

The Promise Scotland's response to the Scottish Government's consultation on Developing a Universal Definition of 'Care Experience'

January 2025

"There must be a more universal, commonly understood definition as it relates to rights and entitlements. There must also be an understanding that the purpose of those rights and entitlements is to support young people for whom Scotland has had ongoing parenting responsibilities, recognising that parents seek to provide care and support for their children beyond the age of 18."

The promise, Page 10

A note on terminology

This response mirrors the terminology used by the Independent Care Review. Wherever possible, 'system language' has been avoided, but on occasion it has been used in line with current and existing legislation for the purpose of clarity.

The term 'care experience' is used, as it was by the Independent Care Review, as a description of the environment that a child or young person is growing up in, as an identity definition, and to denote access to specific rights and entitlements.

The term 'children' is used to mean those under the age of 18, in line with the UNCRC and 'young people' aged up to 26, in line with corporate parenting.

Background

[The Promise Scotland](#) is the organisation set up to support Scotland in its delivery of the implementation of the findings of the [Independent Care Review](#).

The Independent Care Review resulted in a promise that by 2030 Scotland's care experienced children and young people grow up feeling loved, safe, and respected. This response to the Scottish Government's consultation on developing a universal definition of 'care experience' outlines what needs to be in place for the conclusions of the Independent Care Review relating to language and definitions to be realised, **and the promise made to them kept.**

The issue of 'definitions', whether statutory or not, is complex, nuanced and personal. Whatever is decided as a result of this consultation and the resulting policy and legislative changes, in line with Article 2 (non-discrimination) and Article 8 (identity) of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC),

care experienced children and adults must retain the right to choose how they wish to identify and define themselves. They must be made aware that they have the right to choose and be able to make fully informed decisions about how they wish to identify, based on a clear understanding of the legal and practical implications and their rights.

The Independent Care Review heard that, as a definition, 'care experience' has meaning for many. It has supported movement-building and is helpful as an understanding of personal identity. The Independent Care Review also heard that it is an identity definition that some who have experienced care do not wish to identify with as it can feel like a perpetuation of 'othering'.¹

Definitions are difficult and can create tension as they align or not with personal identity. Increased rights and entitlements can feel very difficult as they provide more support to one group over others when there is a pervasive societal context of inequality and lack of general support and provision. The access point for rights and entitlements is not the same as having an inclusive identity definition of the term 'care experience.' The term 'care experience' will have different meaning for different people; some embrace that definition and others do not identify with it.

The Independent Care Review heard that for the care community, a definition of 'care experience' can be connected to identity, rights (for example, access to education and healthcare) and benefits or entitlements (including financial), but for members of the workforce and the 'system' itself it can mean something else. Currently statutory services provide support based on statutory entitlement provided by the 'care leaver' and 'looked after' and accommodated definitions. This means that those with experience of care are not routinely provided with equitable support. The system does, on occasion, utilise its flexibility to address unmet need for those who do not meet the threshold of statutory support however, this is evidenced as being provided inequitably with some young people being left in crisis on their own.

As work continues to progress it is important to ensure that the purpose and attached rights and entitlements relating to a definition of 'care experience' are understood by both children, families and care experienced adults and by the system.

This response should be read in the context of the seven reports produced by the Independent Care Review, specifically [the promise](#), and alongside [Plan 24-30](#).² It is rooted in what was heard by the Independent Care Review.

¹ Independent Care Review, The Promise, 2020, Pg 10

² Plan 24-30 is Scotland's plan, setting out where Scotland must be by 2030 to keep the promise and provides initial routemaps outlining specific steps to get there and support young people moving on from care. These routemaps will be developed collaboratively with the care community and the people and organisations working alongside them and will continue to evolve.

Key messages

- The Independent Care Review concluded that *“there must be a more universal, commonly understood definition as it relates to rights and entitlements. There must also be an understanding that the purpose of those rights and entitlements is to support young people for whom Scotland has had ongoing parenting responsibilities, recognising that parents seek to provide care and support for their children beyond the age of 18.”*
- The Scottish Government’s focus must be to bring clarity as to how the definition of ‘care experience’ will be applied and, in particular, how associated rights and entitlements are known and understood by children and adults with experience of care, and easily accessible.
- The purpose of creating a definition must be clear to both members of the care community and to the workforce. The Independent Care Review is clear about the need for an inclusive, non-stigmatising approach to defining care experience in order to better support and uphold the rights of those for whom the State has parenting responsibility.
- It is, however, not enough to create a new definition of ‘care experience’. There is a need for a broader and comprehensive understanding of existing rights and entitlements to ensure that support and services, including access to advocacy, legal representation, mental and physical health report, trauma recovery support and education are available for children, young people and adults who have experience of care when they need it—rather than according to complex statutory definitions.
- In order to do this, there is a requirement to:
 - Map the existing rights and entitlements at all stages of a child, young person and adult’s journey of care to ensure that Scotland has got this right and there is a clear statutory and non-statutory framework in place that sets out rights and entitlements in line with the UNCRC.
 - Understand how these current rights and entitlements are accessed and what changes are needed—including legislative and financial in order to ensure that they are clearly set out in legislation (where appropriate), policy and practice.
- The Independent Care Review concluded that Scotland must change the language of care. Language must be easily understood, positive and not create or compound stigma. Professionalised language must not be used to describe meetings or experiences, and care must be taken about how society and the media talks about and publicises individual care stories.

Language change on its own is not enough—the experiences of children, families and adults must also change.

Consultation Section 1: Developing a Universal Definition of 'Care Experience'

Q1. Do you agree or disagree that there is a need for a universal definition to describe 'care experience'?

a) Agree strongly.

After listening to over 5,500 voices, the Independent Care Review concluded in 2020 that a universal definition of 'care experience' is required:

*"There must be a more universal, commonly understood definition as it relates to rights and entitlements. There must also be an understanding that the purpose of those rights and entitlements is to support young people for whom Scotland has had ongoing parenting responsibilities, recognising that parents seek to provide care and support for their children beyond the age of 18."*³

Given that there was cross party support for the entirety of the conclusions of the Independent Care Review, the question of whether a universal definition of 'care experience' is needed is settled.

The Scottish Government's focus must therefore be on creating a definition of 'care experience' and working to understand how the definition of 'care experience' will be applied, in particular how associated rights and entitlements are known and understood by children and adults with experience of care, and easily accessible (see our response to question 7 below). Bureaucracy must not get in the way of accessing associated rights and entitlements and there should be ways for care experienced children and adults to disclose their care experienced status that are non-judgemental and non-stigmatising.

The work to create a definition of 'care experience' must look ahead to 2030 when the promise is being kept, rather than being constrained by the parameters of the existing 'care system'.

A definition on its own is not sufficient to realise the conclusions of the Independent Care Review. **It is particularly important to ensure that any associated rights and entitlements are fully resourced and duty bearers (including corporate parents) are able to access them.** For example, if a

³ Independent Care Review, The Promise, 2020 Pg 10

broader definition of 'care experience' means that care experienced adults are entitled to access what is currently called 'aftercare' housing support, advocacy or mental health support or the right to return to care settings the local authorities must be able to provide them.

With that in mind, the development of a definition must align with the ongoing consideration of [The Promise Scotland's advocacy scoping work](#) which was shared with the Scottish Government at the end of 2023. We recommended a four-phased approach to developing a national lifelong advocacy service for care experienced children, adults and families, including a legislative approach.

Q2. What are your views on the potential advantages of developing a universal definition of 'care experience'?

The advantages of a universal definition of care experience will be felt, first and foremost, by children, young people, families and adults with care experience. A clearer, more inclusive, definition will help reduce stigma, bring more consistency for people accessing services and ensuring their rights are upheld.

There will also be benefits for the workforce. Simpler and clearer definitions, backed up with sufficient resources, will make it easier for members of the workforce to ensure that people receive the appropriate entitlements and provide better support.

A universally agreed definition will support accountability, allowing a more straightforward assessment of whether the care experience community is getting the support they need and deserve.

There are a number of existing rights and entitlements for young people and adults with experience of care—and a need, at pace / concluded within the next five years, to identify what other rights and entitlements must be put in place to keep the promise. However, there is not a cohesive, cross sector definition that encapsulates the totality of the experience. The Independent Care Review concluded that that must change.⁴

The Independent Care Review heard a variety of views from children, young people and care experienced adults, as well as members of the paid and unpaid workforce, about how language is used and what different words and definitions mean to them. There was not always a cohesive view—see comments in response to question 3 below about potential disadvantages.

The promise was clear that the access point for rights and entitlements is not the same as having an inclusive identity definition of the term 'care experience'. The

⁴ Independent Care Review, The Promise, 2020, Pg 118

term 'care experience' will have different meaning for different people. However, the Independent Care Review concluded that a universal and inclusive definition of 'care experience' will help to normalise care as more people can understand and relate to it.⁵

Submissions to inform the development of Plan 24-30 highlighted some of the advantages of a definition of 'care experience' for the broader 'system', for example:

- Education institutions, who highlighted in their submissions that the process to "verify" the status of care experienced applicants (to the bursary, for example) has identified challenges with the differing definitions of care experience used by institutions and services across Scotland. Some colleges are aware of cases where institutional definitions of 'care experienced', or the definition used by organisations like Who Cares? Scotland, appear not to be aligned with an entitlement to financial support through the SAAS bursary. A widely agreed definition would help to ensure this process is clearer for both education institutions and for care experienced students—and could potentially lead to further instances where care experienced students are identified, or identify themselves, and are able to access support.
- A clear definition could help to improve effective data collection and reporting on outcomes and experiences for care experienced people. A clear definition will help to ensure more consistent and cohesive methods of collecting relevant information and helping to improve outcomes linked to the implementation of the Promise Progress Framework.

For children, young people and care experienced adults, 100 Days of Listening highlighted that a "lack of an agreed definition for 'care experience' appears to be problematic when it comes to accessing support and resources. Definitions change from organisation to organisation and area to area, and this can lead to an inequity in the provision of support and resources dependent on the local definition. The report concluded that a legal definition for 'care experience' would help to alleviate this and would help to improve equity of support and understanding of associated rights and entitlements."⁶

Q3. What are your views on the potential disadvantages of developing a universal definition of 'care experience'?

As stated above, the Independent Care Review heard that, as a definition, 'care experience' has meaning for many. It has supported movement-building and is

⁵ Independent Care Review, The Promise, 2020, Pg 118

⁶ Staf and The Promise Scotland, 100 Days of Listening, Pg 33

helpful as an understanding of personal identity. The Independent Care Review also heard that it is an identity definition that some who have experienced care do not wish to identify with as it can feel like a perpetuation of ‘othering’.⁷

Definitions are difficult and can create tension as they align or not with personal identity. Increased rights and entitlements can feel very difficult as they provide more support to one group over others when there is a pervasive societal context of inequality and lack of general support and provision.

The access point for rights and entitlements is not the same as having an inclusive identity definition of the term ‘care experience.’ The term ‘care experience’ will have different meaning for different people; some embrace that definition and others do not identify with it.⁸

In establishing a definition of ‘care experience’ it is therefore vital that the term is available to people who wish to use it— but it must be up to individual people whether or not they wish to identify as care experienced and whether or not they wish to access their rights. Associated rights and entitlements must be clearly explained and accessible and people with experience of care must be fully informed of how to access them.

It will also be important to ensure that associated rights and entitlements are fully resourced and funded. A new definition must not add additional layers of complexity for care experienced children and adults to wade through, or additional layers of bureaucracy for the workforce. This includes ensuring that local authorities, in particular, are supported to deliver any additional rights and entitlements aligned with a definition. It is anticipated that, at least in the short term, additional funding will be required. A clear and accurate financial memorandum (if legislative changes are made), that takes into account the likely changes to the size of the care experienced population over time as the promise is kept is vital.

Q4. Do you have any views on the definition of ‘Care Leaver’ as set out above?

See our response to question 7. There is a need to understand the rights and entitlements that a child, young person or adult has, or must have, at each stage of their interaction with the ‘care system’. The current ‘care leaver’ definition prevents access to already established rights and entitlements and support needs for many children and adults just when they need it most—this must change.

⁷ Independent Care Review, The Promise, 2020, Pg 10

⁸ Independent Care Review, The Promise, 2020, Pg 118

In [our response to the Scottish Government’s consultation on ‘Moving On from care into adulthood’](#), we described the need to ensure more children and young people are able to access what is currently termed ‘continuing care’ and ‘aftercare’, including young people accessing higher and further education and young people on Kinship Care Orders.

The Promise Scotland has heard, as the Independent Care Review did, young people talk about being ‘removed from orders’ prior to their sixteenth birthday. In our response to the ‘Moving On’ consultation we set out an alternative approach that does not rely on arbitrary timeframes and is dependent on birthdays—this must align with potential changes to the definition of ‘care leaver’.

Children who have been cared for the majority of their life away from home, may be able to return home before the age of sixteen. The promise is clear that this must be encouraged and facilitated wherever possible. However, returning home at this time would result in the young person not attaining a care leaver status and access to appropriate support. This situation could result in families not being reunited due to the fear of plans not working out and the young person not being able to access adequate support.

Q5. Do you have any views on the statutory definition of ‘Looked After’ as set out above?

See our response to question 7. We also refer to our response to the Scottish Government’s consultation on moving on from care into adulthood where we highlighted the importance of children who are on Kinship Care Orders being able to access continuing care and aftercare. This is likely to require a change to the current definition of ‘Looked After’.

As a result of the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act 2024, young people who previously would have gone to a Young Offender’s Institute will now be ‘looked after’ in secure accommodation. This brings the same rights and entitlements as are currently available to all ‘looked after’ children and young people.

The term ‘Looked After’ must be changed to align better with the core conclusions of the Independent Care Review and the acronym LAC or LAAC must never be used. This includes in official data collection and reporting mechanisms.

Q6. What experience of care would you expect to be covered by any definition of “care experience”?

The Independent Care Review used the term ‘care experience’ as a description of the environment that a child or young person is growing up in and as an identity definition, and to denote access to specific rights and entitlements. The promise is clear that an expansive and holistic understanding of ‘care experience’ must include all the various settings and experiences of care. Within this there must be an understanding of how the role of the State in individuals’ upbringing relates to ongoing rights and entitlements. The experience of being cared for must not be stigmatising.⁹

We support a broad and diverse understanding of care experience, to ensure a collective recognition that care represents a part of all Scotland’s communities. In particular we highlight the following conclusions from the promise that must be addressed:

- The present definitions that operate do not ensure that those who leave care prior to their sixteenth birthday are able to access legal entitlements, even though they have been removed from their families by a decision of the State.
- Current definitions also prohibit those who have experienced adoption disruption from being able to redress the failure of this decision and access those entitlements.
- Scotland must ensure that current definitions that act as the access point for rights and entitlements are inclusive enough to benefit all young people for whom Scotland has had parenting responsibility.¹⁰

The recent [Scottish Government Adoption Vision Statement](#) clearly refers to children who are adopted as being care experienced¹¹ and The Promise Scotland is supportive of this approach, in line with the conclusions of the Independent Care Review.

Q7. Do you have any other comments about a proposed universal definition of ‘care experience’?

This consultation speaks broadly about a definition of ‘care experience’ from the perspective of the ‘system’ rather than about the best interests of the care community and the need for transformational change in line with the conclusions of the Independent Care Review. As the responses to this consultation are analysed, and a definition is taken forward, more ambitious questions must be explored with the care community and stakeholders, that adequately reflects Scotland’s ambition for care experienced children, young people and adults as

⁹ Independent Care Review, The Promise, 2020, Pg 10

¹⁰ Independent Care Review, The Promise, 2020, Pg 118

¹¹ Scottish Government Adoption Vision Statement, Pg 14

encapsulated by the Independent Care Review and taken forward subsequently in policy and in practice. It has already been agreed that there must be a definition of care experience. The focus must now be on how it can be used and what changes need to take place to ensure that whatever their age or experience of care, children and adults who have been cared for by the state feel loved, supported and are able to access appropriate support and scaffolding when they need it.

As we have shared with Scottish Government in our [response to the previous consultation on 'moving on from care into adulthood'](#), our view is that there must be a new way of thinking that prioritises understanding what care experienced children, young people and adults' rights are at each stage of their interaction with the 'care system'.

The Scottish Government must, therefore, undertake an assessment of what rights and entitlements are and must be accessible to children, young people and adults with experience of care at all stages of their journey and interaction with Scotland's care system. This includes:

- When a child and their family is in need of early help and support.
- When the state has become involved in a child and their families' life (children 'on the edges of care').
- When life-changing decisions are being made about children alongside their families (for example, when children are removed from their families by the state or when schooling is changed).
- When children formally enter the 'care system' and become 'looked after' and as they grow.
- When children or young people move on from care, including transitioning from care into adulthood and their lifelong rights, including those children or young people who move back home.

In our view, understanding what these rights are and how children, young people and adults able to access them must be the starting point rather than attaching rights and entitlements to arbitrary ages or definitions. The Promise Bill and associated regulations and guidance is an opportunity to ensure that these rights and entitlements are coherently and clearly articulated in Scots Law, including by consolidating existing rights and duties so that the children, families and care experienced adults and members of the workforce are clear about what they are.

As stated above, current definitions do not ensure that those who leave care prior to their sixteenth birthday are able to access legal entitlements, even though they have been removed from their families by decision of the State.¹² **There is a need for a broader and comprehensive understanding of existing rights and**

¹² Independent Care Review, The Promise, 2020, Pg 118

entitlements to ensure that support and services, including access to advocacy, legal representation, mental and physical health report, trauma recovery support and education are available for children, young people and adults who have experience of care when they need it--rather than according to complex statutory definitions.

In order to do this, there is a requirement to:

- Map the existing rights and entitlements at all stages of a child, young person and adult's journey of care to ensure that Scotland has got this right and there is a clear statutory and non-statutory framework in place that sets out rights and entitlements in line with the UNCRC. Some of this work has already been done linked to [The Promise Scotland and Staf's Moving On change programme, the Care Inspectorate's thematic review](#) and will be shared in the consultation on moving on from care into adulthood.

This includes an acknowledgement and understanding of the different needs of children and adults who have different experiences of different care settings. This includes the needs of children and adults who have experienced adoption disruption or Kinship Care Orders.

Currently, there are inequities, inconsistencies and confusion about what entitlements are available for which children and adults. Clarity is needed to ensure fair, equitable and appropriate access to help and support after a child leaves care so that they can thrive.

- Understand how these current rights and entitlements are accessed and what changes are needed—including legislative and financial in order to ensure that they are clearly set out in legislation (where appropriate), policy and practice to inform the future 'care system'.
- Work to take forward the modelling previously undertaken by the Independent Care Review to understand the size and shape of Scotland's care community. This includes understanding the impact that the implementation of the Independent Care Review's recommendations will have on the number of children likely to experience care in Scotland and the consequential impact of the number of adults likely to be care experienced over time. It must also include an assessment of when it might be appropriate to 'switch on' any changes and to what extent new rights and entitlements associated with a new definition of care experience should be retrospectively applied.

The promise is also clear that as Scotland transitions to a new model of care that keeps more families together with support, the definitions for rights and entitlements will likely also change. That change must reflect the ongoing responsibility Scotland has for the children for whom it has had parenting responsibility and whose family life has been disrupted by the decisions of the State. These young people and adults must be clear about how those with

parenting responsibility for them will uphold their duties—including beyond the age of 26.¹³

As this work continues, and as more families are supported to stay together through accessing high quality, holistic family support, a broader conversation will be required about the particular rights and entitlements of children who are currently defined as being ‘looked after at home’. As the promise is being delivered in families and communities across Scotland, it is anticipated that the number of children that require voluntary or compulsory orders will reduce. This does not necessarily mean that the level of support required for these children and families will reduce, but rather a new way of thinking and working is required, in line with the ‘minimum intervention’ principle where children and families receive wraparound care and support in line with the ten principles of intensive family support described in the promise.

Scotland must be bold in its ambition for these children and families—doing what the promise says and fully broadening its understanding of risk from the risk of possible harm to the risk of not having stable, long-term loving relationships.

There is an opportunity to better reflect the role the family plays in a child being supported at home. This includes, in time, considering whether these children should be officially recognised as ‘looked after’ if they are remaining at home with social work support and what alternative mechanisms should be in place to better support children and families who require help and support rather than placing statutory definitions and maximising state intervention and increasing the risk of stigma.

Consultation Section 2: Wider Language Relating to Care

Q8. Do you have any comments on the existing language of care?

The Independent Care Review concluded that Scotland must change the language of care. Language must be easily understood, positive and not create or compound stigma. Professionalised language must not be used to describe meetings or experiences, and care must be taken about how society and the media talks about and publicises individual care stories.¹⁴

The Independent Care Review heard from children that the words used by the workforce to describe their lives, like ‘unit’ and ‘placement’ and ‘contact’ and ‘respite’ and ‘LAC’ (looked after child), are not the same as those used by their non-care-experienced peers. They told the Independent Care Review that this

¹³ Independent Care Review, The Promise, 2020, Pg 118

¹⁴ Independent Care Review, The Promise, 2020, Pg 87-88

language compounds a sense of being different, can exacerbate low self-esteem and is stigmatising.

Pages 85-87 of '[Hearings for Children](#)', the Hearings System Working Group's report on how to redesign the Children's Hearings System in line with the core conclusions from the Independent Care Review, describes in detail children and young people's views of the language used around and within the Children's Hearings System. They said that some of the language used within the Children's Hearings System is confusing, overly complex and hard to understand. In particular, the Hearings System Working Group heard that words such as 'contact', 'compulsion', 'disposal', 'grounds' and terminology such as 'Compulsory Supervision Orders' are not in keeping with the core conclusions of the Independent Care Review.

It is not enough to simply change the language that Scotland is using to describe children and families and the way in which the state is intervening in their lives. Their experiences must also change. For example, if a change is made to the term 'contact' to replace it with 'family time', there is a need to ensure that children and families' experiences of family time are warm, comfortable, safe and in line with the core conclusions of the promise. Scotland will not be keeping the promise if its language is better, but the rights of children and families are still not being upheld and their experiences and outcomes do not improve.

Q9. Do you have any suggestions on potential ways to change and improve the language of care?

'Hearings for Children' recommended:

"There must be a coordinated approach to establishing an appropriate, considered, and non-judgmental language of care in Scotland. A clear plan must be developed for identifying and implementing systemic policy, practice and legislative changes required to ensure consistent use of this language across all 32 local authorities."¹⁵

This recommendation (2.2) was [accepted in full by the Scottish Government](#) who said:

"This builds on efforts being advanced by multi-agency partners under the Children's Hearings Improvement Partnership. The Scottish Government fully endorses the recommendation's intent. Delivery responsibility will be assigned to the Children's Hearings Redesign Board to be progressed by the statutory bodies in 2024-25. This will

¹⁵ Hearings for Children, Page 87

further link, where applicable, to the planned consultation on changes that will need primary legislative reform – to be taken forward in early 2024.”¹⁶

We are not aware of a plan being developed in the way that ‘Hearings for Children’ recommends but urge the Scottish Government to ensure that this is urgently prioritised.

Although we have seen a notable change in the way that some members of the unpaid and paid workforce are talking about and alongside children and families and writing about them, there is further work to do. We have noted in response to the question below some brilliant work being undertaken at local level around language change—but there is a need for a national approach that includes making the required legislative changes where appropriate. For example, the ‘Hearings for Children’ report states:

“There needs to be clear and comprehensive leadership at national and local level to consolidate this, and a clear plan must be developed to deliver systemic change. This must drive consistent policy and practice changes, and identify which changes will require legislative change to improve the way children and families are spoken about and to. This must take into account the way that language constantly evolves and adapts and must be developed alongside children, families and care experienced adults with experience of the Children’s Hearings System. The Promise Bill must be used as the appropriate legislative vehicle to make statutory changes to the language of care, where necessary.”¹⁷

In addition, we highlight the following areas:

- We have seen a change in some areas (though not all) around the use of acronyms, including ‘LAC’ and ‘LAAC’, but note that we are now hearing the term ‘UASC’ frequently to mean Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children. This must stop.
- As stated above, the need to find an alternative way of describing ‘Looked After’ children.
- There is a need to consider the use of definitions beyond ‘care experience’ including with respect to ‘siblings’ and ‘exclusion’ (as we noted in our briefing for Scottish Government on the Promise Bill).
- As we set out in [our consultation response on moving on from care into adulthood](#), the language used to talk about children moving on from care into adulthood must change, including terms such as ‘continuing care’, ‘throughcare’ and ‘aftercare’. A language of care that better reflects the views and experiences of children and care experienced adults must be

¹⁶ Scottish Government response to Hearings for Children, Pg 4: [‘Hearings For Children’ Scottish Government Response - Policy Responses](#)

¹⁷ Hearings for Children, Page 87

developed, with the implications of changing statutory terms clearly understood.

Q10. Are you aware of good practice to change and improve the language of care?

There are countless examples across Scotland of good practice to change and improve the language of care.

For example (but not exclusively):

The work of **Each and Every Child**, which aims to shift public attitudes toward the 'care system' and those with experience of care, and **Our Hearings Our Voice** (including the [Language Leaders](#)) project.

Children's Hearings Scotland have produced a 'Language in the Hearing Room' guide following the work of the Care Inspectorate and Hearings System Working Group. The guide is part of Children's Hearings Scotland's response to ensure language is child-centred and trauma informed. Alongside the guide, the young people from Our Hearings, Our Voice co-designed and co-produced an animation about the language they hear within the care system: [Articulate \(youtube.com\)](#).

Clackmannanshire Council have developed a 'Language of Care' policy for anyone working alongside children, young people and their families. It identifies four key themes: non-judgemental, transparent, easy to understand and culture and values.

Highland Council has a project called 'Mind Your P's and Q's' which includes a preferred language academy and a '[Keep the Promise' Language Guide](#). This emerged from a language subgroup which aimed to find out how meaningful difference can be made to children and families in Highland. The Guide provides context and choices to help guide practitioners and organisations to normalise care experienced children and adults' lives.

Tests of change in Highland are also underway in two residential homes to bring about positive shifts in language.

Highland Council describes the Guide as a "stepping stone" on the way to keeping the promise. Learning from the tests of change will be shared and more work will be undertaken to replicate good practice.

Stirling Council published a case study reviewing feedback from children and young people in relation to the language of care alongside wider themes of communication in March 2023. The study highlighted a number of different specific words or phrases that young people shared they did not like. In particular, the use of acronyms, including LAC and LAAC were highlighted – young people said

it made them feel as though they were lacking in something. The word 'contact', 'siblings' and 'respite' were also highlighted—in line with the conclusions of the Independent Care Review.

A number of recommendations were made for Stirling Council, including developing further training, reviewing language used in paperwork and online systems and training.

Further submissions and examples were shared with The Promise Scotland as part of the engagement work around the development of Plan 24-30. Addressing stigmatising language is central to some partnerships between care experienced groups and children services. Some local areas have renamed 'Corporate Parenting' boards and plans as, for example, 'Our Promise'. Further, some local areas have developed Language Policies, Language Groups, and Language Charters. In one local area, a speech and language specialist has trained social workers on the impact of language used in statutory reports on children, young people, and families.

For further information about our response please get in touch with our Policy Lead, Chloe Riddell, at chloe@thepromise.scot.