

# A GUIDE FOR SCOTLAND'S TEACHERS ON CARE EXPERIENCE AND CORPORATE PARENTING



This booklet was produced in partnership with SQA

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## About this booklet

This booklet has been created jointly between **Who Cares? Scotland** and the **Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA)**. The aim of this booklet is to provide Scotland's teachers with **insight into the lives of Care Experienced learners** and the important role you play as a [Corporate Parent](#). All learners need positive and stable relationships with adults who believe in their skills, strengths and talents. It is important that teachers understand the specific barriers that Care Experienced learners face, and how your role as a Corporate Parent can mitigate against these barriers. With the right support at the right time, **Care Experienced learners can thrive in education** and achieve their potential.

This resource will help you **understand the statutory Corporate Parenting duties** placed upon you in legislation and how you can fulfil these duties to ensure that your Care Experienced pupils have an equitable chance to thrive and succeed in their journey through education.



# Language Matters

In this booklet we'll generally use the term '**Care Experienced**'. This term refers to anyone who is currently in care or has been for any length of time regardless of their age.

In some contexts, you may come across legal terminology, such as '**Looked After**' or '**Care Leaver**'. The legal definitions of these terms are as follows:

- '**Looked After**'

Under section 17 of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995, 'looked after' children are defined as those in the care of their local authority. It is a legal status in which the local authority has specific duties of care.

- '**Care Leaver**'

A care leaver is a young person who ceased to be looked after on, or at any time after, their 16th birthday.

“**Scotland must understand that 'language creates realities'. Those with care experience must hold and own the narrative of their stories and lives; simple, caring language must be used in the writing of care files.**”

**[The Promise, 2020](#)**

The term Care Experienced is generally preferred by the Care Experienced community for a number of reasons:

Firstly, Care Experienced people have expressed that the term 'Looked After (and Accommodated) Child' can be stigmatising, especially when shortened to 'LAC/LAAC'. The term 'LAC/LAAC' can be felt to imply a lack of family or parents or that they themselves are lacking in some way or not good enough, reinforcing that feeling of being different from one's peers. Language such as this can have a detrimental impact on one's identity.

The term 'Looked After' only applies to situations where a legal order is in place which has been granted through the Children's Hearings system.

The term Care Experienced is **more inclusive of the entire community** as not everyone who is Care Experienced will be 'Looked After' i.e. those who have left care, or those who have lived in informal kinship care.

Many Care Experienced people do not like the term 'Care Leaver' as Care Experienced people often share that 'they may leave care, but care doesn't leave them.' The term Care Experienced recognises the lifelong impact of care, and that care is an experience someone has, rather than something that was 'done to them'.

It is important to recognise that Care Experienced people are not a homogenous group, and individuals may have different preferences in terms of the language they would want to be used to describe their experience. It is always good practice to check with individuals what language and terms they themselves prefer to use.

[Each and Every Child](#) have created an evidence-based training toolkit which supports individuals and organisations to reframe the way they speak about Care Experienced people.

## Where is care delivered?

When someone goes into care, this could be delivered in a range of different settings. These include:



**Looked after at home** – Being looked after at home means that a child or young person remains at home with their parent(s) but is under a Compulsory Supervision Order, granted through the Children’s Hearings System, and will receive services, care and support from the local authority. The role of the local authority is to ensure that the family are supported with any challenges that they are navigating through. There are various measures and supports that can be put in place to ensure that children and young people looked after at home have what they need to feel safe, loved and respected.



**Kinship care** - This is when a child or young person lives with a family member such as cousins, aunt/uncles or grandparents, or sometimes a close family friend. Kinship care can be formal or informal. Formal kinship care is when there is a legal order in place and carers receive assistance from their local authority including an allowance to support them to provide this care. Informal kinship care is when there is no legal order in place. Informal kinship carers do not receive an allowance and are not entitled to support from the local authority.



**Foster care** - This is where a young person lives with another family, often people they have not met before, in their home. This can be provided through the local authority or a private care provider. Foster carers receive payments to support them to provide this care.



**Residential care** - This is when a child or young person lives in a house with 4 to 6 (sometimes more) other children and young people. They are looked after by paid residential carers working on rotas. Residential houses can either be run by the local authority or a private care provider.

Up-to-date statistics and a breakdown of how many young people are currently in care and where they reside can be found on the [Scottish Government’s website](#). When engaging with these statistics, please remember that they only capture those who are currently ‘looked after’ with a legal order in place. Those in informal care settings and those who have left care will not be represented.

## Moving into care

Imagine the scaffold of support that can typically surround a child or young person as they grow up. They may live with their parents, siblings and the family pets. They may live near and see extended family like grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins. The community they live in may be made up of neighbours, friends and their parents. At school, they may be surrounded by their friends and peers, as well as teachers and other school staff. These people make up vital parts of an individual's scaffold of support, providing **love, security, support, guidance and fun**, which create the conditions for them to thrive in education.

Scottish families are up against a rising tide of low wages and high costs. When you're struggling to stay afloat, it's harder to provide the best care. As a result, a number of children are taken into care. When a child or young person moves into care, for reasons out of their control, it can feel very sudden. It can happen in days or even overnight, resulting in **vital pieces of the scaffold** being removed suddenly and without warning.

A new scaffold begins to build around the child as they become Care Experienced. New relationships begin to appear in their life, and most will be paid professionals. Pieces of this scaffold can also be removed when a Care Experienced person reaches a certain age, and each time the scaffold is rebuilt, the joints can become a little weaker. Corporate Parents have a legal duty to help and support Care Experienced people, and **as a Corporate Parent and teacher, you form a vital part of this scaffold of support.**

## Sam's Story

This video shares 'Sam's' experience of going into care, what this journey can feel like, and the impact it can have on someone's life and relationships. It is a composite story comprised of experiences shared with Who Cares? Scotland by the people we support. Please take a moment to listen to Sam:



Click the image above, or scan the QR code to watch the video or visit this link:

<https://www.whocarescotland.org/project/those-around-me-sams-story/>



# What is Corporate Parenting?

You might have heard of the African proverb, '**it takes a village to raise a child**'. This idea, that it takes the efforts of a whole community to ensure a child has what they need to be happy and healthy, is the underlying message behind the concept of Corporate Parenting.

The concept of Corporate Parenting was first grounded in legislation within the [Children and Young People Scotland Act \(2014\)](#). Part 9 of the act sets out the rights of looked after children, care leavers and carers, and the duties, powers and expectations placed on corporate parents.

There are **26 public bodies** named as Corporate Parents in legislation and each serve a diverse range of functions in our society. We know that **communities are stronger when the needs of every child and young person are met**. By working together in collaboration, this skilled network can provide Care Experienced people with the support that we all need to thrive.



## Am I a Corporate Parent?

Every local authority in Scotland is a named Corporate Parent under the [Children and Young People \(Scotland\) Act 2014](#). This means that every employee of a local authority, regardless of role, has Corporate Parenting responsibilities.

Under section 58 of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, **every Corporate Parent has six substantive duties** in respect of the care population to:

- **Be alert**
- **Assess needs**
- **Promote interests**
- **Provide opportunities**
- **Make sure services are easy to access**
- **Look for ways to improve**

These actions should **promote physical, emotional, spiritual, social and educational development**. In many situations, it can help to consider what support you would want for a young person in your family (e.g. your son/daughter/niece/nephew), and ensure that you show the same commitment to your Care Experienced pupils.

As a teacher working for a local authority, you are a Corporate Parent and have an incredible opportunity to make a huge difference to the lives of Care Experienced people.

Though this legislation caps support at the age of 26, we recommend that Corporate Parents consider the legislation as a baseline which provides a strong foundation. **Parenting is a lifelong commitment**, and we encourage Corporate Parents to recognise this in **extending support to all Care Experienced people, for as long as it is needed**. You can read more about the lifelong impact of care in [this report published by Who Cares? Scotland](#).



Click the image above, or scan the QR code to watch this video from Marissa or visit this link:

[www.whocarescotland.org/project/talking-about-corporate-parents/](http://www.whocarescotland.org/project/talking-about-corporate-parents/)





# The Promise

In 2016 First Minister Nicola Sturgeon announced an Independent Root and Branch Review into Scotland's care system: The Independent Care Review. The findings of The Care Review were published in February 2020 across 7 reports led by [The Promise](#).

Over **5500 voices were listened to** during the course of the review. The voices of Care Experienced children and young people made up more than half of those listened to. The other voices were families and the paid and unpaid care workforce.

On February 5th 2020 all of Scotland's political parties as well as the First Minister pledged to keep Scotland's Promise to its children and young people that they will **"grow up loved, safe and respected and realise their full potential."** [The Promise, 2020](#)

**“ Schools in Scotland must be ambitious for care experienced children and ensure they have all they need to thrive, recognising that they may experience difficulties associated with their life story. ”**

[The Promise, 2020](#)

The Promise is comprised of these five foundations:

-  **Voice** - Children must be listened to and meaningfully and appropriately involved in decision-making about their care, with all those involved properly listening and responding to what children want and need. There must be a compassionate, caring, decision-making culture focussed on children and those they trust.
-  **Family** - Where children are safe in their families and feel loved, they must stay – and families must be given support together to nurture that love and overcome the difficulties which get in the way.
-  **Care** - Where living with their family is not possible, children must stay with their brothers and sisters where safe to do so and belong to a loving home, staying there for as long as needed.
-  **People** - The children that Scotland cares for must be actively supported to develop relationships with people in the workforce and wider community, who in turn must be supported to listen and be compassionate in their decision-making and care.
-  **Scaffolding** - 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.



## Care Experienced learners at school

“**Schools and Local Authorities must do everything required to support children to build positive relationships at school and maintain attendance, engagement and learning in a meaningful and supportive way.**”

The Promise, 2020

“**Scotland must recognise that, where educational experience has been disrupted, some people may require additional or different support to realise their potential.**”

The Promise, 2020

School provides an important opportunity for learners to gain skills, knowledge and qualifications that open doors throughout their lives. These skills can be rooted in the subjects they study, but also in how they learn to navigate social situations and form relationships. At school, pupils are part of a community of professionals and peers, learning to overcome challenges and build a future they can feel hopeful and excited about, with help when they need it, every step of the way.

**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. However, Care Experienced learners can face specific barriers which can make achieving at school more difficult.

Factors in pupils' lives can greatly impact on their journey through education. Care Experienced learners can face significant disruption in their lives outside of school and they can have faced traumatic experiences which can impact on them within the school setting. It is **important that all adults within the school environment 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.



## Care Experienced learners at school

For reasons out of their control, 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. This can result in Care Experienced pupils moving to a new school in the middle 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.



[Click the photo or scan the QR code to hear Marissa's thoughts on education.](#)

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.

Many Care Experienced pupils need to attend meetings about their care, which take place throughout the school day.

This can **cause a disruption in their education**. When Care Experienced pupils are unable to attend school due to these meetings, they are missing vital lessons. Furthermore, 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.

**“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](#)**

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](#)). 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.

## Care Experienced learners at school

In the first 5 years since The Promise was published, Care Experienced pupils, from 22 local authorities who responded, have collectively **lost over 1 million school days**. ([Who Cares? Scotland, 2024](#)).

Not everyone understands care experience due to **unhelpful stereotypes** and how Care Experienced people are **portrayed in the media**, which can lead to Care Experienced people facing stigma and discrimination from their peers within the school setting.

A combination of teaching time lost through exclusion, attending formal meetings, and the instability that Care Experienced learners can face in life outside of school, mean that Care Experienced learners are statistically less likely to achieve Curriculum for Excellence levels than peers who are not Care Experienced. The impact of moving around and instability is further evidenced by statistics showing that there is a direct correlation between the number of times learners move within the school year and attainment at all levels.

However, with **the right support** at the right time from caring and committed Corporate Parents such as teachers, **Care Experienced people can thrive at school**. Every pupil requires support to do well, and for pupils with Care Experience it is no different. This support could look like **strong relationships** with teachers and peers with whom pupils **trust**, and who show **genuine care and interest**. It might also be the offer of a quiet place to study, meetings and appointments scheduled flexibly outside of school hours, easy access to equipment, and transport to and from any after-school activities they are interested in.

## Real life experiences of education

### Case Study Documents



Click or scan the QR code:



Josh's  
story



Rebecca's  
story



Leanne's  
story

### Video Clips



Click or scan the QR code:



Lee



David



Gary

## Who Cares? Scotland - Who are we?

**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 over 4,000 members.

At the heart of Who Cares? Scotland's 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 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 to secure positive change.

The Education and Engagement team at Who Cares? Scotland hold the national contract from the Scottish Government, to provide [fully-funded support](#) to Corporate Parents across Scotland. The offer includes live, bespoke learning sessions to learn about care, Care Experienced people, Corporate Parenting legislation as well as support to create and develop Corporate Parenting Plans. **We work alongside Corporate Parents and various communities to broaden understanding and challenge the stigma faced by Care Experienced people.** To find out more about our offer, please get in touch with the Education and Engagement team.





# Who Cares? Scotland - Who are we?

Who Cares? Scotland are also committed to developing Communities that Care through public education, including our whole-school approach. Our whole-school approach **creates the conditions for Care Experienced children and young people to be nurtured and supported in their schools and communities across Scotland**, through education and empathy building activities with entire school communities. The programme is replicable and sustainable and it is our vision that in the future this will be implemented in all Scottish schools. Through this, we will build stronger communities for everyone. Creating school environments which are more supportive and inclusive provides the scaffolding required to ensure that Care Experienced learners have the opportunity to realise their educational aspirations.

At the heart of our whole-school approach are the “Learning About Care Experience” PSE Curriculum Resource Packs, which contain lessons **for children and young people to learn about care experience** in a developmentally appropriate way from Early Years through to S6. The lessons are linked to units within existing qualifications.



To find out more information about our Communities that Care programme, please download our '**Creating inclusive communities through our Whole-School Approach**' guide.

Click or scan the QR code:



# SQA as a Corporate Parent

In April 2015, SQA joined many other public bodies in Scotland to become a national Corporate Parent under the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014.

As a proud Corporate Parent, we were delighted to work with Who Cares? Scotland to develop this booklet to support teachers and schools.

We believe that **all young people deserve the opportunity to realise their potential and achieve their ambitions**. We are committed to the vision of a Scotland where all children and young people with experience of care are understood, believed in, and given every opportunity to thrive.

In our [Corporate Parenting Plan](#), you can read about SQA's commitments and what we have done to support Care Experienced learners.

We promise to:

- **Listen** – by engaging with Care Experienced learners regularly to learn about their lives and ambitions.
- Inform those who work with and for SQA about our Corporate Parenting responsibilities and **the needs of Care Experienced learners**.
- Ensure that Care Experienced learners have **access to SQA services** that meet their needs.
- Support, recognise, and **celebrate the ambition and achievements** of Care Experienced learners.
- **Improve opportunities** for Care Experienced people to access Modern Apprenticeships, internships, work experience, and employment with SQA.
- **Work with other Corporate Parents** to make sure we are all doing our best.



## SQA as a Corporate Parent

As a Corporate Parent, the needs of Care Experienced learners are at the forefront of the decisions we make. To support Care Experienced people, we have:

- Worked closely with Who Cares? Scotland and MCR Pathways to ensure **we are informed about the barriers** Care Experienced young people face.
- Taken opportunities to **listen to Care Experienced learners** at events we attend, and invited young people to speak to us about the lifelong impacts of their care experience to help us to learn more about their experiences as individuals.
- **Established an SQA Learner Panel** - and sought the views of the Panel on a range of issues relating to the awarding of qualifications throughout the pandemic including the Alternative Certification Model, communications, and appeals.
- Launched **online Corporate Parenting training** for SQA staff and appointees.
- Worked with the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration (SCRA) and Children's Hearings Scotland (CHS) to **prevent children's hearings from clashing with SQA exams**.
- Improved processes to ensure it is easier for anyone who has care experience to access a replacement certificate without charge.
- Incorporated relevant and appropriate situations of young people in care into the design of our qualifications.
- **Celebrate the ambition and achievements** of Care Experienced learners with Who Cares? Scotland and MCR Pathways on Results Day in August each year.
- Made progress in **treating 'care experience' as a protected characteristic**, so that being 'inclusive' means looking after Care Experienced people too.
- Supported Care Experienced young people to attend a seven-week residential programme at **Harvard University's Summer School** (2019), in partnership with Who Cares? Scotland.
- Worked with Who Cares? Scotland and MCR Pathways to promote our **Modern Apprenticeship opportunities**.
- To help reduce barriers into the workplace for Care Experienced young people, we launched a new one-year MA programme in 2020 that has no entry criteria for any Care Experienced young person aged 16-29.

Partnership working is a priority for SQA — we know that through collaboration with local authorities, schools, and other public bodies, we can jointly **achieve better outcomes for Care Experienced learners** and fulfil our responsibilities as Corporate Parents as best we can.



**Thank you for taking the time to read through this resource, and to reflect on your role as a Corporate Parent to Care Experienced people.**

**Please get in touch if you have any questions.**



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