

LIFELONG RIGHTS

FOR CARE EXPERIENCED PEOPLE



**Belonging and
Connection Issue Paper
December 2024**



Summary

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.

The fourth most common advocacy theme for our members aged 16+ is relationships. As part of our Lifelong Rights Campaign, here's what we found:

24

Care Experienced people surveyed

147

advocacy issues related to relationships raised by Care Experienced people this year

75%

of survey respondents were struggling with loneliness, highlighting an unmet need for belonging and connection

Respondents were **most likely to be dissatisfied with** their relationships with parents, extended family and professionals/workers

Respondents were **least likely to be dissatisfied** with their relationships with their pets

1/2

Almost half of respondents felt that their experiences of belonging and connection whilst in care had **negatively impacted** on the rest of their life



Unconditional love and equal treatment to non-Care Experienced peers is key to preventing abuse and Keeping the Lifelong Promise







Lifelong support would help Care Experienced adults to maintain relationships, experience love and fulfil their potential.



We draw on evidence from a variety of sources including an online survey open Autumn 2024 and data from our advocacy work over the past year. All of this is supported by composite evidence-based case studies.

Our evidence relates to the following rights, having coded our advocacy data against the European Convention on Human Rights:

			
Respect for views	Privacy and family life	The right to relationships with brothers and sisters	The right to live with or keep in contact with parents

To ensure that all Care Experienced people experience **a lifetime of equality, respect and love**, Who Cares Scotland is calling for (see full list of solutions at the end of this paper):

1. Services providing spaces for connection, befriending, peer support, talking therapy and pet therapy, should be made available and accessible to Care Experienced people of all ages.
2. Aftercare support to include opportunities to gain independent living skills such as cooking, cleaning and money management.
3. Expedite the development of relationships based trauma training to support adoptive parents, kinship and foster carers.
4. A statutory right to lifelong advocacy in the Promise Bill.





Statement of Intent



Stop.

Before you start to read this paper, take some time to reflect on what belonging and connection means to you.

Who do you call family? Where do you feel most at home? Who can you always rely on, no matter what?

That personal sphere of love, belonging and connection is essential to everyone's human dignity.

It is cherished at the highest level of government in Scotland, **Natalie Don-Innes MSP (SNP, Minister for Children, Young People and The Promise;**

'As someone who has lived through some extremely difficult experiences growing up, and who has experienced a sense of unbelonging, fear and disconnection, I am here to fight for all the children and young people across Scotland who face similar issues.'

- Scottish Government Debate on The Promise, 6/11/2024

What scaffolding do we need to put in place to ensure that Care Experienced children, young people and adults feel belonging and connection in their day-to-day lives, on an equitable basis to people who have never been looked after by anyone other than their birth parents?

Every year, our advocacy workers support over 1,600 people with more than 6,000 individual advocacy issues across all 32 local authorities in Scotland. As we take a Human Rights Based Approach to our work, around 10,000 individual rights are logged every year in supporting these issues.

We launched our Lifelong Rights Campaign in October 2023 with a commitment to record and evidence what we hear from Care Experienced people. It reinforces the limited national data available, which shows that Care Experienced people currently do not have the same life outcomes as their non-Care Experienced peers.

This paper is the third in a series that are linked to the top issues that Care Experienced people, aged 16 and over, raise with us through independent advocacy.

It illustrates that loneliness is a prevalent issue for Care Experienced people; that we need to continue work to keep families together where it is safe to do so; and that lifelong support, unconditional love and equal treatment is essential to sustaining relationships to help Care Experienced adults reach their full potential.

We are proud to have secured cross-party support for our Lifelong Rights Campaign, and we welcome more conversations with duty bearers about how to put our proposed solutions from our issue papers into action.

Together, we can make sure The Promise is lifelong to Care Experienced people, and that they achieve a lifetime of love, equality and respect.

Louise Hunter, CEO, Who Cares? Scotland



Existing Policy & Evidence

[The Promise \(2020\)](#) says that **'older Care Experienced people must have a right to access supportive, caring services for as long as they require them.'**

However, the primary reference to belonging and connection in The Promise focuses on nurturing the workforce.[1] It states that:

'The workforce must be nurtured. They must be supported at all stages of their caring journey. That support must enable them to facilitate a sense of home, family, friends, community and belonging in which children feel loved and can flourish.'

The Promise encourages lifelong links for young people and their carers under the 'Care foundation', but again focuses on 'support and time' being needed for carers to focus on developing relationships to deliver children's needs.

The lifelong consequences of the trauma of being removed from parental care and the pain of sibling separation is also acknowledged in The Promise, with a commitment to support all children to continue relationships that are important to them, where it is safe to do so, for example, through intensive family support.

According to [The Promise Scotland's Plan 24-30](#):

'Overall, Scotland is making progress in supporting positive, stable relationships for care experienced children and young people.'

Yet the plan also states:

'Maintaining ongoing relationships between the workforce and children, young people, and families continues to be a challenge due to various systemic issues. These include continual service restructuring, inconsistent thresholds for service provision and difficulties in recruitment and retention of the workforce. The workforce also report limited time to dedicate to building and maintaining trusting relationships.'

The Scottish Government [recently committed to](#):

- Progressing the delivery of a rights and relationships based practice and trauma informed training programme for the workforce.
- Review the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) codes of practice to ensure consistency with the trauma informed family support skills and practice requirements of The Promise.
- SSSC working with The Promise Scotland on a myth busting campaign which supports the shift towards relationship based practice.

[1] Where 'the workforce' is outlined as encompassing people's roles 'in terms of the degree of closeness of relationships they have with children, rather than their status as paid/unpaid or in terms of professional/voluntary.'



The [Scottish Parliament debate on Keeping the Promise in November 2024](#) showed cross-party passion on belonging and connection from the following rights defenders:

'As someone who has lived through some extremely difficult experiences growing up, and who has experienced a sense of unbelonging, fear and disconnection, I am here to fight for all the children and young people across Scotland who face similar issues.'

Natalie Don-Innes MSP
(SNP, Minister for Children, Young People and The Promise)



'We know that attachment is essential to the building of strong relationships, and that such family bonds play a crucial role.'

Roz McCall
MSP (Conservative)



'The briefing from The Promise Scotland once again raises the issue of the lack of contact with siblings for Care Experienced people. It is an issue that I have heard repeatedly from children and young people right across the country, and it appears that we are not yet getting it quite right every time. There needs to be a consistency of approach for siblings.'

Gillian Mackay
MSP (Green)



'One in four siblings are still separated. That is an improvement on the three out of four who were separated at the start of this process in 2017, but seven councils did not know how many were separated. How could they not know? We are talking about one of their main responsibilities, and they admitted that they did not know.'

'Trauma-informed training is very important; nine councils provide it, but 11 councils do not know whether they do.'

Willie Rennie
MSP (Liberal Democrat)



'As for whole-family support, the young people who spoke to the committee told us that, despite some progress being made, too often they are still separated from their siblings. We have heard about such cases today. Indeed, in some cases, that separation was for more than four years.'

Pam Duncan-Glancy
MSP (Labour)



'During the past week alone, I have seen examples of issues in my constituency work. I was contacted by a foster carer who has a young person who is well settled and doing well at a school. They were told by their local authority, Dumfries and Galloway Council, that it can no longer provide transport for that young person to get to the school where they are settled, because another school that is nearer could meet their educational needs. That completely ignores all the friendships and bonds of attachment that that young person has, and the potential changes that might come for that young person in the future.'

Oliver Mundell
MSP (Conservative)





Our Evidence

Advocacy Data

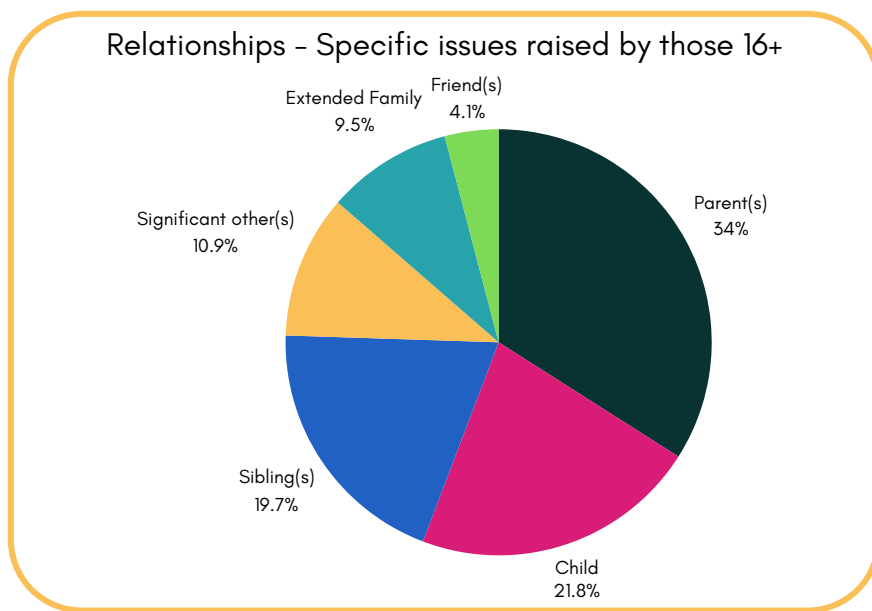
Our advocacy data shows how important it is for members that duty bearers keep families together where it is safe to do so. From October 2023 to September 2024, 83 Care Experienced adults aged 16-26 were supported with 147 issues related to relationships.

Of these issues, most involved relationships with parents (34%), and approximately 1 in 5 related to relationships with a child or children (21%). A further fifth (19%) were about relationships with siblings.

However, we know that issues with belonging and connection are not limited to our younger members. Since 2023, we have provided a space for Care Experienced people aged 16 and over to come relax and connect with other Care Experienced people through our weekly drop in.

“The [Glasgow] Drop In has really filled that void for me because it’s somewhere familiar I can go to and although we don’t often talk about our experiences of care we all know how it is. I always feel welcome and accepted and although I struggle to make friends, I still have a laugh.”

Care Experienced Member
SpeakOut Magazine, 2024



The most common themes from our advocacy data about relationships are increasing ‘contact’ (family time), accessing support, maintaining ‘contact’ and requests related to information sharing with family.

The Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry recognise deprivation of family time for children and young people as a form of abuse. **The terms of reference define abuse as:** “primarily physical abuse and sexual abuse, with associated psychological and emotional abuse. The Inquiry will be entitled to consider other forms of abuse at its discretion, including medical experimentation, spiritual abuse, **unacceptable practices (such as deprivation of contact with siblings)** and neglect, but these matters do not require to be examined individually or in isolation.”



Composite Case Study

Aliyah is 17 years old and has been living in foster care for two years. According to her Compulsory Supervision Order, she is supposed to see her wee brother Sean every two weeks. However, this hasn't been happening recently. She feels that her aunt who looks after him is preventing her from seeing him on purpose by frequently cancelling and rearranging plans.

She found out on a friend's Instagram story that Sean had been in hospital last week after a fall on his bike. She was upset that she found out this way, it had been agreed that her aunt would communicate important updates about Sean to her directly while he is too young to have a phone.

Aliyah is looking forward to spending Christmas day with her previous foster carers who extended an invitation to their big family meal. Her current foster carers were happy with that arrangement and have offered to drive Aliyah to the celebration after spending Christmas morning together.

However, Aliyah hopes that social work can help resolve the situation with her aunt in time so that she gets to see Sean over the holidays. She has asked if this can be in a family setting rather than the social work office, as they want to play PlayStation together.

Aliyah decided to call the Who Cares? Scotland Lifelong Advocacy Helpline. A lifelong advocate helped Aliyah articulate her rights to her aunt and her social worker in relation to some of the issues above, including sibling rights under the Children (Scotland) Act 2020. Mentioning the law really helped, and her aunt has started planning future visits for Aliyah to play with Sean at her home.

Who Cares? Scotland believes in continued investment in the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund to keep families together when safe to do so, and continued work to keep sisters and brothers together. To see our recommendations on lifelong advocacy, please see our solutions at the end of this report.

Survey Data

In order to find out more about important relationships, relationships in care, Keeping the Promise, the impact of relationships in care on life now, loneliness and potential solutions from our members, we conducted an online survey. This was open from 25th October until 12th November 2024, for Care Experienced adults over the age of 16 to share their views.

24 valid responses were received from people aged **16 to 25**, with an average age of **31**.

63% of those were aged 26 and above

71% were female

88% were no longer in care



While this is a relatively small sample size, this report helps us start to build a picture. The Care Experienced population is not a homogenous group, and views and experiences vary. It would help to Keep the Promise in Scotland to do a larger piece of work on the experience of belonging and connection of all Care Experienced people, regardless of age.

Analysis of the survey responses shows that there's a clear need to tackle loneliness, for lifelong support and unconditional love and equality. Recurring themes across the survey included dissatisfaction with relationships in care, struggles in developing positive trusting relationships and experiences of belonging and connection whilst in care having had a negative lifelong impact.

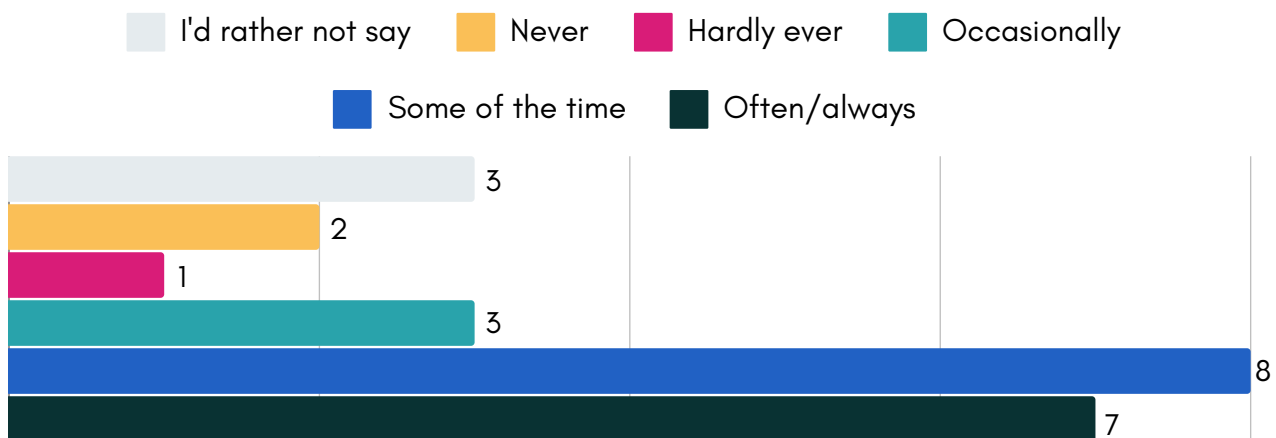
Loneliness

“Loneliness is an unwelcome and generally unpleasant emotional feeling that you get when you have a lack or loss of companionship. It happens where there is a discrepancy between the quantity and quality of the social relationships that you have, and those you want.”

Prof. Andrea Wigfield, Loneliness, 2024.

We wanted to ask our members about feelings of loneliness in connection with the theme of belonging and connection as we know that anecdotally, and from previous work on mental health in (see our [‘Tend Our Light’ report from 2022](#)), that some Care Experienced people experience loneliness which impacts on social relationships.[2]

How often do you feel lonely? (24 respondents answering)



75% of respondents reported feeling lonely occasionally, sometimes, often or always.

[2] In asking this question, we signposted members to various mental health supports, such as the Samaritans, available [here](#). The topic of loneliness and Care Experience is explored further by Care Experienced Young People taking part in 'Project Acorn' in Plymouth in the following [podcast by Barnardos \(2021\)](#).



In 2022, almost 50% of adults (25.99 million people) in the UK reported feeling lonely occasionally, sometimes, often or always ([Campaign to End Loneliness](#)).

We know that anyone can experience loneliness, that it is natural, and that there are many reasons and risk factors. However, we are concerned at our survey results that Care Experienced adults are struggling with loneliness. This clearly highlights an unmet need for connection and belonging.

“The experience of loneliness is unequal. Who Cares? Scotland’s recent research suggests that Care Experienced people are disproportionately experiencing loneliness. The more persistent or chronic the feeling of loneliness is, the more likely this creates negative impacts on both physical health and mental wellbeing. Seeking human connection is the natural response to loneliness and interventions, such as befriending, can support an individual to increase their social networks. Befriending can lead to increases in confidence, a growing sense of purpose, skills for forming friendships, access to new experiences, a widening of their community, and improved self-esteem.”

Susan Hunter, CEO at Befriending Networks

Barnardo’s innovation lab describes tackling loneliness and isolation as a ‘trojan horse’ approach, where investing in the ‘social buy-in’ around a Care Experienced person (or your support network) could be the answer to unlocking a wider range of challenges, and could positively impact many other aspects of their life eg. mental and physical health, education etc.

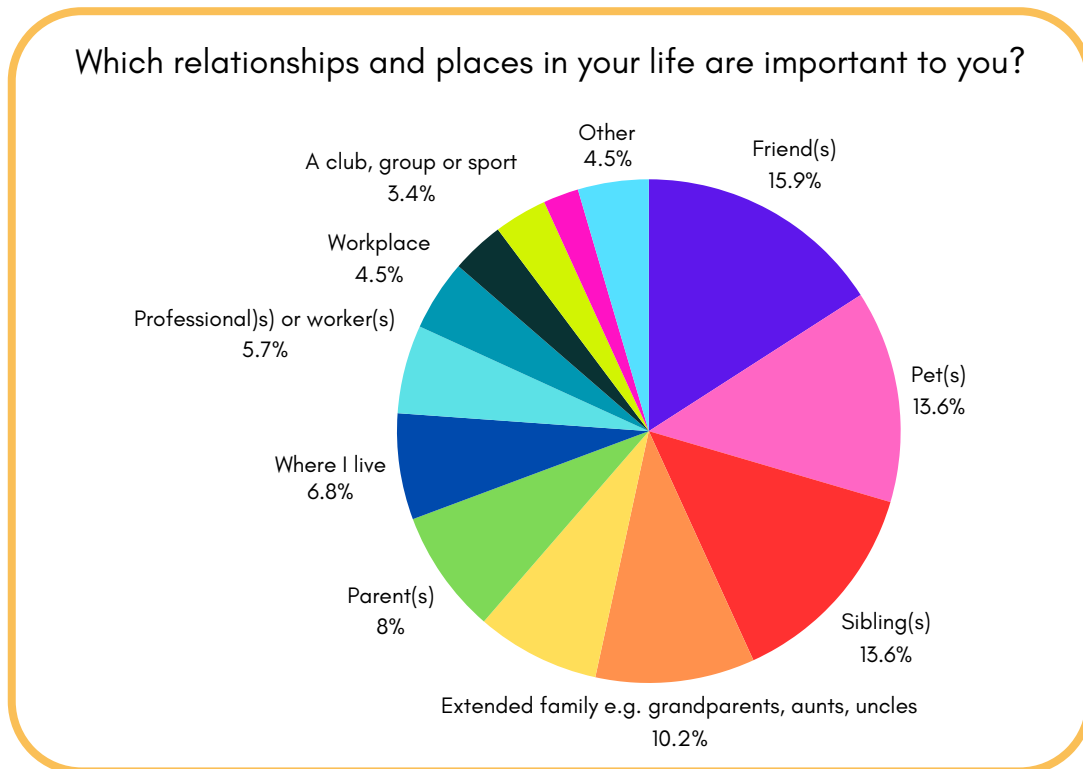
Academic research supports this. When individuals with negative childhood experiences had social and emotional supports, their risk of developing depression decreased by up to 92% ([Brinker and Cheruvu, 2017](#)). Safe, stable and nurturing relationships can serve as a buffer to adversity and developing “toxic stress” or unhealthy coping mechanisms, as well as being key to developing the resilience needed to deal with future hardship in a healthy way. It is still very possible to recover from trauma and build a good life with therapeutic support and scaffolding ([Garner and Yogman, 2021](#); [Crouch et al., 2019](#)).

We have proposed some solutions with examples at the end of this report including **spaces for connection, befriending, peer support, talking therapy and pet therapy**, to help the members who responded, while also calling for more research to be carried out on this topic. This could help us better understand the extent of this issue, and how to inform policy and practice to address it.



Relationships matter

Our data shows us that relationships with friends, pets and siblings are most important to members surveyed, as opposed to relationships with professionals or carers which were less likely to be seen as important. While more research would be required to understand the complexities of the differences in importance of these relationships, anecdotally, we hear this can be due to a number of factors including the inconsistency of staff and foster carers in a Care Experienced person's life.



Notably, when asked to rate satisfaction with relevant relationships while in care;

- Almost half (48%) were either dissatisfied or neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with their carers.
- Respondents were most likely to be dissatisfied with their relationships with parents, extended family and professionals/workers.
- Respondents were least likely to be dissatisfied with their relationships with their pets.

When we asked why these relationships and places were important, values and identity were the most common theme, with unconditional love being a key value for many.

Respondents to Who Cares? Scotland's Belonging and Connection Survey, 2024, said:

"If I was taught love and compassion as a child I may have never have thought toxic was okay."

"As my parents were addicts I think I struggled to learn how a person shows real love. Until I met my husband I think I always thought love had to be earned and not simply just given. I thought for years that doing things to please others would earn me their love but that wasn't the case and I just ended up unhappy as well. I love having a place to call home and a place where I belong."



Shared experience and connection with family, friends, groups or pets, and security and support were other reasons why these relationships matter to our members.



“I chose pets as I have a [dog] and she is the best thing that has ever happened to me, she always makes me feel better when I’m having a hard time, just seeing her makes me feel happier.”*

“They are my comfort and are always there when I need them.”

- Care Experienced people
(Who Cares? Scotland Belonging and Connection survey, 2024).

However, a few people chose to tell us about the struggles they had faced in developing positive trusting relationships due to their experiences in care.

Composite Case Study

Ali is 32 and although he now lives independently, he was adopted at the age of 9. His relationship with his adoptive parents is really important to him as they raised him and instilled in him his values, making him feel fully part of their family from day one.

However, Ali hasn’t seen his biological brother since birth as his brother’s adoptive parents wouldn’t allow it. He has always felt like a part of him is missing.

When Ali first went into care, he felt abandoned and like he had no control over decisions affecting his life. He struggled to make friends at school as he was embarrassed to tell people he was Care Experienced in case they felt sorry for him. These feelings followed Ali into adulthood, and affected his confidence in building relationships at work and in his personal life. He knew he could always talk to his adoptive parents, but that they couldn’t fully relate to what he was feeling.

In his early twenties, Ali heard about a local befriending service that had a focus on Care Experience. He plucked up the courage to sign up, and there he met Joe, an older Care Experienced befriender. Although Ali was nervous at first, once he got to know Joe he found him funny and they had loads in common to talk about, like football and food.

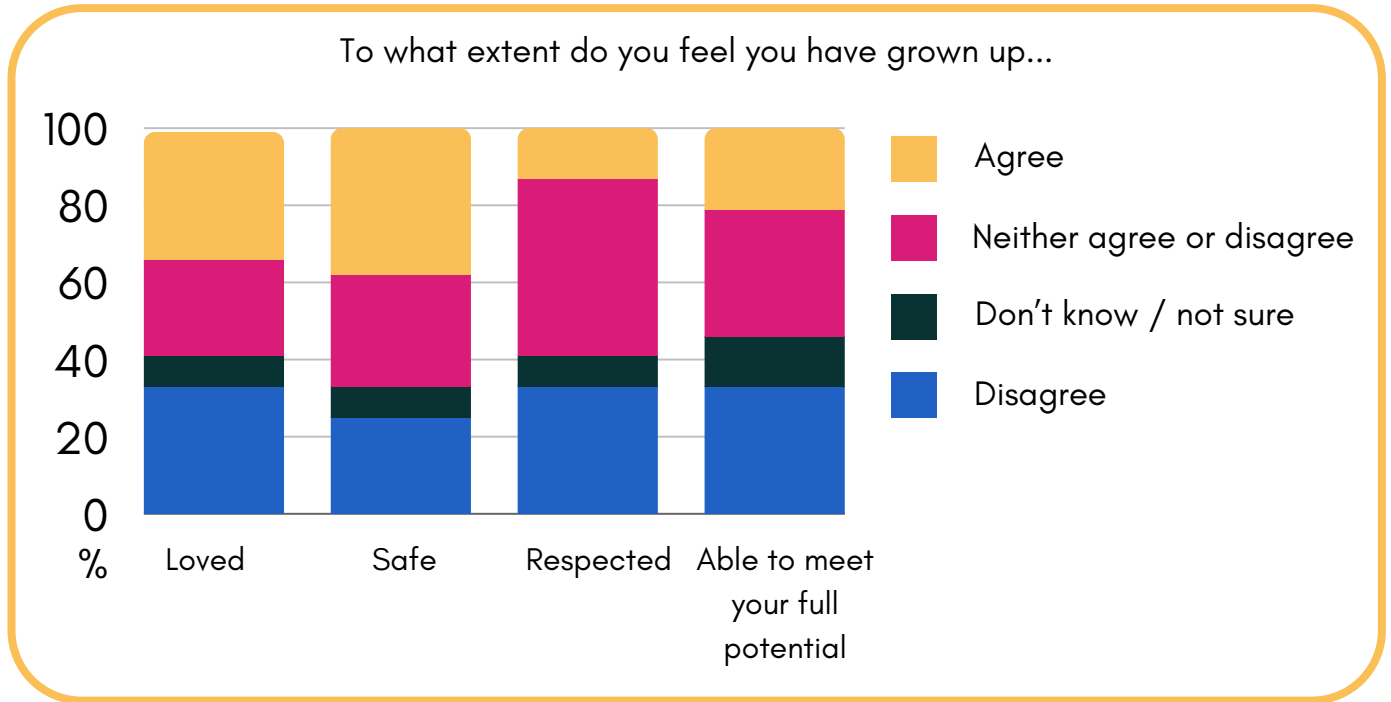
Through Joe, Ali learned that he was not alone, he had nothing to be ashamed of, and that his experience had made him stronger. Over the years, Joe helped him gain more confidence to be able to confidently network at work and to host dinner parties for his friends. He now feels much more fulfilled, and ready to reach his full potential.

**Some quotes have had minor amendments to grammar and spelling for ease of reading.*





Keeping the Lifelong Promise

We wanted to look at how Keeping the Promise – growing up loved, safe and respected – impacts upon a lifelong sense of belonging and connection. Under half of respondents had felt loved, safe, respected and able to meet their full potential. However, as this paper is about the experiences of adults it may not be reflective of the current experiences of care. While work is ongoing to keep The Promise for children and young people, its lifelong impact must be taken into account.



We asked respondents what made them feel safe, loved and respected, and what did not. Understanding these experiences is vital to improving care today, as well as improving lifelong support for Care Experienced adults. The table below shows the themes across answers in order of prevalence:

What made you feel safe loved and respected, and what did not?

	
Stability	Not being listened to
Consistency	Stigma and discrimination
Unconditional love	Lack of control, choice and independence
Feeling included	Abuse
Treated equally	



People who were consistent and went the extra mile were seen as providing stability in otherwise testing times:

“My foster mum was amazing! No matter what hardships I put her through from my experiences and learning the hard way, she always gave me a home, somebody to trust, she never lied to me, she fought every battle by my side and it was always what I felt I wanted/needed and she advocated hard for me. She was a "mother" to me. She taught me everything I know today and I still have a very loving relationship with her.”

“The workers who were there because they genuinely cared, not the ones who liked to tick a box. I made loads of mistakes as a young person and if every worker were to follow protocol in light of those mistakes and not think of my potential future at the time I wouldn't be where I am today as a professional.”

Care Experienced people
(Who Cares? Scotland Belonging and Connection survey, 2024).

Unconditional love, feeling included and being treated equally to children who were not Care Experienced was key for many responses: **‘Being included in my foster family's family events.’**

Conversely, people didn't feel safe, loved and respected when they weren't listened to or treated fairly alongside children who were not Care Experienced.

- **“Being treated as less important than our own children by short term carers.”**
- **“Being treated as different by friends, professionals...”**
- **“It was made out that it was my fault, that I was the problem... it affected me as an adult and still does.”**





Composite Case Study

Josué is in Primary 6 at school, and lives with foster carers. His teacher, Mr Anson, noticed his behaviour had changed when he came back from the summer break. He was more introverted at lunchtime and breaks, yet more disruptive in class.

Mr Anson tried to talk to Josué to find out what had caused this change, but he didn't want to open up.

During an art class where pupils were encouraged to draw about their summer break, Mr Anson learned that Josué had spent some time with a different foster family to his own, and that his foster family had gone on holiday to Mallorca without him.

On a school trip to a community garden, Josué felt more comfortable opening up to Mr Anson. Josué told him that he felt like his foster parents didn't care about him, their children hated him and that he didn't feel like he belonged in the family. They didn't have any photos of him on family photo walls, and the tooth fairy would visit their birth children but not him. He admitted that when he acted out in class, he was angry and craved a bit of attention.

Mr Anson got Josué's permission to raise this with his social worker. The social worker has committed to reviewing what kind of family support could be provided to help Josué feel more included, loved and respected in the family.

A final theme to this question was how human rights violations and abuse some respondents had suffered after being taken into care were a major factor in not feeling safe, loved or respected.

- **"Being unlawfully sectioned without my knowledge."**
- **"Restrained for nothing all the time".**
- **"Physical and sexual abuse."**

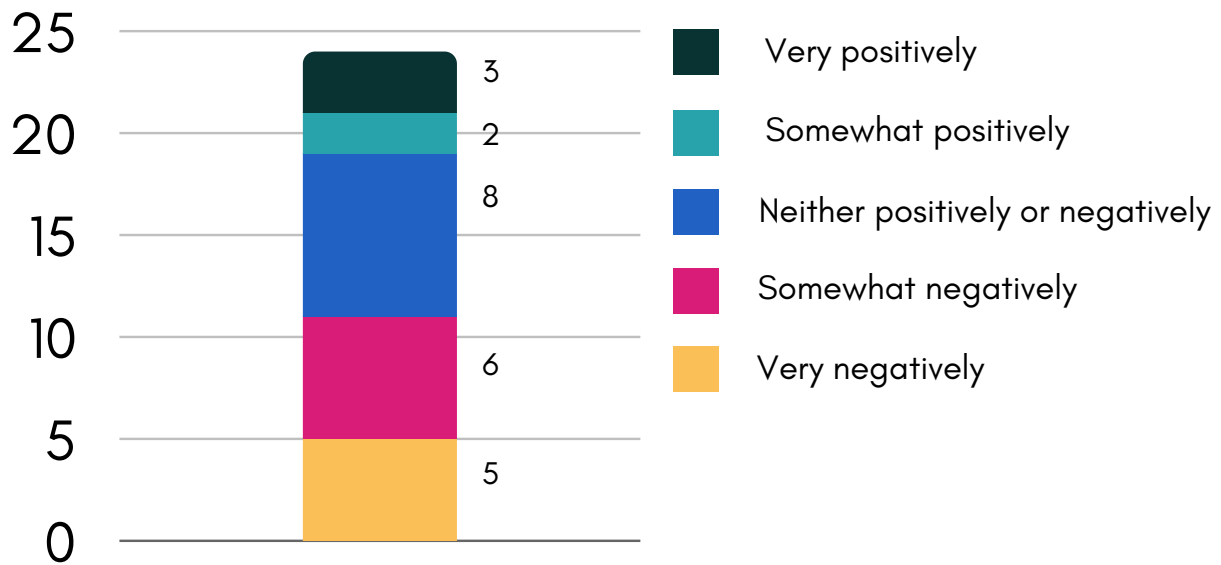
The Scottish Government issued an apology in 2004 to all those who had not received the level of love, care and support that they deserved. Twenty years on and four years into the implementation of the Promise, children and young people are continuing to experience these feelings.

"It is for this generation of the people of Scotland to say quite clearly that it was unacceptable that young people were abused and that it was appalling that they were abused by those entrusted with their welfare. That is why, today, I offer a sincere and full apology on behalf of the people of Scotland to those who were subject to such abuse and neglect and who did not receive the level of love, care and support that they deserved, and who have coped with that burden all their lives."

First Minister Jack McConnell, 2004.



In what way do you feel your experiences of belonging and connection whilst in care has impacted the rest of your life?



Almost half of respondents felt that their experiences of belonging and connection whilst in care had negatively impacted on the rest of their lives. Approximately a fifth felt they had had a positive impact on the rest of their life.

Respondents told us that negative experiences of belonging and connection including loss and bereavement impacted on care identity; stigma; and resulted in issues with socialising, trust and attachment, and feelings of rejection. Positive experiences reinforced feelings of love, stability and belonging.





Composite Case Study

Sasha is 48 and lives with her 18-year-old son, Peter. She was 'in care' from the age of 5-15 after which she was made homeless when encouraged to move out by her then foster carers. This was all before developments in throughcare and aftercare policy in Scotland.

Sasha struggles to trust people and situations in her adult life. Especially professionals. Growing up, she felt that she wasn't good enough and didn't have many supportive adults around her telling her good things about herself.

This has impacted how she is as a mother. When Peter was born, she was terrified that having been in care, she would be under greater scrutiny as a parent and that he would be more likely to be taken into care. In the early months, she struggled to trust professionals involved in his life and she worried that she wouldn't be respected fully or that her parenting skills would be brought into question just because of her background.

She struggled to socialise and make friends at mum and baby groups as she wasn't sure if she'd have anything in common with the other mums, and worried that she'd have to prove herself more than them. She also didn't want to get too attached to new mum friends in case they would leave her or judge her behind her back.

In 2022, Sasha discovered '[The Village](#)', a digital community of support for new parents and parents with care experience. There, she felt free to engage with other parents and professionals free from the fear of being stigmatised. Had this support been there for her in her thirties, Sasha thinks she might have had more confidence in her interactions with professionals, and she might have found it easier to make friends.





Solutions

Everyone has the right to family life (Article 8 ECHR), and feelings of loneliness and isolation can inhibit people's enjoyment of many other rights.

Our evidence tells us that loneliness is a prevalent issue for Care Experienced people; that we need to continue work to keep families together where it is safe to do so; and that lifelong support, unconditional love and equal treatment is essential to sustaining relationships to help Care Experienced adults reach their full potential.

Although many social and economic rights such as the rights to health or employment are unconditional, they do impose a positive obligation on the state to uphold them without discrimination, including indirect discrimination (Article 2 International Covenant of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights).

It is therefore essential that duty bearers in Scotland are proactive and put the right scaffolding of support in place to help Care Experienced people access their rights on an equitable basis with their peers who aren't Care Experienced.

In response to the challenges Care Experienced people have told us they are continuing to face; we have set out key measures inspired by their ideas which we believe are necessary and realistic for duty bearers to take before the conclusion of The Promise.

Tackle Loneliness

- 1. Services providing spaces for connection, befriending, peer support, talking therapy and pet therapy, should be made available and accessible to Care Experienced people of all ages.** Providing these opportunities for belonging and connection could be a lifeline for many Care Experienced people. For example, 81% of attendees to Who Cares? Scotland belonging and connection groups and events in the past year said they helped them develop relationships that are important to them. Duty bearers could create connection around cultural events like the [Who Cares Scotland's Care Family Christmas dinner](#), or extend projects like [Intandem's partner charity projects](#) (which provide befriending to children aged 8 to 15 who are looked after at home or living in kinship care) to Care Experienced adults.

"Christmas is traditionally a time when families get together, so for young people whose families are absent, it can really exacerbate feelings of isolation...There are superb events being organised up and down the country, such as The Christmas Dinners, specifically for young care leavers aged 16 to 25. These events combat isolation and cultivate a sense of community and belonging between young people and the volunteers who run them - making it a day to remember for the right reasons."

Care Experienced Member, [Big Issue, 2019](#).

[Find out how you can support our Care Family Christmas Dinner here.](#)



- 2. More research is required into the topic of loneliness and Care Experience.** While the [Campaign to End Loneliness from 2022](#) found that family circumstances, social disadvantage and living situation can all be risk factors for loneliness, the data was not disaggregated for the characteristic of Care Experience. In order to better achieve equality for Care Experienced people, we need to better understand the extent to which loneliness may exacerbate existing inequalities, and how best to address this.

Unconditional love and equality

- 3. Expedite the development of relationships based trauma training to support adoptive parents, kinship and foster carers.** The Scottish Government, COSLA, the Improvement Service, Resilience Learning Partnership, and NHS National Education Scotland's National Trauma Transformation Programme is currently being rolled out across children's, justice and adult social work services, and workers in educational and residential settings. 'Alternative caregivers' are being considered in the long term delivery plan, but we know that some adoptive parents and foster carers are still treating their Care Experienced children differently to their birth children four years after The Promise. As we have seen, that emotional abuse will have a lifelong detrimental impact on connection and belonging. This development should be expedited to prevent further harm to Care Experienced individuals now.
- 4. Mirror or adapt work to refresh the Common Core framework for Care Experienced Adults.** The [Scottish Government](#) is developing a refreshed Common Core framework of essential knowledge and values for everyone who provides support to children, from birth to young adulthood, and their families. This includes learning to help deliver The Promise, but if it doesn't serve Care Experienced people of all ages we will not be keeping The Promise to Care Experienced adults. This should include the values that were important to members in our survey, such as unconditional love, consistency and being treated equally.

Lifelong support

- 5. A statutory right to lifelong advocacy in the Promise Bill.** Everyone experiences different hardships and struggles throughout their lifetime, these can be exacerbated if you are also experiencing loneliness. During these tough times, people typically rely on different support networks. For Care Experienced people, there are often many voices that surround them, such as social workers, carers and service providers, all with their own interests. For Care Experienced adults, the stigma of explaining their circumstances can hinder their confidence and voice. Everyone in our community must have the support they need to navigate life, when the rising tide of poverty, stress and other aggravating factors can set them adrift. Independent advocates can provide that support by helping make sure Care Experienced people are informed of their options, rights and ensuring they have their voices heard.



- 6. Full implementation and extension of Continuing Care in the Promise Bill.** During 2022-23, [Annual Social Work Statistics](#) show that only 29% of young people eligible entered Continuing Care. The Scottish Government should work in partnership with local authorities and COSLA to publish a route map that shows how they will ensure the number of Care Experienced young people accessing their right to Continuing Care increases. It should be assumed practice that young people will remain in Continuing Care and be able to opt out, rather than frequently requiring advocacy to access their right to this. Continuing Care should be accessible throughout Care Experienced people's lives, on the basis of individual need.

- 7. Aftercare support to include opportunities to gain independent living skills such as cooking, cleaning and money management.** In order to assist local authorities in meeting their duties under the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 (as amended), the Scottish Government should produce guidance or resources to assist Corporate Parents in providing opportunities for independent living skills development, especially as these skills should be assessed as part of the pathway assessment for aftercare services.

- 8. Use the Promise Bill to extend aftercare provision in Scotland to 'previously looked after' young people, who left care before their 16th birthday, on the basis of individual need.** This should address the 'cliff-edge' of support experienced by so many who are unable to access services due to arbitrary criteria relating to their age and when they left care, and help more Care Experienced people gain the independent living skills they need to thrive.





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