

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

Scottish Throughcare and Aftercare Forum (Staf) written submission, 5 April 2024

Scottish Throughcare & Aftercare Forum (Staf) is Scotland's only membership organisation for all those involved in the lives of young people leaving care. Our organisational membership consists of the 32 Local Authority statutory Throughcare & Aftercare teams and a wide range of Corporate Parents, independent and voluntary organisations.

Our vision is that the wellbeing and success of young people leaving care in Scotland is indistinguishable from that of their friends and peers at a similar stage in their life.

Our work is rooted in amplifying voice and enabling care experienced people to gain confidence and self-determination. This is predominantly achieved through relationship-based practice and a strong youth work/community education ethos underpinned by our Values which are We Listen. We Care. We Love.

Staf, in partnership with The Promise Scotland, is currently developing a national strategic approach to 'Moving On' and the first phase of this has been to facilitate 100 Days of Listening (between October 2023 and March 2024). Our team have listened to over 345 'Moving On' experts, who either have experience of care or are part of the workforce supporting those with care experience. Analysis of what was heard during these listening sessions is now underway (anticipated completion June 2024).

Our contribution to the petition is therefore rooted in the conversations we have had with care-experienced people and the Workforce that supports them from within our membership and supported by 100 Days of Listening activity.

Extending aftercare provision in Scotland to 'previously looked after' young people who left care before their 16th birthday, on the basis of individual need.

The Promise is clear that chronological age limits to support is not sufficient in addressing the needs of some adults with experience of care. Some of the young people involved in our work have articulated that they would, or would have had some, benefit from being able to access aftercare beyond the age of 26. On page 92 of The Promise document, it clearly states that "Older care experienced people must have a right to access to supportive, caring services for as long as they require them. Those services and the people who work in them must have a primary focus on the development and maintenance of supportive relationships that help people access what they need to thrive." Removing age barriers to support and providing it based on need is something that Staf would be supportive of.

Our work with The Village and in particular our work to develop a 'care-experienced parents charter' shows the need for some aspects of support to be lifelong and not

cut off at an arbitrary age. People whether care experienced or not can become parents well beyond the threshold for aftercare and need support. This has also been a theme raised by care experienced people when meeting with The First Minister (October 2023) and The Minister for Children, Young People and Keeping the Promise (March 2024) facilitated by Staf.

Our recent Summit focussed on improving health and wellbeing outcomes for care experienced young people and the rich discussion from that day evidenced how health and wellbeing outcomes are life long and that our young people often need support with their mental health well beyond their 26th birthday.

Extending Continuing Care throughout Care Experienced people's lives, on the basis of individual need.

The membership of Staf advise of a lack of adequate resources for delivering continuing care and aftercare meaning that services are being asked to do more with less and, against a backdrop of cost-of-living crisis and increased poverty for care leavers, makes practitioners and managers wary of increasing support beyond current statutory duties. Continuing Care practice needs to be better placed to be delivered with effective resource planning and systemic capacity to meet the need it is intended to address.

It should be acknowledged however that, overall, managers and practitioners we have spoken to support the aspiration of this petition.

The Promise document is clear that "Parenting responsibilities are life-long and holistic. This support should include young people staying 'at home', including with foster carers, for as long as is required."¹ For the Promise to be delivered it is imperative that the resource and capacity challenges are met to ensure that care does not cease primarily based on an individual's chronological age.

Ensuring Care Experienced people are able to enjoy lifelong rights and achieve equality with non-Care Experienced people. This includes ensuring that the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the findings of The Promise are fully implemented in Scotland.

The Care Review found that it was generally agreed that age criteria for support is arbitrary and should be removed, replaced by life-long support². However, there was no consensus on what life-long support should look like, and there were significant concerns about stigma and availability of support³. Types of life-long support included: holistic and emotional, mentoring, and crisis support, alongside provision of support to: maintain relationships, budget, or obtain passports or bank accounts (particularly for unaccompanied children and young people)⁴. The 'Moving On' change programme, of which the 100 Days of Listening is the second phase of, is seeking to better understand how such support could be devised and delivered.

The 100 Days of Listening has been focussed on seeking to understand how children and young people are currently being supported to move on from care

¹ 'The Promise', 92

² 'Evidence Framework', 68.

³ 'Evidence Framework', 68–69.

⁴ Evidence Framework', 68–69.

however, it has had a primary focus of identifying solutions to ensure delivery of the promise for all those who move on from care at some point.

Whilst there have been examples of great practice cited and evidenced during this phase of the programme, this hasn't been the entirety of what has been heard. This process again reminds Scotland that when care planning or provision isn't delivered in the way that matches the rhetoric of national and local policy, the consequences are borne by those with the least resource; children, and young people Scotland would hope would have felt cared for.

Underpinning Staf's contribution to this petition is a recognition of the significance of relationship-based practice, a rights-based approach, and the value of person-centred holistic support for care-experienced people that would need to be in place to support implementation. The Workforce we have spoken to are in support of this. It is right that we invest in Scotland's care-experienced children and young people now. Therefore, it is vital the current entitlements are consistently fulfilled across Scotland and that we invest in their futures by ensuring that legislation, resources, and holistic support are adaptable for care-experienced people to realise equality with other citizens of Scotland.