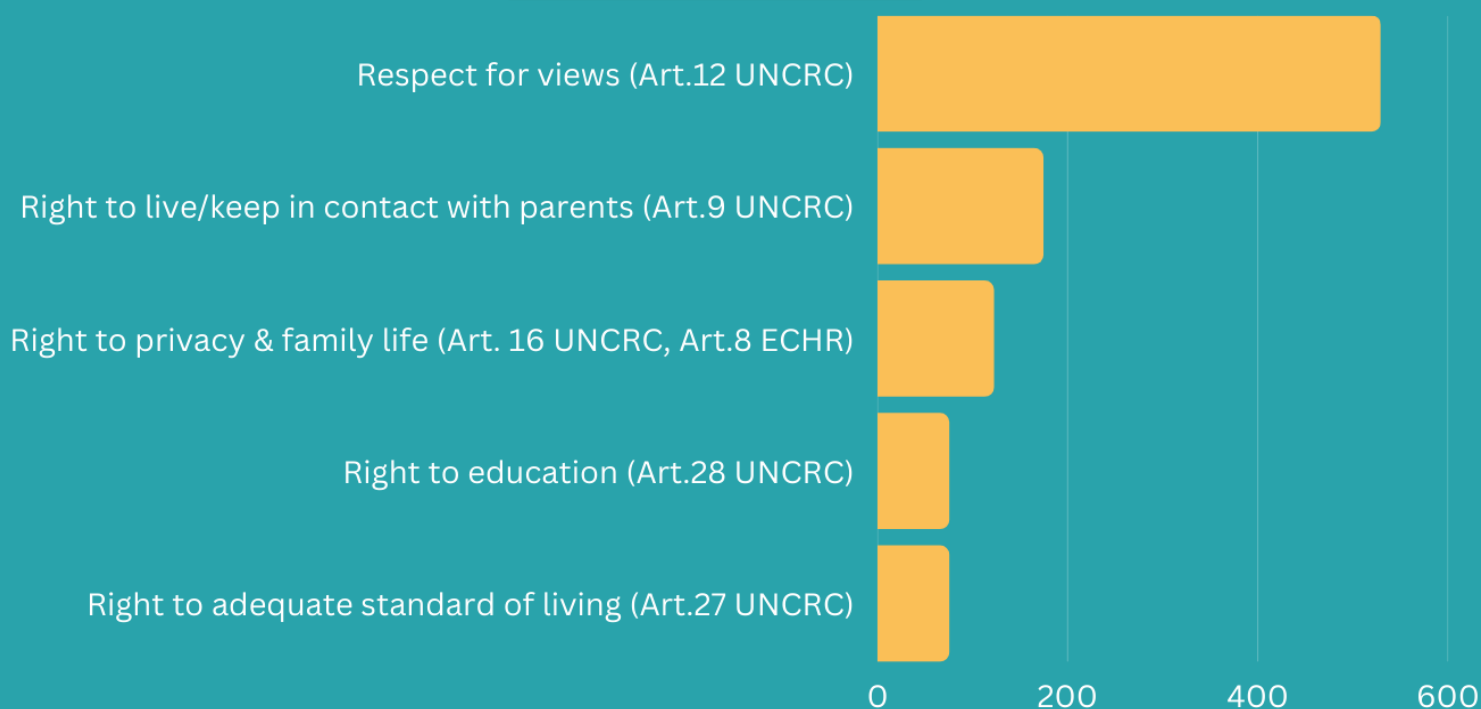
### Top 5 Themes



### Protected characteristics (where relevant to advocacy theme)



## TOP 5 RIGHTS SUPPORTED



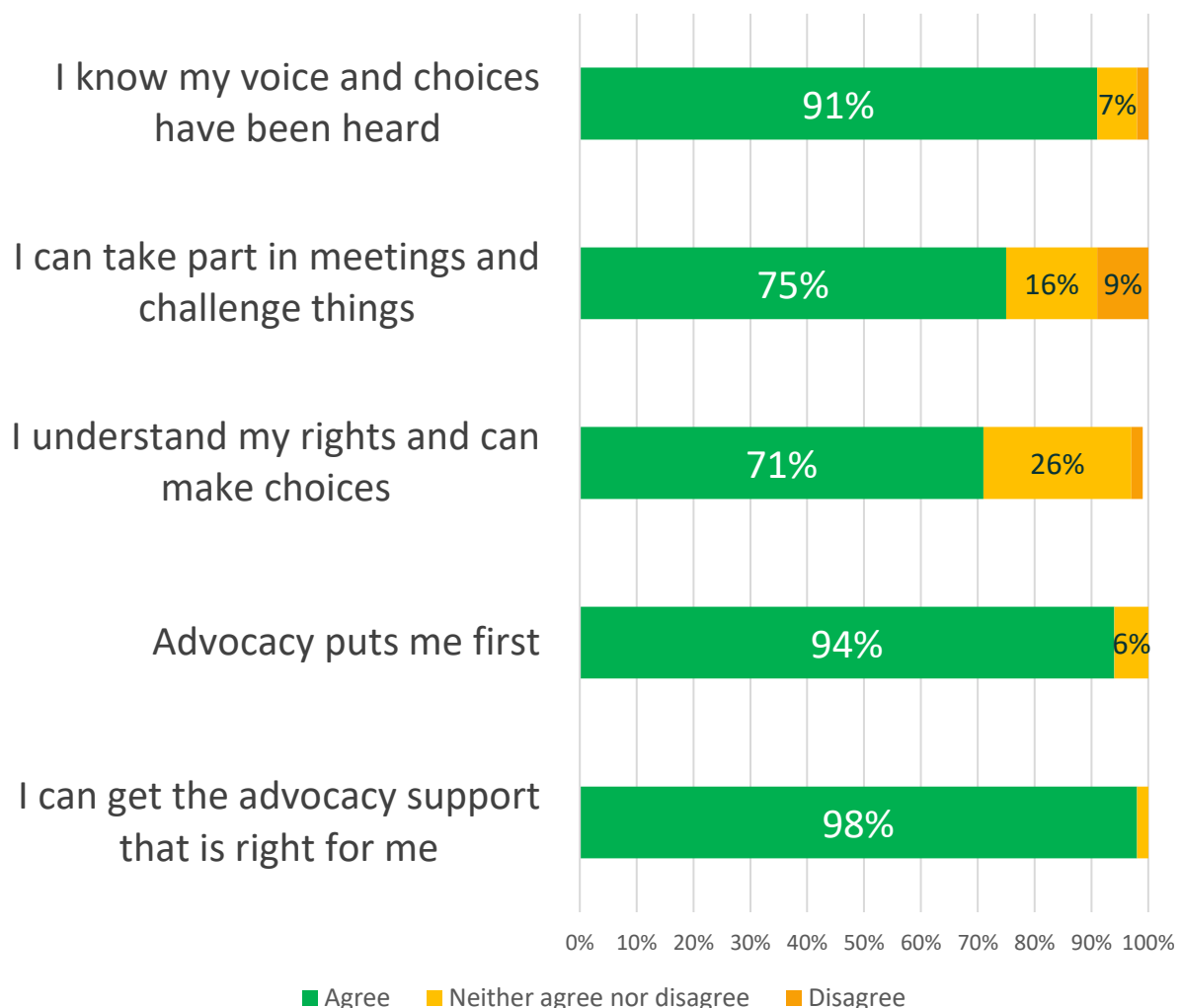


## THE DIFFERENCE WE MADE

In June 2022 we embedded a new feedback framework into our advocacy practice. Individuals receiving advocacy were encouraged to indicate and comment on the difference the service has made for them, and they could choose one of several ways in which to give us this feedback.

The outcomes are derived from the methodology developed to measure the impact of advocacy within the Children's Hearings System in Scotland. Responses received within the seven months since the feedback process was initiated is encouraging, indicating that recipients felt the overall service outcomes were met.

The responses also revealed that there is more work to be done to increase knowledge and awareness amongst Care Experienced individuals of their rights. Many find out about their rights from their Advocate. Young people who had advocacy support for formal meetings indicated they feel more confident in speaking up and participating in their meetings. Others stated there is apprehension in taking part in meetings and challenging decisions on their own, and the crucial role of the advocate who can communicate views on their behalf.



# Advocacy Feedback

***"[My advocate] was able to attend my hearing so people could hear what I wanted to say even when I wasn't there."***

- Child/young person receiving advocacy

***"First time I felt listened to ever at a hearing for my son and I was through the system myself and didn't have an advocacy worker – feel stronger having [advocate] with me."***

- Care experienced parent

***"They were very good at communicating and offering solutions to the problems and never gave up til we got what we needed."***

- A group of siblings receiving advocacy

***"My advocate goes to my meetings as I find them so stressful, otherwise no one would be there just for me."***

- Young person receiving advocacy

***"Advocate helped me get the outcome I wanted with housing."***

- Individual receiving advocacy

***"Because my advocate can make things happen that I can't do alone."***

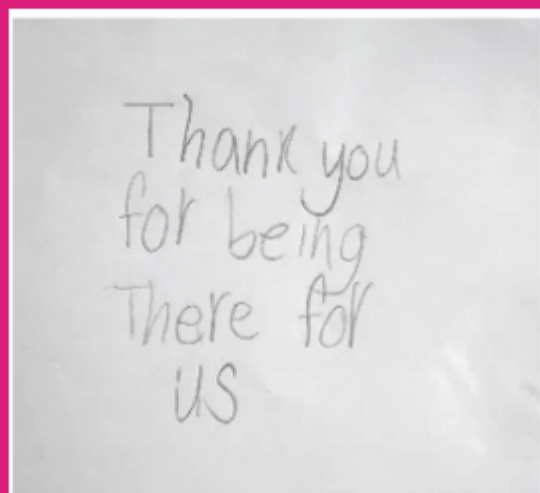
- Young person receiving advocacy commenting on the outcome around individualised support

***"I would like to say a big thank you to [the advocate] in seeking and obtaining [young person]'s views in such a sensitive way which has helped me in my decision."***

- Panel member, Children's Hearings Scotland

## Impact Story:

### Supporting a young person through courts



An advocate took on a referral in 2020 for a young person with additional support needs who was going through Child Welfare Hearings in court. The advocacy issue pertained to contact and parental rights & responsibilities, with the young person stating they wanted contact to be ceased. For over a year and a half the advocate visited the young person and talked over the court process and gained views that were sent directly to the Sheriff before every hearing. Contrary to what the young person wanted, a hearing stated that contact via zoom should continue. This was devastating for the young person who refused to follow through. It had a huge negative impact on every aspect of their life, e.g. school, sleep, home & health. The advocate continued to raise concerns with school, the curator and the Sheriff as the young person asked the advocate to convey how distressing this decision was for them and they were struggling to cope. The Sheriff took the young person's views on board and at the following hearing, contact was stopped.

The next hearing was to do with the pursuer seeking parental rights and responsibilities, which the young person did not want to happen. The advocate met the young person in a local park where the young person wrote their views on a letter to the Sheriff which the advocate sent to Court. A few weeks later the advocate received an email from the Sheriff asking if he could send a letter to the young person via the advocate, explaining his reasons for his decision. On receipt of the Sheriff's letter, the advocate read it to the young person. It stated that the Sheriff did not allow contact or parental rights & responsibilities to happen as he upheld the young person's request and views not to. The Sheriff went on to explain that none of this was the young person's fault and apologised for their experience in court.

The young person was very happy with the outcome and the letter from the Sheriff and stated; ***"The Sheriff should send all boys and girls going through this a letter as it helps give closure and takes a weight off my shoulders. I am glad he done this and now I can get on with my life"***.

The young person went on to say to the advocate; ***"Thank you so much for all your help and being with me through everything. I could not have done it without you and the court should be happy and thank you for doing what you done"***.

**BELONGING**



Total number of people involved in Who Cares? Scotland participation activities

Jan - Dec '22

755

8%  
on 2021

19

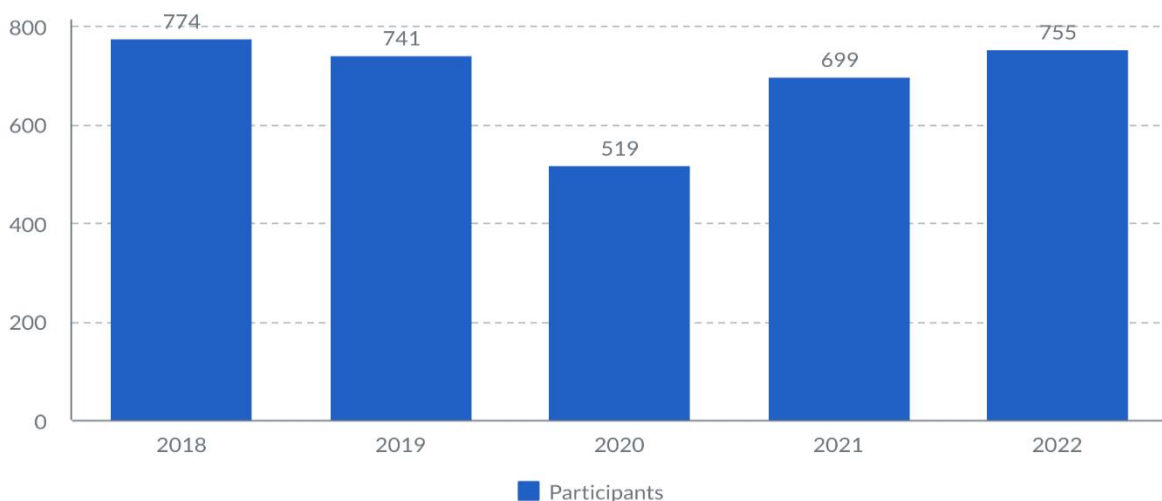
hours

average number of hours Care Experienced people spent taking part in our activities

5

activities

average number of activities Care Experienced people took part in



## OUR CARE EXPERIENCED FAMILY

Who Cares? Scotland is a membership organisation of Care Experienced people working to fulfil the vision of *a lifetime of equality respect and love*. Our members are a family community, connected through shared experience – together, they foster belonging and influence positive change in Scotland and across the world. The logic and accountability for this is rooted in various high-level outcomes, namely:

- Membership will become fully inclusive of the diversity of Care Experienced people
- Engagement with supporters will grow, widening the networks of Care Experienced people
- Membership increases opportunities for Care Experienced people to connect, receive peer support and validation.

In 2022, the fifth and final year of the strategic planning period, we continued to offer support and opportunities to our community, and got back to what we do best – creating in-person local and national connection. Our membership increased to over 3,800 individuals and further diversified, building on trends from previous years. We made connection and having fun one of our top priorities given what we knew about the impact of the pandemic on the Care Experienced community, and over 750 people with Care Experience participated in our regular groups and events<sup>1</sup>, including our varied Summer Programme of activity. Nationally, we were back in business with our big national events<sup>2</sup> – The Festival of Care<sup>3</sup> and Care Day, The Kiltwalk<sup>4</sup>, Care Experienced History Month, The Love Rally, Time to Shine and, of course The Care Family Christmas Dinner<sup>5</sup> all took place in-person this year.

Our work to become democratically transparent and accountable to our membership continued apace too. We revealed a new Strategic Plan based on what our members and supporters wanted at our Member's Assembly, developed a new website with members at the forefront, and our National Representative Body continued to represent and influence at the highest level.

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<sup>1</sup> Funded by various bodies including the Life Changes Trust (LCT), National Lottery Community Fund, John Lewis Partnership and Renfrewshire Council.

<sup>2</sup> Various bodies including LCT and the Scottish Children's Lottery contributed to our national events programme in 2022.

<sup>3</sup> Funded by various bodies including LCT and University of Highlands and Islands.

<sup>4</sup> Supporters included individual donors, people fundraising in the community, corporate partners including John Lewis Partnership, Ashurst, Wylie & Bisset, and a number of Corporate Parents.

<sup>5</sup> Funded by the John Lewis Partnership



22%  
Age 26+

# 3,852 family members

## Gender



44%



55%



1%

## Children's Home



42.9%

## Foster Care



48.7%

## Kinship



25.8%

## At Home



39.3%

Care Experience  
of members

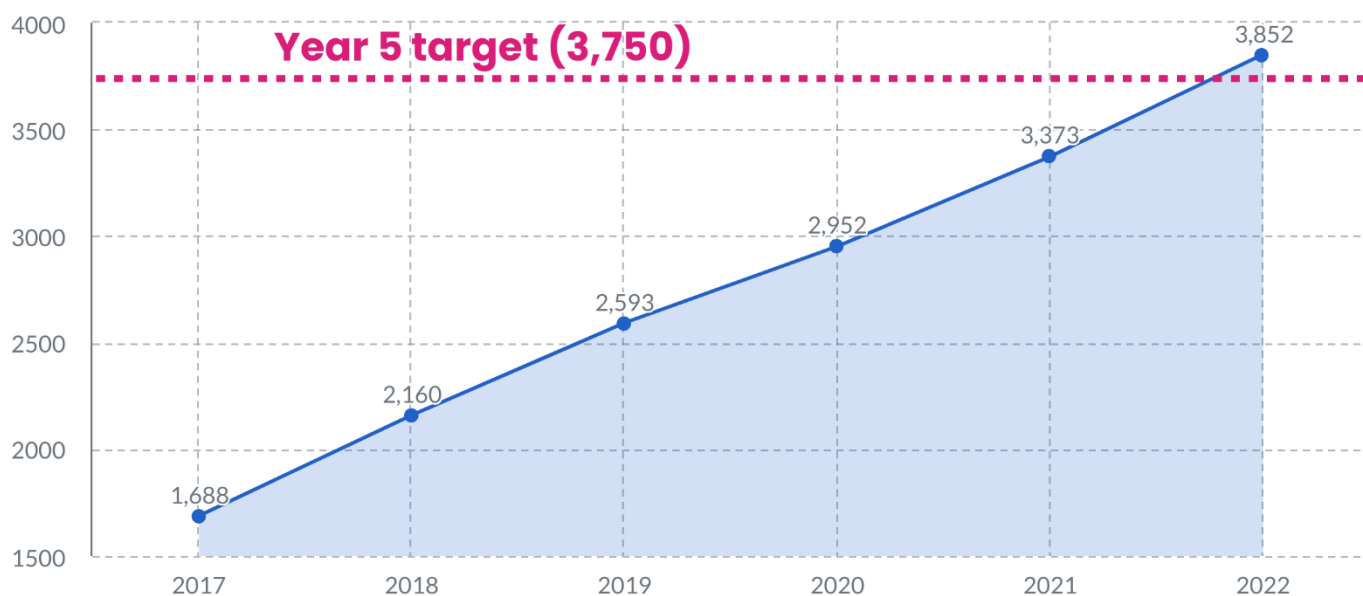


## Secure



2.5%

## Membership Growth



Everyone deserves to feel the love, support and belonging of being part of a family. Care Experienced people are no different. 2022 saw us continue to recruit an average of more than one Care Experienced person every day to join our Care Family - our family grew by 479 to a total of 3,852 Care Experienced people across all 32 Local Authorities in Scotland. Over the strategic planning period we therefore exceeded by over 100 our target, set out in 2017, to recruit 3,750 members by the end of 2022.

We also aimed for our membership to become fully inclusive of the diversity of Care Experienced people. As can be seen below, the care setting of our members currently in care has become more representative of the care population over the last five years, when compared to [official national data](#). The proportion of members in children's homes has decreased dramatically, while those identifying as being in foster care, kinship care or 'looked after at home' has increased steadily over time.

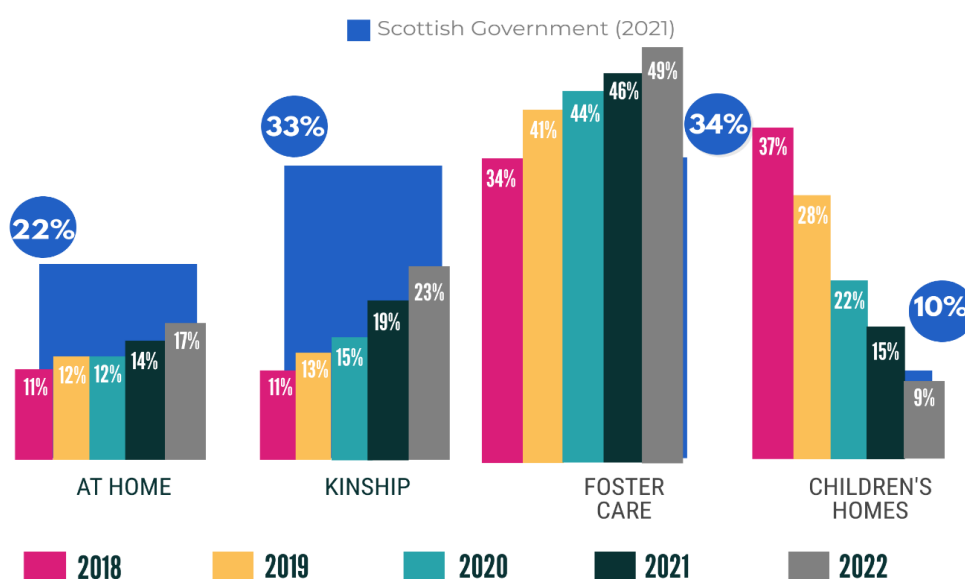
It should be noted that these figures only tell part of the story of the evolving demographics of our membership. The only available public data gives a snapshot in time of current care placements for those who are under 18 years of age. It does not include 'care leavers', other than their destination after care, and gives no indication of the actual Care Experience of individuals. Our data uniquely includes Care Experienced people aged 26 and over (which grew from 19% to 22% in 2022) and an individual's experience of different care settings throughout their life.

In our next strategic period, we will become more sophisticated in how we capture this data, with a key focus on offering equality, diversity and inclusion across each of the five strategic priorities in our [new strategic plan](#) (see page 14).

## REPRESENTATION OF MEMBERSHIP

Where members live, compared to Scottish Government statistics

Under 18s only





# CONNECTION

## Recovering From The Pandemic

The effects of the spread of the COVID-19 virus since March 2020, and the subsequent lockdowns and restrictions which were imposed, were felt by everyone. The Care Experienced community was affected more than most. Care Experienced people do not always have the traditional family and social connections needed to navigate the rough seas of a global pandemic and keep their heads above water.

[Our work on the impact of COVID-19<sup>6</sup>](#) found that Care Experienced people have been impacted disproportionately with issues relating to:

- Wellbeing, physical and mental health
- Finances
- Employment
- Digital exclusion
- Education
- Living in care
- Relationships

A total of 26 recommendations on changes to policy and practice were made as part of our Annual Participation Programme report in this area. Internally, these findings allowed us to further reflect on how we could safely meet the needs of the Care Experienced community and break down the barriers they experience in accessing services. To that end, in 2022 Lifelong Advocates on our Care Experienced Helpline<sup>7</sup> continued to offer holistic support to over 200 Care Experienced people, we delivered a Festival of Care<sup>8</sup> over five days, Care Experienced History Month, a Summer of connection activities, our traditional Care Experienced week activities and our Care Family Christmas Dinner on Christmas day<sup>9</sup>.

In 2022, much of our participation activity returned to pre-pandemic levels. Over the year, a total of 755 Care Experienced people participated in our activities, which included face-to-face trips and events as well as much-missed national events such as The Love Rally, Time to Shine and The Care Family Christmas.

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<sup>6</sup> Funded by bodies such as LCT and the Scottish Government

<sup>7</sup> Funded by bodies such as the Scottish Government and Scottish Children's Lottery

<sup>8</sup> Funded by bodies such as LCT and University of Highlands and Islands

<sup>9</sup> Funded by the John Lewis Partnership

## Local Connection

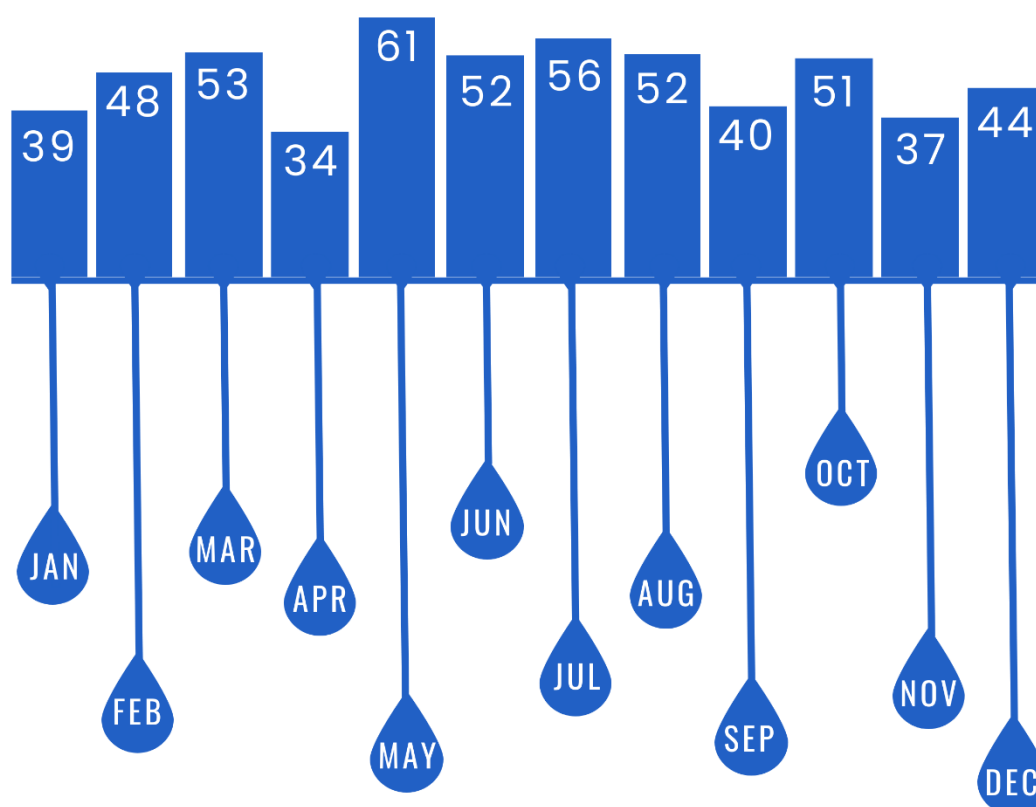
Almost 6,000 discrete participation activities took place at Who Cares? Scotland between 2018-22. In 2022, a total of 801 participation activities took place across the organisation, of which 585 were recurring groups/activities or Champions Boards. Unlike in 2020 and 2021, the number of recurring participation activities remained fairly consistent throughout the year in 2022. Further, the with the removal of all restrictions, groups were able to meet face-to-face, which meant that activities were less frequent but better attended, when compared to the previous two years.

Our local participation this year included:

- 225 Champions Board meetings and activities
- 235 other group meetings and activities
- 25 one-to-one activities with group members
- 83 'one-off' activities such as events and day trips

### IN NUMBERS

recurring activities throughout the year



# The Summer Programme

A key aim for Who Cares? Scotland in recent years has been to ensure more Care Experienced people and their supporters are able to come together in person, to simply connect and have fun. In July, August and September of this year, our Summer Programme of activities allowed us to do just this, with a wide variety of regional and national activities designed by our staff and volunteers offered across Scotland:

- A total of 50 activities took place in Summer 2022, including:
  - **Day Trips**, including meals, bowling, museum visits, theme park visits, go-karting, safari trips and more.
  - **Events**, including Bingo, Pride and a local authority-wide fun day.
  - **Other outings**, including dinner nights, cinema trips and more.
- A total of 463<sup>10</sup> people benefitted from the programme across at least 24 Local Authorities. 69% of Care Experienced members who took part in activities were aged 11-20.
- 93% of survey respondents agreed that they got to play and have fun, 95% enjoyed the day and 90% agreed that the activity had made them feel more positive.

*“Great to see people and have lots of fun & of course get food and cakes AND the weather was amazing so made the day even better.” (Participant)*

*“I got to participate in an activity I would never have done if it was not for this day. I got so much more from this than I gave.” (Corporate Parent)*



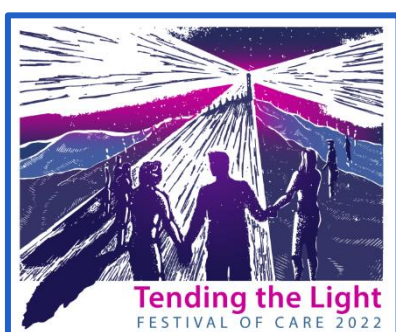
<sup>10</sup> This number includes parents and carers, as well as individuals attending activities via third party partners.

## National Connection

Our members tell us that connecting with their Care Experienced family across the country is always a highlight of their year. After connecting mainly virtually for the best part of two years, 2022 was the year we got back to the programme of national in-person belonging activity that our members know and love.

### January and February – Winter Aid<sup>11</sup>

With funding from the Scottish Government, we processed over 1,100 requests for assistance for Care Experienced people as part of the Winter Aid programme, providing over £175,000 in direct funding for food and fuel to individuals and families who needed it most.



### February – *Tending the Light: The Festival of Care*<sup>12</sup>

In February, Care Day saw the launch of [\*Tending the Light\*](#), the third annual festival of care - a five day programme of events based mainly in Shetland, but involving over 500 people across 14 local Authorities. This year, it included an [opening](#) and [closing film](#), and a special *Twilight Gathering* session with members and decision-makers focussed on Mental Health. Read more on page 42.

### April – Care Experienced History Month

In its second year, we built on the first [website dedicated to the history of Care Experienced people around the world](#), and [the first International Care Experienced Day of Remembrance](#), bringing people together to learn about different moments and stories from the history of care. Read more on page 29.



<sup>11</sup> Funded by the Scottish Government

<sup>12</sup> Funded by bodies such as LCT and the University of Highlands and Islands



## April to August – The Kiltwalk

This year also saw the return of the in-person Kiltwalk, where hundreds of our members and supporters, [including the First Minister](#), stepped up for Care Experienced people and raised £30,000 in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dundee & Aberdeen.



## October – Care Experienced Week

Excitingly, many of our traditional national events during Care Experienced Week returned, including our [Member's Assembly](#), [The Love Rally](#) and [Time to Shine](#). See page 23 for more details.

## December – Care Family Christmas

We sent gift parcels and handwritten Christmas cards to over 2,700 of our members, and on Christmas Day we hosted the return of our Care Family Christmas Dinner<sup>13</sup> in Glasgow. There were board games, crafts, Santa and more, all topped off with a full Christmas dinner for around 70 Care Experienced people and guests. Everyone who was there also got a personalised sack of gifts and an essential food hamper from John Lewis Partnership, who included Who Cares? Scotland in their [Christmas advert](#) as part of our partnership with them.



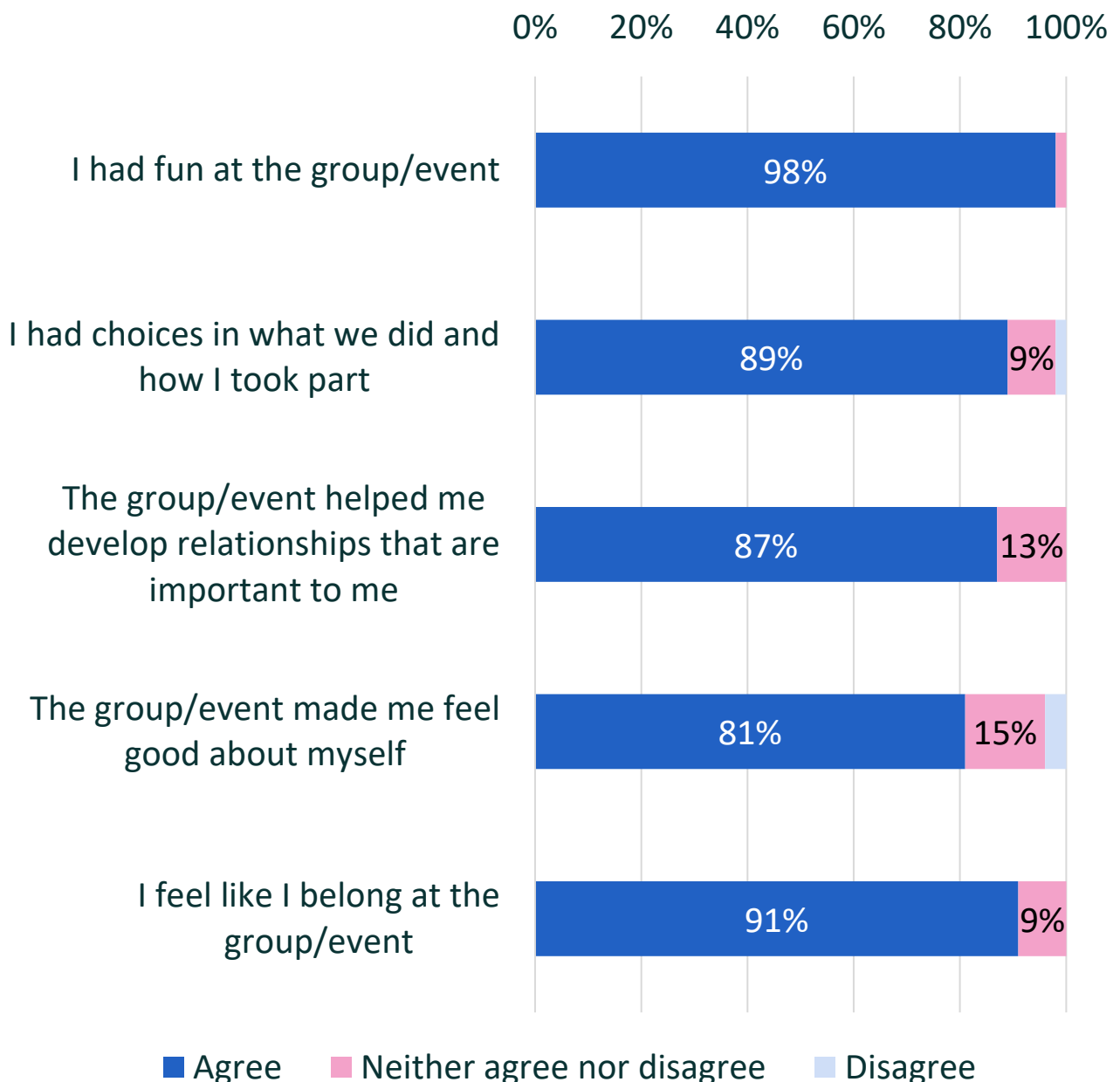
## The NRB

13 Care Experienced representatives continued their work on our [National Representative Body](#), meeting 32 times over 2022, including six residentials, and representing members at numerous events and in parliament. See page 30 for more information.

<sup>13</sup> Funded by John Lewis Partnership.

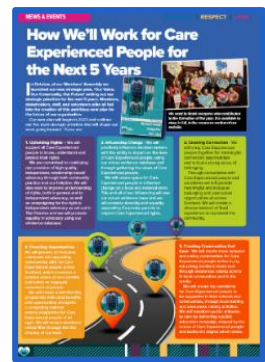
## Belonging Outcomes

Since November 2022, we have given participants the opportunity to give feedback on the events and activities they attended to establish their views. Our Participation Feedback Tool includes a range of outcomes, relevant here are the measures pertaining to 'Belonging', for which we have received 55 responses so far:



Overall, at least 4 out of every 5 respondents agreed that the activities they took part in had met all of the five pre-identified 'belonging' outcomes for them.

# BY MEMBERS, FOR MEMBERS



## Our Voice, Our Community, Our Future

Throughout 2022, we directly consulted almost 300 of our members, staff, volunteers and key external stakeholders on the future of Who Cares? Scotland. We asked them to reflect on what we had achieved and done well over the past five years, as well as what needed to happen in the next five to achieve our vision of a lifetime of equality, respect and love for Care Experienced people.

The result was [\*Our Voice, Our Community, Our Future: Our Strategic Plan for 2023-27\*](#), presented at our Member's Assembly during Care Experienced Week. By operationalising five key strategic priorities (see below) in the coming years, we believe we can continue to be Scotland's national organisation for Care Experienced people.





## Our New Website

At the beginning of November 2022, we launched our brand new and improved website - created with Care Experienced people and our members at the forefront. The launch came at the end of a year-long rebranding process which began with the re-design of our logo (as detailed in Year 4 report). The new website was created in direct consultation with members, staff, corporate parents, and other external stakeholders.



The purpose of the website redesign was to:

- Bring it in line with our new branding.
- Bring the Corporate Parenting site under the main organisation website.
- Make information and resources more accessible.
- Find a better way to advertise our events and opportunities to members.

[The Who Cares? Scotland website](#) is now far more intuitive and user-friendly. It is optimised to work on mobiles as well as computers and has loads of new features to discover.

The **Members' Hub** is home to all the information Care Experienced people might want to know about being a member of Who Cares? Scotland.

- The **Events & Opportunities** calendar is a live digital calendar which shows everything we've got coming up – from our national events, local groups, membership opportunities to job vacancies and volunteering opportunities.
- The **Kids Zone** is made up of content relevant to Care Experienced children under 11 and those who care for them.
- The **'News and Blogs'** section contains articles and stories made either by or alongside members, past and present.
- We have also created a **Helpline messenger service** so Care Experienced people can get support from our helpline if they can't phone for whatever reason.
- There's a filterable **'Resource Library'** which has our full range of reports, consultations and videos for all to refer to.

The new website will support and reinforce the work of Who Cares? Scotland and be a most valuable asset.



# Impact Story: Back to What We Do Best!



After a two year absence, the wait for our members was finally over: A full programme of in-person national events took place during Care Experienced Week at the end of October:

## Member's Assembly & AGM

Our members heard about all of our work and plans at our AGM, as we welcomed five new board members. Senior Managers then presented our new Strategic Plan, before members engaged with our new strategic priorities and talked about what excited them.



## The Love Rally

Then hundreds of our members and supporters marched through the streets of Glasgow to demand love for Care Experienced people, culminating in speeches at George Square.

*"I'd like to see a lifetime of love, equality and support for the care experienced community in Scotland. I'd like to see it get to a stage where nobody even has to think about it anymore, because it's just done."* (Attendee)



## Time to Shine

Over 300 people attended our annual Time to Shine festival at SWG3, where this year's fancy dress theme was *Outer Space* - a space-themed party with music, inflatables, food and more.



## The Wee Meet

We held our Wee Meet event on Care Experienced parents and the supports available to them, as outlined in our *Believe In Us* report. The event was filled with meaningful discussions between members and decision makers.

*"...to be able to have a voice, it speaks volumes for not only my pride, but maybe a legacy that I can give my kids when they are older."* (Attendee)



**VOICE**

# VOICE & INFLUENCING

## IN NUMBERS...



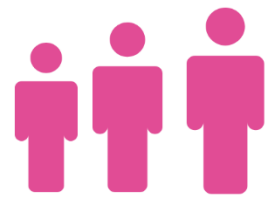
**21**

Media  
pieces



**47**

Opportunities to  
give evidence,  
responding  
to consultations,  
publishing briefings  
and reports



**206**

Champions  
Board  
participants



**10**

Responses as  
new voice  
evidence in the  
Annual  
Participation  
programme

## AMPLIFYING CARE EXPERIENCED VOICE

Who Cares? Scotland continues to commit to opportunities which support Care Experienced people to influence the world around them through community development, education and political and cultural advocacy. This aligns to high-level outcomes, namely:

- The voice of Care Experienced people will be supported to directly influence politicians, journalists, producers, editors and influencers at the highest level.
- Journalists and media personnel are influenced through training and developing positive relationships.
- Meaningful participation of Care Experienced people in Champions Boards or similar forums grows and is sustained.

Our method of supporting Care Experienced people to do this has matured across the strategic planning period as we sought to increasingly embed human rights-based and trauma-informed approaches throughout our influencing work. In doing so, we have increasingly invested in the development of our membership model with a view to ensuring our wider membership feel represented nationally by a group of trained representatives through our elected National Representative Body and MSYPs, and locally through Champions Boards and participation groups.

Embodying a human rights-based approach, we want this model to not only influence the external world for progressive change, but also to hold us accountable to our members and our board.

Our learning over the course of this strategic planning period has also led us to design our Annual Participation Programme (funded by bodies such as LCT and the Scottish Government), acknowledging the need to ensure our membership is actively involved in clear influencing themes to focus on, with enough time to participate meaningfully to effect change. Creating a planned calendar of participation opportunities has led to significant influencing successes in Year 5, which are detailed on pages 28-32.

Additionally, across the reporting period we have enhanced our anti-stigma focus by working with the Each and Every Child Initiative to embed Reframing principles in our Policy and Public Affairs work. In doing so, we have been increasingly emboldened to challenge unfair portrayals of Care Experienced people in the media, to work with Corporate Parents to educate their understanding of care<sup>14</sup>, and to engage and influence The Promise and Scottish Government on their progress and plans for the future.

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<sup>14</sup> Funded by the Scottish Government



# The Annual Participation Programme

Since August 2020, our Annual Participation Programme has been the one-stop-shop for members to decide on, find out about, and become involved in our main influencing priorities for the year ahead. Members could take part in a variety of participation opportunities including surveys, local group sessions, focus groups and engage in other creative ways such as writing a letter, poem or song, or creating a video. More online participation took place in 2020 and 2021 as a result of the COVID-19 lockdowns, and we adapted our participation model to continue to reach as many Care Experienced people as possible.

We focussed on themes selected by our membership, the National Representative Body and MSYPs, as well as relevant political opportunities, including reacting to live and evolving issues such as the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. We advocated for the change members want to see on these topics to decision-makers in the Scottish Government, Scottish Parliament, Corporate Parents and The Promise.

See pages 30-31 for more detail and the impact of each of the themes we have covered.



## Transforming the Narrative

Our media  [churns out stereotypes](#) in newspapers, film, TV, literature and social media that affect our thoughts and behaviour in ways we don't even realise. This negatively affects the self-esteem and sense of identity of those of us with Care Experience, and we believe it is the responsibility of all of us to end this for good.

We are an early adopter of the [Each and Every Child Initiative](#), which aims to transform the narrative about children and young people in care and mobilise communities to take action. We are currently embedding this initiative within all our staff teams, and aligning everything we say and do, internally and externally, with the Reframing principles.

We recognise that the public narrative on Care Experience, driven by media, must be continually challenged and an ongoing dialogue created in order to place Care Experienced voices front and centre of any conversation about them.

In 2022, our members took part in a total of 21 media outputs with Care Experienced voice at their heart:

- 11 online articles, including a piece on the [Care Family Christmas Dinner](#), the progress of [The Promise, our Love Rally](#) and our [Harvard Summer School students](#).
- Six articles in print, including pieces on the four Harvard Summer School Scholarship students, the Festival of Care and the Love Rally.
- Three radio interviews pieces, including an interview on the John Lewis Christmas advert and a member fundraising for a volunteer trip to South Africa.
- And one TV piece on the progress of The Promise.

# Care Experienced History Month



Who Cares? Scotland recognises the universal need for people to understand where they come from, their heritage and their culture. However, the history, heritage and culture of the Care Experienced community has often been untold or forgotten.

With this in mind, the first ever Care Experienced History Month (CEHM) was held in April 2021. The month created [the first website dedicated to the history of Care Experienced people around the world](#), held [the first International Care Experienced Day of Remembrance](#) and brought people together to learn about an aspect of the history of care.

In 2022, building on what was started in the first year, the lecture series returned with [a series of online and in-person events](#), with over 200 people registering to attend:

- "Her Affecting Story": Benomê, a Liberated African child. (In-person)
- "Kindertransported". A screening and Q&A with Henry Wuga MBE (Online)
- Care, Race and Illegitimacy in Eighteenth Century Britain (In-person)
- A Home from Home? Children and Social Care in Britain, 1870-1920 (Online)
- A History From Below: The Rights Movement of Young People in Care in England (Online)
- Black, Asian and ethnic minority young people and the UK care system (In-person)
- Scottish Care History: An Untold Story (Online)

Just like the first year, CEHM had activities around the world, with a group of activists in Australia hosting a range of their own events across April, including connection spaces and online talks, while a member of our CEHM delivery team was asked to be a guest speaker at a forum on older Care Experienced people in Australia.

After just two years, CEHM has already built an impressive resource through its website for anyone wanting to engage with the history of Care Experienced people and will continue to do so for many years to come.

***"An understanding of so much history which is either lost or forgotten and has reminded me there is always more to learn about care, and how families have been impacted for so many decades by care systems."***

***"Really has opened my eyes to think about care experience in a much more expansive way."***

***"Thank you so much for doing this. There is a real gap in our social history and understanding and you are making such a difference."***

(Attendees)

## Our National Representative Body (NRB)

Our National Representative Body of 13 democratically-elected Care Experienced members across Scotland has continued to develop over the past two years. Our democratised membership model aims to ensure our wider membership feel represented at both a national level through our National Representative Body and MSYPs, and locally through Champions Boards and participation groups.

The National Representatives are all volunteers who represent members' views and the Care Experienced community in Scotland, co-designing and delivering the Annual Participation Programme. They shape our policy and campaigning work and are external spokespeople for the organisation.

We continued to encourage our two elected MSYPs to communicate with our membership, engage them in training, and support them to participate in Scottish Youth Parliament sittings and opportunities. They enjoyed success at the July SYP sitting in 2022, with their motion on mental health services passing with 96% support, and they were nominated for four SYP Awards at the September sitting, winning the SYP Human Rights Defenders Award. [Their motion received parliamentary support](#) from Monica Lennon MSP (S6M-05524), backed by nine MSPs from across the political spectrum. It informed our response to the Scottish Government's consultation on the Mental Health Strategy in September.

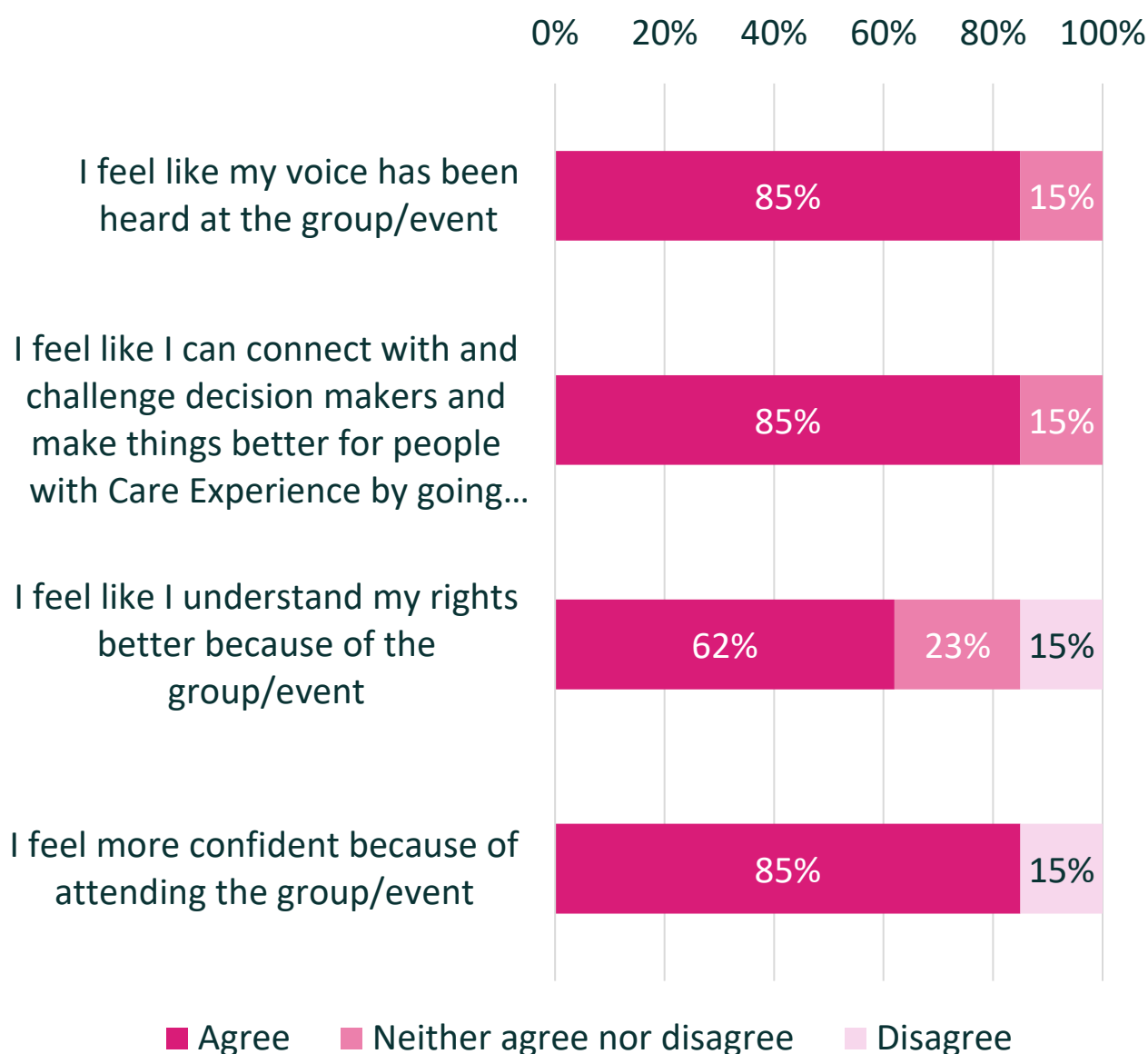
Embodying a human rights-based approach, we empower our members through participation not only to hold decision-makers to account for Care Experienced people's rights locally and nationally, but also to shape decision-making internally, such as through our Member's Assembly. In the past year they have engaged in two residential training weekends and helped to design and deliver numerous influencing opportunities engaging members and decision-makers on topics from mental health to Care Experienced parents, and of course, our Love Rally in October 2022.

This year (2023), we are developing this model to have better local/regional representation from our groups across the country, where representatives are more fully embedded within regional teams and the local groups that members attend. The existing cohort of national representatives complete their two-year term in February 2023, and will then enter a pre-election period, which will culminate with elections at the Members' Assembly in October 2023.



## Influencing Outcomes

Since November 2022, we have given participants the opportunity to give feedback on the events and activities they attended to establish their views. Our Participation Feedback Tool includes a range of outcomes, relevant here are the measures pertaining to 'Influencing', for which we have received 13 responses so far:



Overall, at least 4 out of every 5 respondents agreed that the activities they took part in had amplified their voice, enabled them to connect with and challenge decision makers, and improved their confidence. Only 62% agreed they had a better understanding of their rights, which is an area for development in our future participation opportunities.



# Social Media



## Highlights



180,770  
.....  
Impressions



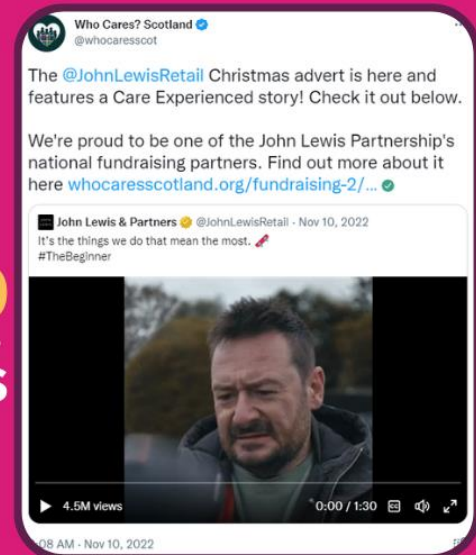
126,310  
.....  
Impressions



110,934  
.....  
Impressions



96,068  
.....  
Impressions



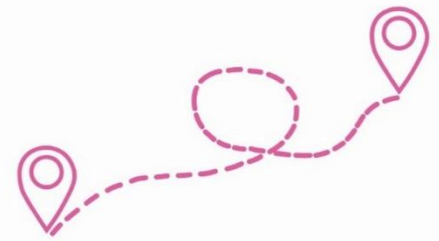
42,572  
.....  
Impressions



38,721  
.....  
Impressions



# INFLUENCING



## Influencing & Informing Policy – Our Journey Since 2018

2018



In 2018, our 1000 Voices project was influential in shaping the Discovery Stage of the Independent Care Review. We collaborated with the Equality and Human Rights Commission to explore Care Experience as a protected characteristic, and contributed our views to the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry, Children (Equal Protection from Assault) (Scotland) Bill, Continuing Care (Scotland) Amendment Order 2018, proposed Draft Police

Other highlights included our Care Records project, which offered an opportunity for Care

Experienced adults of all ages to lead on work important to their lives and secured support from the Information Commissioner's Office and Scottish Throughcare and Aftercare Forum.

2019

In 2019, we launched our [We Don't Have to Wait report](#), which brought together the voices of over 4,000 Care Experienced people over a four-decade period and highlighted over 20,000 advocacy issues. The report set out 43 asks to parliamentarians and key policy decision-makers to strengthen the rights of Care Experienced people. Six of these were incorporated into the 2019-20 Programme for Government as the following policy commitments:

- Extension of free NHS dental care to Care Experienced people aged 18 – 26.
- Removal of the upper age limit on Care Experienced student bursaries.
- Creation of a new statutory provision to place siblings together in care when in their best interests.
- Discretionary Housing Payments ring-fenced for Care Experienced people
- Extension of free early learning and childcare to two year olds with Care Experienced parents.
- Wider eligibility to the new Job Start Payment for Care Experienced people.

In 2019, we also supported over 100 Care Experienced people to feed into the Independent Care Review through seven distinct participation opportunities, and brought the First Minister and Care Experienced people together on Care Day to announce the first public education campaign on care, aimed at challenging preconceptions and stigma.

## 2020

Despite lockdown, over 2020 we supported members to participate in active policy discussions over 30 times on care records, the Minimum Age of Criminal Responsibility (Scotland) Bill, the Disclosure (Scotland) Bill, and had significant successes. Highlights included influencing the Children (Scotland) Bill to adopt a more inclusive definition of siblings, and participation rights for siblings to be part of each other's hearings, if they want to, and launching our first annual participation programme with the topic of rights and UNCRC incorporation.

We also synthesised evidence from our newly established helpline to highlight the impact of the pandemic on Care Experienced people to the Scottish Government, which led to stronger guidance being produced for the sector on lockdown restrictions in care settings and protecting family contact during the lockdown.



## 2021

We facilitated a workshop and created a report to inform the development of Scotland's National Care Service. Our report was clear that children's services must not be included if this will hinder progress to #KeepthePromise. Ministers have since paused plans to include children's services and commissioned research to explore this further.

Other highlights included supporting a member to speak at the UN's Day of General Discussion on Alternative Care, supporting four Care Experienced people to stand for election as our new MSYPs, developing our National Representative Body and working with the Scottish Parliament's Education, Children and Young People Committee and SQA to better support Care Experienced People with Certification and Appeals, as many of our members were negatively affected by the alternative exam approach implemented due to lockdown. We then joined an advisory group to ensure corporate parenting duties are considered in education reform.





## 2022

### Digital wellbeing




The Digital Wellbeing project ran from Oct 2021- Oct 2022. It brought together four passionate members to explore and develop resources for our members and Corporate Parents on digital wellbeing. The members were trained on research, digital rights, social media and design skills. Following a scoping exercise, they chose to design a survey on digital wellbeing, focussing on online safety, digital rights and online relationships. Their survey received 92 responses, and from the findings they created an [online toolkit of resources](#) that includes a report, podcast, reflective videos, blogs, a relationship mapping tool, and a storybook about rights. These were developed as part of the wider engagement with 154 members. A group member and our Digital Participation Officer presented this project alongside representatives from the EU Commission, [META](#) and other youth delegations from across Europe at the [COFACE Families Europe DigiGen conference](#) in Brussels in November 2022.

### Siblings

Who Cares? Scotland staff sat on the Scottish Government's National Implementation Group and short-life working groups for the [Staying together and connected: getting it right for sisters and brothers: national practice guidance](#). We worked with 16 young people aged 6-27 to ensure their voices were heard on sibling rights. They engaged either via a group which met monthly in the national office ('core group'), a group in Moray, and various 121s and case studies presented by advocates. Some of the group will be meeting the Minister for Children & Young People in Spring 2023 to relay the group's findings, which generally demonstrated practice falling far from that committed to in the Promise, as well as their solutions to making sibling rights real.

### Care and Justice Bill



We [responded to the Scottish Government's consultation on the Care and Justice Bill in June](#), including Care Experienced voice on legal aid, the use of physical restraint, raising the age of referral to the Reporter, the disclosure of criminal records and use of cross-border placements. We shared case studies from advocacy work supporting young people in secure care and from consultation work done with 17 young people on the use of secure care transport. The regulations on cross-border placements took into account [our response to a policy paper from January 2022](#) with a proactive offer of advocacy via the Children's Hearing Scotland (CHS) contract to all cross-border children and active consideration of how they will be given access to their rights to education and primary and secondary health care.



## Care records

We are supporting the 'Creating My Care Record' project which builds on work done during the Independent Care Review (ICR) with the Digital Health & Care Innovation Centre and partners, to explore co-produced care records that give ownership to and reduce stigma for young people. The project will research and prototype ideas for young people to tell their story in a way that is empowering for them and gives valuable insight to the organisations and services supporting them, using a 'learn by doing' approach. Two Who Cares? Scotland reps sit on the Design and Steering groups and will support three-four Care Experienced people to be recruited into the project at the end of 2022/start of 2023. We continue to engage in a cross-sector collaboration designing research looking at improving the experience of accessing records for Care Experienced people. This research has been delayed but a final draft is now complete and will be launched in the next reporting period.

## Guaranteed Income for Care Leavers

This work was supported by Aberlour, Staf and Who Cares? Scotland – exploring the idea of Care Leaver Guaranteed Income to provide care leavers with financial security as they move from care placements into independent living. We supported Care Experienced people to connect in a fun session in May, following a letter to the First Minister requesting a meeting to discuss. We ran a preparation session and supported six members to attend an influencing session with the First Minister in September to lobby, as part of the Care Leaver Income Advisory Group. The group then wrote to the First Minister to ask for a pilot.


The team also shared existing evidence related to this area with the Care Leaver Team at the Scottish Government who are developing the Care Experienced Grant and delivered a presentation to the Minimum Income Guarantee teams at Scottish Government. The Care Leaver Support Team at Scottish Government responded:

*'It's great to read the WC?S perspectives on this, providing valuable fresh insight and found the point about legal aid particularly interesting. We will take this and all the other points you have raised under consideration as we progress the policy development.'*

## Community Learning and Development (CLD)

We continued to be represented on the CLD Standards Council recruitment committee, and prepared and delivered a workshop at the World CLD conference in October alongside three NRB members to share learning and experiences around care with 18 community development practitioners from across the world.

## Young person's guarantee



With Young Scot, in May we supported 10 members from across seven local authorities to explore the specific needs, wants and experiences of our Care Experienced young people in relation to the [Young Person's Guarantee](#) which aims to connect every 16-24 year old to an opportunity (training/education/employment etc.)

# Annual Participation Programme - Impact



We have continued to talk to our members about human rights, since our advocacy supporting the movement for incorporation of the UNCRC (from 2018). In 2020, over 80 members shared their views including their knowledge of rights and how well protected their human rights are. [This involved national and local online workshops](#) and an online survey, with partners such as Together - the Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights who supported us to deliver these. From this, we developed a report called '[Navigating the World of Rights](#)' in December 2020 to help us share members' views with decision-makers. For example, the [#AllOurRights report](#) on the new human rights law in Scotland, and the [National Taskforce for Human Rights Leadership report](#), which references the barriers to rights faced by Care Experienced people.

We are continuing to engage with various working groups designed to understand how to incorporate and implement various human rights treaties in Scotland, including the UNCRC – as well as protecting the Human Right Act. Such working groups include:

- Scottish Government's UNCRC Strategic Implementation Board (SIB)
- Scottish Government's Human Rights Bill Advisory Board
- Scottish Government Human Rights Bill Lived Experience Advisory Group (two members)

We supported two young people as part of the Together Rights Right Now participation project by Together which fed into the SIB above until April 2022, and one young person as part of the Rights Detectives project since July. Our Training & Education team delivered UNCRC training, and the Communications Team is developing a Knowing Your Rights prototype website page for members and advocates.

We supported a member of the NRB to write, evidence and submit a petition ([PE1958](#)) to the Scottish Parliament's Petitions Committee. The petition received 392 signatures of support, and aims to support campaigning for lifelong support for Care Experienced people. It is currently being considered by Parliament, with a roundtable happening to discuss this issue further with lived experience and partners in March 2023.

We are working to make sure the new human rights framework in Scotland recognises Care Experience as a lifelong identity, strengthens independent advocacy provision and ensures that Care Experienced people are protected as an equality group which faces greater barriers in realising their rights. We also joined other charities to protest against the Rights Removal Bill via joint letters and briefings.

We submitted evidence to the UN Committee for the Rights of the Child via Together Scotland, highlighting the right to family life, education, health and participation. Our evidence on restraint was also referenced in the [report of the Children's Commissioners of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales in November 2022](#). We also contributed to a Joint Civil Society report to the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in December 2022.

## COVID-19

Our members fed into our early COVID-19 Impact reports from [April](#) and [May](#) 2020 with their experiences during the pandemic, their ideas for 'building back better' in our [COVID-19 Recovery Planning report in February 2021](#) which was shared with the Scottish Government. Videos on the impact of the COVID-19 response on Care Experienced people's [finances](#) and [information and digital access](#) have since been developed for Corporate Parents with this evidence.

## Care Experienced Parents

As part of our APP Care Experienced Parents theme, we engaged with 45 members on their experiences as a parent who grew up in care. Interim findings were used to support implementation of the two-year-old offer for Early learning and Childcare, as committed to in the 2019 Programme for Government.

The '[Believe In Us](#)' report was published on Global Day of Parents in June 2022 with 11 recommendations for change which have been shared with partners and decision makers. We held an influencing event for the report during Care Experienced week in October 2022, called the 'Wee Meet', where the NRB and other members influenced decision-makers across relevant Government areas to implement findings. The CEO of HomeStart said, 'the real impact of this report is in the richness of the quotes from your parents. Those are so powerful, honest and often raw that it is emotional to read even without knowing the individuals.'



## National Care Service



We also engaged our members on the whether the Scottish Government's proposals for a National Care Service would help or hinder Keeping the Promise in February 2022 with an online event called *The Bairns Supper*, which engaged eight Care Experienced people. We shared our [Bairns Supper](#) report from February with the Scottish Parliament's Health, Social Care and Sport Committee as they consider the National Care Service Bill. Our views on lifelong tailored advocacy provision were picked up in their [analysis](#) in November 2022.

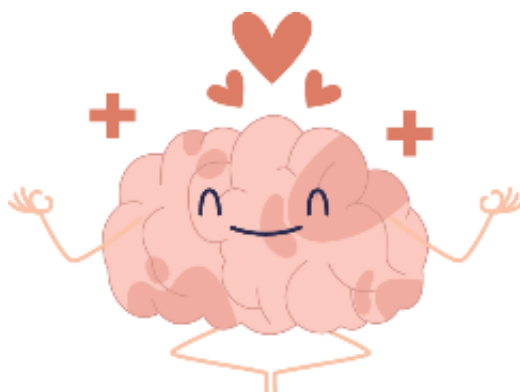
Our views, along with others, informed the Scottish Government's decision that 'more evidence is required to decide where children's health, social work and social care services are best placed.' We also received a video from the Minister for Mental Wellbeing and Social Care, Kevin Stewart MSP, thanking our members, committing to *'work with organisations like Who Cares? Scotland, and people with lived experience, to ensure services are truly co-designed with the people who use them.'*

## Sexual Health and Healthy Relationships



In 2021, 55 Care Experienced people shared their views on sexual and reproductive health ([see the report here](#)). We discovered how they want to learn, that they want autonomy in making decisions about sexual health, and that want services to stop stigmatising individuals for being Care Experienced, or for other parts of their identity. The NRB shaped the recommendations for change which influenced the [Sexual Health Standards by Healthcare Improvement Scotland](#).

**See impact story on page 43 for details on our work on Mental Health.**



## Champions Boards

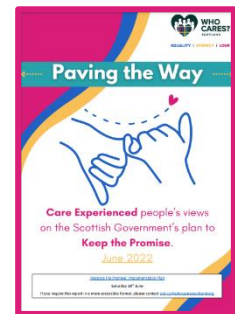
206 of our members participated in 13 unique Champions Board groups run by us in 2022<sup>15</sup> (up by 16% on 2021). To supplement [Research Scotland's Champions Boards evaluation](#), we reflected on some highlights over the year, a selection of which is given below:

- In **Aberdeen**, the ACE group worked alongside Police Scotland to advise them on Care Experience, making and having dinner with a number of Corporate Parents throughout the year whilst talking about issues such as cost of living, trauma-informed practice and they were involved in interviewing for new staff.
- **East Lothian** Champs recruited some new members and moved to a new venue at the QMU. They undertook reframing training with the Each and Every Child team and attended a residential trip with Columba 1400.
- **East Renfrewshire** Mini Champs created and took part in several interactive events, including in the jungle, murder mysteries and a crazy sports night. They engaged in several sessions looking at plants, flowers and weeds in a town environment with framing of 'thriving far from home.'
- In **Lanarkshire**, three groups combined to deliver a creative showcase during Care Experienced Week. The [TNT group](#) in North Lanarkshire presented their work on Mental Health in front of the Deputy First Minister and others at the *Twilight Gathering* event.
- The **Moray** Better Meetings group were central participants in the consultation on Keeping Siblings Together. The group inputted throughout the year into the Hearing System Working Group with Moray & Highland professionals, as well as Child Protection and Panel Member training in both Local Authorities.
- In **Highland**, the Champions Board and Little Champs started to get back together again after the pandemic, going bowling and making lighthouses amongst other activities.
- **Midlothian** Champs did sessions of the language of care, had visits from several Corporate Parents and took part in an art competition.

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<sup>15</sup> With additional funding from Local Authorities

## The Promise – Paving The Way



In January 2021, during the height of the pandemic, we supported members to submit questions to the Promise Scotland about the work they had planned to turn the findings of the Care Review into reality. The Promise Scotland team then filmed a [Q&A video](#), where Fiona Duncan, the Chair of the Oversight Board, answered the questions submitted.

In June 2022, we created space for 46 people with care experience to engage with the Scottish Government's Keeping the Promise Implementation Plan. This included involving the NRB in the design and delivery of the event. Our participants learned about The Plan and asked questions in the first session through a series of interactive posters we developed to explain each chapter, supported by our staff facilitators. Our interim report '[Paving the Way](#)' prompted [media coverage](#), a [parliamentary question \(S6W-10246\)](#), and a successful [parliamentary motion \(S6M-05477\)](#) supported by 19 MSPs, as well as various follow-up influencing meetings with decision-makers across Parliament, Government and Corporate Parenting bodies.







Through our Annual Participation Programme, a major issue we have explored is mental health for Care Experienced people. To build on our knowledge from independent advocacy support related to mental health, in Autumn 2021, we consulted with 61 Care Experienced people across Scotland, with around half sharing their views through an online survey and half through group sessions or interviews.

With our findings, in February 2022 we launched our [Tend Our Light report on mental health](#) at the Twilight Gathering during our Festival of Care, with seven recommendations shaped by our NRB. This was an online event co-delivered by our NRB where we presented the findings of this report to a mixed audience of politicians, professionals and Care Experienced people, creating space for dialogue about the recommendations and future action. The event was attended by five MSPs, including the Minister for Mental Health and Social Care and the Deputy First Minister, and 107 others including professionals. We also supported our two MSYPs and two NRB members to travel to Shetland to discuss these issues with this island community.

After the event, our recommendations were supported in full by 18 MSPs via a parliamentary [motion \(S6M-03400\)](#) by [Martin Whitfield MSP](#). The Head of Health Improvement in Lanarkshire committed to take forward our recommendation to support care experienced adults' mental health, and we went on to present the report again at a Cross Party Group on mental health in Scottish Parliament in June 2022.

Our recommendations on Mental Health and Reproductive and Sexual Health fed into the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee's inquiry into the health and wellbeing of children and young people, leading to dedicated oral evidence sessions with and on behalf of our members (in December-January), focussing the inquiry on care experience. The [report published in May](#) contained specific recommendations (53-57) about care experience, and [the Scottish Government responded in July](#) committing to improving data and guidance on health and wellbeing outcomes for care experienced people, and to working with people with care experience to improve counselling services.

In May and November 2022, we held workshops with 20 Care Experienced people including national representatives and strategic leads across health and local government through the Scottish Government and COSLA's Joint Delivery Board on Children and Young People's Mental Health. At the November meeting we reviewed the group's draft recommendations, including work on lifelong support and resources on building supportive, loving relationships between children and professionals. We are waiting to see if our feedback for more specific actions will have been taken into account in the group's final recommendations.

The Tend Our Light report evidence also fed into the Scottish Government's Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy and Mental Health Law Review consultations, and the Scottish Government and COSLA's Suicide Prevention Strategy consultation. We also fed into third sector partners' work including Our Minds, Our Future, and the Mental Health Foundation.

# **OPPORTUNITIES & CHOICE**



# OPPORTUNITIES AND CHOICE



2018-21: NUMBER OF CARE  
EXPERIENCED PEOPLE...



Benefitting from employment  
and training opportunities

178

125



External to Who  
Cares? Scotland  
receiving successful  
employment support



Who Cares? Scotland  
staff transitioned into  
employment

51



Transitioned into  
further education

38



Total relationship-  
based 1 to 1 meetings

1,000  
+

## LIFELONG ADVOCACY

At Who Cares? Scotland, we believe that people in our communities should be afforded the options and support in education, employment and training which enable them to thrive. We know, too, that for those of us with Care Experience, this is rarely the case, and scaffolding is required to build the strong foundations that are needed. Each individual's journey through education and employment is unique and requires tailored holistic support. Our original high-level outcomes for this area of work include:

- More Care Experienced people can access and sustain a supported employment opportunity and transition to a positive destination as a result of our lifelong opportunities work.
- Corporate Parents and local partners will be better equipped to support Care Experienced young people to gain and sustain employment.
- Support provided to national employability programmes will build their capacity to meaningfully engage and support Care Experienced young people on their employment journey.

This year, our five year transformation from Reaching Higher to Lifelong Opportunities to Lifelong Advocacy was fully realised, as our Lifelong Advocates and a team of trained Helpline Volunteers provided rights-based support and guidance in areas such as finance, employment, education, health and housing. Our team spoke to hundreds of people via the Care Experienced Helpline and offered ongoing holistic support. We believe this is the realisation of something our members have long-since told us they need – independent advocacy support throughout their lives.

Our work in Opportunities and Choice extends to our Training & Education team<sup>16</sup>, who delivered 79 sessions about Care Experience to over 2,300 professionals, while our Volunteering Programme went from strength to strength. The number of active trained volunteers at Who Cares? Scotland has more than quadrupled during this strategic planning period to 136 (29 of whom are Care Experienced members), and in 2022 more than 3,000 hours were committed to our cause by volunteers.

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<sup>16</sup> Funded by the Scottish Government

# Individual Holistic Support

Our Lifelong Opportunities team undertook over 1,000 relationship based 1-to-1 meetings with Care Experienced people during this strategic planning period (2018-21). Specific issues and tasks included:

## Finance

- Assisting application for historical DWP benefits, as well as devolved Scottish benefits, such as Scottish child payment and Limited Capability for Work.
- Support with Universal Credit and benefits appeals processes.
- Referral to local supports.
- Help with financial management and budgeting.
- Support in accessing grants (SAAS, college bursary, childcare and discretionary funds, clothing grants, free school meals, Scottish Welfare Fund).
- Support with council tax (i.e. exemption, challenge).

## Wellbeing

- Enhanced referral follow up process for mental health service externally after the Who Cares? Scotland counselling offer ended.
- Ernst Maas fund – funding which allowed us to access financial support to help people into further education.
- Historical child abuse inquiry – increased referral for supports.
- Accessing care records – historical and other.
- Support in developing healthy coping mechanisms.
- Regular check-ins (including telephone, Zoom and socially distanced walks).
- Referrals to counselling offer and external mental health supports.
- Support in accessing exercise equipment, such as bikes, gym equipment.
- Financing IT equipment to support digital inclusion.
- Arranging supports from food banks and gas and electricity providers.

## Services

- Referrals and contact with housing and specific homelessness teams.
- Working alongside lecturers and teachers.
- Referrals to statutory services.
- Liaison with housing, social work and criminal justice departments.
- Referral to Citizen's Advice Bureau & financial inclusion teams.
- Liaising with Care Experienced Officers at college and university.
- Support in accessing legal services.

## Employability

- Mentorship through Social Security Scotland.
- Support in job and education applications, CV writing & interview preparation.
- Arranging funds from local providers for travel to work and suitable work clothing.
- Supports to access job opportunities improving job searching skills.

## The Journey to Lifelong Advocacy



Our Lifelong Opportunities model, which specialised mainly in employability and opportunities for Care Experienced people of all ages, staffed by two Employment officers, transitioned at the end of 2021 to a Lifelong Advocacy role, supported by a team of highly trained volunteers. While this marked the final stage in our journey to Lifelong Advocacy, our Employment Officers have always offered holistic supports to those we worked with, in the key areas of finance, accommodation, and health and relationships, with a central focus on employment, education and training.

### 2018

In the first year of the strategic plan, as part of the Reaching Higher programme, multiple employment and training opportunities for Care Experienced people were secured through partnerships with corporate parents, private and third sector organisations, such as:

- A pre-employment programme was delivered to a total of 20 care experienced people, all of whom rated it as good or very good.
- 15 employees accessed alternative funding for training, education, travel, clothing, housing support, driving lessons, laptops and other equipment.
- 10 Community Jobs Scotland employment opportunities were secured.
- Five Modern Apprenticeships were secured: one with SQA and four with NHS.
- SVQs were completed by seven Reaching Higher employees (SVQ Level 3 by three and SVQ Level 2 by four Reaching Higher employees) focusing on Business Administration, Children & Young People and Social Care.

### 2019

In 2019, this work became referred to as Lifelong Opportunities, reflecting the new direction of travel Who Cares? Scotland embarked on in 2018.

20 training and development opportunities were completed by Care Experienced employees in 2019, with four people progressing internally and 14 externally. Unlike in previous years where Care Experienced roles were recruited wholesale at a set point during the year, a more staggered approach was introduced in 2019. This resulted in less pressure on staff and an ability to have a more autonomous approach to annual workstreams for line managers. The model saw the line manager approaching the Lifelong Opportunities Team when an opportunity within their team arose, from which point the team supported the recruitment process.

The above improvements resulted in a culture change, with less distinction being made between Care Experienced and non-Care Experienced staff. Along with the staggered recruitment approach, we saw an increase in the number of applications



from Care Experienced people for roles, especially from university graduates. This led to a further diversification of our workforce and helped to demonstrate that a wide range of talent can be attracted to Who Cares? Scotland through targeted recruitment of this kind.

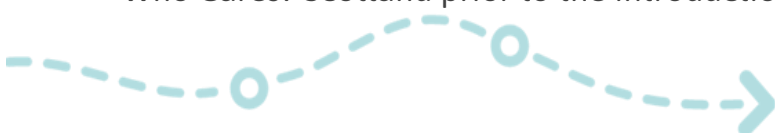
## 2020

In 2020, the wide-ranging changes to the employment and education environment following the spread of COVID-19 resulted in a huge spike in demand for support and guidance for Care Experienced people in areas such as finance, benefits, health and housing. Reacting to this, we rapidly set up a confidential helpline, reorganising our staffing construct to take almost 2,000 calls and support over 900 Care Experienced people and carers over the year. When restrictions started to be relaxed in the Summer, we decided to keep the helpline open, resourced by our Lifelong Opportunities team, but not before they designed and delivered two COVID-19 specific employability workshops for Care Experienced people. Added to this, the team continued to proactively offer specific relationship-based support to over 40 Care Experienced staff and external candidates across 100 meetings, to help them achieve real progress against their career or education goals. Lastly, we undertook an average of three training and consultancy sessions a month with employers, reaching over 500 Corporate Parenting professionals and working with them to offer an increased number of employment and development opportunities to Care Experienced people.

In our Strategic Plan 2018-22, we set ourselves the target of having 30% Care Experienced staff at all layers and levels of the organisation, and this has been more recently underpinned by a trauma-informed approach to all our work. The proportion of Care Experienced people employed by us rose from 20% to 26% in the 6 years from 2014, with 90% of those employees receiving successful employment support in 2020.

## 2021

It became apparent during the pandemic, through evidence gathered from our [Care Experienced Helpline](#), that the need for Lifelong Advocacy continued to be unmet for Care Experienced people of an older age, or those who could no longer access the supports from Local Authority or local advocacy services. We recognised that the majority of callers lived in their own tenancy and were so-called 'care leavers'. Lifelong advocacy is something we have supported our members to campaign for, and we felt we could do something about it. We therefore adapted our Lifelong Opportunities model to ensure the best offer was available for those who require this support, and Lifelong Advocacy was born. This has meant that we extended our reach to people with Care Experience who would have otherwise never approached Who Cares? Scotland prior to the introduction of the Helpline.





## 2022 – The Helpline: We're Still Here

In 2022, we created two full-time Lifelong Advocate (LLA) roles attached to the National Advocacy Helpline. This LLA resource provides advocacy support and representation to Care Experienced people who do not meet the criteria for our local authority advocacy contracts, and to those who support them directly or indirectly. We wanted to ensure that all Care Experienced people, no matter their age, could get vital support in a trauma-informed manner.

In addition to this LLA resource, we embarked on a Helpline Volunteer recruitment strategy to attract quality individuals to provide short term support and signposting for calls to the National Helpline. We currently have a team of six volunteers from various professional disciplines supporting the work of our Helpline.

Often, calls can begin with one query and develop into several different issues that the person needs help with. The issues our Helpline staff and volunteers provide support with most frequently include:

### Finance

Financial queries are the most frequent reason someone initially contacts our Helpline, but frequently, financial queries/distress are a major contributor to poor mental health and anxiety. We receive calls/emails from individuals requiring support with a wide range of welfare rights and benefits issues including: needing support with their debts and sanctions; issues around Personal Independence Payments (PIP); applications for Scottish devolved benefits; applications for any funding ring fenced for Care experienced people, such as the Care Experienced bursary and council tax exemption. The number of calls regarding financial wellbeing are on the increase due to the cost-of-living crisis and we are delivering more intensive support and signposting to other agencies that offer help with income maximisation and support with historical debts.

People are now regularly calling saying they have no money for utilities or food, therefore many referrals are being made to foodbanks, and we often contact fuel companies to make payment agreements or access any funding they may have set aside to help with increased energy costs. Furthermore, we support many Care Experienced people to apply for funding to access furniture, soft furnishings, and white goods when they secure their own tenancy and all benefits related to housing if necessary.

### Education / Training & Bursaries

Individuals frequently call the Helpline needing support to apply for bursaries, support to access proof of their care experience and for further signposting to widening participation teams or Care Experienced supports in both colleges and universities. The Helpline also field general enquiries pertaining to employability

support and help with job interview techniques to improve confidence in gaining employment.

## **Housing**

Individuals call with a range of housing related issues, such as homelessness and for support in accessing funds to furnish their accommodation. We have strong links with Shelter when legal support is needed. Lifelong Advocates will work with Care Experienced individuals over weeks, sometimes months, in support of housing issues. The main assistance provided relating to homelessness is to mediate and bring all the other supports together to promote multi-agency working. Once a Lifelong Advocate is involved and reiterates the rights and entitlements of those they are supporting, progress is often made.

## **Mental Health and Wellbeing**

The Helpline receives a wide range of calls from individuals seeking support with mental health and wellbeing concerns. Issues raised vary from needing access to counselling or mental health advocacy, to people needing a 'listening ear' so they can voice how they are feeling. The importance of well-skilled, experienced staff with connections to other (crisis) services is essential when receiving calls of this nature. These callers, some of whom prefer to remain anonymous, say it is useful just to have someone understand the Care Experienced element of their identity and how this adds to their feelings.

## **Other Issues e.g., Access to Care Records**

Sometimes individuals call the Helpline requiring support to confirm their Care Experienced status with social work departments and for support to apply for access to their care records. These cases can be protracted and often result in additional advocacy asks. For instance, being faced with barriers to accessing your care records can cause stress and anxiety, therefore a referral would be made to other agencies that could support with this impact on the individual.

## **Other Issues e.g., General enquiries about Who Cares? Scotland**

The Helpline receives calls about individuals wanting to volunteer, make referrals for our local authority advocacy services and for information on our membership and participation activities.



1,018

Direct interactions made through the helpline in 2022

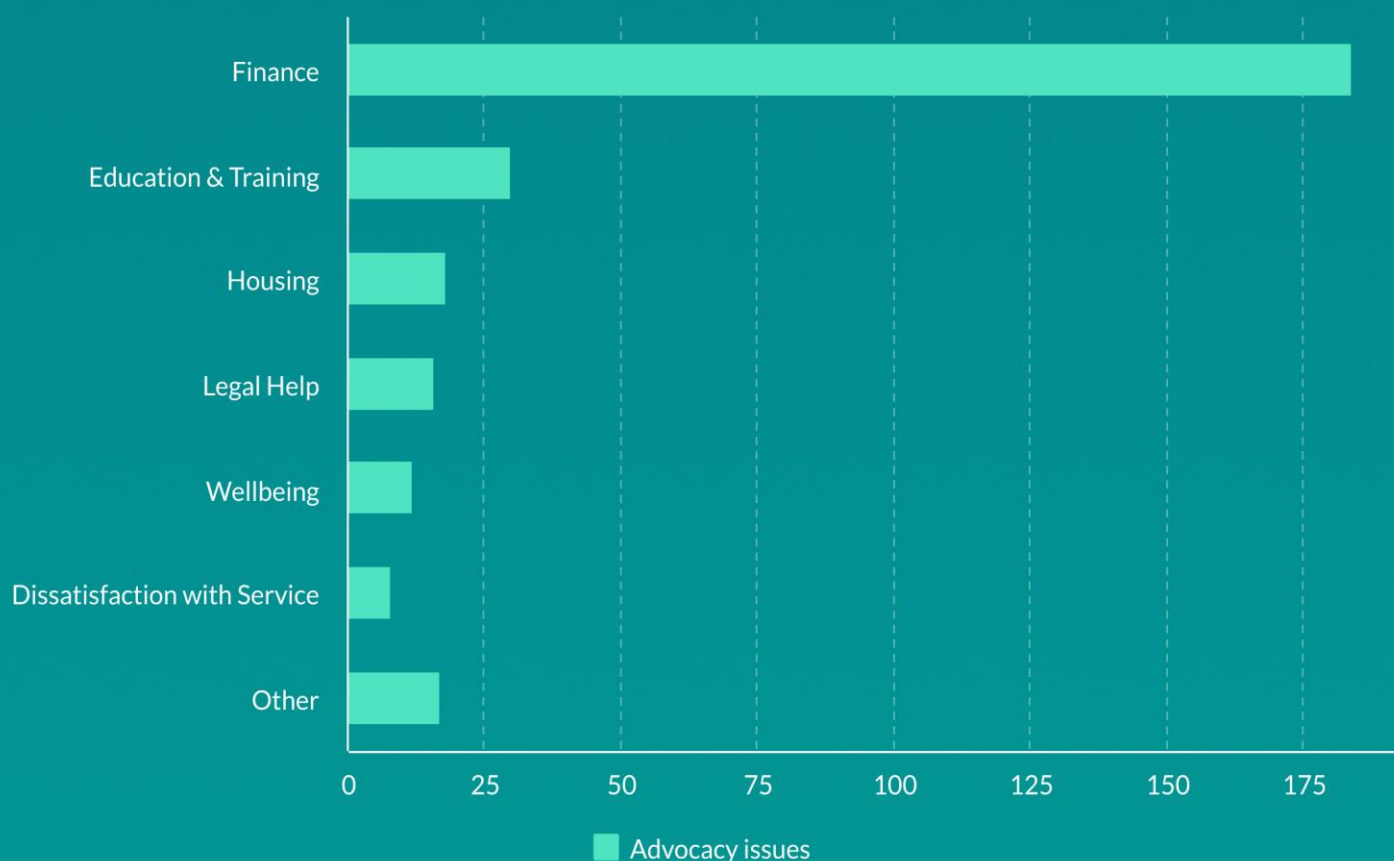
203

Unique people with Care Experience directly supported with a total 285 advocacy tasks

Average age of caller

24

## Advocacy Themes



## TRAINING & EDUCATION

The Training and Education team is funded directly by the Scottish Government to deliver a programme of support for Corporate Parents across Scotland. This grant is intended to ensure all Corporate Parents fully understand and enact their statutory Corporate Parenting duties as defined by the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014. The programme of activity is fully informed by the voices of Care Experienced people, utilising evidence the organisation has gathered through advocacy, the Helpline, the Annual Participation Programme and through the team's direct interaction with individual members.

The programme consists of:

- live, bespoke training for individual Corporate Parents.
- larger, themed collaborative training events with a wide variety of Corporate Parents in attendance.
- support to create and develop Corporate Parenting Plans.
- access to an online learning hub with guidance material, written case studies. and case study films.
- e-learning modules.
- consultation time with Who Cares? Scotland staff.



## VOLUNTEERING

Who Cares? Scotland is built on strong foundations of dedicated individuals working together with a commitment to champion Care Experienced people. Our members have been able to create stable, unique, and dynamic relationships with committed volunteers. Through continued consultation with members, staff and volunteers over the past four years, it is evident that volunteering is fundamental to our work. Volunteering increased from **32** volunteers supporting **7** projects in 2018 to **136** volunteers supporting **12** projects in 2022. **100%** of our staff surveyed in 2022 believed that volunteers had a positive impact on our work, highlighting the importance of volunteer's crucial input.

The Volunteering Programme allows our Care Experienced members further opportunities to get involved in participation, to create and drive positive change, to give something back, improve their skills and career prospects, as well as benefit in turn from the work volunteers do. **29** of our members in 2022 were also volunteers. Volunteering has impacted positively on the aims of Who Cares? Scotland over the last four years and will be integral to achieving our objectives set out in the organisational strategy from 2023-2027.

Volunteering enhances our work; increases our presence and ability to raise awareness to educate others; is crucial to achieving our vision; and this year officially includes our Helpline volunteers who have been able to support Care Experienced adults across Scotland.

Volunteers contribute to six areas within the organisation:

- **Participation support** (local and national) – helping us to bring young people together by supporting youth work activities.
- **Influencing support and training** (local and national) – helping us to bring about positive change by supporting our campaigning and events.
- **Fundraising support** – helping us reach as many people as possible with administration, membership, marketing and fundraising.
- **Community school support** – helping us to educate and raise awareness of care experience in schools.
- **Events** – helping us facilitate belonging and connection events across the country.
- **Helpline** – supporting Care Experienced adults across Scotland, having extensive knowledge across a number of areas.



In 2022...

- **136** volunteers were active in roles (increase of 53% on 2021)
- 29 of whom have experience of care (up 12% from 2021)
- At least **3,138** volunteer hours were committed (up 78% from 2021)
- **20** unique groups or projects were supported by volunteers (up 33% from 2021)

#### What our members said

- 71% of members said that volunteers helped them take part in activities and have fun.
- 67% of members said volunteers helped them understand what support they could get (Helpline).
- 67% of members said volunteers helped them to gain confidence (Helpline).
- 67% of members said volunteers helped them to feel safe.

***"I like having the volunteers because they look after me, support me & teach me new things."***

#### What our volunteers said

- 100% felt extremely valued by staff.
- 75% rated their experience of volunteering as excellent.
- 100% find their volunteering meaningful and rewarding to achieve personal goals.
- 100% of volunteers would recommend Who Cares? Scotland as an organisation to volunteer with.

***"I can give back to an organisation that helped me as a member, whilst feeling part of a wider community."***

***"I personally feel that our members feel more connected to their care experience when volunteers support them to access different groups, talk about their stories or just be themselves."***

#### What our staff said

- 100% said volunteers make an important contribution to our work and bring important skills & experience.
- 100% said volunteers were important to our members.
- 91% said volunteers add to capacity to deliver team's work.

***"The volunteers bring with them experience from other areas and a wealth of knowledge. The passion and care they bring is invaluable and this boosts the work that we do."***

## Impact Story: Helpline Support



Jack\* had a variety of different care experiences growing up, and now, as an adult, very much wanted to access his care records from childhood to finally piece together his early life and to find out why he was placed in care. He wasn't really sure where to start, so he reached out to several organisations asking for advice – none of which were able to help him. Then Jack was given the contact details for the Who Cares? Scotland Helpline.

Jack contacted the Helpline and spoke with a Lifelong Advocate who explained the process for accessing childhood care records. She told Jack that we could contact the Social Work department that had looked after Jack and his siblings about his care records, if he was happy to give consent, and that he would be copied into all correspondence made.

During the call, the Lifelong Advocate gathered as much information as possible and completed a DSAR (data subject access request) on Jack's behalf. She then emailed this directly to the Local Authority where he was looked after, copying Jack in. Given how long it had been since Jack was in local authority care, he was not hopeful that he would receive the files or the answers he was looking for...

After several months of emails back and forth to the Local Authority, the Lifelong Advocate finally received a call from them explaining they had found files relating to Jack in their archives. There were several boxes full, and the Local Authority were hoping to have these sent to Jack, but, given the content of some of the files, they wanted to ensure that he had support when reading them.

The Lifelong Advocate contacted Jack to explain the situation. Jack felt comfortable talking directly to the Local Authority, so a member of staff called him and spoke at length about the volume and content of his records, which he found extremely helpful. Jack felt he had enough support around him to read his records in a safe environment, so it was agreed that the records would be posted to him via a secure courier.

Jack finally got to read about his early life and to fit some of the jigsaw pieces together. He knew it would be difficult, but he also knew it was something he needed to do.

*"They [the Helpline] have been so helpful. I thought I had no chance of getting my files."*



Our work is only possible thanks to the generosity of our funders and supporters who continually show their commitment to a lifetime of equality, respect and love for Care Experienced people.

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