

# West Dunbartonshire's Promise Progress Report



July 2025

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# The Independent Care Review and The Promise

## The background to the Promise

All children need the same things to thrive: a stable home, strong support and steady, loving relationships.

The Promise is Scotland's commitment to making sure this is a reality for all children.

The Promise emerged from Scotland's Independent Care Review: a comprehensive, participatory process launched in response to longstanding concerns about the experiences and outcomes for children and young people in the care system. The movement for change was driven by activism and advocacy from care-experienced people across Scotland, who sought to ensure that all children grow up loved, safe, and respected.

In February 2020, the Review published its findings and recommendations in The Promise. The Scottish Parliament, with cross-party support, committed to implementing these recommendations in full by 2030 at the latest.

Keeping The Promise requires Scotland to overhaul its care system, moving away from bureaucratic, process-driven approaches and towards a culture that centres on relationships, rights, and the voices of children and families.

The Promise is built on five key foundations:

- **Voice:** Children and young people must be listened to and involved in decisions about their care.
- **Family:** Where safe and loved, children should stay with their families and be supported to overcome difficulties.
- **Care:** If children cannot remain with their families, they should stay with their brothers and sisters where possible and belong to a loving, stable home for as long as they need to.
- **People:** The workforce must be supported to build trusting, compassionate relationships and to listen to those they support.
- **Scaffolding:** The broader system-laws, policies, and services-must provide the necessary support for these aims.

Plan 24-30 is the national Plan we are currently following in implementation of the Promise in West Dunbartonshire. Plan 24-30 is organised under the five foundations, and builds on the progress made under Plan 21-24. You can read more about Plan 24-30 here: [Welcome to Plan 24-30, Scotland's route map to keeping the promise by 2030](#)

This progress report is structured around these themes.



West Dunbartonshire  
Health & Social Care Partnership  
*Improving Lives with the People of West Dunbartonshire*



West  
Dunbartonshire  
COUNCIL

NHS  
Greater Glasgow  
and Clyde



## Keeping The Promise in West Dunbartonshire



## **The West Dunbartonshire Context**

### **Local Data around care experience and family support**

The Promise highlights the need to “do data differently” and ensure that we are measuring what matters to children, young people and families. At present we collect a wide range of data across children’s services, but often it is not joined up, does not actually tell us much about children’s experiences and meets the needs of the system as opposed to the needs and rights of children and families.

We are working hard to review the current data gathered across Children’s Services, which is largely quantitative and often required to report to the Scottish Government. This data will continue to be required but attempts to join up data sets will lead to greater understanding. We are working with the Children and Young People’s Centre for Justice (CYCJ) to consider opportunities where we can gather more qualitative data around children’s experiences to lead to a more nuanced and sophisticated understanding of their experiences and how we can improve services. As part of their mapping process CYCJ recognised it was important to understand what has already been said by children, young people and their families in West Dunbartonshire where they had discussed what challenges they were facing and how they thought things could be better. They looked at surveys on what more than 1,700 children and young people and more than 1,000 families had to say and produced a report to support learning and analysis. There are examples of what was shared within each of the sections under the foundations.

### **What does it mean to be a “looked after” child?**

To be a looked after child in Scotland means that a child is in the care of the local authority, which assumes certain legal responsibilities.

This can happen for a number of different reasons, including experiencing abuse and neglect, being an unaccompanied asylum-seeking child, having a disability that requires special care or being involved in the youth justice system.

A child in Scotland can be looked after in two main ways:

- **Looked after at home:** The child stays at home with their parent(s) or usual carers and has a Compulsory Supervision Order made by the Children’s Hearing System, meaning support and monitoring from social work to address difficulties and safeguard the child.
- **Looked after away from home:** The child is cared for outside their family home. This could be with family members or family friends (kinship care), foster carers, residential care, secure units or perspective adopters. The legal basis for this can be a Section 25 arrangement (an arrangement made between the parent and a local authority for the child to be cared for away from the family home), or an Order made by a Children’s Hearing or a Sheriff.

### **What age do you stop being a looked after child?**

A child or young person is generally considered looked after up to 18, however this can end early if they return home, are adopted or the legal order ends.

Aftercare support is provided to young people who were looked after on or after their 16<sup>th</sup> birthday and continue until they are 26. Young people are also entitled to Continuing Care, which means they can remain where they are living until they are 21.

The time a child spends as a “looked after” child can vary greatly depending on their circumstances. Being a “looked after” child is a legal term and is only applied whilst the child is living in one of the circumstances described above.

## **What is Care Experience?**

Care Experience is a term used to describe anyone who is or was, at any stage between birth and 18:

- Looked after at home
- Looked after away from home (kinship care, foster care, residential care, secure care, with prospective adopters)

The term care experienced is used to recognise the broad and varied experiences of people who have been in care. It acknowledges the long-lasting impact of care, and that this can stay with you throughout your life. Care Experience is currently not a legal term, however, has been widely adopted by the care community. The issue was consulted on in 2024 by the Scottish Government and a legal definition of Care Experience is likely to feature within the upcoming Children (Care, Care Experience and Services Planning) (Scotland) Bill in 2025.

## **What is a Corporate Parent?**

Corporate parenting in Scotland is a statutory duty for public bodies and certain organisations to act collectively and proactively in supporting, protecting, and advocating for the wellbeing and rights of looked after children, care experienced young people, and care leavers, aiming to give them the best possible start in life.

Elected members, as corporate parents, are expected to champion the needs and rights of looked after children and care leavers, hold the council and its partners to account, and ensure that every decision and policy reflects a commitment to giving these young people the same opportunities, care, and support as any good parent would provide



The Promise Progress Framework was launched in December 2024, and is a national tool developed by The Promise Scotland, the Scottish Government and COSLA to track and understand Scotland's progress around keeping the Promise. The framework brings together nearly 50 streams of existing national data, with 10 vision statements, linked to outcomes and indicators which will show measurable changes over time. We are working to incorporate the Promise Progress Framework in our Nurtured DIG planning and reporting structures. You can find out more about the Promise Progress Framework here [The Promise Progress Framework : Plan 24-30](#)

Nationally, the number of children who are looked after has been reducing since 2020 and is the lowest the figure has been since 2005/06. In West Dunbartonshire our number of looked after children has been increasing. This is a key driver to the What Would it Take? 5 Year Re-design of Children and Families Services, which aims to safely shift the balance of care, so we are able to support many more children and young people to remain at home with their families, or where this is not possible to live within local family-based care.

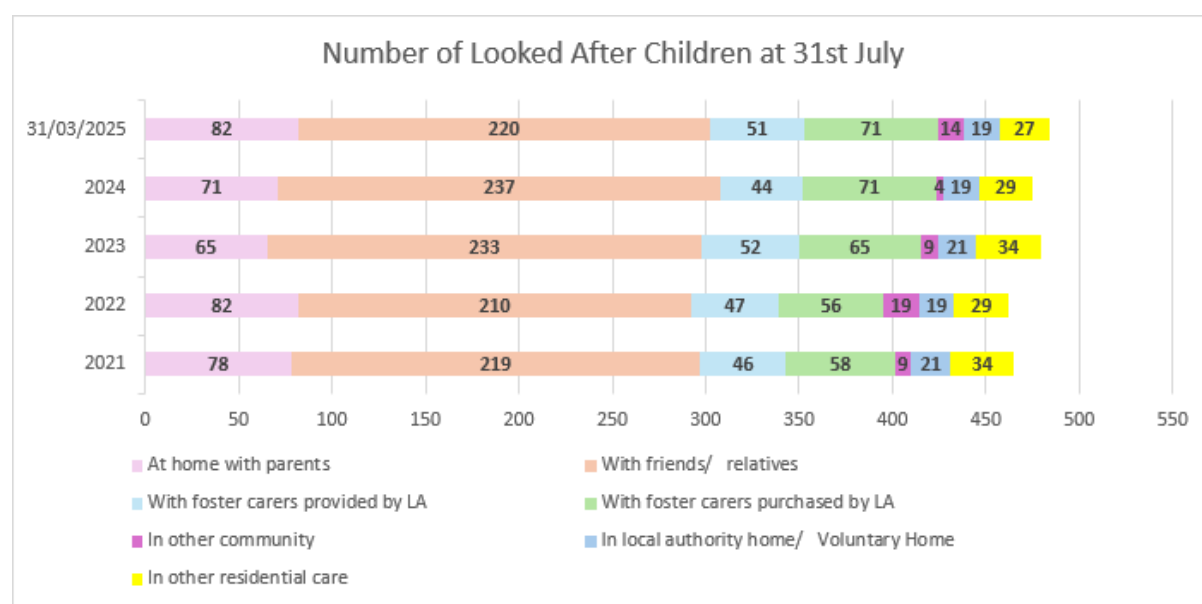


Table 1

One of the key outcomes the Promise is working towards is around the rate of children entering care decreasing. For those that do need to enter care, a higher proportion are able to stay living at home with parents, or in a family setting.

We are seeing our number of children looked after relatively stable over the past 3 years and mirroring the Scottish average figures.

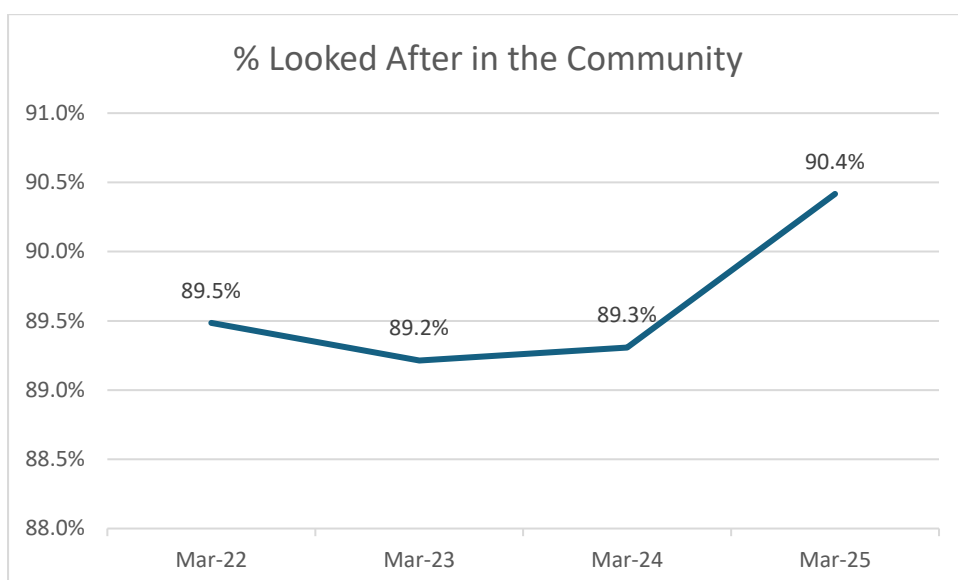


Table 2

We have one of the highest percentages of our looked after children living in kinship care in Scotland. In 2023 49% of our looked after children were in kinship care, whilst the national average was 34%.

Child poverty is considered a contextual factor within the Promise, providing context to the improvement work. Addressing child poverty is a crucial aspect of family support, with it widely acknowledged that whilst child poverty levels remain so high it is increasingly difficult for the Promise to be kept. In 2023 West Dunbartonshire's child poverty levels were above both the Glasgow City Region (average) and the Scottish and UK averages.

### Children in low-income families: Local Area Statistics 2017- 2023 (%)

| Local Authority                      | (%)<br>FYE 2017 | (%)<br>FYE 2018 | (%)<br>FYE<br>2019 | (%)<br>FYE<br>2020 | (%)<br>FYE<br>2021 | (%)<br>FYE<br>2022 | (%)<br>FYE<br>2023 |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| East Dunbartonshire                  | 9.6%            | 9.7%            | 9.2%               | 10.3%              | 8.2%               | 11.1%              | 11.5%              |
| East Renfrewshire                    | 9.0%            | 9.7%            | 9.7%               | 10.4%              | 9.0%               | 10.7%              | 10.3%              |
| Glasgow City                         | 24.4%           | 28.5%           | 28.8%              | 29.6%              | 25.0%              | 32.1%              | 33.5%              |
| Inverclyde                           | 15.7%           | 16.9%           | 17.4%              | 17.6%              | 13.7%              | 21.4%              | 23.1%              |
| North Lanarkshire                    | 19.2%           | 21.2%           | 21.0%              | 22.3%              | 18.9%              | 24.1%              | 24.1%              |
| South Lanarkshire                    | 15.7%           | 17.3%           | 16.8%              | 17.7%              | 15.0%              | 19.4%              | 19.9%              |
| <b>West Dunbartonshire</b>           | <b>18.9%</b>    | <b>22.1%</b>    | <b>22.0%</b>       | <b>22.9%</b>       | <b>18.9%</b>       | <b>25.6%</b>       | <b>25.6%</b>       |
| <b>Glasgow City Region (average)</b> | <b>17.2%</b>    | <b>19.3%</b>    | <b>19.3%</b>       | <b>20.1%</b>       | <b>16.8%</b>       | <b>22.2%</b>       | <b>22.8%</b>       |
| <b>Scotland (Average)</b>            | <b>15.5%</b>    | <b>17.0%</b>    | <b>16.8%</b>       | <b>17.8%</b>       | <b>15.1%</b>       | <b>19.7%</b>       | <b>20.2%</b>       |
| <b>United Kingdom</b>                | <b>16.9%</b>    | <b>18.0%</b>    | <b>18.2%</b>       | <b>19.3%</b>       | <b>18.7%</b>       | <b>20.1%</b>       | <b>20.1%</b>       |

Table 3

### Funding in West Dunbartonshire related to The Promise

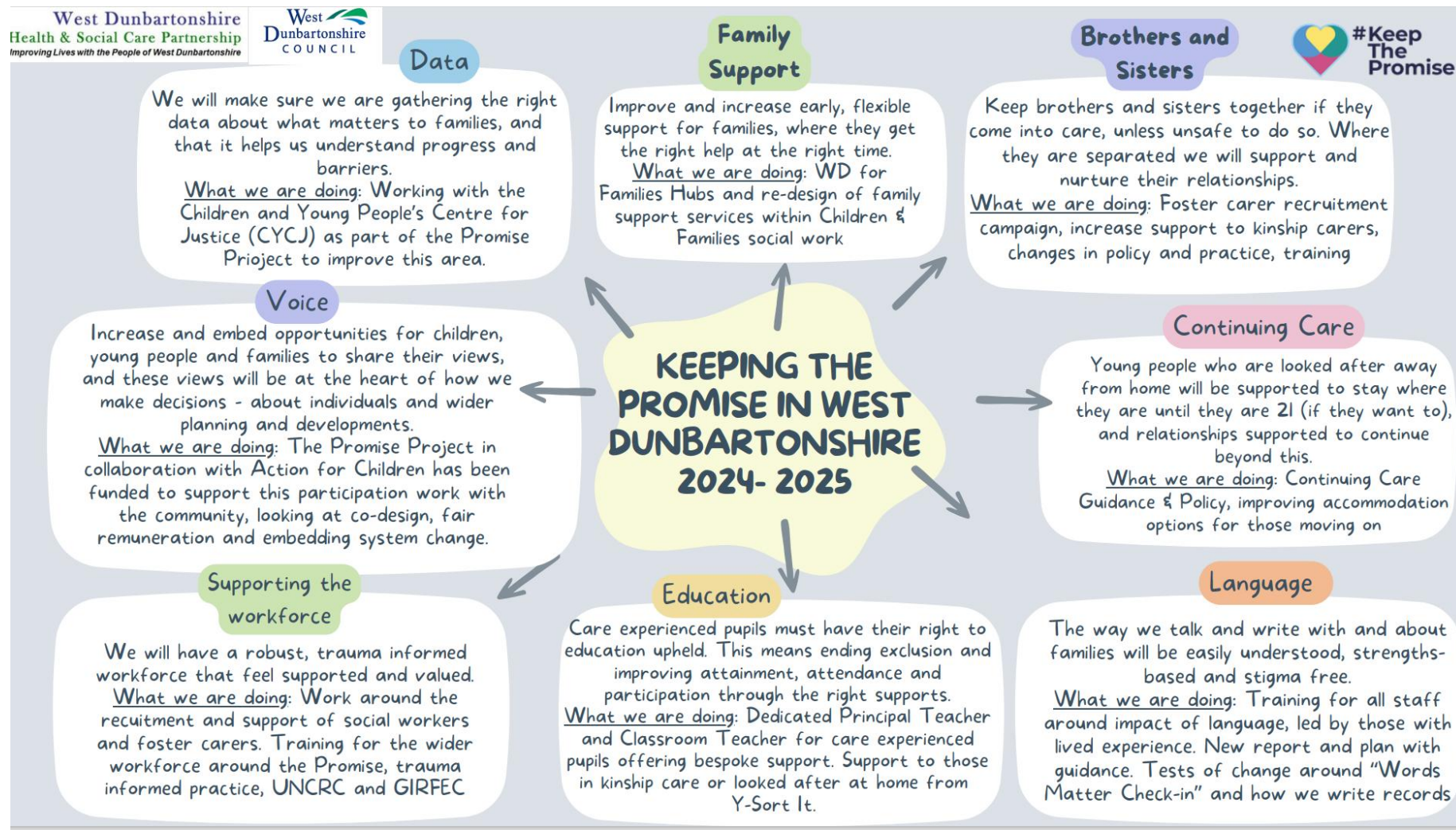
Funding that we receive in West Dunbartonshire related to the delivery of the Promise is Whole Family Wellbeing Funding, which every local authority receives, relative to their index of multiple deprivation. In West Dunbartonshire we receive funding from the Scottish Government to deliver family support, testing out new preventative, early intervention and intensive intervention approaches to develop practice to support families more effectively. The Scottish Government committed to £500 million between 2022 and 2026 nationally to support this transformational change.

The Health and Social Care Partnership applied to the Corra Foundation for Promise Partnership funding in 2023 and were successful in obtaining £160,000. This was to create an 18 month project around how we embed children, young people and families voices within planning and designing of services. An element of this project was also to look at the data that we gather, and making sure we are measuring what matters to children and families, as well as using our data to drive improvements. This project will end in March 2026.

The Lead Officer for the Promise was recruited in 2022, with funding initially for 1 year by Corra's Promise Partnership fund in 2022, with match funding from West Dunbartonshire for 1 further year. In 2024 this post was made permanent and comes from the HSCP budget.

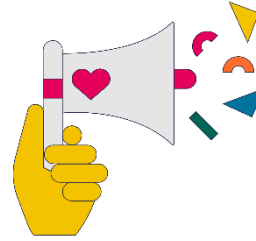
### Governance

Reporting around the Promise currently sits with the Nurtured Delivery Improvement Group (DIG), with the Keeping the Promise Group sitting as a sub-group, reporting to the Nurtured DIG.









# **Voice**

“Children must be listened to. That means they should be meaningfully and appropriately involved when decisions are made about their care.

And it means everyone involved in their care should listen properly to them and respond to what they want and need.

Scotland's culture of decision-making must be compassionate and caring. It must be focused on children, and those they trust.” The Promise

What children, young people and families have told us:

*Trust matters: Children and families said they feel safer and better supported when they trust the adults helping them.*

*Kind and caring workers help most: Young people and families liked having the same key worker who listened and didn't judge them.*

*Being listened to feels good: Families appreciated when professionals really listened and showed they cared.*

## **Voices of the Promise**

In 2024 West Dunbartonshire was successful in a bid and awarded £160,000 of Corra Promise Partnership Funding to create a participation project for children, young people and families around the Promise, as well as creating a data project to ensure we are gathering and measuring the data that is important to children, young people and families. We have commissioned these projects to Action for Children and the Children and Young People's Centre for Justice (CYCJ) respectively. The Voices of the Promise project is the result of this funding and has already achieved lots in their first 9 months.

A Family Fun Day was held as their launch event in October 2024 as part of Care Experience Week. This was held in one of the WD for Families Hubs and had stalls and activities from a wide variety of West Dunbartonshire services, as well as fun activities for children, young people and families. The event attracted over 100 people and received lots of positive feedback, whilst raising awareness about care experience and family supports available in West Dunbartonshire.

Voices of the Promise consists of the Participation Co-Ordinator, and a Participation Worker. They have been working alongside young people in our Children's Houses to co-design Promise workshops for children and young people. These are activity based and support young people to learn more about what the Promise is, as well as helping them explore what is most important to them within this. The workshops are now complete and will be rolled out initially within youth groups in West Dunbartonshire, with wider plans to be used within schools.

They have created an Experts by Experience group, which is for adults with experience of care, family support or justice. This group will sit alongside the Keeping the Promise group and help steer the work of The Promise within West Dunbartonshire. The group are scheduled to participate in the Columba 1400 Leadership programme to support them in their work.

An issue-based group has also been created with young people around Brothers and Sisters. The ambition within the Promise is that brothers and sisters should stay together in care whenever it is safe to do so, and if not together should have their relationships supported. The young people are keen to influence change in this area and will be supported by Voices of the Promise, Champions Board and Routes staff on this mission. They want to create a Brothers and Sisters Charter, that would detail expectations and practice standards for the workforce around how they can support these relationships, that the local authority would sign-up to and commit to achieve. The group are also keen to develop a training session around the importance of brothers and sisters, and sibling like relationships, for the wider workforce.

Voices of the Promise are keen to ensure there are many ways to involve children and young people, including creative approaches. They have started working with a group of young people to create a musical around care experience, created by young people with care experience in West Dunbartonshire. There will be opportunities for involvement in many different aspects, including writing, acting, set design, costume design, hair and makeup, stage management and event planning. The Musical will then be performed over Care Experience week in October 2025, with performances dedicated for children, young people and their families, as well as a performance for senior leaders, elected members and decision makers, featuring a participatory session afterwards to explore the themes of the show and young people's messages and requests for decision makers.

### **Champions Board**

A Champions Board is traditionally a group or forum of children and young people with care experience who come together to influence change and engage with their Corporate Parents, who include local authority leaders, elected members, and service representatives across the Council.

We have recently commissioned Who Cares? Scotland to provide a full-time Participation Worker who will lead on the development of a Champions Board. This role will involve engaging care experienced children and young people, finding out what is important to them, and how they would like this group to look and function. It is essential to also develop a robust feedback loop, so the information shared, and asks of the group are shared with relevant people within the local authority, be that elected members or senior leaders. This will ensure that their experiences and priorities can be heard and reflected in decision making. This Leadership Group around Corporate Parenting is in the process of being set up.

## **Advocacy**

Independent Advocacy is an important way we make sure children and young people's views are shared and heard within care planning and decision making. We have seen a significant increase and development of independent advocacy provided by Who Cares Scotland? and Partners in Advocacy over the past year for our care experienced children and young people.

There was a 70% increase in referrals to advocacy provided by Who Cares Scotland between January – March 2023 and April – September 2023, and a 122% increase in Advocacy tasks undertaken during this period. At the end of 2024 we doubled our Advocacy provision with Who Cares? Scotland to reflect the need for this service and support the right to Advocacy for children and young people.

Feedback from Who Cares? Scotland about what has supported this increase in advocacy uptake was positive around the introduction of our Independent Reviewing Co-Ordinators (IROs), who now consider advocacy at every review meeting, and make referrals on to Who Cares? Scotland themselves when appropriate. It was also noted that there has been a felt shift in relation to understanding and support of Advocacy within the workforce, and a recognition of the importance of ensuring children and young people's voices are heard.

## **Language**

The Promise calls for a shift in the language that is used around the care system, recognising our use of language historically has often been cold and stigmatising. Locally and nationally care experienced people have reflected that terms like "LAAC" feel like they are "lacking" something, and "contact" with their family diminishes the significance of this time. Language was identified as a key area for focus through the development work of the Keeping the Promise group, as well as through discussions with children, young people and families. In West Dunbartonshire we have a responsibility to acknowledge, address and embed the changes required in the way we talk, write and think about infants, children, young people and their families and their lives.

Action for Children delivered training around language, which had been co- designed by young people with care experience. It aims to support people to understand the true impact of language used for infants, children, young people and their families. We will be asking staff to commit to thinking about the impact of the language they use and how they can make changes.

We have also had training delivered to multi-agency staff from Each and Every Child. Each and Every Child is an initiative that aims to build understanding and shift public attitudes towards Care Experience and the Care System in Scotland, particularly considering how we think and talk about care experience.

Policy and practice documents have been reviewed and new documents created through a more compassionate and respectful lens to ensure the required shift in language is embedded within practice and culture.





# **Family**

“Where children are safe in their families and feel loved, they must stay.

Families must get support together to nurture that love, and to overcome the difficulties which get in its way.” The Promise

What children, young people and families have told us locally:

*Stigma makes it hard to ask for help: Some carers felt judged, especially if they had faced things like addiction or abuse.*

*Friendly, easy-to-reach services made a big difference.*

*Getting help early is better: Families said that if they got support sooner, things might not have gotten so bad.*

*Extra support needed for some kids: Children with autism, ADHD or other support needs don't always get the help they need. Families said this needs to change.*

## **Whole Family Well-being Fund**

The Whole Family Wellbeing Fund was created by the Scottish Government in response to the call within the Promise for better family support. Whole Family Wellbeing continues to develop, with the WD for Families Hubs creating spaces for drop-in, family support, welfare advice and parenting groups amongst others. The funding is also able to support services like Functional Family Therapy and Includem, which offer more intensive support to families that need this. This also supports a programme of professional development for the workforce.

A Family Wellbeing, Participation and Involvement Lead Officer is in post to support the coordination, operational planning and developments surrounding West Dunbartonshire's aspirations to fully implement our Whole Family Wellbeing Route Map and Plan.

WD For Families Hubs fully launched in October 2023. These are staffed and operate on a 'chatty cafe' style approach, where families can drop in for help and or plan a visit to attend 1-1 or group sessions. Families can be helped by outreach workers, signposting, on site welfare support workers and specialist providers.

Evaluations show the approach is working and where we need to continue our focus. The team are developing robust evidence-based approaches and ways of measuring impact.

## **West Dunbartonshire Wellbeing website**

The Health Improvement Team within the HSCP led on a project related to Young People's Mental Health and Chaired by Principle Psychologist. This involved the creation of an online resource directory in 2023 to support children, young people, families and professionals identify available supports and resources, both locally and nationally. This was in response to consultation with the community that identified many did not know about what services were available.

Expansion and widening the reach of the West Dunbartonshire wellbeing site has continued in 2024/25. Work has been undertaken to ensure the information contained within the site remains relevant and current. A communication campaign encouraged the widest reach of the site, promoting the site as a stigma free location for universal support in West Dunbartonshire.

Between April 2024 – March 2025 the site received:

6.1K views (number of page views of a website)

19,000 events (an event is counted when a user view pages, scrolls for a certain time, engages with the resources, downloads a resource)

2.2K new users

In March 2025 the top 5 topics searched for were:

- Anxiety
- Money
- Parents and Families
- Positive Wellbeing
- Care Experience



[WDWellbeing.info](http://WDWellbeing.info) is a new website for children, young people, their families and carers, and those who work with them in West Dunbartonshire, with information to support and improve wellbeing and emotional health.



## **Poverty**

### **The Family Prosperity Network**

West Dunbartonshire is dedicated to taking a transformational approach to its work to tackle child poverty and has been working alongside the Improvement Service and other national partners to gain deeper understanding of the current landscape and ensure a robust, co-ordinated approach to tackling child poverty. The Family Prosperity Network was created in 2023 and has representatives from community planning partners, third sector organisations, employers and incorporating voices of people with direct experience, to coordinate joint efforts to address child poverty.

The Family Prosperity Network is focused on addressing economic challenges faced by families, with the following objectives;

- Alleviate immediate hardship by providing support for families in need
- Reduce the cost of living through targeted interventions
- Maximise income from benefits and employment to improve financial stability

### **Working4U support**

Working4U ensures that care-experienced individuals can access support through a multi-faceted approach, integrating employability, learning, financial assistance, and social support. The key strategies for support are:

#### **1. Multiple Access Points for Support**

- Community drop-ins, self-referrals, and partner referrals ensure young people can easily engage with services.
- Close collaboration with Through Care and Social Work facilitates direct outreach.

○

#### **2. Targeted Employability Support**

- The Thrive Youth Employability Programme supports care-experienced individuals with financial assistance for expenses such as work uniforms, travel, and training costs.
- Employer Recruitment Incentives help care-experienced individuals enter the workforce.
- The Foundation Apprentice Team encourages young people to register for employability support before leaving school.
- Apprenticeship opportunities are directly communicated to the Through Care Team to ensure care-experienced applicants receive the necessary support.

### 3. Education and Skills Development

- ESOL and literacy support is provided for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) in care, with most progressing to college.
- Training opportunities cover key qualifications in personal development, employability skills, health and safety, and customer service.

### 4. Financial and Social Support

- The Financial Inclusion Team works with the Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) and social work to ensure young people leaving care and kinship carers receive welfare benefits and debt advice.
- The Child Poverty Team, based in secondary schools, provides targeted financial support and assistance with grants, school meals applications, and benefit transitions.

#### Progress within Working4U in keeping the Promise What Has Worked Well?

- Enhanced Partnerships: Close collaboration with Through Care, Social Work, and Skills Development Scotland has increased referrals and improved service delivery.
- Trauma-Informed Support: Staff receive continuous professional development (CPD) to ensure services are delivered with empathy and understanding.
- Engagement with Keeping The Promise Group: Attendance at The Promise meetings has improved local knowledge and service coordination, particularly in identifying the needs of kinship carers.
- UASC Education Support: Strong links with social work and residential homes have facilitated smooth transitions for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children learners into further education.

#### Next Steps & Future Focus

##### Child Poverty & Financial Support

- Increase referrals of kinship carers and ensure earlier interventions for financial stability.
- Seek to continue with financial aid programmes, such as the Energy Hardship Grant & Cash First Fund.
- Develop the West Dunbartonshire Family Prosperity Network to address child poverty through an economic lens.

##### Employability & Mentoring for Care-Experienced Young People

- Strengthen links with criminal justice services to reach care-experienced individuals involved in the system.
- Complete mentoring training in partnership with Barnardo's and Skills Development Scotland.
- Expand direct outreach to kinship carers, ensuring they receive the same information as Through Care Teams.

### West Dunbartonshire Citizens Advice Bureau

West Dunbartonshire Citizens Advice Bureau been working with S1 pupils at St Peter the Apostle High School and exploring with them the stigma around poverty and how kindness and empathy along with community volunteering can help tackle the embarrassment people feel. The young people have developed characters (rather than tell of their own experience) and created a comic book with four stories, offering some insight into the lived experience of young people experiencing poverty.

Poverty Alliance, Citizens Advice Scotland, Scottish Poverty and Inequality Research Unit, West Dunbartonshire Council Education Department and Education Scotland have all indicated support and a willingness to work alongside this project, so the aim now is to troll out this programme firstly across S1 in St Peter The Apostle, and then to other secondary schools in West Dunbartonshire. You can find the videos here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HGwf-g96FX4> - Trouble in the family

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RmBjQy\\_fZqc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RmBjQy_fZqc) - School Photo Day

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RKD3\\_L8UHLU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RKD3_L8UHLU) - Molly's Story

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EiSctwiaSEA> - Georges's story

## **Third Sector support**

### **Y-Sort It**

Y Sort It delivers two key services in West Dunbartonshire for care-experienced children and young people: the intandem mentoring programme and the Care Connections service. Both are built on a foundation of relationship-based, trauma-informed practice, and are aligned with the vision of *The Promise* — that all care-experienced young people in Scotland will grow up loved, safe, and respected.

#### **1. Intandem Mentoring Programme**

The Intandem service provides long-term, 1:1 mentoring for children and young people aged 8–14 who are looked after at home or in kinship care. Trained volunteer mentors meet weekly with their mentees, building consistent and trusted relationships that promote confidence, emotional wellbeing, and social connection.

- Youth voice is at the heart of the programme, with young people actively involved in the InVoice group, including attendance at the Scottish Parliament's Oversight Board event.
- Mentoring relationships are built with the whole family where appropriate, strengthening trust and engagement.
- The programme offers rare long-term relational support in an otherwise time-limited system.

#### **2. Care Connections**

Care Connections offers flexible, holistic support for care-experienced young people aged 10–16, both in school and in the wider community. Each young person is matched with a dedicated Support Worker who helps them explore their interests, set personal goals, and build the skills and confidence they need to thrive.

Support is entirely tailored to each young person and includes:

- 1:1 support
- Group sessions and informal learning.
- Community activities, trips, and visits
- Life skills development (e.g. cooking, social skills)
- Support with schoolwork.

The service's core strength lies in its flexibility — Support Workers have the time and autonomy to meet young people where they're at, often supporting learning outside formal education environments in partnership with schools and families.

Strong relationships have also been developed with Collaborative Support Services in Education, enabling a more joined-up approach to meeting the needs of each young person. This collaborative working strengthens the support plan and helps ensure young people are seen and understood across settings.

#### **Shared Themes & Opportunities**

Both intandem and Care Connections:

- Prioritise relational, person-centred support that adapts to the needs and interests of young people.

- Are making a tangible difference for care-experienced children and young people — many of whom would otherwise receive minimal or no support.
- Face common challenges around capacity, referral pathways, and long-term funding, despite clear evidence of impact.

### Routes – Scottish Families Affected by Drugs and Alcohol (SFAD)

Routes supports young people aged 12-16 years old who are affected family drug and alcohol use. They currently support 91 young people across West Dunbartonshire and 76 of these young people are care experienced. A key focus is giving them positive childhood experiences, creating peer support and advocating of their behalf. Routes ensures the young person's rights and entitlements are always at the forefront of their support and work in partnership with other organisations in West Dunbartonshire to create a network of lasting support. There is no end date for their support which gives young people stability knowing they always have someone to turn to in time of crisis but equally someone to share good times and achievements in their lives.

The Routes project recently obtained Corra Promise funding to deliver a youth led project. Their young people felt strongly about care experience entitlements within Education and Higher Education, and recognised the lack of awareness amongst the workforce of care experienced entitlements was meaning young people were missing out. They have been working on a project to address this over the past months and will launch their work later this year, with resources to raise awareness of these entitlements.

Routes have also been able to provide other groups of care experienced young people with funding through this grant from Corra. This includes young people from one of the Children's Houses keen to explore open water swimming, with staff members getting training in how to support this safely. They have also been able to fund a group of young people from across care settings who are passionate about brothers and sisters within care. This group is supported by staff from Voices of the Promise, Routes and the Champions Board to look at how they want to influence practice and services to ensure more brothers and sisters stay together in care, or when separated have their relationships supported.

### Includem

Includem's edge of care service, co-produced with West Dunbartonshire HSCP, commenced on 24th July 2023. The service aims to support shifting the balance of care and contribute positively towards the West Dunbartonshire HSCP strategy for children and young people, What Would it Take? 5 Year Re-design. The primary objective of this service is to prevent children and young people's needs from escalating, reducing admissions to statutory care provision.

Includem's delivery model is focussed on intensive intervention and support to children and young people within their own communities. This involves supporting up to a maximum of 12 children and young people at any one time, aged 10 years old and over. Whole family support is available over 7 days including evenings and weekends, alongside the provision of 24-hour helpline 7 days a week.



## Shameless Youths Campaign

Shameless Youths is a collaboration between NSPCC Scotland, West Dunbartonshire Youth Council and partner agencies, and is an example of early, preventative help being led by young people. This has been a youth-led project, focussed on how to support young people have safe relationships online, “removing shame from the conversation”. The campaign launched in 2024 with an event in Clydebank Town Hall with over 80 attendees. The campaign has run for over 6 months, with young people creating a range of resources to support the workforce, parents and carers and young people, as well as creating artwork to support their messages. The art was on display in Clydebank Town Hall between April and May 2025, with April seeing a footfall of 368 people visiting the artwork.

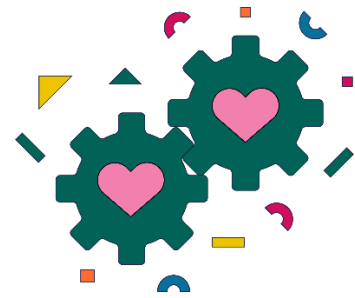
There have been a number of sessions around the campaign delivered within schools to pupils, staff and parents and carers. There has been national interest in the campaign, with inputs provided to national forums on online safety, and interest from the Department of Education in England around the unique and interesting strengths based approach of the campaign, with the possibility this would go on to impact policy in this area.

## Kinship Carers of West Dunbartonshire

Kinship Carers of West Dunbartonshire are a community group created and run by local kinship carers. They have a large base in Erskine House, Clydebank, where they hold groups for kinship carers and children and young people in kinship care. They support over 100 kinship carers from West Dunbartonshire, and provide emotional support, signposting, advice and guidance. Many kinship carers have fed back that being part of this community has made the biggest positive difference to them in their experience as a kinship carer. Members of the group have been hugely influential in supporting greater understanding of the issues faced by kinship families, and how services could better meet their needs, influencing services like social work, education and welfare rights. The Chair of the group was involved in the Independent Care Review and development of the Promise, continuing to be involved in national work and consultation alongside the Scottish Government through her role with Kinship Carers of West Dunbartonshire and the national group, The Kinship Care Alliance.

The kinship carers who operate the group are all volunteers and rely on financial support from the local authority and fundraising efforts. In 2024 the group were able to fundraise to take kinship families on a holiday abroad, realising a long held ambition of “weans on a plane”. They also have a caravan in Wemyss Bay which can be used for free by kinship families, providing short breaks and joy to children, young people and carers alike.





# Care

“Sometimes, it's not possible for children to live with their family.

But they must still be able to live with their brothers and sisters, as long as it's safe.

And they must belong to a loving home, staying there for as long as they need to.”  
The Promise

*What children, young people and families locally told us:*

*Staying close to siblings matters: Lots of children in care are split from their brothers and sisters. Children want more chances to stay in touch and spend time together.*

*Plans need to be clearer: Many children don't have a proper plan for seeing their siblings. This makes it harder to keep in touch.*

*Children need to understand why: Some children don't know why they are separated from their siblings. Adults need to explain things better.*

## **What would it take? 5 Year Re-design of Children and Families social work**

The Promise is firmly embedded within the 5-year redesign of Children and Families social work services. This involves ensuring that children, young people and families voices are sought, heard and inform the development of services. The principles of the redesign are aligned with the Promise, which is about safely shifting the balance of care, and ensuring that families have all the early help and support they need. For those children and young people who can't live safely at home their experience must be as positive, supportive and loving as possible.



Below is a summary of the projects that are part of the What Would It Take? Strategy.

- **Child Protection and Safeguarding**

Access Help and Support Team was launched on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2025 and provides one team for all new referrals to Children and Families social work, replacing the previous “duty” model. This model provides more consistency to children, young people and families, as well as to the workforce who may be referring families into the service. One social worker oversees the support and work, passing the family on to one of the longer-term teams after an initial assessment, if required.

- **Permanence and Care Excellence**

The Permanence Team was established in 2024 and aims to improve the permanence process for children and young people. Four Social Worker posts were configured using existing resource in locality teams to provide a dedicated team of qualified staff in this area of work. This team is dedicated to working with children and young people where the decision has been made that they cannot return home, and so permanence is being sought to secure their long-term care. This should decrease drift and delay and increase stability and belonging for children and young people. Alongside the establishment of the Permanence team there is also work ongoing around our Permanence processes and understanding our data, with support from CELSIS and utilising the PACE approach.

- **Foster Care Recruitment and Kinship Support** There is a working group around Kinship Care and ensuring that the support we offer to kinship carers and children and young people in kinship care meets their needs. This has involved the creation of Kinship Assessment procedures and guidance, as well as an Independent Kinship Panel, ensuring a consistent and robust approach is taken across West Dunbartonshire to supporting kinship families. There is also exploration taking place around a Single Point of Contact for Kinship Carers, with dedicated staff to support kinship carers, creating consistency and specialism around this area.
- In addition, this workstream has focused on local Foster **Care Recruitment** with the implementation of a local recruitment campaign to attract more West Dunbartonshire residents to fostering. There has been a national crisis around the recruitment and retention of foster carers both across Scotland and in West Dunbartonshire. Our foster carer population is aging, and a number of foster carers projected to retire in coming years. Having a robust group of foster carers in West Dunbartonshire allows children and young people to be placed closer to home, more likely to remain connected to supports like schools. It is also more financially viable than reliance on external foster care providers. The Scottish Government has also led on a national campaign over Fostering Fortnight in May 2025 to help raise the profile of foster care as a role, expel some myths around fostering and emphasise the positives that can come from foster care. A post has also been created within the Family Placement Team which will support the recruitment and training of foster carers. This is expected to be recruited to later in 2025.
- **Family Support Services** There is a workstream focussed on the re-design of the **Children and Families Social Work Family Support Service**. This has been a long-established service and is made up of Alternatives to Care (ATC), Family Group Decision Making (FGDM), and Family Support workers. Each team delivers early intervention and preventative services, aiming to support families and allow children and young people to remain at home where safe to do so. The redesign will use the Promise 10 Principles of Family Support as their foundation, including that they are non-stigmatising, responsive, timely and work with family assets. The project will be steered by feedback from staff, as well as the views and experiences of children, young people, parents and carers who have used the service.

- The **Supported Accommodation for Care Leavers** workstream is developing housing and support options for those moving on from care, looking at the repurposing of a building previously used as a care leavers supported accommodation. Learning from best practice nationally, and what local young people need and want from a service is currently steering how this project develops. The goal is to have a menu of options for young people moving on from care, considering the varying needs and preferences of young people to ensure they are supported into adulthood. Supporting young people to move on from care is a significant area raised within the Promise. The Promise recommends that there should be no “cliff edge” of support, as young people transition into adult services, and that transitions should be planned, phased and based on individual needs. All care experienced young people must have access to secure, appropriate housing as they transition into adulthood.

You can find more information on the What Would It Take? Strategy here:

<http://www.wdhscp.org.uk/projects/what-would-it-take-programme-2024-2029/>

### **Introduction of Independent Reviewing Co-Ordinators**

Recruitment took place in early 2023 of four Independent Reviewing Coordinators to undertake reviews of plans for all looked after and accommodated children. These posts will ensure that all children and young people who are looked after away from home will be regularly reviewed in line with regulatory frameworks and good practice guidance.

In addition, the quality assurance function is key to ensuring the ‘birds eye view of practice’ is fully understood and quarterly reports on a set of Key Performance for children and young people is being developed and shared with the wider children’s management team. This includes consideration of retention of sibling connections as part of new reportable data to Scottish Government as well as ensuring that children and young people’s views are captured and are central to planning processes.

### **Brothers and Sisters**

The Brothers and Sisters group began in March 2023 by gathering our local data to establish a baseline for how we are doing in keeping brothers and sisters together when they come into care, alongside efforts to establish how decisions are made, and how we are supporting on-going relationships when brothers and sisters are separated. A Brothers and Sisters plan was created with the findings of this data.

A repeat gathering of this data was carried out in April 2024 to consider our progress in this area. Learning from this work has been shared locally and nationally, with the Lead Officer for the Promise presenting the findings at the national Community of Practice for Siblings in January 2024, and the Promise Conference in February 2024. Following this there were a number of other local authorities who were interested in replicating the work within their own area, which the Promise Lead Officer supported with. We are currently progressing through our Brothers and Sister’s Plan, which has been informed by both the qualitative and quantitative data gathered. The addition of the Brothers and Sisters group created by young people

will greatly enhance this work, with work underway to develop a Brothers and Sisters Charter and training for the workforce.

We continue to engage in the national agenda around brothers and sisters, following the work over the last two years around how we gather data on brothers and sisters and how we improve our practice and culture in this area. This year West Dunbartonshire is part of a small group of local authorities, alongside The Promise Scotland, CELSIS, The Care Inspectorate, Scottish Government to further develop how data is gathered around brothers and sisters, and how we can tell that story to the wider community and influence change.

### **West Dunbartonshire's Children's Houses**

West Dunbartonshire has three Children's Houses: Blairvadach, Burnside and Craigellachie, with a maximum of 6 young people staying in each house.

The staff within the Children's Houses have been trained in Dyadic, Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP), which is a trauma informed, attachment base approach. DDP allows staff to approach situations in a manner that allows for the best resolution for the young people being able to explore their views and wellbeing using the PACE model: Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy. This approach supports staff to use a trauma informed approach when engaging young people who have experienced developmental trauma in their lives. The team are also trained in Promoting Positive Behaviour (PPB), a strengths-based approach with a focus on de-escalating situations before reaching crisis. There has been a decrease in the need for safe holds and restraints to be used with children and young people. The teams will use every other tool available to them, primarily the relationships they have with young people, to de-escalate situations to avoid using restraints.

In Craigellachie the young people have recently been able to develop their space based on what they need and want in their home. This has included creating a meditation/chill out room within the house, as well as converting an outhouse into a gym. This was achieved by accessing a portion of the youth-led funding Routes had been awarded.

In Blairvadach there have been a number of projects that staff have adopted based on young people's needs and interests. An example of this was the creation of their pizza oven, which was built from scratch by staff and young people and continues to provide a point of celebration and connection, with annual pizza parties held in the summer. Blairvadach also benefited from the Routes Youth-led funding and were able to have two staff members trained in cold water swimming, due to interest from young people in this area. This will involve the staff working with young people from across the three houses, finding safe places to swim. Young people from Blairvadach have been working closely with Voices of the Promise, and have co-designed the What is The Promise? Programme.

In Burnside the young people have been doing workshops with The Voices of the Promise Participation Workers around the 5 foundations of The Promise and what this means to them. The young people have worked hard on a Promise wall which is the focal point of the house and serves as a reminder of what the Promise means to

the young people in Burnside House. Burnside are developing a nurture / games area in the house, led by the young people as a project allowing them to develop this space as their own.

Within all the houses there is a strong ethos of maintaining positive relationships with families, and wherever possible working together towards the young person returning home. The staff are able to provide support to parents at home, providing scaffolding for as long as this is needed. The staff are also good at maintaining relationships with young people and their families long after they have moved on from the house, with an open-door policy of people being able to drop in to see staff and the house, as well as organised events throughout the year.

### **Continuing Care**

Continuing Care is a legal entitlement that allows eligible young people who have been "looked after" (in foster care, kinship care, or residential care) to remain in their care placement and continue receiving the same accommodation and support after they cease to be formally looked after, up until their 21st birthday. It is designed to ensure that young people leaving care in Scotland do so at a pace and in a way that best supports their wellbeing, independence, and long-term outcomes.

West Dunbartonshire created Continuing Care Guidance in 2024 to ensure that staff have a clear and consistent understanding of the legislation around this and the processes that need to ensure the assessment and provision of Continuing Care support to young people.

As of April 2025, there are 38 young people in Continuing Care within West Dunbartonshire.

### **Children's Hearings**

Children's Hearings is Scotland's unique care and justice system for children and young people. Its primary aim is to protect the safety and wellbeing of infants, children, and young people who may be at risk, need care and protection, or have come into conflict with the law.

The Promise called for reform to the Children's Hearing System, whose function has shifted since its creation in 1971, now having a much greater focus and demand for infants, children and young people in need of care and protection. The Hearings Redesign Working Group was set up, chaired by Sheriff Mackie. The Hearings for Children report contained 97 recommendations on how Scotland's Children's Hearings System can be redesigned in a transformative way. It is expected that recommendations adopted by the Scottish Government will be included in the Children (Care, Care Experience and Services Planning) (Scotland) Bill.

West Dunbartonshire has a Children's Hearings Improvement Partnership (CHIP) which has multi-agency representation and looks at how to improve the experience of Children's Hearings for children and families.

One of the improvements the group has introduced has been a checklist to be completed by social workers prior to submitting their report to the Scottish Children's Reporters Administration (SCRA). The checklist contains a number of prompts to support a child's attendance at a hearing and ensure their rights are upheld. For

example, ensuring the social worker has sent a sibling report, explained and offered Advocacy for the child, as well as preparing the child for a Hearing. This includes ensuring they have explained the reason for the Children's Hearing, the recommendations and potential outcomes as well as identifying any special arrangements required.

As part of Children's Hearings Scotland's ongoing aim to make children's hearings more welcoming and child-friendly, the Chair of the hearing will soon be greeting the child in the waiting room to introduce themselves, explain what's going to happen and bring the child, their family and professionals into the hearing room.

This was one of the recommendations in the Hearings for Children Redesign Report. It is hoped this will allow the child and Chair to connect before the hearing in a more relaxed setting and to reinforce that this hearing is about the child and that they are the focus. It will also prevent children walking into the hearing room with three seated strangers waiting for them, which they've fed back can make them nervous and anxious.



# People

“The children Scotland cares for must be supported to develop relationships: with people in the workforce, and those in the wider community.

And these people must also be supported: to listen, and to be compassionate in their care and decision-making.” The Promise

*What children, young people and families locally told us:*

*Having the same worker helps: Families liked having one worker who knew their story and could give the right help. Changing workers too often made things confusing.*

*Trust grows with honesty: Families trusted workers who were honest, kind, and worked with them, not against them.*

*Judgement hurts: Families who faced tough times in the past didn't like feeling judged.*

## Workforce support

There has been a significant national crisis in relation to the recruitment and retention of Children and Families social work staff, and this has been felt over the past number of years within West Dunbartonshire.

In addition to core training, our workforce continues to have access to a wide range of learning and development opportunities. In relation to the Promise, there has been specific training opportunities for the workforce in relation to Language, Brothers and Sisters, Infant Mental Health and Voice as well as Trauma Informed Practice.

Opportunities for obtaining formal social work qualifications has been made available within the HSCP. Between 2023-2024 5 employees entered formal academic study to obtain a Social Work degree and there is scope to widen this access for a career pathway, in partnership with the Open University.

Staff supervision has been a key priority for social work and social care staff over the last year. Self- evaluation of staff experience and recording has taken place across Children and Justice services to inform the most recent training and learning for staff in relation to effective supervision for staff.

The Newly Qualified Social Worker (NQSW) Supported Year is a structured, mandatory programme introduced across Scotland from October 2024. It is designed to support social workers in their first year of practice, ensuring a consistent, high-quality experience as they transition from education to professional practice. This has been introduced to support new social workers in the transition from education to



practice, allowing extra time for learning, development and support. It aims to reduce early career burn out and increase retention of social workers.

West Dunbartonshire HSCP is commitment to the NQSW Supported Year. This includes individual and group support as well as a caseload that is built up incrementally over several months. As part of our offer and will ensure that all social workers within their first year will be able to spend a minimum of six weeks with a range of social work teams to ensure there is experience and understanding of the diversity of social work functions across the HSCP.

A Practitioner Forum has also been created for Children and Families social workers, as a space for reflective discussion, learning and peer support. Unison has also created a Practitioner Forum open to social workers from all services.

### **Signs of Safety**

Signs of Safety is a strength based, solution focussed framework for supporting children and families in social work. It shares values with the Promise around collaboration and partnership, listening to children and families and building transparent and respectful relationships.

West Dunbartonshire is in the process of implementing Signs of Safety within Children's Services. This begins with an initial 6-month period of preparation for implementation, including reviewing paperwork and existing processes. The workforce will then receive training and support to embed Signs of Safety into practice.

### **Trauma Informed Practice**

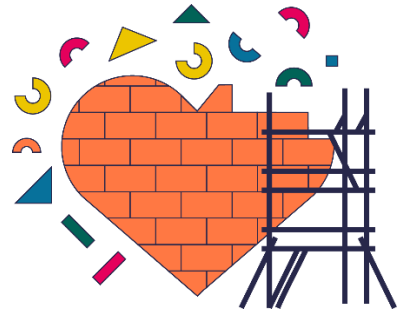
Trauma Informed Practice is a fundamental tenant of how the Promise is implemented. The Promise recognises that for many children, young people and families who interact with the care system have experienced significant trauma, and that at times their experience of care can inflict additional trauma.

West Dunbartonshire is committed to the National Trauma Training Programme (NTTP) and appointed the Programme Lead for Trauma Informed Practice, in 2023. There is training available for the workforce at all levels across the Council, with e-learning modules to be available later this year.

There is a Trauma Informed Steering group which supports the work around implementation of Trauma Informed Practice, which also has a Staff Wellbeing sub-group, and a Systems, Policies and Processes sub-being created.

For services that are interested, The Programme Lead can run bespoke Trauma-Informed sessions that are tailored to what each team needs. This includes working with managers to get examples of a typical referral and discussing this through a Trauma-Lens.

For managers, there is an upcoming Scottish Trauma Informed Leaders Training (STILT) in September 2025. This is a great opportunity to learn how to make changes to our systems, policies and processes through a Trauma-Informed lens. A STILT session was previously held in West Dunbartonshire in 2023 and was widely attended by managers from across Children's Services and Justice.



## **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.” The Promise

What children, young people and families locally told us:

*Too much pressure on the system: Some services are too busy to help properly. This made it harder for families to get what they needed.*

*One size doesn't fit all: Families wanted to choose what kind of support worked best—like talking in person, on the phone, or online.*

*Mental health support takes too long: Children often had to wait too long to get help for their mental health. They wanted faster support and more chances to talk early.*

*Training for workers helps: Professionals need training to understand trauma and how to support best children in a kind way. They also need help with big workloads and staff changes.*

### **Keeping the Promise Group**

We have a strong, multi-agency Keeping the Promise group, which was formed in 2022 and has over 60 people on our invite list, and around 30 who attend regularly. These are Promise Keepers, who take the information back to their service or organisation and are able to share their experiences of how the Promise is being embedded. Within the Governance structure this group sits below the Nurtured DIG as one of the sub-groups.

### **Education**

Within Education we now have two members of staff who are dedicated to care experienced pupils: Care Experienced Principal Teacher, and the Care Experienced Classroom Teacher. They can provide bespoke support to care experienced pupils, as well as providing wider support to education staff around care experience, including rolling out the Promise Award within Education.

### Support for Care Experienced Children & Young People at school

- Schools bid for support for Care Experienced Children and Young People up to 3 times per year.
- Panel work in collaboration to allocate support between Collaborative Support Service & Care Connections (Y-Sort It)
- Care Connections providing support for pupils Looked After at home (Compulsory Supervision Order) and in formal Kinship Care.
- Collaborative Support Service supporting pupils who are currently experiencing or who have previously experienced care.
- Consistent and robust Care Experience data processes being established to target gaps in attendance and attainment.
- Collaborative Support Service Acting Principal Teacher Aislinn McQuade & Class Teacher Johann Herd- supporting 28 pupils across 15 schools.
- Care Connections, Y Sort It- 13 pupils from 10 schools.
- Planned targeted support for pupils focusing on SMART targets on Education Support Plans.
- Bespoke learning experiences within school (Collaborative Support Service) & out-with school (Care Connections) ensuring inclusion for all.
- Linking some pupils with intandem and Young Carers service if appropriate.
- Pupil progress tracked and monitored, ongoing collaboration between services and schools to provide holistic support to Care Experienced Children and Young People and families.
- Established partnership with agencies- Y Sort It, Action for Children, WDC Senior Phase Team, WDC Promise Lead.
- Direct and ongoing contact with secondary schools to promote pupil engagement with Y Sort it services and Collaborative Support Service bid system.

### Keeping the Promise Award Rollout 2024-2027

The Promise Award remains a key priority on the Education Delivery Plan with schools being encouraged and supported to have a Care Experience lens. This Professional Learning Programme was devised for schools to develop a consistent approach to enhancing knowledge, understanding of practical support for Care Experienced Children and Young People.

To date:

- 7 Early Learning Child Care leads have achieved 'I Promise' Award
- 1 Early Learning Child Care Settings have achieved 'We Promise' Award - 70% of setting have undertaken learning.
- 3 Primary Practitioners have achieved 'I Promise' Award
- 3 Secondary Practitioners have achieved the 'I Promise' Award
- 1 Secondary School have achieved 'We Promise' Award - 70% of setting have undertaken learning.
- Care Experience Principle Teacher will continue to liaise with National Keeping the Promise Network working Group regarding the development of this element of the award and evidencing the work to support Care Experienced Children and Young People.

## **The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)**

The UNCRC sets out the fundamental rights of all children and fundamentally underpins the Promise. The UNCRC is the most widely ratified human rights treaty in the world and sets out the specific rights that all children have to help fulfil their potential, including rights relating to health and education, leisure and play, fair and equal treatment, protection from exploitation and the right to be heard. The UNCRC was incorporated into Scot's law in 2024 and brings significant new legal duties and accountability for public bodies in Scotland.

As part of the Whole Family Wellbeing Funding there has been a Whole Family Wellbeing Officer appointed, with a lead role in developing a plan regarding the upholding of the United Nation Convention on Rights of the Child (UNCRC) within West Dunbartonshire. Within this plan was the delivery, coordination and evaluation of Professional Learning for all service staff within West Dunbartonshire Council. This has helped to ensure staff have increased awareness of The UNCRC and promote strategic thinking where The UNCRC has impact in service delivery. There has been awareness raising of the importance of the voice of children in decisions that impact them, and that this is a requirement by law to ensure children and young people have their voice considered in policies that will impact them.

As part of staff development and focus on ensuring implementation of the UNCRC, Reach Advocacy Scotland have delivered a series of professional learning sessions to key identified staff from all educational establishments and partner agencies. This Professional Learning has increased awareness of UNCRC knowledge, supported participants to apply UNCRC to policy and practice as well as explored monitoring and protecting rights. To date 216 Education Staff have been supported to engage with the UNCRC ILEARN Module that was created by WDC UNCRC Officer, with further learning from the UNCRC Officer being delivered directly to 18 Early Years, 31 Collaborative Support Services Team and 61 Newly Qualified Teachers. A further Council wide staff briefing was delivered to all senior managers across West Dunbartonshire Council to promote and acknowledge the rights of the child and the responsibility of all as duty bearers. To support the implementation of UNCRC across all services, a website has also been created.

## **Health**

In West Dunbartonshire we are committed to providing free Leisure Passes to care experienced children and young people. Depending on their age this provides them with access to Council gyms and swimming pools. Between April 2024- March 2025 there are 213 children and young people who have a pass (this number includes Young Carers, who are also entitled to the offer). Anyone can refer a child or young person for the pass, including self-referrals. Most commonly cited reasons for accessing the pass have been improving physical health, to support with neurodevelopmental needs and improve confidence and self-esteem.

Wee Minds Matter is the Infant Mental Health Service that covers the Greater Glasgow and Clyde health board area. They are a multi-agency team who offer support to parents and their babies from birth up until 3. They also provide consultation support and training to the workforce around infant mental health. Wee Minds Matter have provided training to multi-agency staff, and have further sessions

planned in 2025 on how the workforce can best support babies and young children. A pilot is planned with staff who are regularly working with babies and young children within social work to participate in monthly Reflective Practice sessions alongside staff from Wee Minds Matter, where they will be supported to think reflectively about a family they are working with.

Young People in Mind is the Mental Health Service for children and young people within foster care and residential care in West Dunbartonshire. The team are concentrating at present on foster parents and workers developing an understanding of what it means to be Trauma Informed. This is done using Book Groups, which has proved to be a popular method with foster parents. Trauma Informed Parenting increases the likelihood that children will enter caring and loving homes and translate to better outcomes, contributing in part to fulfilling some of the care components of The Promise. Children and young people's voices often manifest in actions and behaviours and Trauma Informed parents are learning to tune in to those needs.

### **Police**

In West Dunbartonshire the "Not at Home" protocol has been rolled out over the past year. This is in response to the disproportionate criminalisation of care experienced young people, and for those who can be reported missing to the Police, when they have in fact just not come home and carers are aware of where they are. This is driven by trying to replicate what would happen at home within a family.

The Philomena Protocol is an information gathering tool designed to assist the police find a child or young person who has been reported missing from a care setting as quickly as possible. It should be used as part of the Not at Home Protocol.

The aim of this protocol is to listen to children and young people, having their voice heard and involvement in problem solving. The responsible adult will ask the child or young person what can be done to prevent them from going missing in the future.

Feedback that the Police provided to Craigellachie Children's house highlighted there had been a reduction of children and young people having been reported as missing from Craigellachie. This shows that the ongoing training and staff involvement with the young people are working, reducing the risks involved with a child or young person going missing.

### **Foster Care and Continuing Care Framework**

There is currently work underway to develop Frameworks around how we commission Fostering Services, Continuing Care services and Residential Services as part of What would it take? 5 Year Re-design. A key aim of the Framework is that enduring attachment relationships are formed, and that children and young people have positive and stable care experiences. Overall, we are developing an Outcomes based, flexible framework which is underpinned by aims and vision of the Promise. This represents a shift in how we have previously commissioned these services, and providers who are accepted onto the Framework will deliver an Outcomes focused approach to supporting children, young people and their foster/continuing carers.

## **Data**

We currently have a data project as part of the wider Voices of the Promise project, which is a partnership with the Children and Young People's Centre for Justice (CYCJ) and Action for Children. This is to support West Dunbartonshire to develop a greater understanding of current data gathered, as well as layering this with what children, young people and families are telling us to provide a deeper, more nuanced understanding of priorities and need. CJCJ have been able to provide support around reviewing our current data, suggesting areas where we learn more about people's experiences and gather qualitative information. They have also supported the development of more child friendly ways of gathering data and feedback.

## **Challenges**

It is important to acknowledge the challenges to implementing the Promise that have been experienced in West Dunbartonshire. Through discussion with colleagues nationally, and through reports like the Promise Oversight Board reports, it is evident that these are frequent challenges and barriers that are being felt nationally.

The Promise was launched approximately 1 month before we went into lockdown as a result of the Covid 19 pandemic. This fundamentally changed practice, with many services adapting rapidly to risk and uncertainty. There have been many positives to take from how flexible and responsive services were able to be during this time, but the Promise undoubtedly lost some momentum in those first few years, with the focus for the workforce and for many families being to get through the pandemic.

The subsequent cost of living crisis has had a significant impact on the pace at which the Promise can be kept. We are seeing rising levels of child poverty, and more financial insecurity for much wider sections of the community, including the workforce. This has created increased stress and need. The impact on local authority budgets has also been challenging, with many services being reduced or cut. The Promise is transformational and aspirational, however is having to operate in a very difficult financial climate.

There is much about the system in which the Promise is trying to influence that has not yet been able to change. One aspect of this is the short-term nature of funding, with a real need for consistent, and multi-year funding to support good quality, preventative work.

As mentioned earlier in this report, the recruitment and retention difficulties around social workers have had an impact on the pace at which the Promise can be implemented locally. At points over the past 5 years Children and Families teams have been operating at 40% under full complement, meaning that workers are experiencing high levels of demand and often stress.

## **Opportunities**

In June 2025 the Promise Bill, now formally recognised as the Children (Care, Care Experience and Services Planning) (Scotland) Bill was laid before Parliament. Some of the fundamentals of this Bill are around simplifying the legislative landscape, clarifying rights and duties, ensuring compliance with the UNCRC legislation and having a coherent vision for care. In its current form, some of what the Bill considers is the redesign of children's hearings, expanding entitlement to Aftercare, ensuring life-long access to Advocacy for care experienced children, young people and adults, creating powers to limit the profit that can be made from children's residential care and requiring fostering services to register as charities. The Bill will now be scrutinised by Ministers before moving on to the next legislative stage.

The ethos and principles of The Promise are becoming embedded within services and systems in West Dunbartonshire, and are fundamental to strategies such as What Would It Take? 5 Year Re-Design. This is a really important way the Promise is brought to life, and we make sure we are "Promise-proofing" service design and delivery.

We enjoy positive relationships with national organisations to support our work around the Promise, particularly The Promise Scotland, COSLA and the Scottish Government. This connects us nationally with best practice and sharing learning around our own journey in West Dunbartonshire.

There continues to be a great deal of activity, energy and enthusiasm around The Promise, both locally and nationally. This report has attempted to draw together some of the incredible work that is on-going in West Dunbartonshire around supporting children, young people and their families by promoting relationship based, trauma informed practice, placing their views and experiences at the heart of planning and decision making.

Thank you for reading this report, and engaging with the progress West Dunbartonshire is making around the Promise.