

Petitioner submission of 5 February 2024

PE1958/G: Extend aftercare for previously looked after young people, and remove the continuing care age cap

I would like to begin by thanking the Scottish Government for providing further information and clarification as requested by the Committee.

Scaffolding is one of the five foundations of the Promise Scotland for families.

“Children, families and the workforce must be supported by a system that is there when it is needed: the scaffolding of help, support and accountability”

The Scottish Government highlights the reduction of young people growing up in the care system through the interventions in place to support families, with many young people being removed from their CSOs due to presence of adoption orders. However, the figures do not highlight the higher numbers of young people being removed from CSOs due to being placed under a kinship care order, or figures not being recorded accurately due to COVID-19. Further detail is available in the [Children’s Social Work Statistics 2021-22](#) (see Table 2.1)

Children should grow up in a safe and loving environment. This is supported by the UNCRC which emphasises *“there should be extra protection for them”* [children]. It is, therefore, important that young people are aware of their rights and protected to understand the impact any decision to remove CSOs

Further information on the destination accommodation of young people removed from CSOs is provided in Table 2.5 of [Children’s Social Work Statistics 2021-22](#).

The Scottish Government highlights that care plans should be in place; it is worrying that the term “should” is being used as this indicates that there is no certainty that this is being replicated throughout all local authorities. In 2021-2022, 27% of young people in Scotland who were 16 or over did not have a care plan in place when they ceased to be looked after. This number is worrying as they are eligible for aftercare support, and then poses the question of the impact on the number of children who are not eligible for aftercare support? It is crucial, that in line with

GIRFEC, all children who ceased to be looked after in Scotland have a care plan in place.

Recommendations

- A young reader friendly version of plans, such as the [Pinky Promise document](#)
- A team to support young people to understand the outcome of this decision.
- Families supported to understand the decisions made during these meetings and invited to attend meetings where appropriate.

People who have ceased to be looked after engage with several services for support when they reach crisis point. I welcome the Scottish Government establishing a national advocacy helpline with Who Cares? Scotland, which to date has received 3,500 calls, with the following areas of concern being raised by care experienced people: finance, education and training, housing, legal, health and wellbeing and dissatisfaction of service as listed in the [lifelong rights report](#).

It is also important to highlight that if young people do not want to receive advocacy, how can they ensure their rights will still be upheld?

It is crucial for the Scottish Government to be open to a redress scheme to compensate care experienced people who did not receive the support due to the age criteria - it is their moral duty as a corporate parent. Young people who have been left without continued care have not been scaffolded by services due to legislation and policy refusing to identify their needs or care experience title.

I welcome the ongoing work the Scottish Government and partner organisations such as STAF, are undertaking. It is vital to have the voices of people with lived experience to support the work that is going to implement change. I have given my own account during the launch of the 100 days of listening, openly discussing the urgency for policy and legislation to:

- recognise care experience as being lifelong
- end the practice of terminating CSOs early
- include previously looked after people in the official government term for looked after young person.

When the Scottish Government conclude their findings, I hope that if these themes arise from other people these points will be examined closely.

There is also scope to further develop the financial support available for young people who choose an employment or training path. There is a lack of support, with employers not always having a true understanding of the pressure of leaving care and navigating a positive destination through employment.

Recommendations

- [DYW Workforce](#) promise pledge
- 'Promise Workplace' a mentor in place to act as a [trusted person in the young person's life](#).

It would be useful if the Care Experienced Children and Young People Fund was divided separately by the Scottish Government prior to being passed on to local authority education and social work departments, rather than being awarded as one lump sum to the local authority to improve attainment. This could promote separate work streams focused on attainment and family wellbeing, with funding also put aside for joint working projects, helping to support the scaffolding aspect of the Promise.

The council tax exemption has been vital for care experienced young people in lifting a financial burden, however barriers remain including providing proof of care experience for this exemption and for funded early learning funding/childcare places. Without this, care experienced parents lack the opportunity to sustain employment, training, and education. It can be very traumatic to provide evidence if an individual left care 10 or more years before having children, particularly when seeking evidence from departments they no longer have a relationship with.

Recommendations

- Provide care leaver with their care first number when leaving care, enabling them to navigate initiatives put in place.

It is also concerning that the response from the Government notes that eligibility for childcare varies depending on local authority. There should

not be postcode lottery regarding the corporate grand parental support available.

I welcome the mental health funding proposal as it is vital to support young people leaving care with regards to mental health.

Current barriers

- Care leavers are presenting at crisis point to services.
- 6 years waiting list for specialist services.
- Lack of CPN triage support in complex trauma, childhood trauma, PTSD.
- Relationship building with 8 CPN workers during triage.
- Short sessions
- Lack of awareness of care experience as a risk factor.

Possible solutions

- CHI number linked to the Care first number.
- Risk factor understood.

Care experienced people have their care title on their health records for life, this is not being picked up with regards to the severity of the risk factor. Our experiences have lifelong implications which is backed by [research from the University of Edinburgh](#).

I welcome the news of the work The Promise Scotland is undertaking to scope a report making the recommendations for a national lifelong advocacy service. It must be inclusive to supporting all aspects of care experience such as marginalised groups. I believe this will achieve scaffolding.

The proposal for the care leaver payment would have a positive impact on the care community.

- Will this impact universal credit? Would the payment be £83.30 a month for two years?
- Are there two payments e.g. care experienced parents?

I would like to conclude by highlighting once again that there is a real impact of change with regards to keeping and delivering the Promise. I

appreciate the work that is being done to improve the experiences for care experienced people.