



**WHO
CARES?**
SCOTLAND

EQUALITY | RESPECT | LOVE



Scottish Labour Consultation

Response to Scottish Labour's Scottish Policy
Forum's initial consultation for the Scottish
Parliament Election 2026

January 2025

www.whocarescotland.org

Who we are

[Who Cares? Scotland](#) is Scotland's only national independent membership organisation for Care Experienced people. Our mission is to secure a lifetime of equality, respect, and love for Care Experienced people in Scotland and we currently have around 4300 members.

At the heart of our work are the rights of Care Experienced people, and the power of their voices to bring about positive change. We provide individual relationship-based independent advocacy and a range of participation and connection opportunities for Care Experienced people across Scotland.

We work alongside Corporate Parents and various communities to broaden understanding and challenge the stigma faced by Care Experienced people. We work with policy makers, leaders, and elected representatives locally and nationally to shape legislation, policy and practice. We do this collaboratively to build on the aspirations of [The Promise](#) and secure positive change.

Summary

This response outlines reforms and policies we believe would be of interest to Scottish Labour and the Scottish Policy Forum. It is informed by insights from our members and the changes they have identified as critical to making their life experiences more inclusive and supportive.

Five years since the publication of [The Promise](#), significant work remains to ensure its commitments are fulfilled by 2030. Our [Is Scotland Keeping the Promise](#) report identified key challenges that must be addressed to achieve this goal.

To supplement this evidence, we conducted a large-scale participation exercise, the Summer of Participation, between June and August 2023. This initiative engaged over 200 Care Experienced people across a diverse range of ages, backgrounds, and protected characteristics, providing valuable firsthand insights into their needs and priorities.

Additionally, through our [Lifelong Rights Campaign](#), we are publishing a series of issue papers focusing on the top five concerns that Care Experienced individuals aged 16 and over raise with us through independent advocacy including [Finance](#), [Housing](#) and [Belonging and Connection](#). These papers have further shaped our response and recommendations.

By concentrating on the most relevant questions, and leveraging our evidence and expertise, we aim to provide clear and actionable suggestions to inform meaningful change for Care Experienced people in Scotland.



Who Cares? Scotland calls for:

- Providing relationship-based, lifelong independent advocacy for every Care Experienced person in Scotland who needs support.
- Develop a comprehensive, trauma-informed whole-school approach that reduces educational disruption, eliminates exclusions, and creates supportive school environments for Care Experienced learners.
- Establishing robust national data collection systems and clear accountability measures to track Promise implementation up to and beyond 2030.

Response to the consultation questions

Care Experienced Children

1. What kind of support do care experienced children and young people need in order to access the same opportunities that education offers young people who are not care experienced?

Policy recommendation: Develop a comprehensive, trauma-informed whole-school approach that reduces educational disruption, eliminates exclusions, and creates supportive school environments for Care Experienced learners.

Schools are an ideal setting to improve attitudes, understanding and perceptions of Care Experienced people amongst the next generation. School pupils will grow up to become adult community members; they are the future employers, workforce and Corporate Parents. Creating school environments which are more supportive and inclusive provides an opportunity to improve education outcomes for Care Experienced pupils, which are disproportionately poor compared with their peers ([Education Outcomes for Looked After Children 2022/23](#)). With the right support at the right time, Care Experienced people are capable of achieving their potential and aspirations in the same way as peers who are not Care Experienced.

Change is needed to our current education system because Care Experienced learners are currently facing more inequalities within education when compared to all learners, as outlined within the [Education Outcomes for Looked After Children 2022/23](#). In summary:

- Care Experienced school leavers continue to have lower attainment than all school leavers.
- Care Experienced learners are more likely to leave school without any passes at SCQF level 3 qualifications or better.
- When Care Experienced people do leave school, they are less likely to be in a positive destination when compared to all school leavers.
- Gaps in attainment can also be seen within primary school, as a lower proportion of Care Experienced learners are achieving Curriculum for Excellence levels relevant to their state when compared to all pupils.

These statistics illustrate the stark differences of educational outcomes for Care Experienced learners, and why there needs to be a clear and concentrated focus on supporting and listening to Care Experienced people within the Scottish education system. Our recommendations below outline key support mechanisms which will ensure Care Experienced children can access the same opportunities as those who are not Care Experienced.

Reducing Disruption to Education

A key barrier that Care Experienced people have told us is that moving around can have a detrimental impact on their education. Care Experienced pupils often need to move house during a school year. This can involve moving into a different type of care, and sometimes moving to a different community, often resulting in Care Experienced pupils moving to a new school in the midst of an academic year. This can cause gaps in their education, as there is not consistency across schools regarding the order the curriculum is taught, causing disruption in their education. Evidently, Care Experienced learners are disproportionately more likely to experience both formal and informal school exclusions than their peers, and there is a direct correlation between the likelihood of exclusion and the number of times Care Experienced pupils have moved within a school year (Scottish Government, 2022).

Care Experienced people also often need to miss classes to attend meetings related to their care, such as [Children's Hearings](#). This increases the likelihood of missing vital lessons, and due to the nature of these meetings, Care Experienced people can often feel overwhelmed afterwards. This can lead to them either not returning to school, or less able to engage in lessons if they do return. This is something that Care Experienced people cannot control, and educational institutions must take steps to ensure that learners are able to catch up on any content missed.

Sometimes Care Experienced pupils can have long distances to travel to get to school if they have been placed far away from their original home but remained in their current school. This can impact on their ability to arrive at school on time and they can often feel tired due to having to be up and out earlier in the morning than the rest of their peers.

To address these disadvantages, all social work and Children's Hearings System meetings should take place outside of school hours, minimising disruptions to education and enabling Care Experienced learners to fully participate in their studies without additional stress. Additionally, there should be a clear and concentrated effort to minimise school moves during crucial times in the academic calendar on a case-by-case basis, and if this cannot be avoided, there should be a transitional plan in place to ensure that the Care Experienced young person feels supported and heard throughout this process, by all involved, including social work, teachers and the primary caregiver.

Fulfilling the Promise

"Scotland must not exclude care experienced children from education or reduce their timetable to such an extent that they are denied their rights to education." The Promise, 2020

The Promise seeks to end all forms of informal and formal exclusion of Care Experienced people in education. However, in our '[Is Scotland Keeping the Promise](#)' report the variation in local authority data tells us otherwise. Our research found that 23 local authorities said that they continued to formally and informally exclude Care Experienced pupils from school, with five local authorities not providing an answer. Alongside this, 18 provided no target date to end these exclusions from school for Care Experienced pupils.

To ensure Scotland can confidently monitor the implementation of policies aimed at ending formal and informal exclusions, it is crucial that accurate and consistent data is publicly available across all local authorities. Currently, there are inconsistencies and gaps in the information collected and reported, creating barriers to holding the system accountable and assessing whether the aims of The Promise are being met.

If Scotland is to truly uphold this commitment, clear targets must be set, and progress must be systematically monitored through reliable data. This approach will ensure that Care Experienced people feel supported and are not left behind in schools, fostering transparency and driving meaningful change.

Creating Communities that Care

There continues to be a widespread lack of knowledge and understanding of care, and the impact this can have on someone, among the general public.

It is important that everyone within the school community have a solid understanding of Care Experience, the specific barriers that Care Experienced learners may have faced, and the importance of adopting a [trauma-informed approach](#) to ensuring that Care Experienced learners have the same chance to thrive and succeed as their peers. As when faced with instability in life, school can become an even more important piece of the scaffold of support surrounding Care Experienced learners, and relationships with teachers can become among the only stable relationships present in an individual's life at that time.

Our '[Communities that Care](#)' Whole School Approach involves educating entire school communities on care experience with the aim of creating more empathic and inclusive communities. This creates the conditions for Care Experienced children and young people to be nurtured and supported in their schools and wider community. An important element of this work involves teaching school pupils about care experience. A key theme that has emerged from this work is that many Care Experienced people do not know that they are Care Experienced. This has been particularly true for those who have experience of kinship care or are being looked after at home.

Through learning about care at school, Care Experienced people have had the opportunity to learn more about, and embrace, their care identity:

"I don't think I would know I am Care Experienced." - Care Experienced person, Communities that Care Stakeholder Interview Focus Group Report, 2020.

Currently, over 110 schools across three local authorities are 'Care Aware' through our training. A shining example of how these training sessions have been embedded into their school model, is Kirklandneuk Primary School who in collaboration with OneRen and Active Schools Renfrewshire created their weekly sports club which provides a welcoming space for Care Experienced children to engage in activities promoting health and inclusion. To eliminate barriers and reduce potential stigma,

the school provides transport to the children who attend and invites them to bring a friend along too.

Their broad definition of Care Experience means that children from diverse backgrounds, including those on the edges of care or who are adopted, can benefit from the initiative. One young person happily describes the weekly sports club as "the best moment of my week and I am so happy I now attend a club in school."

This example demonstrates the power of ensuring all Scottish schools are 'Care Aware' thus building a scaffolding of support around all Care Experienced children. The programme is replicable and sustainable, and we actively encourage that this programme be implemented in all Scottish schools. Through this, we will build stronger communities for everyone.

2. What specific measures would help care experienced children get into work?

Policy recommendation: To encourage the private, public and third sector to treat Care Experience as if it were a protected characteristic to ensure workplace rights and support throughout life, while creating inclusive employment environments.

As with any diverse community, Care Experienced children and adults have an abundance of talent, skill and motivation to benefit any organisation. Yet we know that many Care Experienced people face significant barriers in securing and sustaining secure and meaningful employment opportunities. A lack of support in the form of traditional family safety nets combined with the general public's lack of understanding about care has led to Care Experienced people being underrepresented in stable, long-term employment.

The Independent Root and Branch Review of Care echoes this, evidencing that Care Experienced people in Scotland are:

- Over three times as likely to not have had a full-time job by age 26.
- On average, earn three quarters of the salaries of their peers.
- Over one and a half times more likely to have financial difficulties.

([The Money report, The Promise \(2020\), 10.](#))

Our campaign issue papers in 2023 on [housing](#), [finance](#) and [belonging](#) reinforced these inequalities finding that:

- Care Experienced people were more than twice as likely to be living in relative poverty due to the cost-of-living crisis.
- The income gap between Care Experienced people and their peers had potentially widened since publication of the Promise.

- 57% of Care Experienced people we surveyed had experienced homelessness.
- Equal treatment to non-Care Experienced peers is key to preventing abuse and Keeping the Lifelong Promise.

According to [Scott \(3\)](#);

“Care Experienced people also face specific forms of discrimination and embedded inequality which require particular consideration and targeted intervention... To do so would be consistent with the Scottish Government’s wider efforts to keep its promise to Care Experienced people and make a real difference to the effective protection of their rights.”

We know targeted intervention is supported beyond the Care Experienced community. For example:

- 13/26 named Corporate Parents in Scotland, including 4/32 Local Authorities, are represented among public bodies currently voluntarily treating Care Experience as if it were a protected characteristic in terms of their equality processes.
- 78/196 Councils in the UK are currently treating CE as if it were a protected characteristic (see [here](#) for more info).

[According to the Equality and Human Rights Commission’s legal opinion](#), by treating Care Experience as if it were a protected characteristic, we would place greater responsibility on employers to think creatively and inclusively about their Diversity Equality and Inclusion strategies, ensuring that no one is left behind and that Care Experienced people are supported to get into work, and beyond- at every stage of life.

A Care Aware Workforce

Organisations such as the Scottish Children’s Reporter Administration, The John Lewis Partnership, Scottish Police Authority and Social Security Scotland have demonstrated excellent practices in this regard, setting a benchmark for others to follow.

The John Lewis Partnership (JLP), for example, has made a bold and long-term commitment to Care Experienced people, including the ambition to be the Employer of Choice for those with experience of care. But they recognised that to do this meaningfully, they’d need buy-in from their entire workforce – and that they’d need support and guidance from specialist partners in order to achieve this goal.

Who Cares? Scotland have been involved in this via the roll-out of Care Aware workforce training to over 500 JLP employees over the last 2 years, and the development of an eLearning module which is accessible to over 75,000 members of the workforce. Alongside this, JLP offer a specific work experience programme for Care Experienced people; opportunities for Care Experienced people to design products to be sold in their stores; and try to influence change for Care Experienced people at a policy/political level.

We have also heard some great examples of practice from Corporate Parents such as ringfencing Modern Apprenticeships for Care Experienced people, setting up Care Experienced Colleagues Groups and treating care experience as a protected characteristic, through our work supporting Corporate Parents to fulfil their duties.

We have compiled a series of examples of positive practice in the awards programme for the 2024 Corporate Parenting Awards, which is publicly available on our website here: <https://www.whocaresscotland.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/A4-Prog-CP-Awards-2024-with-all-PP-examples.pdf>

3. What is needed to keep The Promise made to children and young people? How do we improve the provision for Care Experienced children?

Policy recommendation: Implement robust national data collection systems and clear accountability measures to track Promise implementation, up to and beyond 2030.

Five years on, doubts and uncertainty are beginning to surface about how, and whether, The Promise can be fully met by 2030. As we set out, areas of human rights concern for Who Cares? Scotland are especially around exclusion and restraint.

Our [Is Scotland Keeping the Promise](#) report, published last year, identified two critical issues that must be addressed to improve provision for Care Experienced children and keep The Promise:

Data Availability and Accountability

A lack of national data is a major barrier to assessing the progress of The Promise. This issue has been consistently highlighted, including in reports from The Promise Oversight Board, but remains unresolved nearly five years after The Promise was published. Without robust, consistent, and comprehensive national data, it is impossible to measure the real impact of The Promise on Care Experienced people's lives.

Key questions remain unanswered:

- How do we measure progress and ensure the outcomes align with The Promise?
- Who is ultimately responsible?

To ensure Scotland can confidently monitor the implementation of policies related to the Promise, it is crucial that accurate and consistent data is publicly available across all local authorities. Currently, there are inconsistencies and gaps in the information collected and reported, creating barriers to holding the system accountable and assessing whether the aims of The Promise are being met.

If Scotland is to truly uphold this commitment, clear targets must be set, and progress must be systematically monitored through reliable data. Policymakers and stakeholders need to collaborate to create a unified data collection system to track progress, highlight areas of success, and identify where improvements are needed up to and beyond 2030.

Dilution of Original Aims

Additionally, a key concern identified was the dilution of original aims set out in the Promise, in particular the use of restraint.

In 2020, Fiona Duncan the then chair of the Independent Care Review said: “I think part of the challenge is we know that use of restraint is not properly documented and recorded,” she added. “We are very clear we need to know when and where it’s happening and why. There is a lot of work to do so that we can stand-up very soon and say Scotland no longer uses restraint.” Five years on, this issue is still ongoing.

We have seen a dilution of the original aim for Scotland to become a nation that does not restrain its children as set out in The Promise. This can be seen with the introduction of terms such as “safe holds” used to describe the practice previously known as restraint.

One Local Authority responding to our FOI said that “the HSCP no longer uses the term “restraint” in our practice, we refer to safe holds.” As well as this, Plan 21 - 24 adds to this dilution by stating on page 24 that: “Restraint will always be pain free, will be used rarely, and only when required to keep a child safe.”

[The Scottish Government’s Promise Implementation Plan](#) echoes [Plan 21 - 24](#) that restraint will only be used when necessary to keep a child safe and sets out actions to ‘support the continued safe use of restraint’. This includes working with [the Scottish Physical Restraint Action Group](#) to explore the definitions of restraint, the data that is held and training and support available for residential care staff. This is quite different from the statement in The Promise. Scotland must be steadfast in its commitment to protect children from violence and end all uses of restraint.

Again, there must be increased accuracy and transparency around the recording and reporting of when Care Experienced people are restrained. Only then can the progress to becoming a ‘nation that does not restrain its children’ be tracked. There must be target areas that require extra support to achieve the phasing out the practice altogether. To achieve this, local authorities must be appropriately funded and provided with high quality training to be able to measure and ultimately, eradicate this harmful practice. It must not be allowed to continue under a different name.

Looking to the future

Scotland is now almost halfway through the ten-year plan to implement The Promise. It is clear that whilst commitment remains high and some progress is evident, it is unlikely that the Promise will not be implemented in full.

We know there are barriers related to funding and the external challenges faced globally over the past five years. However, much of our discovery during this

research demonstrates that, in many cases, key commitments in The Promise were either not being tracked or have not started being put into practice. Worryingly in some cases, commitments are not even being considered for practice currently. This suggests a breakdown around planning, tracking and accountability which are all fundamental elements for transformational change.

Scotland's care 'sector', including local authorities, third-sector organisations, educational establishments, and health providers, are at the front line of delivering the required reform. They are being tasked with delivering the commitments of The Promise, against the context of tighter budgets, cuts, and growing costs. If The Promise is to be upheld, they must be supported to do so.

We believe what is needed most is financial support across the sector. There must also be a clear route map with tangible actions and dates set out for each local authority to work towards, which takes account of the challenges which lie ahead. However, the challenges are significant, but they are not insurmountable. By prioritising these areas and working collaboratively across sectors, Scotland can honour its promise to Care Experienced people and create a future where their rights are upheld, their needs are met, and their voices are heard.

[Plan 21 - 24](#) has not been delivered in full and failure with [Plan 24 - 30](#) cannot be accepted. The Promise to ensure a lifetime of equality, respect, and love for all Care Experienced people must be kept and achieved by 2030.

4. Is the knowledge and insights of care experienced children and their carers sufficiently fed into policy?


Policy recommendation: Centre Care Experienced voices in all policy decisions through consistent engagement and feedback mechanisms across all local authorities.

From 2017, the Independent Care Review gathered insights from over 5,500 Care Experienced individuals and paid and unpaid carers. Based on the findings, one of the Care Reviews demands was:

“The balance of power must be upended so that listening to children and young people is always the basis of all decisions made about their lives.”

Alongside four other key demands, this formed the foundation of The Promise published in February 2020. While it can be said that these views collected are reflected in current Scottish Government policy, evidence from our *Is Scotland Keeping the Promise Report* and *Summer of Participation 2023* suggests that implementation is inconsistent and not equal across all local authorities.

Our findings highlight encouraging progress in several areas, including upholding the rights of brothers and sisters, reshaping the youth justice system, and challenging stigma within the care system. However, significant gaps remain in addressing other priority areas, such as the monetisation of care, education, and the use of restraint.



This variation shows the need for greater focus and accountability to ensure that all aspects of The Promise are fulfilled.

It is essential to involve Care Experienced people in designing future policies and activities, ensuring their views and experiences are central to decision-making and accountability processes. Over the past five years, their voices have not been adequately included in these processes, which has hindered progress in achieving the Promise.

Reflecting on a similar rhetoric discussed in Question 3, while national policy broadly reflects the principles of The Promise, implementation still varies significantly at the local authority level. This variation highlights the importance of consistent action across all regions to ensure that all Care Experienced people are equally supported, no matter where they live.

Having a Home

1. What can be done to assist young people accessing their own homes?

Policy recommendation: Create comprehensive housing support mechanisms including shared ownership schemes, consistent financial assistance, and transitional housing programs for Care Experienced young people.

It's no secret that we are in the midst of a challenging financial period, with the current cost-of-living crisis and the Scottish Government's declaration of a national housing emergency in May 2024 making it increasingly difficult for young people to afford homes or save for their future ([Lockhart, 2024](#)). Transitions for today's youth are far from the once-linear path of moving from education to secure employment, followed by housing stability ([Furlong and Cartmel, 2006](#)).

While many young people rely on the "Bank of Mum and Dad" or other family support networks to navigate these challenges, this option isn't available for all. The average age to leave home is now 23, reflecting a growing dependency on family resources ([ONS, 2019](#)). However, for many Care Experienced people, the absence of such networks has made navigating financial independence a long-standing reality.

Our [Finance](#) and [Housing](#) Issue Papers highlight these challenges, with one of the most pressing concerns being the ability to finance a home—whether renting or purchasing. For many Care Experienced young people, the barriers to securing stable housing are compounded by a lack of financial resources and traditional family safety nets.

The issue papers identified several tangible recommendations to address these challenges and support Care Experienced young people in accessing their own homes:

Support to own a home through a Shared Ownership Scheme and financial advice.

Many people with experience of care will aspire to own their home for an enhanced sense of security and belonging. This will likely be without financial support from family or inheritance. Care Experienced people should become a priority group eligible for the existing [Scottish Government Shared Ownership scheme](#) and have access to financial literacy and advice beyond basic budgeting skills. This training should cover mortgages, understanding credit, and the various savings account which support first time buyers. This advice is something which many of those from traditional backgrounds receive support from parents with.

Each local authority should offer consistency in their approach to financial support and highlight each available offer.

We know through our advocacy work that each local authority has a different offer of support. Whilst some support will be tailored to meet the needs of the area, support such as financial assistance should remain consistent across Scotland. All local authorities should clearly outline the amount given to those with care experience for setting up housing costs, rent and any other financial support to ensure there are no gaps in provision, such as money offered in line with Section 29 of the [Children \(Scotland\) Act 1995](#). This funding should also be raised in line with inflation.

Implementation across Scotland of National House Projects or similar programmes.

“It is difficult to leave care and be in your own tenancy with no support around you or the support you have is not daily. It can be lonely and difficult to manage. There should be more supported tenancies for young people leaving care and also the option to go into supported tenancies if you find you can’t manage on your own.” – Care Experienced person, Summer of Participation, 2023.

Respondents to our Summer of Participation 2023 highlighted a need for a safety net of support, including alternative housing placements. We have seen the success of transitional type placements, such as the [National House Projects](#), which offer young people a stepping stone between leaving care and living independently. These type of gradual transitions with wrap around support from professionals and connection with peers has been invaluable to many young people, but we are aware are not available in most local authorities. Local authorities that do operate National House Projects can also only offer a limited number of young people this opportunity each year. We would like this option to be available to any young person who feels that this is what they would prefer.

2. Are there some groups of young people more at risk of homelessness than others? What should we do to support them?

Policy recommendation: Strengthen continuing care and aftercare services to prevent homelessness, ensuring Care Experienced young people have continuous support and housing stability.

A lack of a safe place to call home and the uncertainty and stress of homelessness can have a devastating impact on mental and physical health, employment, finances and relationships ([Poverty Alliance, 2015](#); [Crisis UK, 2021](#)). This is often aggravated by a lack of support for those in need. Research regularly highlights that many Care Experienced people leave care abruptly, before they are ready and without the necessary preparation and support ([CELCIS, 2022](#); [Scottish Throughcare and Aftercare Forum, 2024](#)).

Coupled with limited options for young people to return to care or rely on a family support network for a lifeline, Care Experienced people are at a greater risk of falling into repeat homelessness and experiencing severe and multiple disadvantages ([Lankelly Chase, 2019](#); [Crisis UK, 2021](#)). Our [Housing Issues Paper](#) echoed this, with approximately 57% of respondents having experienced homelessness.

There is much that could be done to prevent Care Experienced people from experiencing homelessness. This includes, full implementation of the [2013 Scottish Government Staying Put guidance](#), the [Continuing Care provision of the 2014 Children and Young People \(Scotland\) Act](#), and the [2019 A Way Home Scotland Coalition's Care Leaver Homelessness prevention pathway](#), all of which have been committed to by the Scottish Government and The Promise. It is essential that they are resourced appropriately.

Having a secure home base established first enables people to effectively address other interdependent human rights issues, such as education and employment ([Crisis UK, n.d](#)). Ensuring that all young people, first and foremost, have a home that meets their needs from which they can thrive must be a priority for local authorities and duty-bearers.

Ending homelessness is an ambitious but essential aspiration that Scotland must continue to take action on. To achieve it, policy makers and service providers will need to look beyond arbitrary limitations and definitions and provide the support necessary to all Care Experienced people, for as long as needed.

Our [Finance](#) and [Housing](#) Issue Papers outlined several tangible recommendations for preventing Care Experienced people from experiencing homelessness:

Effective Continuing Care and Aftercare Services

A critical step in supporting Care Experienced people is through effective throughcare and aftercare services, ensuring they are not rushed into leaving care at 16. Who Cares? Scotland firmly believes that all young people should have the right to remain in their home until they feel prepared to live independently, regardless of whether they are Care Experienced or not.

Scotland has robust [Continuing Care](#) rights enshrined in legislation, allowing young people to stay with their carers until age 21, irrespective of whether a compulsory supervision order is in place.

Despite these rights, uptake remains low. The [2022-2023 Annual Social Work Statistics](#) reveal that only 29% of eligible young people accessed Continuing Care during that year, and just 17% of all eligible young people were in Continuing Care.

Prioritising the full implementation of Continuing Care legislation is essential to making it the norm for young people in care turning 16. Remaining in care until they feel ready to leave is one of the most effective ways to prevent homelessness and other adverse outcomes. Alarming, some Care Experienced young people are unaware of their right to stay in care:

"My experience has been awful. I felt like I was just booted out the door. I was told on my 18th birthday, 'that's you, we don't need to see you anymore, bye.'"
– Care Experienced person, Summer of Participation, 2023.

Efforts must focus on raising awareness and normalising these rights so that no young person feels pressured or abandoned as they transition into independent living.

Many young people during our Summer of Participation, 2023 told us in response to our question on moving on from care that too many changes happened too fast, in some cases literally overnight. Many also described a perceived cliff edge of support, particularly in terms of social work provision.

The [2022-23 Children's Social Work Statistics](#) revealed that only 71% of children who were 16 years or over on the date they ceased to be looked after had a pathway plan upon discharge and just over half (52%) had a pathway coordinator. Children whose final placement was at home were less likely to have a pathway plan (64%) than those who had been placed away from home (73%). Further work must be done to understand the reasons behind the significant numbers of young people who are not benefiting from this policy.

Priority Housing Points and Continuing Care and Aftercare support should be available to all Care Experienced young people in any local authority.

Care Experienced people should also be able to choose to live in the area that is best for them, without compromising their right to support. Local Connection tests were abolished for the general population applying for housing in Scotland in 2022. To continue to apply a form of 'local connection test' to Care Experienced people only, could be discriminatory. Priority Housing Points should be awarded to Care Experienced people, regardless of which local authority was responsible for their care. Those with experience of care must also have the choice to receive practical and emotional aftercare support from the team local to them, rather than in a local authority potentially across the country from where they are living, working or studying. Local authorities must continue support for as long as required, on an individual basis over the age of 26.

4. What reforms can be made to protect young people and students from exploitative practices in the rental market?

Policy recommendation: Develop standardised housing support mechanisms for Care Experienced people, including transparent local authority support, targeted financial assistance, and expanded rental access.

"I had very little knowledge of how to access support with deposits for private lets and had no idea how to access council housing. I had a job and was also at university, so it seemed like I was left to fend for myself because I was standing on my own two feet. Something which was out of necessity for survival, not because I essentially wanted to do it alone." Care Experienced Person (Who Cares? Scotland Housing Survey, May 2024)

The rental market presents significant challenges for Care Experienced people, who often lack the family support and resources their peers may rely on. To address this, Who Cares? Scotland has outlined the following reforms which would protect Care Experienced people from exploitative rental market practices:

Publication by each local authority of all support available for Care Experienced people.

Each local authority should publish, in one place, all the support a Care Experienced young person can expect to get when leaving care and, in the future, if they need support. This should include their policy for financially supporting students, details of grants and practical support available.

Widen access to mid-market rental schemes to include specific provision for Care Experienced adults.

This support would allow Care Experienced individuals, who are often at a higher risk of homelessness, affordable access to quality housing. Allowing those with experience of care more opportunities to live in quality housing allows individuals to feel more secure and create stable living environments.

Reintroduce ringfenced Discretionary Housing Payments for Care Experienced People of all ages.

The Scottish Government trialled ringfenced [Discretionary Housing Payments for 'Care Leavers' in 2019](#). Uptake was low but with wider awareness of the scheme and its ability to support those struggling to meet rent costs, this could be a lifeline for Care Experienced people without family to fall back on. If this must be age-capped, then it should be at least expanded to include Care Experienced parents.

Standardised grants for leaving care and setting up a home.

Money given to young people under section 29 of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 should be set at a standard rate across all local authorities and rise in line with inflation. It should be non-means tested and available to all young people leaving and moving on from all types of care including informal kinship care, looked after at home with social work supervision and unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people.

By implementing the above reforms, Scotland can take meaningful steps to protect Care Experienced young people and students from exploitative rental practices, ensuring equitable access to housing and the stability needed to thrive.

Social Security

1. Is there anything you would change about the current social security system in Scotland?

Policy recommendation: Establish a dedicated emergency fund and explore guaranteed income approaches specifically designed to support Care Experienced individuals throughout their lifetime.

It's no secret that we are in the midst of a very challenging financial situation, given the current cost of living crisis, leading many households to struggle. For many Care Experienced people, this is not a new reality. With a lack of traditional family support networks, Care Experienced individuals are 1.5 times more likely to experience financial hardship and earn 25% less than their peers ([Independent Care Review, 2020](#)).

Care Experienced people have told us the financial support they receive currently is not enough. Too often, the bureaucracy they encounter when applying for financial support acts as a barrier to accessing what they are entitled to and many feel left to fend for themselves once they have moved on from care placements. This leaves Care Experienced people sometimes unable to heat their homes, buy and cook nutritious meals or provide for their own children. Every week our independent advocates support Care Experienced people to access their right to social security and signpost to limited pots of crisis funding available. But this is not enough alone.

Our recommendations below, highlight how current social security and welfare provisions can ensure lifelong support for all Care Experienced people, ensuring the Promise is kept.

The Scottish Welfare Fund should ringfence funding for an emergency fund for Care Experienced adults, with no age cap.

Although there are a number of schemes aimed at providing financial support to the Care Experienced community, these are often limited to education or have age caps. Our Summer of Participation evidence and [Lifelong Rights Campaign](#), demonstrates how many Care Experienced people experience a cliff edge of support when they turn 26, particularly in relation to financing their future.

Our [Finance Issue Paper](#) survey respondents highlighted how beneficial lifelong support would be, rather than having all forms of support removed at the age of 26. Ensuring there are funds specifically for crisis points, with no barrier to the number of applications that can be made, would support those without familial connections to avoid financial hardship. While there are current funding pots available for those in hardship, such as [Aberlour's Urgent Assistance Fund](#), these often have limits on the number of applications that can be sent within a year and can be limited to those who have children under 21 living at home.

The introduction of a Guaranteed Income for all Care Experience people in Scotland.

The Welsh Universal Basic Income (UBI) pilot, accessed by 635 Care Experienced individuals, demonstrates the potential for more radical approaches to addressing the financial challenges faced by those with care experience. Research into UBI projects highlights positive impacts on physical and mental health, while such initiatives can also reduce the disproportionate expenditure on reactive support and mitigate the growing costs of public services ([University of Salford, 2023](#)).

Scotland has already begun taking steps towards a Minimum Income Guarantee (MIG) with the establishment of the cross-party [Minimum Income Guarantee Steering Group](#) in 2021 of which Who Cares? Scotland were an active part of. The MIG offers a viable solution to healing the wounds of the cost-of-living crisis and preventing further inequalities being exacerbated ([Statham et al, 2021](#)). While concerns over the affordability of such reforms are valid, evidence suggests that streamlining social security delivers significant benefits: reducing income security, lowering administrative costs and increasing household consumption, which in turn boosts economic growth ([Ortiz et al, 2018](#); [Pereira, 2017](#); [Statham et al, 2018](#)).

We believe that the financial precarity many Care Experienced people find themselves in can change and that a guaranteed income approach is within reach for Scotland. Wales has shown us that such a pilot scheme for care leavers is possible. We should now follow their lead and make a similar commitment to provide adequate financial support, which recognises the many additional and specific challenges Care Experienced people can face in their lives.

7. What more can we do to support people stuck in a cycle of debt?

Policy recommendation: Create compassionate debt management strategies for Care Experienced people, including debt forgiveness, internal debt handling, and lifelong independent advocacy support.

Our [Finance Issue Paper](#) evidence suggest that 64% of our Care Experienced respondents were in some form of debt, from e-credit or store card debt (54%), utilities debt (40%) and arranged or unarranged overdraft (33%). Additionally, 33% of respondents indicated they owed money to a buy-now-pay-later service such as Klarna or Clearpay. The level of debt participants reported ranged from £90 to £40,000, with the latter being roughly 2.5 times higher than the national average in 2022 (£16,174) ([StepChange, 2022](#)).

Many respondents linked debt to negative impacts on their mental health, financial responsibilities, caring duties, and housing costs. Combined with lower income, debt can create a vicious cycle that worsens both physical and mental health, especially when support is difficult or stigmatising to access.

One Care Experienced stated that they: “Struggle to make ends meet, debt always following me and unable to move on or think about next steps in life such as buying a home, marriage or meeting my child’s needs as they grow into a young adult.”

Financial challenges and debt can have a catastrophic impact on a person's life, impacting their ability to access their basic human rights. Our recommendations below, highlight measures of support for Care Experienced people currently in debt, and preventative measures for the future.

Discontinue the practice of local authorities passing the debts of Care Experienced people to private companies and disengage from using attachment of earnings orders.

When local authorities pass debts on to private companies, there are typically added fees and charges imposed during the debt recovery process. Ensuring that the debts of Care Experienced individuals are handled internally by local authority staff would offer a more compassionate approach whilst also alleviating stigma to seek financial support and preventing a continuous cycle of debt. Deducting debt from benefit entitlements and income only widens the income gap faced by Care Experienced people and potentially compounds the physical and mental health impacts of poverty.

Waive council tax and rent arrears within local authority housing and publicly funded housing associations for Care Experienced individuals over 26 who were unable to access the council tax exemption or benefit from aftercare support.

Exercising discretion to waive council tax and social housing related debt would reduce the financial hardship on the Care Experienced generation during a cost-of-living crisis who have not benefitted from The Promise and related policies. This would also align with the Scottish Government's commitment to eradicating poverty.

Independent, relationship-based, lifelong advocacy for every Care Experienced person in Scotland who needs it.

Who Cares? Scotland has supported Care Experienced people for the past 45 years, with 27 of those as an independent advocacy provider. This means we've supported thousands of Care Experienced people on some of the issues that matter the most to them. In 2023, we began coding our advocacy data against the European Convention on Human Rights to better understand the support needs of the Care Experienced people we assist in relation to human rights. The top advocacy issue raised by Care Experienced people over the age of 16 is [finance](#).

For Care Experienced people, traditional family support networks and advice aren't always guaranteed. The role of an independent advocate is to provide support with unvested interest by helping make sure Care Experienced people are informed of their options, rights and ensuring they have their voices heard. Advocacy not only ensures that their voices are heard, but Care Experienced people are signposted to greater financial resources, information and support available to them. Therefore, it is a valuable tool support mechanism for Care Experienced people who are currently in debt.

The value of independent advocacy was recognised by the Independent Care Review and the Promise which stated that:

“Care Experienced children and adults must have the right and access to independent advocacy, at all stages of their experience of care and beyond.” (The Promise, p. 115)

Yet echoing the responses from previous questions, there are doubts and uncertainty beginning to surface about how, and whether, The Promise can be fully met by 2030. Therefore, we have significant concern that the statutory right to lifelong, independent advocacy for all Care Experienced people may be one of the calls which will fall through the cracks.

[Who Cares? Scotland’s National Advocacy Helpline](#) is a success story of widespread provision of independent advocacy. Set up in 2020 during the Covid-19 pandemic to support Care Experienced throughout Scotland, the Helpline supports, signposts and offers choice when Care Experienced people feel there is nowhere else to turn. As highlighted, finance was one of the top advocacy issues raised, with many calls for support with rent arrears, council tax arrears, utilities debts, benefits entitlement and support in applying for local grants.

The access and support provided to Care Experienced people by our Helpline, particularly after the age of 26 is invaluable and the success and demand for our Helpline demonstrates the persistent and urgent need for ensuring that the right to independent, relationship-based, lifelong advocacy for every Care Experienced person in Scotland is available to all, and upheld within the Promise.

Financial education should be widely available and implemented from the early stages of care.

“I feel like I could have been given more help with what’s available for me being a Care Experienced child. I wasn’t really made aware [of] much benefits or grants...that I could’ve had being Care Experienced.”

We heard from respondents that there was a need for more financial education, with many citing that they had not received this to their detriment, which reflects the findings from STAF’s 100 Days of Listening ([Scottish Throughcare and Aftercare Forum, 2024](#)). Research across the sector shows that Care Experienced people want access to financial education, beyond how to set up a bank account. Just like anyone learning to be financially independent, Care Experienced individuals should be able to make mistakes without fear of financial hardship, and local authorities and the Scottish Government should ensure that financial education includes support that allows Care Experienced individuals to learn how to spend and save, whilst also allowing for learning experiences.

Should you wish to discuss the contents of this response, please contact:

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