

#KeepThePromise



Poverty

Autumn 2020

Between 2017 and 2020, the Care Review heard the experiences over 5,500 care experienced infants, children, young people, adults and members of the paid and unpaid workforce had of Scotland's 'care system', and their vision for what needed to change. This vision was set out in ['The Promise'](#) which reflected what was heard and detailed the foundations that Scotland's care for its children and families must be built on:



Voice: Children must be listened to and meaningfully and appropriately involved in decision-making about their care, with all those involved properly listening and responding to what children want and need. There must be a compassionate, caring, decision-making culture focussed on children and those they trust.



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 must be ready and responsive when it is required.



Family: Where children are safe in their families and feel loved they must stay – and families must be given support together to nurture that love and overcome the difficulties which get in the way.



Care: Where living with their family is not possible, children must stay with their brothers and sisters where safe to do so and belong to a loving home, staying there for as long as needed.



People: The children that Scotland cares for must be actively supported to develop relationships with people in supported to listen and be compassionate in their decision-making and care.

This series of briefings is intended to help Scotland **#KeepThePromise**, highlighting key areas of alignment between what was heard during the Care Review and mapping those to different sectors, in order to guide and inform planning and implementation. They will also bring into focus the substantial amount of overlap between these areas across all parts of the country's workforce. It is hoped that in doing so, the briefings will support inter-sector, partnership discussions on how to take forward Scotland's Ambition, to make it the best place in the world to grow up.

Each briefing begins with a bullet point summary of the 'headline' themes for the sector. The remainder of the document highlights key sector-relevant themes and sections from The Promise giving the relevant page numbers to help signpost readers.

Briefing Summary

- There must be a significant, ongoing and persistent commitment to ending poverty and mitigating its impacts for Scotland's children, families and communities.
- The impact that poverty has on families must be discussed openly to support all children to grow up loved, safe and respected.
- More support must be given to families experiencing poverty to tackle the additional pressures it causes and mitigate its impacts.
- There must be more support for families in their communities, thus maximising the assets of the community and community-based relationships.
- Providing support through universal services is non-stigmatising for families and is critical to building relationships with trusted professionals.
- More support must be given to kinship families without them having to fight for it.
- Scotland must broaden its understanding of risk and prioritise stable and loving relationships.
- Scotland must ensure that the way support is delivered does not stigmatise people-the 'Language of Care' must also change to be easily understood, be positive and not create or compound stigma.

Poverty has a pervasive impact and must be addressed

- p.17** It is impossible to review Scotland's 'care system' without properly considering the pervasive impact of poverty. Children growing up in poverty are over represented on the child protection register and are more likely to be removed from their families.
- p.17** In times of crisis some challenges can be solved if families have sufficient financial resources. Evidence points to the provision of financial assistance for families reducing child abuse and neglect.
- p.17** The Care Review consistently heard that financial and housing support were some of the greatest concerns from children and families.
- p.17** In other words, children and adults' need for support and provision does not operate in isolation.
- p.17** Supporting family financial resources is a worthy intervention – both in the short term via effective family support that can ameliorate the impact of poverty and in the longer term via an economy which tackles the existence of poverty and inequality.
- p.17** Poverty is a mediating factor among various factors that increase the risk of child abuse and neglect.
- p.17** When a family lacks financial resources, when they face sub-standard service provision, when the streets they walk are less safe than in other parts of town, when homes are cramped and when keeping food on the table is a struggle, meeting all the needs of a child can be challenging.
- p.17** It is thus hardly surprising that some families, without supportive resources to turn to, are simply unable to be the parents they want to be and that their children deserve.
- p.17** Beyond the material aspect, poverty also takes a toll on children and adult's hearts and minds that can, in some cases, increase the risk of interaction with the 'care system'. The stress of living in poverty can make family life harder – increasing anxiety and depression, damaging both mental and physical health.
- p.17** Socioeconomic disadvantage and stressful life conditions can drive parents to reach for perceived coping mechanisms that do more harm than good – problematic substance use, for example.
- p.17** Stress can raise the risk of abuse and neglect. Evidence shows that poverty generates stress which in turn has impacts on biological, physical and mental health
- p.18.** At its most basic, the existence of poverty, material disadvantage and economic inequality in Scotland is evidence of an economic system that does not provide enough for children and adults.

The impact poverty has on families must be discussed openly to support all children to grow up loved, safe and respected.

- p.18** Together, these material and emotional impacts of poverty illustrate the evidence of a strong association between poverty and the likelihood of suffering abuse and neglect.
- p.18** Some of this might be attributable to official bias and the need for the workforce to manage bias, but the evidence shows there is a link between poverty (or socio-economic disadvantage) and increased risk of child poverty and neglect and that child neglect shows a social gradient.
- p.18** Entry to the 'care system' also has a social gradient: the more deprived a family is, the more likely that the children are placed on the child protection register or enter the 'care system'.
- p.18** Poverty is neither a necessary nor a sufficient factor but it has revealed itself to be a contributory causal factor. The Care Review has seen that an economy characterised by poverty, precarity, and inequality can therefore be a driver of the incidence of the need for care.
- p.18** As already seen, there are two major mechanisms: the impact of poverty on parents' resources to look after children is a structural pressure that undermines parents' scope to look after their children. Poverty then also impacts via stress that affect parents' ability to function.
- p.18** In other words, when the economy hurts children and adults, and housing and social security systems fail to provide the protection from harm needed to compensate,

increased pressures on family life can increase the odds of interacting with the care system.

- p.18** This evidence must not be ignored for fear that families are further unjustly stigmatised. Rather these issues of poverty and the impact on families must be discussed openly to support all children to grow up loved, safe and respected.
- p.18** Persistent poverty and intergenerational interaction with the 'care system' has created intergenerational trauma. Scotland must break that cycle.
- p.18** There must be significant, ongoing and persistent commitment to ending poverty and mitigating its impacts for Scotland's children, families and communities.

More support must be given to families experiencing poverty

- p.47** The Care Review has not been able to ignore the impact of poverty on families and communities across Scotland. There is significant evidence that social and economic inequalities, particularly poverty and debt, increase the stressors in families and communities. Poverty can make parenting more difficult..
- p.47** When poverty is combined with other issues such as mental health problems, domestic abuse or substance use, the challenges of parenting can be magnified. Families struggling to cope with poverty, poor housing, substance use and health difficulties may have little capacity to engage with services in order to make changes.
- p.47** Providing support through universal services is non-stigmatising for families and is critical to building

relationships with trusted professionals which can ameliorate the impact of poverty. It establishes good patterns of help-seeking behaviour.

p.47 Given the prevalence of poverty, these services need to be able to support and assist families sensitively where poverty is the underlying problem.

p.47 Good universal support also provides the basis for the identification of risk of harm for children. Universal support will look different in every community, and be delivered by a range of organisations and groups, but it must follow the journey of a family.

There must be more holistic support for families in their communities

p.15 Nurturing and supporting families to stay together will take far more than what Scotland currently provides.

p.46 Scotland's commitment to early intervention and prevention must be realised through proper, holistic support for families. There must be a significant upscale in universal family support services.

p. 48 Scotland must support a broad understanding of the importance of the early years of parenting.

p.49 Scotland must ensure that there are places in every community for parents of young children to go for support and advice, to meet other local parents and to stay and play with their children.

p. 51 Scotland must ensure that timely, trauma informed and thoughtful support therapies act as a cushion to all those that require it, regardless of diagnosis.

p.52 Scotland must support all families caring for disabled children and those with additional support needs. If families require intensive support they must get it and not be required to fight for it.

p.52 Scotland must recognise that there are some families experiencing particular issues who are much more likely to come into contact with the 'care system'.

p.55 Whatever issues families face, Scotland must ensure that intensive family support is available, proactive and characterised by the **10 family support principles**.

p.57 Intensive family support must be geographically located in local communities, with the explicit intention of maximising the assets of the community and community-based relationships. Support must be explicitly connected to, or even housed in, locations that work for local families and the community, such as schools, health centres, village halls and sports centres. Scotland knows where this support is most needed. Communities must have a say in where support is located.

p.63 Support for families who have had their children removed – If children are removed from the care of their parents, Scotland must not abandon those families. Families must continue to be provided with therapeutic support, advocacy and engagement in line with principles of intensive family support.

More support must be given to kinship families

- p.74** The Care Review has heard from many kinship families about the lack of support they have in caring for children and the fear they sometimes have of asking for help.
- p.74** Kinship families spoke of being fearful of being seen as not being able to cope and if they do ask for help it can feel punitive and they worry about what might happen as a result.
- p.74** The principles for intensive family support that wrap around a family must be as accessible to kinship families as to families of origin.
- p.74** Support must be offered freely without kinship carers having to fight for it. Kinship carers should not feel the need to professionalise their role in order to access support.
- p.74** Support must recognise the particular challenges that can exist for kinship carers. There must be a recognition that kinship carers may be caring for deeply traumatised children and that they may experience their own pain at the consequences of family breakdown.
- p.74** There must be a consideration of kinship carers as part of the wider workforce so that they have access to ongoing supervision, space for reflection and support to continue to care without becoming overwhelmed.

- p.74** Financial support to kinship carers must match that of foster carers. However, there must also be recognition of the tension and complications that money can add to decision making about children, particularly when wider family groups are living in poverty. Decisions about where children live must follow their best interests.

Scotland must broaden its understanding of risk and prioritise stable and loving relationships

- p. 16** Scotland must broaden its understanding of risk. This is not about tolerating more risk, or becoming more risk enabling. It means ensuring Scotland has a more holistic understanding of risk that includes the risk to the child of removing them from the family. There must be a shift in focus from the risk of possible harm to the risk of not having stable, long term loving relationships.
- p. 17** When children talk about wanting to be safe, they talk about having relationships that are real, loving and consistent. That must be the starting point. Scotland must prioritise that message from children over rules that have too often failed to keep them safe.
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p.17 The Care Review does not underestimate the scale of the challenge or the natural instinct to protect, but Scotland must acknowledge that the current system of rules and safeguards has not served its children well. It will require strong leadership across and throughout the entire 'care system' to make the shifts needed.

Challenging stigma, changing the 'Language of Care' and normalising care experience

p.58 The way in which support is delivered must not stigmatise the family. That means there must be no uniforms, lanyards or branded vehicles appearing outside houses or schools to provide support. The basis of all support must be the quality of relationships, not the professionalisation of the workforce.

p.58 The language of family support must reflect normal discourse, and not be hidden behind professional language such as 'looked after child' ("LAC"), reviews and risk assessment. Overly professionalised language stigmatises families and acts as a barrier to engaging and supportive work.

p. 69 Life Stories – Scotland must understand that 'language creates realities'. Those with care experience must hold and own the narrative of their stories and lives; simple, caring language must be used in the writing of care files.

p.69 Language of Care – Scotland must change the language of care. Language must be easily understood, be positive and must not create or compound stigma.

p.87 Normalisation of Care Experience – Scotland should be a good parent to the children it has responsibility for. That means carers and workers must act, speak and behave like a family so that Scotland can be the best parent it can be. Scotland must stop stigmatising the children it cares for.

p. 88 Childhood experiences – In all care settings, Scotland must provide and promote positive, regular experiences for children.

#KeepThePromise

'The Promise' outlines an approach to family and to care that will mean that Scotland can truly be 'the best place in the world to grow up.' To achieve that, there is considerable work to be done.

This series of briefings is intended to support your organisation in thinking about what it means to #KeepThePromise. It should be used to help you to align organisational policies, strategies and practices with what the Care Review heard, and to identify what changes can be made to those, both now and in the future. The Care Review made clear that it is simply not possible to isolate any one aspect of the system. Therefore, these sector briefings should also help organisations understand who else they need to work with in order to make change happen.

To realise the ambitious scale and extent of change, The Promise Team will need the ongoing input and views of all those with responsibility. Please look at the #KeepThePromise **engagement document** to help you think about the work of change.

The Promise website will be regularly updated with information and resources.

For more information about what the Care Review heard about poverty see the **Evidence Framework**.



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