

# **Joint response to Scottish Government consultation on 'A Connected Scotland: Tackling social isolation and loneliness and building stronger social connections'**

**April 2018**

## **Overview**

Social isolation and loneliness are serious issues which have a detrimental impact on the wellbeing of care experienced children and young people. To ensure these individuals' needs and views are represented and fully considered in this consultation, on 27<sup>th</sup> March 2018, the Centre for Excellence for Looked After Children in Scotland (CELCIS) hosted a roundtable discussion to identify key areas of concern, and actions for improvement in relation to these issues. Developed in collaboration with Barnardo's Scotland, Befriending Networks, Children in Scotland, LGBT Youth Scotland, Staf (Scottish Throughcare and Aftercare Forum), Who Cares? Scotland, and YouthLink Scotland, this paper sets out our response to the Scottish Government's consultation on tackling loneliness and social isolation, with particular attention to issues affecting those with care experience.

## **Why focus on care experience?**

As of July 2017, there were 14,897 looked after children, and 5,653 care leavers in Scotland.<sup>1</sup> These are children and young people living (or previously living) with foster carers (35%), with friends or family in formal kinship care arrangements (28%), in residential accommodation (10%), in secure care (<0.5%), or at home with their birth parent(s), with compulsory social work supervision (25%). These individuals all have care experience.

Children and young people with care experience are not a homogenous group. Their own individual and familial experiences, and associated reasons for state intervention, can be diverse, as are their individual experiences within the care system. While the circumstances, needs and views of these children and young people are rich and varied, they have all experienced major difficulties in their lives. Many have experienced trauma, abuse, and neglect, the impact of which can be felt across an individual's life course. Due to the level of need and vulnerability of these children and young people, and the state's responsibilities to safeguard their rights and promote their wellbeing, [Part 9: Corporate Parenting](#) of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 (the 2014 Act), requires Scottish Ministers, local authorities, and a range of other public sector bodies to uphold particular responsibilities across all areas of their work. Corporate parents must be alert to matters which adversely impact on looked after children and care leavers, promote their interests, and enable them to make use of supports and services they provide. As such, particular attention must be paid to these individual's needs and views when working towards tackling social isolation and loneliness in Scotland.

Vulnerability factors associated with loneliness and social isolation include: having no qualifications; not being in work, training or education; having limited contact with family; knowing few people in the local neighbourhood; and having no source of practical or emotional support.<sup>2</sup> Such vulnerability factors can stem from adverse childhood experiences, and are issues which disproportionately affect care experienced children and young people.

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## Key issues for care experienced children and young people

A number of factors contribute to care experienced children and young people's vulnerability to becoming socially isolated and lonely:

- **Stigma** – stereotypical assumptions held by society and communities often lead to care experienced children and young people being stigmatised and viewed as 'outsiders' who pose a risk to community wellbeing. This can create and/or perpetuate feelings of shame, and increase barriers to care experienced children and young people making and keeping friends.<sup>3</sup> Not only is the experience of social isolation and loneliness itself associated with stigma, social isolation and loneliness can be propagated by the effects of other forms of stigma.
- **Developmental impact of early life experiences** – where children have experienced trauma and disrupted attachment relationships, the impact on their development can be enduring. Children with these experiences may find managing stress, and understanding and controlling emotions difficult. This can affect their social and learning experience in schools, and adaptive behaviours may lead to interpersonal difficulties in adulthood.<sup>4</sup>
- **In-care transition and dislocation** – the social networks of children and young people who move frequently between different placements can be "shattered",<sup>5</sup> and movements through and out of the care system (potentially coupled with transience earlier in life) can lead to disconnection and dislocation from family and community. Particular skills and support networks are required to rebuild connections, which children and young people may not have had the opportunity to develop or refine.<sup>6</sup>
- **Relationships** - supportive, enduring relationships with those who care for and about children (such as carers, teachers, befrienders, social workers and other significant adults) are the "golden thread" in children's lives, and the quality of these relationships should be prioritised.<sup>7</sup> Care experienced children report feeling relationships are not prioritised and they are not supported to sustain relationships with significant adults in their lives. This can make investing in new relationships even more challenging for them.<sup>8</sup>
- **Weakened family connections** - many children who are in foster and residential care do not have as much contact with their family as they would like, and require support to strengthen their family relationships.<sup>9</sup>
- **Sibling separation and contact** - children who are looked after away from their birth parents experience a high degree of separation from their siblings, and children's views and wishes on this matter are inadequately recorded.<sup>10</sup>
- **Disruption to friendships** - children and young people may lose contact with friends as they experience different placement moves. Friendships and peer relationships can serve as a buffer to stress and change; children should be enabled and supported to maintain these.<sup>11</sup>
- **Leaving care** – despite developments in policy and practice to enable positive transitions for young people leaving care, for many this continues to be a time of acute vulnerability. As one young person who left residential care puts it:

*"You kinda get used to the company and then if you're just moving out and you get a flat... I don't know what to do with my time. Some people would turn maybe to drink or drugs or get in with a bad crowd. Having people check-up and making sure you're alright makes the world of difference instead of leaving you to your own devices because a lot of people won't be able to kinda adapt to it."*<sup>12</sup>

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Leaving care at a young age, inadequate preparation, disrupted relationships and social networks, limited emotional and practical support, and poverty can all lead to isolating and lonely experiences for those leaving care.<sup>13</sup> In turn, this can trigger or exacerbate mental health difficulties, and affect coping strategies.<sup>14</sup>

- **Housing options and homelessness** – without suitable housing options, care leavers are at risk of homelessness. Housing options such as B&B's are experienced as particularly isolating and lonely, and should not be used to accommodate care experienced young people. Where care leavers move into their own tenancies, loneliness is a key factor affecting the sustainment of these.<sup>15</sup>

### **Actions for improvement**

These are complex issues, requiring significant attention. Despite the considerable efforts of a wide range of organisations and individuals across Scotland to pursue improvements for care experienced children and young people, more work is required. The following improvements are critical:

- **Challenging stigma and promoting understanding** – the stigma and prejudice care experienced children and young people face are unacceptable, and must be challenged. In addition to national campaigns to combat stigma from organisations such as Who Cares? Scotland,<sup>16</sup> corporate parents across all levels of the system have a responsibility to drive this, from Scottish Ministers working in diverse portfolio areas, to classroom teachers responding to children day-to-day. This extends beyond challenging specific issues such as bullying behaviour, and must involve government action to promote inclusion and inclusivity within our society, so that all individuals are valued, respected and equal. Eliminating stigma will contribute to reducing care experienced children and young people's experience of social isolation and loneliness. A focus on eliminating stigma is particularly vital, given the proposed strategy relies heavily on the role of communities to reduce social isolation and loneliness.
  - **Promoting permanence and stability in children's lives** – for children and young people in care to be able to build lasting relationships, social networks and feel connected throughout their lives, they require the foundations of stability: namely a permanent place to grow up, where they feel safe, secure and nurtured. Such places must not only be legally permanent, but they must *feel* permanent to the child. The work of the Permanence and Care Excellence programme led by CELCIS and Scottish Government contributes to this by working with whole systems to improve timescales for securing sustainable, long-term placements for children. Additionally, NSPCC Scotland are piloting an evidence-based approach to working with families and children aged 0-5. Alongside NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde and Glasgow City Council, this approach places children's attachment relationships at the heart of decision making, and aims to secure early permanence.<sup>17</sup>
  - **Full, consistent implementation of 'Staying Put' and 'Continuing Care'** – policy and legislation in Scotland recognises the importance of positive transitions from care settings, and of enabling young people to remain in care for longer, rather than being expected or encouraged to leave at a young age or before they are ready. Such positive transitions align more closely with the experiences of young people leaving home for the first time, and serve to reduce social isolation and loneliness. In Scotland, the average age for leaving care is 17 years, while the average age for leaving home is 26.<sup>18</sup> As a corporate parent, there is a responsibility on the state to ensure care leavers are supported to the same standards expected for their own children. This should not include an expectation
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of becoming independent, but rather *interdependent* and part of a network of positive relationships and lifelong support.<sup>19</sup> Central to the Scottish Government (2013) guidance [Staying Put Scotland: Providing care leavers with connectedness and belonging](#) is the importance of relationship-based practice, and extended and graduated transitions to achieve long term positive futures for young people leaving care. [Part 11 \(Continuing Care\)](#) of the 2014 Act sets out provisions enabling young people who have ceased to be looked after to remain in the same accommodation and receive the same assistance as when previously looked after, up to the age of 21. [Part 10 \(Aftercare\)](#) of the 2014 Act increased the age of eligibility for aftercare support for care leavers up to the age of twenty-six (providing a young person is deemed eligible after assessment). However, advances in policy and legislation have not necessarily translated into practice nationally. Young people still frequently express the routine nature with which they are expected to move on when they reach certain ages, for example:

*"...see if someone was being put into care when they've been quite young, they get used to it, they get used to kinda the routine, and then when you turn 16 they're like aw that's you, you're 16 now go on. I find that quite hard to believe that like... you've just... done everything for this person and you've not really taught them anything, now you're wanting them just to just go off, just hope they do it...function by themselves."<sup>20</sup>*

Continued, concerted attention must be focussed on the full and consistent implementation of existing policy, on a national scale. This requires ongoing political commitment, and leadership at national and local levels.

- **Access to advocacy, information and support** – quality advocacy services can be instrumental in empowering children and young people to fully understand their rights, and participate in decisions that affect their lives. It is critical that all care experienced children and young people (up to the age of 26) are aware of their rights and entitlements, and are provided with appropriate support to access services. They also need redress mechanisms to fairly challenge decisions, for example, where they have been deemed not to meet eligibility criteria. One young person describes the positive impact an advocate had on his housing situation and related social isolation:

*"We worked together to explain to the Housing that I needed to be able to stay somewhere I knew and somewhere that meant I could still work and see people."<sup>21</sup>*

Access to advocacy can be necessary to ensure young people's rights are upheld, but is not always available to all.

- **Increased positive housing options** – to minimise experiences of social isolation and loneliness, when young people are genuinely ready to leave care, there must be a suitable range of options to meet their needs. [Housing Options Protocols for Care Leavers - Guidance for Corporate Parents: Improving housing and accommodation outcomes for Scotland's care leavers](#) were launched by Scottish Government in October 2013. This guidance, based on the philosophy of 'Staying Put' supports corporate parents to ensure the housing and accommodation needs of care leavers are consistently met to a high standard, however their implementation is inconsistent. Both the Housing Options Protocols and Staying Put guidance explicitly state that no care leaver should be required to
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present as homeless in order to be able to access housing. We are aware through our networks that this continues to be common practice in some areas. After hearing from individuals with care experience, in its February 2018 [Report on Homelessness](#), the Scottish Parliament's Local Government and Communities Committee recommended the [Homeless Persons \(Unsuitable Accommodation\) \(Scotland\) Order 2014](#) be amended to ensure care experienced people do not experience unsuitable accommodation (such as B&Bs) for any longer than 7 days. We support this recommendation, though remain seriously concerned that even a 7 day period is considered acceptable. One young person describes the negative impact of B&B accommodation, illustrating that decisions to allow care experienced young people to stay in B&B accommodation are clearly at odds with corporate parenting principles:

*"There has never been a positive story which has involved being forced into a B&B accommodation placement. It's always ended in an addiction or homelessness or just a worse scenario than you were before. Why they keep doing it baffles me"*<sup>22</sup>

A range of appropriate accommodation options must be properly resourced and available to care leavers, such as supported lodgings, semi-independent living with 24 hours staff support, flat sharing, and high quality relationship-based visiting support or peer mentoring. As one young person articulates, options must be suited to the individual:

*"So, every supported accommodation does things differently, yknow what I mean? But it's whether or not it works for you. And that's when it becomes difficult for mental health I think, 'cause I was in like about five or six different supported accommodations between the ages of 16 and 20 and I'd say only one of them worked."*<sup>23</sup>

- **Enabling relationship-based practice and sustained positive relationships** – given the primacy of relationships for children and young people with care experience, greater priority must be given to relationship-based practice, based on empathy, respect and 'stickability'.<sup>24</sup> Staffing changes should be minimised and consistency in workers promoted. The support needs of staff must be attended to in order to ensure that this is possible, in relation to any emotional demands as well as workload pressures. Enabling and encouraging positive, enduring relationships with former carers, residential workers, befrienders/mentors, youth workers or other significant adults are critical to young people feeling supported when they do come to make life transitions.<sup>25</sup> One young person explains the impact of positive relationships on her life when leaving care:

*"For me, loneliness was a huge part of my life... I didn't realise how difficult life was without your family until I left care. I am in a better place now, because a worker seemed to get what I was going through... Not being isolated has made me feel less stressed, happier and now I am at college. I don't think I could have coped with college if I still felt as isolated as I did."*<sup>26</sup>

Opportunities to develop supportive relationships through community based youth work, befriending or mentoring are invaluable in promoting inclusion, and

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reducing social isolation and loneliness. Risk averse practice, culture and bureaucratic barriers can detract from children and young people's positive experience of enduring relationships, and attention should be focused in these areas. Similarly, funding cycles can lead to uncertainty for some services and their staff, and further undermine consistent relationships. Relationships provide opportunities for role modelling, and it is also through these relationships that children and young people experience the world, and build the skills and expectations which encourage and enable future healthy relationships to develop with others, which protect from social isolation and loneliness. Studies examining the prevalence of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) have highlighted that children who do well despite adversity have usually had at least one stable committed relationship with a supportive adult.<sup>27</sup>

- **Early intervention, family support and family connection**

- Working together with families to provide the right support, at the right time, is central to the Getting It Right For Every Child (Girfec) approach. Where community based and third sector projects which promote social contact are struggling, or competing for declining funding, maintaining a range of high quality preventative services remains a challenge. Without the right supports, families' issues can reach crisis point, and, in some cases, children become looked after.
- Where children and young people are living away from their birth families, every effort to ensure and support positive, high-quality, relationship-based contact with important family members must be made, in line with the child's views and wishes.
- Where siblings are looked after away from their birth parents, they should not be routinely separated from one another. Where this is unavoidable, siblings must be supported to spend quality time together on a regular basis, in accordance with their views and wishes. Maintaining and supporting sibling relationships could have a significant positive impact on care experienced children and young people's experience of social isolation and loneliness. The Scotland wide partnership, [Stand Up For Siblings](#), aims to improve legislation, policy and practice pertaining to sibling separation and contact, to protect the rights and promote the wellbeing of siblings whose relationships are at risk.
- Of the 4274 children and young people who ceased to be looked after last year, 2326 (54%) returned to the home of their biological parents.<sup>28</sup> When children and young people leave care and return to their family home, appropriate supports must be available to rebuild and sustain positive family relationships.

- **Access for young people to suitable community spaces** – experiences of social isolation and loneliness are reduced when children and young people have opportunities to spend time with like-minded peers, engaged in purposeful activities that they enjoy, which build on talents and interests, in order to increase self-esteem, confidence and resilience.<sup>29</sup> The availability and accessibility of suitable places (such as youth work organisations, youth centres and community centres) for young people, including those with care experience, to participate in a range of activities and spend social time requires improvement.

## **Conclusion**

Social isolation and loneliness can impact on children and young people with care experience in a range of ways, at different points in their care journey. Potential exists to change this, by making improvements such as those outlined above. However, this is not straightforward, and requires the connected and concerted effort of Scotland's corporate parents, and wider society. Care experienced children and young peoples' needs and views must be a central consideration as we work towards tackling loneliness and isolation in Scotland, and it is concerning that they are not mentioned in the consultation document.

## **Consultation Questions**

### ***1. What needs to change in your community to reduce social isolation and loneliness and increase the range and quality of social connections?***

Every individual is different, each may require different responses and supports to reduce social isolation and loneliness. However, at the community level, barriers to children and young people with care experience feeling included often relate to stigma, which must be addressed. Stereotypical assumptions held by society and communities often stigmatise individuals with care experience, viewing them as 'outsiders' and a risk to community wellbeing. Stigma and prejudice towards care experienced children and young people are unacceptable, and must be challenged by corporate parents at all levels of society in order to ensure that care experienced young people are included and embraced in community led work to end social isolation and loneliness.

Children and young people with care experience should not feel unwelcome or excluded from their communities, but rather respected, valued and included. Article 31 of the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (UNCRC, 1989) recognises that every child has the right to relax, play and take part in a wide range of cultural and artistic activities. Children and young people with care experience will all have diverse interests, they require access to a range of activities in their communities, to suit their individual talents and needs. This will enable individuals to spend time developing relationships with those with whom they share interests.

Groups and activities are most likely to be successful when they are developed in line with the views and needs of those who will use them, using co-design and co-production to ensure maximum participation.<sup>30</sup> For example, the approach taken to improve 'leaving care services' in one local authority area in Scotland, by bringing together corporate parents and young people to explore issues and develop change. This approach broke down existing hierarchies, empowered young people, and generated ideas and ownership.<sup>31</sup> There is a need to recognise care experienced children, young people and their families as valued participants, who should have opportunities to be involved in service design, delivery and evaluation. This aspiration is clearly set out in the work of the Christie Commission on public service reform.<sup>32</sup>

Children and young people (including young parents) with care experience may require additional support and encouragement to access community resources, for a variety of reasons. Corporate parents, families, carers and communities should take an active role in encouraging and supporting children and young people with care experience to access community resources, and reduce barriers to access at individual and systemic levels (for example, due to low confidence and self-esteem, or prohibitive transport or attendance costs).

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Additionally, care leavers require safe and appropriate housing options, in communities to which they feel connection and belonging. The relationship-based support individuals require at times of transition from care settings (to deal with practicalities of independent living and associated emotional challenges, alongside maintaining and developing positive social networks) must be provided and continued for as long as necessary.

***2. Who is key at local level in driving this change, and what do you want to see them doing more (or less) of?***

Corporate parents at the local level play a critical role in ensuring the needs and views of care experienced children and young people are championed. These range from elected members in local authorities, to police officers, teachers, housing officers and health professionals. By engaging with children and young people with care experience, and their families and carers, corporate parents can work collaboratively together and alongside other individuals and community organisations to reduce stigma, barriers to participation, and support positive transitions from care to interdependence.

***3. What does Government need to do nationally to better empower communities and create the conditions to allow social connections to flourish?***

As corporate parents, Scottish Ministers have specific responsibilities to safeguard the rights and promote the wellbeing of those with care experience. At a national level, the Scottish Government should take a leading role in supporting and encouraging other corporate parents, and also in holding corporate parents to account where practice is inadequate. Public awareness of the needs and issues affecting care experienced people has been amplified over the past year, with the commencement of a 'root and branch' review of the care system. Further public conversation and messaging from the Scottish Government about what is required in communities, and to challenge stigma, will contribute to minimising the impact of social isolation and loneliness on these children and young people.

Additionally, to be empowered to create change, communities require resources. We recognise the investment from the Scottish Government in local community projects to date (as noted in the consultation document) however, it is concerning that there is no commitment to future investment of any kind, especially in light of announcements from the UK government for a dedicated fund to support their efforts to tackle loneliness and social isolation.<sup>33</sup> A well-resourced youth work strategy which ensures community based youth work is sustained could provide opportunities and safe spaces for continued relationships for children and young people, including those with care experience.

***5. Do you agree with the evidence sources we are drawing from? Are there other evidence sources you think we should be using?***

The evidence sources drawn on provide an overview of the issues of social isolation and loneliness in general. However, we are concerned at the lack of evidence considered in relation to the impact of loneliness and social isolation on children and young people with care experience. This response highlights such evidence, and it is hoped this evidence will be given due weight in the future development of the strategy.

***8. How can we all work together challenge stigma around social isolation and loneliness, and raise awareness of it as an issue? Are there examples of people doing this well that you're aware of?***

We recognise the prevalence of stigma as a result of individuals being socially isolated and feeling lonely, however we reiterate the impact that other forms of stigma (such as

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judgements made about people with care experience) have on an individual's vulnerability to experiencing social isolation and loneliness.

**11. What do we need to be doing more of (or less of) to ensure that we tackle social isolation and loneliness for the specific life stages and groups mentioned above?**

We are concerned that children and young people with care experience are not included in the vulnerable groups mentioned, or elsewhere in the consultation document. This includes, importantly, within the performance framework. This is a major omission, and it is anticipated that evidence from this document will highlight key concerns and actions to be progressed. As corporate parents, there are specific duties in place to ensure that Scottish Ministers (and others) are alert to matters which may adversely impact on looked after children and care leavers, and actively promote their interests. This includes within consultations such as this, where the relevance to children and young people with care experience is evident.

**15. How can we better equip people with the skills to establish and nurture strong and positive social connections?**

Promoting permanence and stability in care experienced children's lives is critical to minimising experiences of social isolation and loneliness. Connections with family, friends and important people should be supported and maintained. Children should not be routinely separated from their brothers and sisters when they are looked after away from home. By ensuring children and young people experience sustained, positive relationships with a range of people who are important to them, they are best placed to continue this pattern throughout their lives. Recognising the importance of supportive relationships to care experienced children and young people, the Scottish Government currently funds the [in tandem Scotland](#) service. This offers mentoring to 8-14yr olds who are Looked After at Home. A further rollout to those in foster, kinship or residential care may support care experienced young people more broadly.

For many children and young people with care experience, experiences of trauma and early childhood adversity have an enduring impact on development, affecting behaviours, coping strategies, self-esteem, and trust in others. Such challenges can impact on an individual's ability to establish positive and stable social connections throughout life. It is imperative therefore, that children are supported in a way which meets their developmental needs, at the earliest possible stage, to build safe and appropriate relationships with caregivers, peers and others, and to develop the lifeskills necessary for managing life independently. This requires committed and skilled practitioners, who can support parents and carers in their interactions with children and young people throughout their childhoods and adolescence. Relationships must be prioritised, and children and young people must be enabled and encouraged to continue significant, supportive relationships for as long as they need and wish.

**16. How can we better ensure that our services that support children and young people are better able to identify where someone may be socially isolated, and capable of offering the right support?**

Using a co-production approach, and ensuring those who use services are fully involved in service design, delivery and evaluation, are vital to ensure services respond to needs.

Establishing trusting relationships with children and young people, where they feel safe, respected and listened to, is critical in being able to support individuals in a timely way which meets their needs. Relationships may take time to develop, but it is by listening to children and young people, and responding positively to them as individuals, that trust

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can be established. Positive relationships with family, friends, informal and formal carers, teachers and wider social networks are crucial to development, and contribute towards connectedness and stability.<sup>34</sup>

Young people are particularly subject to social pressures to appear successful, and may find loneliness difficult to talk about or something to deny or hide.<sup>35</sup> Relationships are important tools to use with young people so they do not feel threatened or embarrassed, but supported and understood. Where practitioners and services can encourage and facilitate low-key ways for young people to connect (to them, or to peers, family or others), experiences of social isolation and loneliness can be minimised.

***17. How can the third sector and social enterprise play a stronger role in helping to tackle social isolation and loneliness in communities?***

The third sector and social enterprise have a crucial role to play in communities, in terms of facilitating high quality places and opportunities for children and young people, and families/carers, to come together and build connections, supported by specialist practitioners. Early intervention and preventative services are again of critical importance. Sustainability of funding is a concern however, as the impact of services ending abruptly is a particular barrier to successfully tackling loneliness and social isolation.<sup>36</sup>

***20. What are the barriers presented by the lived environment in terms of socially connecting? How can these be addressed?***

As discussed above, such barriers for young people leaving care include unsuitable housing options, particularly where young people do not feel safe, supported, or in an environment to which they feel they belong. This can be addressed through increasing the range of suitable and appropriate housing options for care leavers, and ensuring sustained, relationship-based support. Additionally, financial hardship and poverty impacts disproportionately on care leavers.<sup>37</sup> Financial barriers to participation in social activities or opportunities to connect for care leavers should be assessed as 'eligible needs' in terms of Part 10 of the 2014 Act. Where costs are prohibitive and participation would benefit the wellbeing of the individual, costs should be met by local authorities or other corporate parents wherever possible.

***23. How best can we ensure that people have both access to digital technology and the ability to use it?***

Digital technology and social media have the capacity to enhance existing connections for children and young people with care experience. Children separated from their families can feel closeness through monitoring family members' social media posts, accessing photographs, and chatting online.<sup>38</sup> However, children and young people themselves recognise that whilst it can help sustain social contact, online interaction is not a substitute for enduring, caring relationships.<sup>39</sup> Like all children and young people, those with care experience must be supported to use digital technology and social media safely, to recognise positive relationships and opportunities, and potentially exploitative ones. Children and young people with care experience may also seek or receive contact from family members with whom they have had difficult relationships with in the past, over which they may require particular support and advice.

As noted above, care leavers can experience particular financial hardship and may not be able to access the internet easily at home. They may not have smartphones, computers or tablets on which to access public Wi-Fi. Whilst there are opportunities for social

connection as a result of technological developments, these should not be prioritised at the expense of genuine human connection.

**24. Taking into account answers to questions elsewhere, is there anything else we should be doing that doesn't fall into any of these categories?**

In order to embed children's rights and interests into decisions and policymaking, a Children's Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment (CRWIA) should be considered at the earliest possible stage.<sup>40</sup> There does not appear to be a CRWIA accompanying (or mentioned within) the draft strategy. This is concerning, given the impact and effect policy change in relation to social isolation and loneliness will have on children in Scotland.

**26. Is there anything missing (from the framework we have created to measure our progress in tackling Social Isolation and Loneliness) that you think is important for us to consider?**

We are concerned that the outcomes, measures for success, and indicators do not clearly link up with one another, appear vague, and together may not result in achieving the overall vision. The limited detail of measures such as 'improved population health' will lead to difficulties quantifying the impact of the strategy, and driving future improvements.

Children and young people with care experience do not feature in the framework, and the only outcome, measure or indicator which specifically relates to children or young people is in relation to reducing bullying cases in schools. A far greater consideration of what is required for children and young people, particularly those with care experience, is required within this framework, and strategy as a whole. A specific indicator relating to housing options for care leavers is recommended, and consideration should be given to measures relating to services being trauma and ACEs informed.

**Thank you for providing us with this opportunity to respond. We hope the feedback is helpful. We would be happy to discuss any aspect in further detail, including facilitating dialogue with care experienced young people.**

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