



# Foundation to Focus

Annual Review 2022/23

The Promise Scotland  
August 2023

“You **will** grow up  
loved, safe and  
respected.”

## National Performance Framework and Scotland's promise to all children and young people

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This is a short annual review of the work of The Promise Scotland from April 2022 to June 2023. It outlines our activity and learning over the past year, and provides a basis for our new Strategic Work Programme.

We hope you find it informative.



# Note from Chief Executive

Hello,

Thank you for your interest in the work of The Promise Scotland and for picking up this annual review: Foundation to Focus.

Across Scotland, work is underway to #KeepThePromise by 2030. The case for change has been made, and Scotland is now focused on delivery. The promise continues to have the support of the Scottish Government and parties across the Scottish Parliament; our partners in local government remain committed, under the leadership of the Local Government Programme Board for Keeping the Promise; and I am continually struck by the amazing work being done by community and third sector organisations making a difference to children and families' lives, day-in, day-out.

The job of The Promise Scotland, therefore, is about enabling relationships between parts of the "care system," making sure they are working better together for children, young people and families. Through [the Promise Design School](#), we're building capacity in the workforce. Through projects like [the Hearings for Children Redesign report](#) and [the Promise Data Map](#), we're laying the foundations for lasting change. Our local support work is helping teams across Scotland pave the way for change and improvement in local communities.

We know more needs to be done and the pace needs to quicken. [The Promise Oversight Board made that clear in its report TWO, published in June](#). As Scotland moves into the final year of [Plan 21-24](#), and looking towards the development of [Plan 24-30](#), The Promise Scotland is focusing on where support for lasting change will be most needed.

Getting legislation and policy right will be key to making the changes required. Redesigning services and systems of inspection and regulation will be critical aspects of the changes to come. And how money is used, in an increasingly tight financial environment, is more important than ever.

In the end though, as the Independent Care Review made clear, it is developing and preserving safe, loving relationships that will be the thing that makes the biggest difference for children and families in and around the care system.

The Promise Scotland is a unique organisation, intended to exist only until 2030 at the latest. We have no specific powers or regulatory functions, and we do not deliver services. That means everyone who works with us does so because they choose to, and because they want to make change.

That unique mandate means that all the work The Promise Scotland does has to be grounded in relationships based on trust, which can deliver better practice, policy, funding and collaboration. Most importantly, the work needs to honour the voices of the care experienced community that the Independent Care Review heard, as well as hearing new stories as they emerge.

This is a short look back at the work of The Promise Scotland and the relationships we have built to support the change required to #KeepThePromise. It outlines our activity and learning over the past year, and provides a basis for [our Strategic Work Programme for 2023/24.](#)

I hope you find it useful and informative.

With very best wishes,

Fraser

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**Fraser McKinlay**

Chief Executive of  
The Promise Scotland



# About The Promise Scotland

The Promise Scotland does not deliver services directly, and does not have any regulatory or statutory powers. Its role is:

## To Collaborate

To work alongside those who must deliver the change the care community demanded.

## To Convene

To bring people together so they can learn, join-up, solve problems, broker solutions, and clear pathways.

The Promise Scotland only gets involved where it can truly make a difference.

## To Challenge

To speak truth to power in a way that recognises context and supports improvement, and which aligns or redirects. The Promise Scotland challenges poor practice.

## To Bridge

To support systems – locally and nationally – to transition to better ways of working, by identifying learning, highlighting innovative practice and being assertive about what good looks like.

## To Monitor

To support the Promise Oversight Board in its role of holding Scotland to account to #KeepThePromise.

The Promise Scotland will be crystal clear about where the system needs to collectively focus its efforts.



# It's all about relationships

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**The promise is built on five foundations:**

**voice care family people scaffolding**  
and underneath these are relationships.

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Transformational change relies on good quality relationships. They must sit at the heart of everything The Promise Scotland does and says.

Keeping the promise is about relationships because:

## **Relationships build a good childhood**

Every child deserves the support they need to thrive, and that comes from more than one person. As we grow up, all of us need safe, loving relationships with our families and communities.

## **Relationships build a good system**

A system isn't just about the people who make it up. It's about what happens when these people work together.

## Good relationships let us:

- experience genuine collaboration
- bring people together on a journey of change
- accelerate and enhance the change required
- step back and enable others to lead.

## Good relationships mean we have:

- surfaced, showcased and shared good practice
- identified solutions to challenges
- identified gaps in the "care system"
- been more able to focus on priorities.

Through the last year, we have continued to strengthen and nurture our relationships:

**Between each other.** With the appointment of its first Chief Executive and the recruitment of the broader team, The Promise Scotland is working in an increasingly integrated way to develop our role as a supporter of change.

**Between parts of the "care system."** Our relationships have helped us to:

- **collaborate** with specific parts of the "care system"
- **convene** groups that bring parts of the "care system" together
- **challenge** those people and organisations who we have a strong relationship with
- **bridge** gaps within the "care system," and
- **monitor** how well Scotland is doing, through our support of the Promise Oversight Board.

[You can find out more about how The Promise Scotland is set up and funded here.](#)

# System Relationships

The responsibility for #KeepingThePromise sits with many different organisations across Scotland, who have a duty of care to children and families.

Much of what The Promise Scotland does is to bring people and organisations together — and help build the relationships needed to bring about change.

## Hearings System Working Group

The **Hearings System Working Group** was a good example of this. This was a group which The Promise Scotland set up and supported throughout its work. Members of the group included **Children's Hearings Scotland** and **The Scottish Children's Reporter Administration**— with **Scottish Government** in an observer role. Sheriff David Mackie chaired the group.

This group's goal was systemic change, as a direct response to the Independent Care Review: to redesign the underlying structures of Scotland's Children's Hearings System.

The Kilbrandon Report – which established the Hearings System's principles almost sixty years ago – is still highly regarded around the world. The Working Group's goal was to show how it can remain at the heart of a redesigned Hearings System which simultaneously respects the rights of children and families.

The Promise Scotland managed this Working Group through over 500 hours of discussion and deliberation. It also worked to make sure Voice was embedded in this process in a safe and authentic way, through workshops with young people, parents and carers.

At the end of the process, under the Chairing of Sheriff David Mackie, The Promise Scotland drafted, published and launched the recommendations for redesign. Hearings for Children sets out around 100 ways in which the Children's Hearings System must change.





Throughout 2023, The Promise Scotland will continue to highlight these changes to others, who have the responsibility to make them.

Without The Promise Scotland, these cross-system changes wouldn't have been developed, or agreed upon.

They could only be identified by getting different parts of the "care system" together, and listening to those people who the system works for.

And they could only be owned and published by The Promise Scotland, holding the relationships between different parts of the care system, as those parts work out new ways to work together

You can read the Hearings for Children report and dive into associated resources – including podcasts, videos and summaries – here.

## Seeing the difference

"This was a powerful and liberating programme of work – the outcome of which we can now all coalesce around. It wasn't easy, it needed to be properly resourced with the right people, able to work together in the right way. But the overall outcome I think has been well worthwhile – a really solid, well based programme of work we are now all committed to taking forward together – carrying forward the lessons and the new skills on collaboration, redesign and a sense of common mission and purpose which have been so important in guiding us to this stage of transforming Scotland Childrens Hearings System."

**Neil Hunter**

**Principal Reporter**

Scottish Children's Reporter Administration

## Doing data differently

Without data, it's much harder to bring about positive change. Too often, data is captured to reflect what matters to the care system. Scotland's picture of the data which matters to children and families is a long way from being complete.

**The Promise Data Map** will help will make this better, by helping organisations share their datasets around what matters to children and families.

By doing this, it will build up a picture of how these datasets interrelate. **It will also help organisations build relationships with each other.**

It will show where datasets are duplicated, insufficient, or fail to join up in a sensible way. As a result, it will show where different parts of the "care system" could be working with each other.

Phase One of the project was about scoping the task, establishing collaborative working with partners and building the underlying architecture of the Data Map.

## Completing phase two

The second phase of the Data Map project ran from August 2022 to July 2023. It made sure the Map would be able to capture the many different types of data which organisations hold.

And it looked at ways to make sure those organisations can build relationships around data, while having a shared understanding of what the Data Map is for.

It also looked at how to develop the Map in a way that minimised duplication across the workforce— and which didn't require them to do additional reporting.

This involved many conversations with stakeholders about how services can begin to improve their data, in a way that would help #KeepThePromise.

This design and development work should mean that the Map supports the workforce, and that it acts as a useful tool.

It should help make existing work better, rather than creating more for the workforce to do.

## Preparing phase three

Phase three of the Data Map project began in July 2023, and looks at how questions around what matters to children and families can become part of the map.

In preparation for this phase, work to develop these questions has been ongoing through the last year. They're rooted directly in what the Independent Care Review heard from children and families. The questions are meant to support organisations see how much their data currently supports – or hinders – work to keep the promise.

It should help them make their data more streamlined, and to look hard at what's really useful. It should help them understand what's collected that shouldn't be.

[You can find out more about the Doing Data Differently project and listen to a podcast about it here.](#)

## Seeing the difference

"This process has really enabled us to refine our data sets. But we also have a better understanding that it's not just about what we are asking: it's how we are asking it, which has had clear impacts in terms of what data we collect. For example, one key area we've made changes in has been better understanding our community participation work. We used to ask young people who came along to services if they were care experienced— not a mandatory question, but for anyone willing to share. We started thinking about how complex that category actually is, and how we might be able to unpack that more. Now we ask specific questions: 'Have you ever lived with foster carers? Have you lived with other family members who aren't your parents?' And so we're getting a better picture of how these young people see themselves, as well as their participation in universal services."

"I'm more confident in pushing those boundaries, because I have a much better – and more optimistic – understanding of what's possible when it comes to data. The scale of it can be daunting, but having seen what's possible so far I'm no longer fazed by that. I know that, if we put in the work, we can create a system that lets us collect and share better data and information, which can then help us do better for our children and families."

**Dawn Parker**

Corporate Parenting Lead Officer  
South Ayrshire Council



## The Promise Design School

Through the last year, The Promise Scotland has been running The Promise Design School to help people build confidence in co-design so that people who use services have influence over how they work.

Different teams from the workforce, all working on a specific change, come together to learn about service design. Together they reflect and plan how this might help them to co-design more confidently.

Leading this work has provided The Promise Scotland with learning and feedback that allows us to continuously amend and improve the offer.

The Promise Design School now provides two clear “offers.”

**Our flagship programme** offers more intensive support through both face-to-face and digital delivery, working with change projects for up to 6 months as they lead co-design in their context.

**Our 2D Sprint** offers an interactive 2-day experience online, supporting organisations to think differently about designing their services.

As well as this, in 2023 The Promise Design School launched its **Learning Calendar**. This provides practical help around service design, based on feedback from people who are redesigning services themselves.

[You can read more about The Promise Design School and the Learning Calendar here.](#)

## Rethinking Restraint with The Promise Design School

As part of a broader piece of work, Aberlour Children's Charity and Kibble sought support from the Promise Design School. They brought together teams from Residential Centres across four local authorities to

rethink the use of restraint in residential settings.

Through the programme, they learned to apply design thinking to the issue of restraint. Each identified barriers to change, finding out what was unique to their setting— but also what shared learning they had.

Through the process, they developed solutions that would support reduction in restraint by ensuring a focus on the experiences of the young people and staff at the centre.

Participants told us that the design school gave them time to think through the problems and create solutions.

[You can read more about the work and learning in the evaluation report.](#)

# 14

**organisations** have been through the Promise Design School's flagship programme as of July 2023.

# 24

**change projects** took part in the test of our 2-day Sprint offer between April and June 2023, with:

**69** practitioners, from across  
**30** different organisations.

# 317

**learners** participated across:

**20** learning calendar events.

## Promise Partnership

The Promise Partnership is delivered by the Corra Foundation on behalf of the Scottish Government.

The Promise Scotland provides support to the funded organisations to support the sharing of learning. It has no role in the decision making process around successful Promise Partnership projects.

**In total, 81 change projects have been supported by the Promise Delivery Partners between April 2022 to March 2023.**

Supporting change projects and nurturing relationships between them is one way in which The Promise Scotland helps organisations to share lessons learned, make connections, and learn about good practice.

To help these things happen, in June 2023, The Promise Scotland and Corra Foundation hosted a showcase and learning event, recognising projects working on Brothers and Sisters and a Good Childhood Fund.

**All of the projects, their learning and change journeys can be found here.**

## Local relationships

In the three and a half years since Scotland made the promise, a lot of change has happened across many places.

Since their appointment in Summer 2022, The Promise Scotland's **Delivery Partners** have helped support these to happen. They've built relationships **within** these areas so changes can take place, and relationships **across** local authorities so lessons can be learned where appropriate. In the coming year, The Promise Scotland will be sharing some of these **stories of change** more widely, to help more of Scotland's workforce build on what others have already learned.

Some of the work taking place across Scotland is listed below:

- The promise was clear that stigmatising language for children living in the 'care system' needs to change. Promise Delivery Partners have worked with Clackmannanshire Council's Participation Network to develop a new **Language Policy**— so that people who work with children, young people and families know when a word can be stigmatising.

It's a project that's brought in the voice of children, young people and families. And the

work of The Promise Scotland has helped support a change of culture around language—rather than just a change in the language itself.

- The Promise Scotland has lead **Communities of Interest**, bringing together Promise Leads and people who are working for change to share experiences and plans. **The Northern Promise Collaborative** is a similar initiative: facilitated by The Promise Scotland, the Collaborative brings together Leads from the North and North East. It's resulted in connections and learning between these areas.
- Supporting place-based work is vital to keeping the promise, with community spaces being places for family support and developing relationships with care experienced young people. With local budgets stretched, retaining these spaces can be difficult. Promise Delivery Partners in West Dubartonshire shared learning from community asset transfers experience in other authorities to support retaining premises for Children 1st family support services. This secured important place based services in the context of stretched budgets.
- In Dumfries and Galloway, the Promise Delivery Partner worked to support better understanding of roles and responsibilities for driving the promise through governance and work planning structures. This has led to shared understanding and increased commitment across the partnership.



The Promise Scotland's Delivery Partners have built relationships **within** local authorities, and relationships **between** them.

These relationships can help bring about **lasting change**.



# Supporting the Journey

## Policy

To keep the promise, some parts of Scottish law and policy will have to change. And when new laws come before the Scottish Parliament, they must be written in a way which allows the promise to be kept.

Over the past year, The Promise Scotland worked with The Scottish Government and Scottish Parliament Committees on **the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Bill** and its close links with the Hearing System Working Group.

We will continue to work with The Scottish Government on developing the legislative and policy approach to the upcoming **Promise Bill**, ensuring the Hearings for Children recommendations and other legislative changes are included.

We continue to work on projects specifically on behalf of Scottish Government.

These include:

- Scoping a **blueprint for information held by care experienced people**.
- Recommending changes to the **"care system's" governance and accountability landscape**. This will report by June 2024.
- Developing a **lifelong advocacy model for care experienced people**. Recommendations will be made to Scottish Ministers by the end of 2023.

## Supporting Oversight and Advice

The Promise Scotland supports the Promise Oversight Board. This holds Scotland to account around whether it's on track to #KeepThePromise by 2030.

We provide the Secretariat for the Board, as well as information and intelligence that helps them draft their reports. This supports the Board in holding Scotland to account, and in the publication of their annual reports.

### The Oversight Board published Report TWO in June 2023.

The Promise Scotland also supports the newly established Independent Strategic Advisor for the promise, Fiona Duncan. We are continuing to support her as she leads the development of Plan 24-30.

## Working with Government

To #KeepThePromise, there needs to be coordinated action across Government policy areas to ensure family support is well coordinated and the 'care system' can facilitate a good childhood. Local and National Government both have roles in doing this, and so The Promise Scotland works closely with both.

We work to support the development and delivery of the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund, and to consider the nature and structure of Foster Care alongside other strategic workgroups and engagement.

We also Co-Chair the Promise Collective with Scottish Government and CoSLA. The Promise Collective is a forum for better aligning Scottish Government funded national improvement activity in relation to #KeepThePromise.

Fiona Duncan, Chair of The Promise Scotland and Independent Strategic Advisor, and Fraser McKinlay, Chief Executive, attended Cabinet in June with some care experienced young people, sharing experiences and outlining work to #KeepThePromise.

## Maintaining cross party support

The conclusions of the Independent Care Review received cross party support with all political parties committed to make changes needed to #KeepThePromise. The Promise Scotland has worked over this year to maintain and develop relationships and understanding across political parties.

We've conducted engagement at party political conferences, and meetings have been held with all parties.

Fiona Duncan, Chair of The Promise Scotland and Independent Strategic Advisor, and Fraser McKinlay, Chief Executive, have met with all party leaders to support maintained commitment and understanding.

## Website

In late 2022, The Promise Scotland's website launched.

Created with advice and feedback from care experienced young people, this website aims to explain the promise in a clear and accessible way— while also explaining the work of The Promise Scotland.

As people across Scotland work to keep the promise, it's important they have a clear and common understanding of the concepts and issues involved.

The website aims to provide this, and it will expand on it in the near future by highlighting stories of change.



# Focus

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The Promise Scotland will only exist until 2030, and that means relationships need to be at the heart of the role which it plays.

We will continue to bring people and organisations together, working with them to ensure that change is really happening— and is being felt by children, young people and families in and around the care system.

Transformational change will only happen when services, staff and families are confident that it's sustainable. Otherwise, they won't invest time and emotion in something unlikely to endure.

The Promise Scotland can build relationships until sustainable change is possible, and until it's established. After this, it is able to step away.

The Promise Scotland's purpose is to support the change demanded by the Independent Care Review with a commitment to its own obsolescence by 2030 and so, at all times, will avoid building itself into 'the system'.

The Strategic Work Programme '**Focus on the promise**' sets out The Promise Scotland's work priorities for 2023/24. It is built on the learning and experience of working to support change, and provides a framework in which this organisation will operate.





# #KeepThePromise

**The Promise Scotland**  
Edinburgh  
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