



**EQUALITY | RESPECT | LOVE**

# COMMUNITIES THAT CARE RENFREWSHIRE

WORKING IN SCHOOLS - IMPACT REPORT  
December 2020

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# 1. Need

Care Experienced people currently experience stigma and discrimination within their communities, underpinned by a lack of public knowledge and understanding of care experience. This leads to Care Experienced people not feeling accepted, included or as though they belong within their communities. We know that in order to realise Who Cares? Scotland's vision for *a lifetime of equality, respect and love for Care Experienced people*, public education needs to be at the heart of what we do. Our evidence for the need for public education is vast and wide-ranging, some of which can be found [here](#):

Educational outcomes for Care Experienced people are disproportionately poor compared with their peers. For example:

- Care Experienced school leavers continue to have **lower attainment** than other school leavers.
- Care Experienced children and young people **leave school earlier** than their non-Care Experienced peers.
- Care Experienced children are **less likely to be in positive destinations** nine months after leaving school.
- The rate of **exclusions among Care Experienced children is much higher** than in the general school population. The more placement moves a child experiences in a year, the higher their likelihood of exclusion.
- Figures show that at all levels, Care Experienced students have **lower rates of course completion** compared to all students at university and college.
- For the most up-to-date statistics see our [website](#).

Schools provide an ideal setting to improve attitudes, understanding and perceptions of Care Experienced people amongst the next generation, and to support a ripple effect from that learning within the wider school community. Creating school environments which are more supportive and inclusive provide an opportunity to improve educational outcomes for Care Experienced pupils.

Many Care Experienced people do not know that they are Care Experienced, particularly those who live with family. By learning about care experience, they are able to own and embrace a care identity and access supports available to them. Providing safe spaces for Care Experienced people to come together within their communities, strengthens this sense of belonging and care identity.

**Who Cares? Scotland's Communities that Care project began in 2016 in Renfrewshire as a 5-year project (funded by STV Children's Appeal). The project aimed to ensure that Care Experienced people are accepted and included and have a sense of belonging within their communities. This report outlines the impact of the Communities that Care project's work in Renfrewshire schools.**

# 2. IN NUMBERS

**8** Renfrewshire schools

**129** PSE inputs

**6,109** pupils

**59** drop-in sessions

**87** teachers trained from 4 Renfrewshire schools

**2,600** students completing initial teacher education

**4** inputs to a total of 29 parents and carers

We asked pupils questions before and after our class inputs to test their **knowledge, understanding** and **attitudes** in relation to Care Experience...



## 3. KEY IMPACT THEMES

### 3.1 Knowledge and Understanding

At the beginning of PSE sessions, pupils were asked anonymously what they knew about Care Experienced people. Responses given at this time highlighted a lack of understanding of what it means to be Care Experienced, with a lot of confusion around the difference between Care Experienced people and young carers. Pupils were then asked the same question following the input. Responses at this stage indicated that pupils had a greater knowledge of what care experience is and a greater understanding of what life is like for Care Experienced people.

Pupil responses were coded using a coding scheme to generate scores for pupil knowledge and understanding before and after our input. Analyses have shown that **pupils' knowledge and understanding of Care Experience more than tripled** from the beginning to the end of our inputs.

To assess the long-term change in knowledge and understanding of Care Experience, 7 follow-up sessions were undertaken with a total of 107 S1 pupils who had received an input from the project team at the start of the academic year. Results showed that, as a result of inputs, pupils reported a **73%** increase in their understanding of care experience. Pupils also undertook an interactive quiz in teams on different types of care and what constituted care experience, scoring an average of **78%**. The results from these follow-up sessions have indicated that the increase in knowledge and understanding of care experience observed following PSE sessions was sustained 6 months following the inputs.

The project team recently carried out a number of interviews and focus groups with key project stakeholders. Participants in these sessions highlighted that the project's work in local schools was key to increasing knowledge and understanding of the term "Care Experienced" and the different types of care. Care Experienced people and kinship carers in particular felt that kinship care is not widely understood and that inputs in school play an important role in raising awareness of this:

*"Being in the schools is a good thing, the kids know you. A lot of people don't know what kinship is and now you can tell them. It's important to learn this at school."*

(Kinship Carer)

*"See when we were talking in the class, we went through a presentation about kinship care and see when they asked what we were, and I said 'kinship care' none of them got what it meant but then see when you came in and you spoke about it and you told us about all the different types of care and told us about other people's stories I think it was good. I think they learned more about it."*

(Care Experienced young person, age 12)

## 3.2 Attitudes

To capture pupils' attitudes towards Care Experienced people, pupils were asked anonymously to indicate on a 4-point scale the extent to which they agreed that going into care was a young person's fault. Pupils responded to this question both before and after the input and responses were coded and compared. Analyses have shown that pupils' attitudes towards Care Experienced people had **improved by 51%** following our inputs.

Results from 6 month follow up sessions showed that, as a result of inputs, pupils reported the social desirability of being nice to Care Experienced people at **87%**; indicating that some positive attitudes towards Care Experience were sustained 6 months after the original input.

During interview and focus groups sessions, the project's work in local schools was highlighted by many project stakeholders as being instrumental to changing attitudes and perceptions of pupils who are not Care Experienced. Teachers highlighted that before engaging with the project, many pupils would have been unaware of the challenges faced by their Care Experienced peers:

*"I always do a wee follow up just the following week and I think it's amazing how the kids' attitudes change. For some people it's just something they haven't really thought about"*

(Guidance Teacher, Secondary School)

*"Kids at heart do want to look out for one another. I think that sometimes kids can go through life with tunnel vision if they have never experienced adversity or any upset within the family home, sometimes it can lead to a lack of empathy. I think that having the PSE classes, raising the profile has made them more empathetic and understanding."*

(Pastoral Support Teacher, Secondary School)

Those with direct experience of care highlighted that there is a lack of understanding present within schools which can result in Care Experienced pupils being treated differently by their peers. Both kinship carers and Care Experienced people have experienced positive change in relation to this due to the Communities that Care project's work educating school pupils. Care Experienced people now feel more accepted and included within their schools due to improved attitudes of their non-Care Experienced peers:

*"The project has helped being in the school, not everyone knows about what kids go through, it helps other kids to understand."*

(Kinship Carer)

In addition, teachers commented that the lunchtime drop-ins had provided an opportunity for those who weren't Care Experienced to learn more and to show support to their Care Experienced peers:

*"I think that being in the school and doing the drop-ins has also been good, because it's kind of, for want of a better word, it's normalised and I think children who even aren't Care Experienced have been keen just to drop in and say hello and support their friends maybe who have been."*

(Guidance Teacher, Secondary School)

**“It’s making a massive difference to the wellbeing of Care Experienced pupils and even the ones who aren’t, having them understand that everybody’s got a different life, everybody’s got different families and always you have to be kind and understanding.**

**I don’t know if you do recognise the difference that you’ve made to a lot of young people to be honest.”**

**(Pastoral Support Teacher, Secondary School)**

### 3.3 Feeling Accepted & Included

During PSE inputs, pupils were asked to consider what they as individuals could do to make school easier for their Care Experienced peers. Example responses included:

- Make them feel safe and happy
- Accept them for who they are
- Make them feel welcomed
- Be kind
- Ask them to play
- Don't judge or treat them differently
- Support them
- Stick up for them
- Know that it's not their fault
- Don't ditch or bully them

These responses demonstrate an eagerness to care, support, and be more attentive to those who may need it. During 6-month follow-up sessions we assessed whether these intentions had resulted in actual behaviour change. Pupils undertook scenario work in groups to establish whether they had experienced certain situations in or out of school and how they had reacted to the following situations:

- Witnessing bullying of Care Experienced peers
- Experiencing Care Experienced peers having no friends
- Witnessing peers being picked up by a carer or other family member

Pupils provided examples of ways that they had behaved in a supportive way towards their Care Experienced peers in these situations, as well as an understanding of where behaviours of Care Experienced peers may come from, given their experiences at home.

During interview and focus groups sessions, Care Experienced young people connected with the project communicated to the project team that following inputs in their class, they feel that those in their class have a better knowledge of care experience. In addition, they feel that attitudes towards Care Experienced people have improved. This has led them to feel more accepted and included at school:

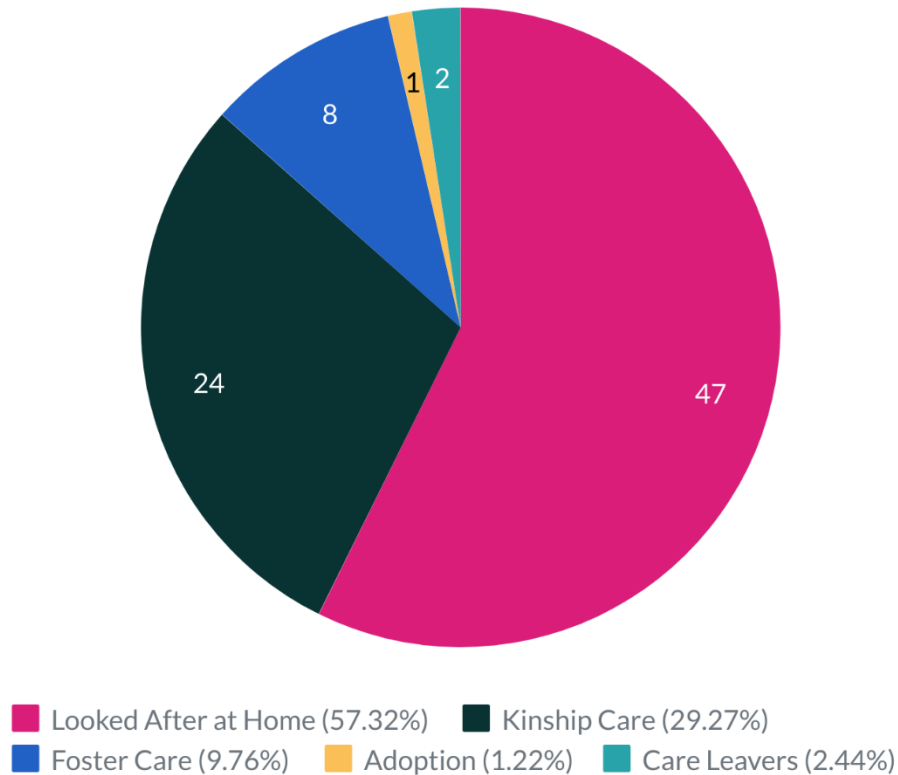
*“They [peers] used to always ask questions about like why I stayed with my Nana and they didn't get what it meant. I feel like, I think now they understand more and now they don't look at you as if you're weird. Because it [the project's input to the class] helped. I think it's really good for everybody to learn about Who Cares because it's a good thing. You do good.”*

(Care Experienced young person, age 12)



### 3.4 Care Identity

To date, **82** Care Experienced pupils have signed up as family members of Who Cares? Scotland as a result of connecting with the project team at school. These young people had experience of various different types of care:



Many of these young people did not know that they were Care Experienced before our input, particularly those who were looked after at home and living in kinship care. We know from our analysis of Who Cares? Scotland membership trends that these young people are the ‘hardest to reach’ and are therefore under-represented in our membership nationwide. This project, through engagement with schools, is bucking that trend, making our membership more representative of the Care Experienced population as a whole.

To date **23** Care Experienced young people have attended regular local groups following engaging with Who Cares? Scotland at school. These young people have then had the opportunity to take part in national influencing and participation activity and to connect with other Care Experienced people from across Scotland.

During interview and focus group sessions, Care Experienced people highlighted that the project’s work in schools was key to ensuring that young people are able to learn that they are Care Experienced and to support a positive sense of care identity:

*“I think the work in schools is good because you talk to younger people and some of them might not know that are Care Experienced and you can talk to them and help them understand and get them to the groups.”*

(Care Experienced young person, age 16)

*“See if I never met you I wouldn’t have felt confident about it. I’m happy staying with my Nana, I do like it, she’s funny but I don’t think anybody else would have got it if it wasn’t for WC?S coming into my school and explaining it to people.”*

(Care Experienced young person, age 12)

### 3.5 Access to Supports

Interview and focus group participants highlighted that the Communities that Care project has made it easier for Care Experienced people to access support and opportunities. By increasing awareness of care experience and ensuring that Care Experienced people (and those around them) understand the different types of care, the project has enabled those working with Care Experienced people to support them to access the supports available to them. Having the opportunity to access these supports from Who Cares? Scotland and other organisations has impacted positively the overall wellbeing of Care Experienced people:

*“One of the children in primary 7 didn’t identify herself as Care Experienced because she was always in the care of her maternal grandmother.... but simple things like financial support or clubs that she wouldn’t have normally been able to get to you know we were then able to use.”*

(Head Teacher, Primary School)

*“You’ve made a massive difference to many of them [Care Experienced pupils] within the school. Having opportunities to go to Love Rallies and really have a voice is so important. How can we make things right, how can we make things better for people who are Care Experienced if they don’t have a voice? And now because of the work that you have been doing, they do and they have a means of communicating that”*

(Pastoral Support Teacher, Secondary School)

Interview and focus group participants highlighted that the project’s work in local schools has also enabled Care Experienced people to access long-term advocacy support. Having access to advocacy has been essential to supporting Care Experienced people to have their voices heard on issues that matter to them within their own lives:

*“If you weren’t in my school, I wouldn’t have known about Who Cares? Scotland and I wouldn’t have got advocacy. When you’re a wean you don’t really want to say what you want in front of the three members of the panel, the writer, your school, your mum and dad, your social worker. I didn’t want to say how I really felt because I didn’t want to let anyone down. But having you there to say it for me, it didn’t make it feel better, but it made it feel more relaxed.”*

(Care Experienced young person, age 19)

*“It has made a difference, in just helping them, and feeling that they’ve got a voice and that somebody is listening and somebody actually is speaking up for them as well....knowing that they are not having to represent themselves”*

(Guidance Teacher, Secondary School)

### 3.6 Teaching

At the end of the training delivered to teachers and other members of school staff, participants filled in an online survey regarding their experience of the training. Results showed that 95% of 1,382 respondents agreed or strongly agreed that attending the training had enhanced their understanding of what life is like for young people in care; 88% of respondents strongly agreed that attending the session would help them to include and support Care Experienced young people more effectively and 71% of respondents strongly agreed that attending the session improved their understanding of their role as a Corporate Parent.

A key theme emerging from the interviews and focus groups was that before the Communities that Care project was in Renfrewshire, there was very little knowledge of the work of Who Cares? Scotland and the various supports offered by the organisation. Through engagement with the project, teachers and support staff working with Care Experienced people now know more about Who Cares? Scotland and the opportunities for Care Experienced pupils to access independent advocacy and get involved in both local and national participation activities to develop a sense of belonging and influence change:

*“I knew that there is a huge initiative and drive from Who Cares? but I wasn’t really aware how that benefits our local community. Before we started engaging with yourselves, there was nothing really there for the young people that had experienced care at some point in their life. Through working with yourselves I feel like as a pastoral support teacher I have more places I can refer young people; I’ve got greater expertise identifying possible support networks and a better understanding what your organisation does and how you can support us and also the work that you do with the young people.”*

(Pastoral Support Teacher, Secondary School)

*“Yes we have worked with children with care experience over a number of years, but what I didn’t realise was the extent of support that would be out there for those who were Care Experienced and that’s had a huge impact in some of our children and families.”*

(Head Teacher, Primary School)

The project has enabled staff within schools to be more aware of which pupils within the school are Care Experienced and to be more alert to recognising when these pupils may need support and understanding. There was a common theme in interview and focus groups that engaging with the project had empowered schools to be more supportive of their Care Experienced pupils:

*“It’s important that staff are able to know who Care Experienced young people are so they can pick up on any difficulties and offer empathy and support and be more understanding. Without you and that education of the staff and the pupils then that wouldn’t happen and they wouldn’t be as well supported as what they have been.”*

(Pastoral Support Teacher, Secondary School)

*“Had we not had your involvement; things would have been really quite different. We probably would have just been struggling along and maybe not been as effective as what we can be now with regards to supporting these children.”*

(Depute Head Teacher, Primary School)

In addition, through the training and support delivered by the project, school staff now have a deeper understanding of what Care Experienced pupils could be communicating with their behaviour and how to respond to this communication empathically. This empathy and understanding among education staff are essential to ensuring that barriers to Care Experienced pupils achieving their academic potential are removed wherever possible and to improving overall school experiences:

*“Teaching staff were going about their daily job and young people were getting into trouble for things that was outwith their control and there wasn’t any understanding of adversity or that young person’s journey. So working with yourselves, and us under our Head Teacher’s direction, really looking the whole holistic view of the young people and taking into consideration their life and what’s maybe happened with them has equipped our teachers to be more understanding of that.”*

(Pastoral Support Teacher, Secondary School)

*“It really reiterated what children who’re Care Experienced go through and to be a bit more mindful of what is going on in their lives at home and it gives a wee bit of insight into why they are acting in certain ways and helps us to be a bit more understanding.... I think makes you realise how important your support is to them.”*

(Teacher, Primary School)

The project’s work within local schools, in particular the training delivered to school staff, has been instrumental in prompting and enabling a shift towards restorative practice within schools:

*“We spoke about the restorative practice that is fully embedded across our school now. You know, we’ve thought about that and that wouldn’t have been here if it wasn’t for the input that you gave....we had already started that but I think your project actually brought it right home to us more than anything, because you guys were all part of Renfrewshire”*

(Head Teacher, Primary School)

**“The whole programme with regards to coming to staff first making sure staff are aware, not just teaching staff but support staff, staff across the establishment, to make them have an understanding that benefits the children and the parents I think that has been vital within the school community.”**

**(Head Teacher, Primary School)**

## 4. LEARNING AND NEXT STEPS

The Independent Care Review report “The Promise” reflects the views of over 5,500 Care Experienced children and adults, families and the paid and unpaid workforce. The Promise gave some insight to the need for services change and had a strong focus on creating supportive and inclusive school environments where Care Experienced pupils are supported to reach their full potential. The Communities that Care school model provides a mechanism to fulfil several of the recommendations laid out in The Promise.

Our evidence has shown that educating school pupils about care experience can have a profound impact on their understanding of what life is like for their Care Experienced peers. We found that PSE sessions were more effective than assemblies in increasing knowledge and understanding of care experience; improving attitudes towards Care Experienced people and ensuring that Care Experienced pupils were able to access supports – likely due to the deeper quality of interaction enabled within in-class inputs. Feedback from pupils highlighted that having the opportunity to hear directly from Care Experienced people was the most impactful element of our sessions and what were most likely to remember after the input.

Although we have seen evidence of some long-term change in knowledge, understanding and attitudes, the evidence is unclear whether this is sustained longer than 6 months after the input. Key reflections from interviews and focus groups were that while the project’s in-class inputs were hugely impactful, these alone may not be enough. Reflections from Care Experienced people and schools themselves were that there needs to be more than just one lesson, and perhaps a series of lessons throughout the school journey and that this needs to be incorporated across the local authority. It was highlighted that having lessons on care experience taught at every educational stage would benefit Care Experienced pupils in many ways both in terms of their peers being more understanding, and increasing their own understanding of care experience and the supports available from Who Cares? Scotland and other organisations:

*“I think maybe rather than just the one workshop, maybe a series of workshops in the classrooms because again I think it’s good to build upon it even a shorter input over a number of weeks because then the children have got time to have a wee think about the impact. A series of lessons would be good because I think that would have a greater impact on the children.”*

(Head Teacher, Primary School)

*“I think it’s good for wee ones from P1 right the way up to S6 to get it [learning about care experience]. It’s better if you’re learning about it from a young age cos then you understand going through high school and going through primary more about it. I think it’s better if it’s every school, I think everybody should be learning about it and every school should know about it, especially for the other people who are going through it, so people understand more about how they feel and not to laugh about it. I think they should be learning about it, it’s a good thing to learn about because you never know when you could be going through it.”*

(Care Experienced young person, age 12)

Another key piece of learning has been the importance of taking a “whole-school approach”, embedding learning about care experience throughout the school community. The aim of the project has been about influencing school ethos and culture, and this could not have been possible without engaging with the entire school community of pupils, staff and parents/carers. In particular, the training provided to teachers and other

members of school staff has empowered those with key relationships with Care Experienced pupils to ensure that they have been able to access the support that they need, both within and outwith the school environment. This whole-school engagement combined with the regular presence that the team have had within the schools has been an important factor in creating the positive impact that has been outlined in this report.