



Response to 'Moving on' from care into adulthood consultation

About Parenting across Scotland

Parenting across Scotland (PAS) is a network of charities working together to realise a Scotland where all parents and families are valued and supported to give children the best possible start in life. We welcome the opportunity to respond to the 'Moving on' from care to adulthood consultation.

Our response will focus particularly on parenting issues relating to transitions for care experienced young people; both in terms of young people's relationships with birth, foster and adoptive parents and when care experienced people become parents themselves. We draw evidence from a number of sources including our Parenting Evidence Review¹ published earlier in 2024, from our members and from organisations working to support care experienced young people. We have used direct quotes from young people, parents and carers in this response where we can.

Questions

Question 4: What services and support should be considered and provided to a care leaver who returns home to live with their birth family?

When The Promise report was published in 2020 it recognised that "Parenting does not stop at 18"². PAS supports this statement and would welcome further focus on parenting beyond 18 years at a national policy level.

Positive relationships between care experienced adults and their birth parents should be nurtured and encouraged where possible. However, there can also be challenges when care leavers return to live with their birth families, both from the perspective of parents / carers and care experienced young people themselves.

¹ https://www.parentingacrossscotland.org/media/1675/pas-literature-review_digital.pdf

² <https://thepromise.scot/resources/2020/the-promise.pdf>

This year PAS has been working with our members to explore the topic of parenting adult children. In a recent roundtable discussion, we heard from parents of adult children with disabilities, mental health problems, addictions and within the criminal justice system, all of whom still required significant support from their parents and wider families. Parenting adult children through challenges such as these can be difficult work and those undertaking such parenting roles often need support themselves.

Evidence from The Promise indicates that care experienced adults are more likely than their peers to experience severe multiple disadvantages, including homelessness, substance use, mental health problems and offending.³ Care experienced adults experiencing these issues need access to long term support and such support should be extended to birth parents, foster parents and wider families as well.

The Promise Report highlights the experience of Lauren who continued to turn to her foster parents for support into her late 20s, but who found that they were not able to help her as much as they would like⁴. Ensuring that organisations such as [Scottish Families Affected By Alcohol and Drugs](#) and [Families Outside](#) among others are adequately and sustainably funded is an important aspect of providing care experienced adults with the holistic support they need.

There are also a number of practical considerations that can help parents and carers to support care experienced adults. Our 2024 Parenting Evidence Review highlights some of the financial challenges experienced by parents whose children had been taken into care, including loss of benefit entitlements and the increased costs associated with maintaining links with their children, including travel and mobile costs⁵. Birth, foster or adoptive parents may also experience additional financial pressures when supporting care experienced adults. We do not know of any research or evidence focused specifically on this topic however and would welcome further investigation of this area.

Fargas-Malet and McSherry explore the emotional nature of birth family relationships for care experienced and adopted young people. They describe instances where care experienced young people attempted to reinstate relationships with birth parents in adulthood and the disappointment that ensued if this did not work out;

There was a period there where she never drank- and I sort of thought right you've grown up now so I will come up and see you. So I went up and everything was alright and then went back up a week after and it was absolutely hectic with the drinking it

³ <https://thepromise.scot/resources/2020/the-money.pdf>

⁴ [the-promise.pdf \(thepromise.scot\)](#)

⁵ https://www.parentingacrossscotland.org/media/1675/pas-literature-review_digital.pdf

*was just . . . all the situations were going on at once. So I sort of thought to myself right I'll take myself out of this. [. . .] that sort of kicked up a whole fuss just about getting my name changed and I just thought, "You know what? if you are going to be that childish rather than just dragging it on for this long, then just don't talk to me." [. . .] So that's whenever I did sort of stop talking to them. They did ask me to come up and they did try to get in contact with me but I wouldn't.*⁶

Even with the best support available, it is possible that relationships between care experienced adults and birth parents will deteriorate. In such circumstances individuals may need counselling and other types of emotional support to come to terms with this.

Question 5: What improvements can you suggest in the support provided to young people with care experience as they prepare to give birth or become parents?

The 100 Days of Listening exercise undertaken by Staf and The Promise explores what is necessary to support care experienced young people to move on from care⁷. Those with lived experience spoke of judgements and assumptions made on their abilities because of their experience of care. The stigma around being care experienced was a particular concern for them at the point when they became parents themselves. Individuals spoke of feeling under scrutiny during pregnancy because of their care experience and this was often the defining factor that brought their own child into the 'care system'.⁸

These findings were echoed in Barnardo's care experienced parents peer research project. Peer researchers found that care experienced parents often did not get effective support either during or after pregnancy and the support they did receive from professionals could be both judgmental and discriminatory⁹. They described how assumptions had been made about their parenting ability due to their care experience and some had historical details kept on file which were used to assess risk years later¹⁰.

⁶ [The Emotional Nature of Birth Family Relationships for Care-experienced and Adopted Young People: A Longitudinal Perspective - Montserrat Fargas-Malet, Dominic McSherry, 2021 \(sagepub.com\)](#)

⁷ <https://www.staf.scot/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=36c14562-d65a-4866-b6bf-685d0462974b>

⁸ <https://www.staf.scot/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=36c14562-d65a-4866-b6bf-685d0462974b>

⁹ Care Journeys (2022) Care-experienced Parents Unite for Change, Peer researchers' project exploring the experience of becoming a parent;
<https://www.barnardos.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/Care%20Experienced%20Parenthood%20Report.pdf>

¹⁰ Care Journeys (2022) Care-experienced Parents Unite for Change, Peer researchers' project exploring the experience of becoming a parent;
<https://www.barnardos.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/Care%20Experienced%20Parenthood%20Report.pdf>

As reported by CELCIS, we know that young people with care-experience may have experienced complex lives, and in order to properly support them, practitioners need to provide holistic, non-judgmental support across a wide range of topics and encourage the development of relationship-based support networks¹¹.

One good example of relationship-based support networks is 'The Village' which was created following the learning from the Parent and Child group at The Why Not? Trust. 'The Village' is an online community for new parents and parents to be with experience of care and acts as a place to get information, access resources and reach out to others. The community was built in response to parents of care experience stating they often felt stigma or judgement when reaching out for help.

The 2023 annual review highlighted the success of The Village community, with the team providing direct daily support to 30 families, and having over 400 followers across social media platforms. Not only has the community been an environment for parents to interact and access support, it has also helped to inform other agents. For example, some parents reported difficulty accessing the 1140 hours of free childcare for eligible 2s, with difference assessment systems existing in different local authorities and a lack of knowledge expressed by council workers. Following the feedback, a Charter was developed ensuring a best practice guide is available to local authority managers and workers who deal with these queries. Feedback from group members highlights the enormous impact the community has had on parents with care experience:

"To put it bluntly, I'd be lost without them. I wouldn't know who to go to or what to do if anything happened. There have been times I have wanted to cry or share my happiness or general chit chat and they've listened and encouraged me. It's nice as they ask how I am, so it's not about the baby all the time. That shows me they care. The Village is there for me and my family - it literally feels that if I was to fall they would catch me. That's how much I trust The Village" (Parent response)¹²

Question 24: How can the workforce be better supported to help care experienced people as they become parents?

¹¹ McTier A., Anderson C. A., Young E. (2023) Births to care experienced teenagers and women aged 14-24 in Scotland: an estimation; https://www.celcis.org/application/files/2116/7604/8031/Care_Experienced_Teenagers_and_Mothers_V1_Feb_2023.pdf

¹² The Why Not? Trust (2023) The Village Annual Review; <https://whynottrust.org/media/50rj3igm/the-village-annual-review.pdf>

Who Cares Scotland recommends that all training for practitioners should be trauma informed and co-designed with care-experienced people. They also emphasise the need for training to challenge stigma and assumptions about carer experienced individuals' parenting abilities.

Professionals need to be aware of the interplay of the many factors that can impact on care-experienced parents to ensure they have a trauma-informed approach¹³. There should be regular updated training on policies, entitlements and services for those working with care-experienced parents and young people to ensure that they are knowledgeable about entitlements, such as childcare for eligible 2s.

Question 25: How can children's and adults' services better work together to provide whole family support for parents who are care experienced?

Peer researchers involved in the Barnardo's research project recommended the development of family hubs in local communities, where parents and parents to be could go for support and advice. These hubs would be accessible to all parents, including those with care experience¹⁴. We support this recommendation.

PAS, together with Midlothian SureStart, the Open University and Children in Scotland has recently started phase 3 of our [Open Kindergarten project](#), which provides non-stigmatising peer-led parenting support within early years settings. Phase 2 of the project was evaluated by the University of Stirling, who found that parents who attended felt the inclusive, relaxed and supportive atmosphere to be hugely beneficial;

"I feel like when I come here, I can just feel relaxed and be normal and she can just play away and I can talk to other mums about how I feel, what's went on, and it's like we share different things, different techniques, and it's like, okay, I'll give that a try. Yes, and it's good to have other support other than my partner, which is nice."
(Mayfield parent 9)¹⁵

¹³ McTier A., Anderson C. A., Young E. (2023) Births to care experienced teenagers and women aged 14-24 in Scotland: an estimation;
https://www.celcis.org/application/files/2116/7604/8031/Care_Experienced_Teenagers_and_Mothers_V1_Feb_2023.pdf

¹⁴ Care Journeys (2022) Care-experienced Parents Unite for Change, Peer researchers' project exploring the experience of becoming a parent;
<https://www.barnardos.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/Care%20Experienced%20Parenthood%20Report.pdf>

¹⁵ [Open-Kindergarten-University-of-Stirling-Final-Report-June-2020.pdf \(childreninScotland.org.uk\)](#)

We believe that approaches such as Open Kindergartens could have huge benefits for care-experienced parents, supporting them to make connections with other parents in their local communities.

Having seen the success of The Village, we can also see the value of spaces just for care-experienced parents as well. Such spaces would give care-experienced parents the opportunity to share their unique perspectives with others and find individualised support.

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