

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Public Protection Committee
DATE	28/04/21
EXEMPT	No
CONFIDENTIAL	No
REPORT TITLE	Corporate Parenting Updated Plan 2021-2023
REPORT NUMBER	OPE/21/084
DIRECTOR	Rob Polkinghorne
CHIEF OFFICER	Graeme Simpson
REPORT AUTHOR	Andrea McGill
TERMS OF REFERENCE	1.2

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To respond to the Committee's request for an annual report on the progress of our Corporate Parenting responsibilities and a refreshed and updated Corporate Parenting Plan 2021-2023.

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

It is recommended that Committee:

- 2.1 Note and endorse progress and activities against key Corporate Parenting duties.
- 2.2 Note the updated Corporate Parenting Plan 2021-2023 (Appendix 1).
- 2.2 Note the Champion's Board Plan 2021-2023 (Appendix 2)
- 2.3 Note Aberdeen Care Experience (ACE) Participation report May 2020-March 2021 (Appendix 3)
- 2.4 Note that a further annual update will be presented to the committee in April 2022.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 This is the fifth annual report to Committee providing a progress update and overview of key Corporate Parenting duties. Previous reporting to Committee has linked care experienced young people's inclusion and engagement with Champions Board development, to the broader attainment of Corporate Parenting Outcomes. The Committee in October 2020 requested that the updated Corporate Parenting Plan, 2021-2023 be presented to them for consideration. The updated and refreshed plan is an appendix to this report along with the refreshed Champions Board plan for 2021-2023.

3.2 The refresh of these plans reflects the completion of Life Changes Trust grant funding which had been awarded to Aberdeen City Council during the period 2016-2021. The Life Changes Trust award has supported activities which have linked the voice and views of those with lived experience of the care system, to those Corporate Parent representatives of the Champions Board. The cessation of grant funding has given a legacy and strong foundation from which participation and engagement with care experienced young people will be consolidated. The partnership commissioned from Who Cares? Scotland has been continued by way of a contract which will be reviewed in 2024.

3.3 The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, legally embeds the concept of corporate parenting and defines the role and activities of corporate parents as, collectively *'designed to ensure that the attention and resources of various publicly funded organisations are explicitly focused on the task of safeguarding and promoting the wellbeing of looked after children and care leavers'* (Centre for Excellence for Children's Care and Protection CELCIS, Corporate Parenting Implementation Notes, 2016).

3.4 Part 9 of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 identifies the key objectives of the role of Corporate Parent:

- Providing safe, secure, stable and nurturing homes for looked after children and care leavers.

- Enabling looked after children and care leavers to develop and maintain positive relationships with their family, friends, professionals and other trusted adults.
- Upholding and promoting children's rights.
- Securing positive educational outcomes for looked after children and care leavers.
- Ensuring 'care' is an experience in which children are valued as individuals, and where support addresses their strengths as well as their needs.
- Ensuring physical or mental health concerns are identified early and addressed quickly.
- Increasing the number of care leavers in education, training and employment.
- Reducing the number of looked after children and care leavers who enter the youth and criminal justice system.

3.4 The above are reflected in our Local Outcome Improvement Plan (2019-2026) where the following objectives are set for Corporate Parenting:

"All care experienced children and young people will have the same levels of attainment in education, emotional wellbeing and positive destinations as their peers by 2026."

3.5 The updated Corporate Parenting and Champions Board Plans continue to reflect these duties and commitments, additionally threading the principles of *The Promise* and findings from the *Independent Care Review*. Particularly in shaping how we measure and hold ourselves to account in our effectiveness as Corporate Parents.

https://www.carereview.scot/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/The-Promise_v7.pdf

3.6 The Independent Care Review reported that for a majority of the care community:

Being loved and told they were loved, receiving physical affection and having lifelong support were all a normal part of life for those growing up around them, but for many care experienced people, these experiences were largely absent from their lives. This lack of love served to highlight a broader pattern of stigma, which singled them out as different from their peers. The Care Review heard about the sense of isolation and loneliness many care experienced people felt, along with low expectations of life and

difficulties in being able to look positively to the future. This also affected children's view of themselves, and a great many spoke of their feelings of shame and self-blame, and that they were undeserving of love or the same opportunities as others. Feelings of pride, confidence and trust were all heavily impacted by experiencing a lack of love while in care. (Independent Care Review Evidence document 2020)

The impact views of those who are beneficiaries of Corporate Parenting are significant in our current and ongoing reporting. The Corporate Parenting Plan 2021-2023 is presented as a draft document to allow time before finalising to seek views of care experienced young people. It is planned to share the document with them during April and May 2021. Going forward, the development of our Corporate Parenting and Champions Board plans will continue to be shaped by the voice of lived experience.

The Independent Care Review reported that the term 'Corporate Parent' was perceived by care experienced young people as 'cold and impersonal' and, as such, at odds with an approach that sought to uphold relationships that make children feel loved, safe and respected. The updated reports (appendix 1-3) in support of this Committee report should all demonstrate how a relational approach is embedded across these plans and offer examples of relational co-production. Any change by our Champions Board in the use of terminology will follow the guidance of the work of The Promise Implementation Team as they take effect to the Independent Care Review.

3.7 Corporate Parenting Plan

3.8 Our refreshed and updated Corporate Parenting Plan 2021-2023 and Champions Board plans remain congruent with LOIP priorities. The vision for the refreshed Champions Board Plan 2021-2023 remains unchanged 'our care experienced children, young people and care leavers have a right to participate in decision-making about their own lives and have their voices heard'. To do so we have identified the following priorities:

- Increase the number of corporate parent mentors to support engagement with MCR (Motivation Commitment Compassion) Pathways.
- Promote the uptake of the mandatory online Corporate Parent training.

- Promote and support attainment of #KeepThePromise.
- Embed trauma recovery approaches in our practice as Corporate Parents.
- Support workforce awareness and partner recognition that those with care experience can be overrepresented in criminal justice systems and seek to reverse this trend.
- Reduce stigma by adopting Write Right About Me as a multi themed approach to improving how Corporate Parents narrate the experiences of those who are care experienced.
- Develop an access scheme which serves to expand digital connection opportunities for care experienced young people in line with peers,
- Continue our partnership with Who Cares? Scotland in the delivery of participatory opportunities which seek to build the capacity of care experienced young people to share their views.
- Seek to use earlier and broaden the application of the Mind of My Own app to extend the reach to those with care experience who are part of protection processes.

3.9 Corporate Parenting Performance and Improvement Group

3.10 The Corporate Parenting Performance and Improvement Group have oversight of the LOIP Improvement Project Stretch aim 5; *95% of care experienced children and young people will have the same levels of attainment in education, emotional wellbeing, and positive destinations as their peers by 2026.* The above multi agency group will provide oversight of the Improvement project actions(at 3.8 above) which will support this achievement aim and for linking the Corporate Parenting Plan activities for 2021-2023 to the context of this strategic framework. The Corporate Parenting Performance and Improvement group has specific governance, oversight and monitoring role in relation to the updated Corporate Parenting Plan.

3.11 The numbers of young people who are looked after by Aberdeen City Council remain relatively static, from 548 reported in 2019 declining to 543 (Q3/ 2020). With multi agency focus on shifting the balance of care toward recognising how we safely support care plans where young people can be supported to be looked after at home and equally, looked after within Kinship arrangements.

3.12 The Corporate Parenting Improvement and Performance group plan to address the issue of representation from the care experienced community in terms of group membership and to seek representation from the care experienced community in terms of group membership. This will be in place by May 2021.

3.13 The Corporate Parenting mandatory workforce training digital module is finalised. The plan supporting the uptake of this training will be supported at a number of levels given the significant priority in improving general workforce and elected member knowledge of Corporate Parenting. The recent webinar outlining our Corporate Parenting plan and supporting the launch of the training is available here:

[Watch the Video](#)

3.14 Virtual School

3.15 Due to the impact of Covid19 and the late release of national validated data about the attainment and initial destinations of school leavers, it was not possible to include attainment and initial destination data in the Virtual School annual report for period 2019/2020. A supplementary report will be published in April 2021. As a result of Covid-19, attendance and exclusion data for academic session 2019/20 has been impacted upon. The following is reportable from this Virtual School annual report:

.. this reporting period suggests there was an emerging picture of a decrease in the unauthorised absence of Looked After children in all placement types. This will be monitored through session 2020/21.

The headlines from the above report additionally reflect that:

- *The most vulnerable Looked After children identified by social work and education accessed the Hub provision for learners.*
- *70% of those who attended Hub provision for learners were Looked After at home with a >90% attendance rate.*

- *MCR Pathways has been commissioned to support Looked After children with a focus on those who are Looked After at home who have the lowest attendance rates and also the key transition stages where there is evidence that attendance falls.*
- *exclusion incidents have continued to reduce over the past 3 years and the projection based on the data to March 2020 and previous data on exclusion incidents during the period from April to July 2019 of the academic year would suggest that this trend was continuing.*

3.16 The number of care experienced young people accessing further and high education options supported by the Youth Team has increased by 30% over the last 3-year period. Increasing from 26 in 2018: 30 in 2019/20 to 34 in 20/21. This is a positive indication of partnership activity including the promotion of access to the Care Experienced Grant, student support with rent and accommodation costs and more recently digital connectivity support.

3.17 Housing, Council Tax Exemption

3.18 Young people placed in alternative to family care are being encouraged to stay put in care placements on a Continuing Care basis. This has a beneficial impact on future success. There has been an increase in the numbers of young people aged 18 years and over remaining in our local children's homes this has increased from 30% in 2019 to 38% in 2020/21. In addition, 22 young people are in Continuing Care with foster carers. This is an investment in future capacity and is considered preventative in reducing future dependencies and demand. It also contributes to decreased homelessness.

3.19 The Youth Team are supporting 82 young people who have a permanent Local Authority tenancy, a 28% increase from 64 in 2019. This improvement is reflective of the partnership approaches with Housing Access where sustainable, safe accommodation, is a mutual priority. To support improvements and development in this key area, the post of Housing Support Officer will be co-located in the Youth Team from April 2021, with the post holder having a case holding role for care experienced young people.

3.20 It was agreed at the meeting of the Full Council in March 2020, to take forward a Rent Support Scheme which supports care experienced young people. The beneficiaries of the scheme are care experienced young people who are Aberdeen City Council tenants and are students enrolled in higher or further education. It can be reported that this Scheme is now operational and in 2020/21 benefitting 14 young people, an increase from 8 in 2020.

3.21 The Youth Team have been part of a coordinated approach, promoting the uptake of Council Tax exemption for care experienced young people. In collaboration with Revenue and Benefits and Housing Access, processes identify eligible young people. This system is also utilised to identify young people who are eligible for the exemption of Council Tax. There has been a 131% increase in uptake since this scheme was introduced in 2018. At March 2021, with 109 exemptions and 9 discounts, an increase from 88 exemptions and 10 discounts in 2019 and from 47 in 2018.

3.22 Aberdeen Care Experience (ACE) and Champions Board

3.23 The updated Champions Board Action Plan (appendix 2) highlights the themes which Champions will prioritise over the duration of the plan. Despite the challenges of Covid19, the Champions Board continued to meet regularly in 2020 with 5 Champions Boards meetings taking place utilising an online platform. The ACE report for May 2020 March 2021 provides a comprehensive overview of the key themes addressed with Champions and the progress made over this challenging period.

3.24 The ACE Report May 2020-March 2021 (appendix 3) demonstrates how challenges in connecting and engaging were overcome during the lockdown periods of this pandemic. This report serves to demonstrate the significant impact on the health and wellbeing of these young people in the absence of available family relationships and the importance of alternative access to trusting contacts. Significantly, the impact on many of these young people of structural inequalities can be equally demonstrated by the use of hardship support which had a high and positive uptake by this care experienced group (and by their family members who have carer roles). The Lord Provost Hardship Fund provided £10,000 of financial support to 73 care experienced

young people, with an additional 27 receiving assistance from Who Cares? Scotland helpline and hardship fund. There was in addition an amount of £5000 which has been utilised to support the immediate digital connection needs of care experienced young people. Recent research published by CELCIS *Bridging the Digital Divide* highlights how inequality of access to digital technology has a specific impact on the care experienced community <https://www.celcis.org/news/news-pages/digital-connection-and-inclusion-should-be-basic-right-care-leavers/> At the recent meeting of Full Council (March 2021) funding in support of a local approach (and access scheme) to digital inclusion for care leavers was agreed.

3.25 The ACE report indicates that there have been 119 individual young people, who were engaged through ACE across 115 activities, with 54 of these activities taking place on-line. Report data notes that there is a core group of 18 young people who can be described as ACE advisors and who have assumed a direct role in sharing voice and experience.

3.25 The ACE annual report for 2019/20 (previously shared with Committee by way of a service update in October 2020) provided a strong sense of the relational connection offered by this model of participation practice. The report demonstrated the capacity building approaches being utilised and the focus on participation and capacity building opportunities for young people to lead in voice, direction and decision making.

Belonging meetings are an opportunity for young people to arrange activities themselves, invite and engage participants, decide on actions etc. Advisor meetings are held with members of a core group of young people who act as Advisors to ACE, the Development Officer, and the Champions Board. These meetings are where discussions, feedback etc are conducted. Advisors represent the voice of Care Experienced young people looked after by Aberdeen City, and with the Development Officer meeting just over 42% of the Care Experienced young people living in Aberdeen (see data below), not to mention to many other young people Advisors know, Champions Board, the local Authority and Corporate Parents can be confident that the voice they hear, IS the voice of Care Experienced young people in Aberdeen. (ACE Report 2020)

3.27 Children's rights, Mind of My Own participatory practice

3.28 The Aberdeen Young Person's Rights Service (formerly Children's Rights Service) are key supporters of care experienced young people in their engagement with the Champions Board and in improving dialogue with Corporate Parents. Care Experienced Young People were key stakeholders in the Functional Review of Aberdeen Young Person's Rights Service, which concluded in January 2020. The functional review of the service was framed around the key issues of:

- Participation, have your say and be listened to
- Protection, to be safe
- Provision, to be well looked after

3.29 Following review, the service has rebranded with an extended remit to include children and young people involved in child protection processes as well as expanding the age range of those who can be referred up to 26 years. The Aberdeen Young Person's Rights Service (AYPRS) is effectively utilised, with a 43% increase in referrals in 2019/20 from the previous year. Covid19 has required a service refocus to digital connections which are effective if limiting by nature. In 2021, the AYPRS has been involved in 4 Child Protection Case Conferences and 2 Care and Risk Management Meetings, indicating progress in improving responses and involvement with children and young people in conflict with the law. In addition to supporting the provision of independent advocacy support to 4 Children's Hearings.

3.29 The Service has been working hard to extend its reach, including: a webpage, with links to 'Aberdeen Getting It Right' and an updated co-produced leaflet, increasing use of social media, producing a quarterly participation and rights-related bulletin, which has served to share key legislative changes with the workforce including the adoption into domestic law of the UNCR <https://www.gov.scot/news/landmark-for-childrens-rights/> and setting up fortnightly virtual information 'drop-ins' for professionals, including carers. These approaches have all contributed to extending support to more children and young people who are looked after at home, in kinship care or who may be involved in child protection processes. There are plans to extend 'drop-in' provision to children, young people and young adults.

3.30 In March 2019 Children's Social Work, purchased the Mind of My Own app, the app is the only digital tool that supports Article 12 of UNCRC. [MOMO APP](#) and [MOMO WEBINAR](#). Since adoption in 2019, use of the app has grown from 122 young people Mind of My Own accounts, to 194 in March 2021; worker accounts have increased during this period from 352 to 386 and statements from 225 to 878.

3.31 Aberdeen City have received three awards from the device creators, most recently, in March 2021, as having both the second and ninth highest rate of use by two Children Social Work practitioners, nationally (there are over 30 000 users). Care experienced young people have continued to have a key role within the Mind of My Own Champions group as app trainers and facilitators. There will be further targeting of the Children's Social Work workforce and teams to seek increased uptake both at an early stage of contact where protection concerns are being investigated and with those young people whose placements are at distance from local support, both are areas where safeguarding practice can be consolidated.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendations of this report.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The Corporate Parenting duties included in Part 9 of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 are designed to ensure that the attention and resources of various organisations are explicitly focused on the task of safeguarding and promoting the wellbeing of looked after children, young people and care leavers. This part extends the duties of corporate parents and the reporting responsibilities of local authorities.

5.2 Aberdeen City Council has a duty to report to Scottish Government Ministers every three years on how it is meeting its corporate parenting responsibilities as detailed in the Children and Young People Act 2014. The second submission, by way

of sharing key documents, to the Scottish Government was provided in March 2021. The Council has a responsibility to continue to comply with its statutory obligations.

6. MANAGEMENT OF RISK

Category	Risk	Low (L) Medium (M) High (H)	Mitigation
Strategic Risk	That the multi-agency workforce training delivery plan is insufficiently supported	M	There is a robust delivery plan and support at a senior level
Compliance	The Council has responsibility to comply with its statutory corporate parenting responsibilities	L	The updated Corporate Parenting plan has partnership support
Operational	Care Experienced Children and Young People are a vulnerable cohort whose needs require to be recognised and met. Competing resource demands may have an impact	L	These are duties which have been incorporated across existing structures and will be consolidated in practice
Financial	n/a		
Reputational	A failure of Aberdeen City Council to comply and meet its Corporate Parenting	L	There is a strong legacy of positive practice and sharing of success in this area

	responsibilities would reflect negatively on the Council		
Environment / Climate	n/a		

7. OUTCOMES

<u>COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN</u>	
	Impact of Report
Aberdeen City Council Policy Statement	The proposals in this report have no impact on the Council Delivery Plan.
Aberdeen City Local Outcome Improvement Plan	
Prosperous Place Stretch Outcomes	<p><i>(Review and update of LOIP may amend priorities as listed)</i></p> <p><i>The proposals in the report have direct link specifically to the delivery and attainment of stretch outcome 5 and 8.</i></p> <p><i>95% of care experienced children and young people will have the same levels of attainment in education, emotional wellbeing, and positive destinations as their peers by 2026.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>• Increase the number of care experienced young people accessing a positive and sustained destination by 25% by 2022.</i> <i>• Increase in the number of inhouse foster and kinship placements by 2021.</i> <i>• Increase the number of care experienced people who receive appropriate support when accessing their records by 2022.</i> <i>• Increase the number of children and young people remaining in a placement between 16-18 years old by 2021.</i> <i>• Increase the number of care experienced young people receiving appropriate multiagency throughcare by 2021.</i>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Increase the number of staff, including carers who report increased understanding and skills to respond to children who have adverse childhood experiences (ACE) by 20% by 2021.</i> • <i>Reduce the length of time that care experienced children and young people wait for an initial Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) appointment to less than 4 weeks by 2021.</i>
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8. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
Impact Assessment	Not Required
Data Protection Impact Assessment	Not required

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

<https://www.carereview.scot/conclusions/independent-care-review-reports/>

10. APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Corporate Parenting Plan 2021-2023

Appendix 2 Champions Board Plan 2021-2023

Appendix 3 Aberdeen Care Experience Report May 2020-March 2021

11. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

Name	Andrea Mcgill
Title	Service Manager
Email Address	amcgill@aberdeencity.gov.uk
Tel	07824608372

APPENDIX 1

GETTING IT RIGHT FOR ABERDEEN'S CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Aberdeen City **#KeepThePromise** Corporate Parenting Plan
2021-2023



The best Corporate Parents we can be

The impact of Covid-19 on the wellbeing and welfare of our care experienced children and young people has served to emphasise the vital role that we have as corporate parents, which extends beyond our quarterly participation at Champions Boards. We have an active group of care experienced young people (ACE) in Aberdeen and they have ensured regular meetings of Champions have taken place despite challenges. They have supported us as champions to fully embrace digital technology as the main means of sharing connection and taking the time to keep in touch. The list below represents the least we can and will do, to support our care experienced children and young people, and over the life of this plan we will have their voice at the centre of our actions.

- *Considering their wellbeing, and being alert to anything which might affect this;*
- *Assessing their need for services and support;*
- *Promoting their interests;*
- *Making sure their voices and opinions are heard;*
- *Providing opportunities for them to promote their wellbeing, and taking action to help them access those opportunities;*
- *Providing advice and assistance when they're needed;*
- *Making sure services are easy to access for them.*

Angela Scott
Chief Executive Officer



Corporate Parenting: Our Vision

Aberdeen City Integrated Children’s Services Plan (ICSP) has a clear vision, role and partner remit for the development and improvement of planning for children’s services. Within our Local Outcome Improvement Plan (2019-2026) we have set the following objectives for Corporate Parenting:

“All care experienced children and young people will have the same levels of attainment in education, emotional wellbeing and positive destinations as their peers by 2026.”

To achieve this, Corporate Parents will evidence improvement by progressing the following areas in our refreshed plan for 2021-2023:

How will we monitor our progress?

The Corporate Parenting Plan activities for 2021-2023 will be reviewed quarterly by the multi-agency Corporate Parenting Performance and Improvement group which has a specific governance, oversight, and monitoring role in relation to this plan. It is planned to seek representation from the care experienced community in terms of group membership. This will be in place by May 2021.

<i>What are our aims?</i>	<i>What will we do?</i>
Improve education outcomes for care experienced children and young people.	Increase number of corporate parent mentors to support engagement with MCR Pathways. This has been commissioned across six secondary schools. This approach will support us in the implementation of the Promise with one of the 5 key foundations stating: <i>‘The children that Scotland cares for must be actively supported to develop relationships with people in the workforce and wider community, who in turn must be supported to listen and be compassionate in their decision-making and care’.</i>
Improve the knowledge and skills of the workforce in relation to their Corporate Parenting duties and responsibilities and by doing so highlight the pervasive impact of care experience on opportunities and life chances.	Promote the uptake of mandatory online Corporate Parent training. Develop with partners, targeted approaches to this training, dependent on status and role, which is supported by a series of webinars.
Feature and promote the recommendations of The Independent Care Review across key systems, processes, and partnership practice.	Promote and support attainment of #KeepThePromise (link here to local statement) and local plan .

<p>To work in ways which recognise the life- long impact of trauma, placing recovery principles at the forefront of Corporate Parenting planning.</p>	<p>Support care experienced young people in accessing supports which enable and offer them physical and emotional wellbeing benefits. Support work force awareness and partner recognition that those with care experience can be overrepresented in criminal justice systems and seek to reverse this trend. 'Write Right About Me' will be supported as a multi themed approach to improving how we narrate the experiences of those who are care experienced in the reduction of stigma.</p>
<p>Continue to develop participation and engagement opportunities with and for our children and young people.</p>	<p>Expand digital connection opportunities for care experienced young people in line with peers, by developing a local approach and access scheme as well as e.g. building on Phase Two of Connecting Scotland which has provided 110 devices, (Chromebooks; iPads and MiFi connectivity) to care leavers. Enabling them to stay connected to key relationships and wider social and employment inclusion. Continue our partnership with Who Cares? Scotland in the delivery of participatory opportunities which seek to build the capacity of care experienced young people to share their views.</p>
<p>Seek creative ways to listen to and capture children and young people's voices and views. Build on the strong foundations we have developed to expand the impact of the Champions Board and the role of Corporate Parents in Aberdeen.</p>	<p>Seek to use earlier and broaden the application of the Mind of My Own App to extend the reach to those with care experience who are part of protection processes. Seek to celebrate Care Day and Care experienced week with twice per year workshop and themed events.</p>

Who is the Plan for?

This Plan is both our commitment to children and young people who are care experienced and for our partners in Aberdeen City who, along with ourselves, have corporate parenting responsibilities. Collaboration and participation both with care experienced young people and partners are at the core of our actions if our vision for Corporate Parenting is to be realised.

There are 24 organisations who can be identified in the [Children and Young People \(Scotland\) Act 2014 Section 56](#) as having "Corporate Parent" status. In Aberdeen City, our representative members include:

Aberdeen City Council, NHS Grampian, Police Scotland, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, North East Scotland College (NESCOL), Robert Gordon University and University of Aberdeen, Sport Aberdeen, Children’s Hearings Scotland, the Scottish Children’s Reporters Administration (SCRA) and third sector partners, represented by Aberdeen Council of Voluntary Organisations (ACVO).



Why do we have a Plan?

The [Children and Young People \(Scotland\) Act 2014](#) came into force on 1 April 2015. The duties in [Part 9](#) of the Act legally embed the concept of corporate parenting and collectively are *‘designed to ensure that the attention and resources of various publicly funded organisations are explicitly focused on the task of safeguarding and promoting the wellbeing of looked after children and care leavers’* ([CEL CIS, Corporate Parenting Implementation Notes, 2016](#)).

The concept of Corporate Parenting is not new. These duties build upon previous commitments such ['These Are Our Bairns: A Guide for Community Planning Partnerships on Being a Good Corporate Parent'](#) (Scottish Government, 2008).

In looking at what a Corporate Parent is, the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland states that *'in simple terms, a corporate parent is intended to carry out many of the roles a loving parent should. While they may not be able to provide everything a parent can, but they should still be able to provide the children and young people they're responsible for with the best possible support and care'*.



Corporate Parenting Duties

The Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland sets out that *'corporate parent responsibilities are intended to encourage people and organizations to do as much as they can towards improving the lives of care experienced and looked after children, so that they feel in control of their lives, and are able to overcome the barriers they face'*.

Our Refreshed Plan, in summary

This is the refreshed Corporate Parenting Plan for 2021-2023, with our Champions Board Action Plan running alongside. The period since March 2020 has been challenging for care experienced young people and their families and as Corporate Parents, we have been very mindful of the impact of isolation and disconnection experienced by many of them. Positively, the support networks offering support to care experienced young people unified quickly in introducing digital ways of keeping in touch. With care leavers **Youth Team** increasing the use of the team Facebook page by over 400% and in the distribution of over 250



resource provisions to care experienced young people through welfare packages and direct contact. We can also report on our success in accessing digital devices in phase two of Connecting Scotland and in our commitment to ongoing improvement of digital access for care experienced young people in Aberdeen City, recently supported as part of our future budget commitments in 2021. **We will develop an access scheme for the promotion of digital inclusion for care leavers in 2021.**

The Virtual School ensured **all** Looked After Children in Aberdeen City had access to digital technology which supported them to continue with their learning throughout lockdown restrictions, including video links with key members of staff to support connection. **MCR Pathways** had commenced in 2 city academies prior to lockdown, digital devices and connectivity in place ensured that mentor support could be continued virtually. This support is now in **6 academies across Aberdeen City**. All Looked After Children who are educated outside of Aberdeen City were also able to access digital technology through the Virtual School.

From June 2020, our **Champions Board** has moved to a digital forum. Feedback from Aberdeen Care Experience (ACE) advisors has been positive. Digital connection can be focused on maintaining contact with young people, many of whom are placed at some distance from their local areas. Our refreshed plan **shares positive** examples of our **progress** as Corporate Parents, we will expand and replicate these in 2021-2023. This includes focusing on how Corporate Parents will support the local **#KeepThePromise** commitment.



How good are we as Corporate Parents?

What have Care experienced young people told us about Corporate Parenting?

Participation and Champions Board

"I really feel like we are making progress now, big decisions and working with Corporate Parents better says one of the young people about our Champion care experienced young people and continues to reflect the themes we intend to advance in this planning period". (ACE advisor)



Mind Of My Own

Since March 2019 we have received 885 statements from young people either independently or supported by their worker.

199 young people have their own accounts which they can use in their own time. The three most popular scenarios are:

- My Worker is Visiting
- Share My Good News
- Prepare for a meeting

The box below captures activities the participation officer has co-produced with care experienced young people and continues to reflect the themes we intend to develop.

Participation Activities 2021-2023

Our core activities and outcomes		
	Activity	Outcome
1	Youth engagement and participation	Care experienced young people will have opportunities to share their views across a range of media.
2	Young people development	There will be examples of young people making contributions to Aberdeen City Champions Board.
3	Partnership working	Core partners will engage in Champions Board and each will demonstrate and impact.
4	Information, awareness-raising, and promotion	Co-produce events which highlight corporate parenting role.
5	Monitoring and evaluation	Gather, hold evaluate information concerning core activities impact on young people and investment in exit planning strategies.

Supporting Care Experience Participation

The Aberdeen Care Experienced Group (ACE) have been supported to grow and build their capacity and voice, there have been great examples of collaboration,

“It’s going well but we will always need support from (the Development Officer) to make sure we get our voice heard and don’t become a ‘decoration”.

This was what one young person said in reference to her voice and the use of the Participation ladder at a Champions board meeting. The reference to ‘*decoration*’ refers to the stage on the ladder (see previous page) and the risk she feels will always exist of young people “*being seen and not heard*”.

How Corporate Parents have actively engaged and listened to young people’s voice

Monthly Cooking together with Champs as part of the activity calendar
Phone bank which has redistributed redundant devices from ACC to care experienced young people
Celebrating Success awards held annually to celebrate achievements with and for young people
ACE and Saltire Awards presented to group members annually in light of their volunteering hours in support of ACE
Champs Camp as part of Life Changes Trust
Promoting uptake of the Council Tax exemption for care leavers
Introducing a rent support scheme for students who are ACC tenants
Being successful in our Connecting Scotland bid for digital devices and connection for over 100 young care leavers
Renewing our partnership with Who Cares? Scotland to work together to support opportunities for lived experience to be better represented across systems and services which impact on them
Multi-agency Corporate Parent Training
Write Right about Me and the prominence of voice

Key Successes and Going Forward

Education

The Virtual School has supported our looked after young people, targets for 2021-2023

- The program with partners **Sport Aberdeen** is being further developed to support key transitions and build relationships. This forms part of the wider achievement program which is being expanded as a means by which the local authority can seek to fulfil Corporate Parent duties.
- In order to support learning and continued engagement throughout lockdown, a number of Looked After children identified by social work and education accessed the Hub provision.

- Young people **looked after at home** had priority placements in hub provision, **70%** of those who attended were Looked After at home and overall, there was a **>90% attendance rate**.
- MCR Pathways has been commissioned to support Looked After Children in secondary with a key measure being attendance. There will be a focus on those who are Looked After at home who have the lowest attendance rates and also the key transition stages where attendance falls.
- Overall numbers of **exclusion incidents have continued to fall since 2019**, the projections for 2021-23 suggest that this trend will continue.
- The local authority **Exclusion Policy** and guidance has been refreshed reflecting recommendations within **The Promise**.
- The Virtual School Education Support Officer will continue to co-work alongside schools and partner agencies including No one left behind and SDS to **ensure planning for all senior pupils** who are Looked After Children is robust.
- The new program to support planning for positive destinations was developed in partnership with the Virtual School to ensure cognisance was taken of the specific needs of Care Experienced Young People and Corporate Parent duties were delivered on, this will be further developed and linked to locally targeted employability options for care leavers

Balance of Care

- Data from 2016-2020, at chart 1 below suggests that numbers of Looked After Children in Aberdeen City remains relatively stable ranging from 590 to 543. As Corporate Parents are responsible for alternative family care planning, we will take effect to the **foundations** identified by the Independent Care review which will influence how we offer support:
- **Voice:** Children must be listened to and meaningfully and appropriately involved in decision-making about their care, with all those involved properly listening and responding to what children want and need. There must be a compassionate, caring, decision-making culture focussed on children and those they trust.
- **Family:** Where children are safe in their families and feel loved they must stay – and families must be given support together to nurture that love and overcome the difficulties which get in the way.
- **Care:** Where living with their family is not possible, children must stay with their brothers and sisters where safe to do so and belong to a loving home, staying there for as long as needed
- The goal for 2021-23 is to **increase by 3%** the number of children and young people who can be looked after at home and looked after within Kinship networks, shifting our use of resource where from where we are (majority of Aberdeen looked after young people are placed in foster care (Q3 of 2020)) 46.7% of our total number of looked after children are accommodated in foster care.

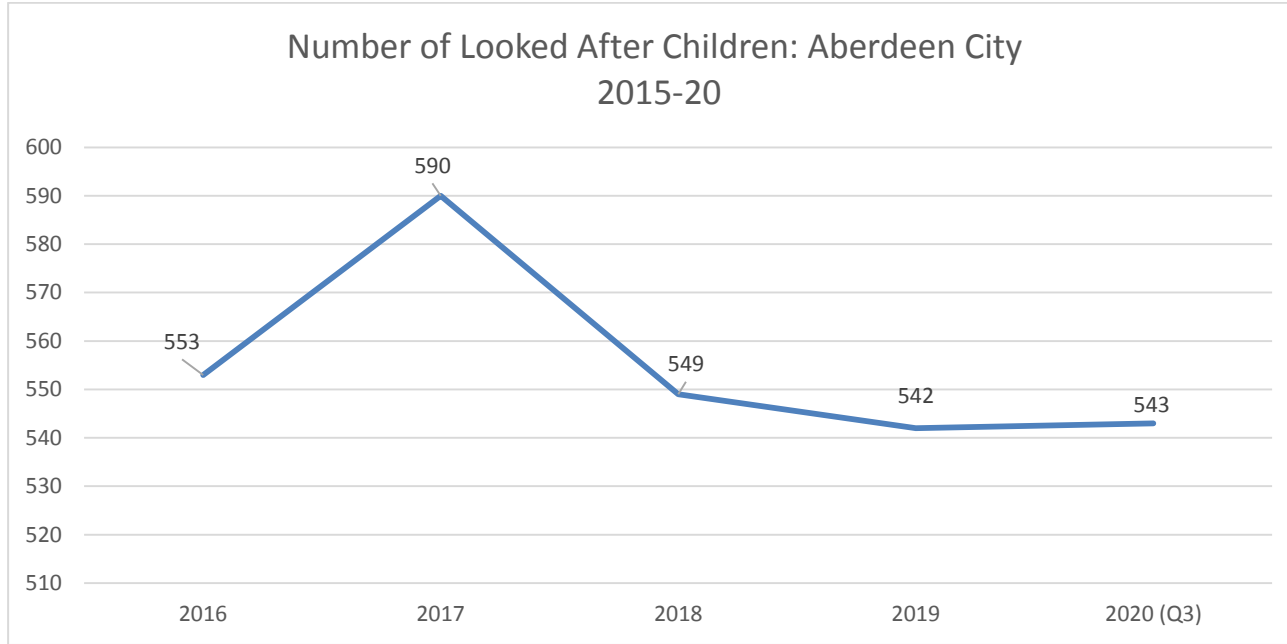


Chart 1.

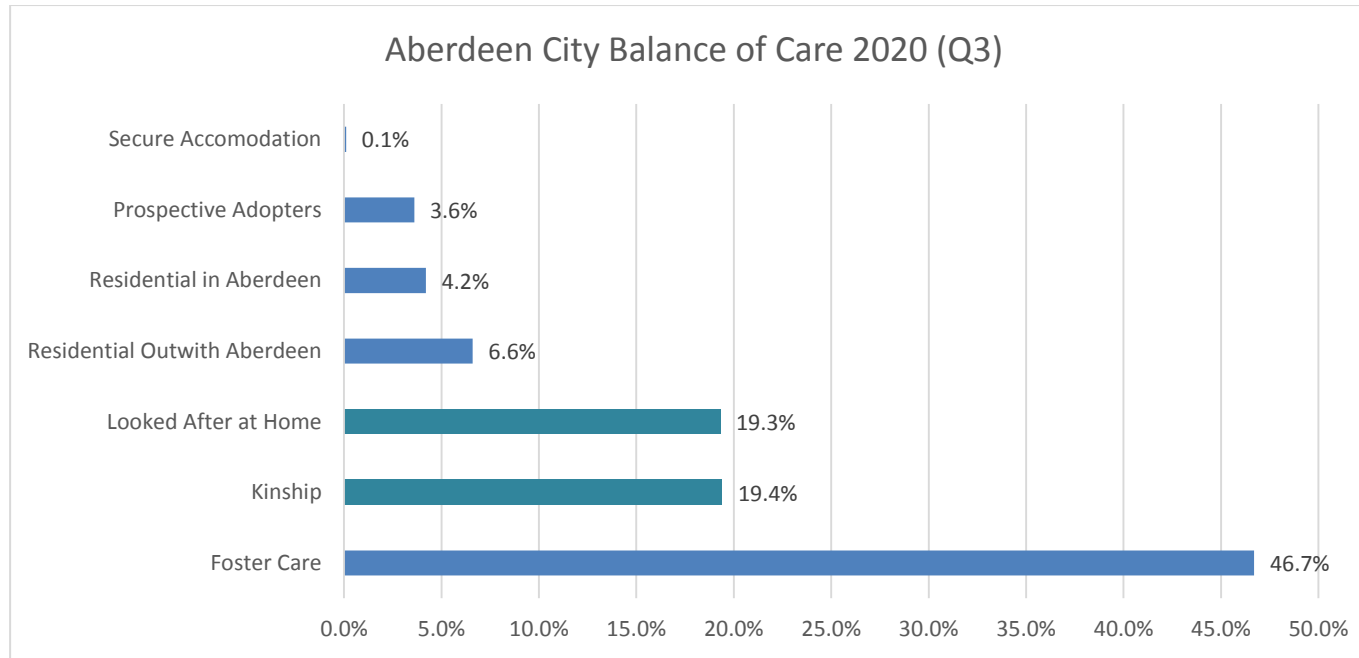


Chart 2

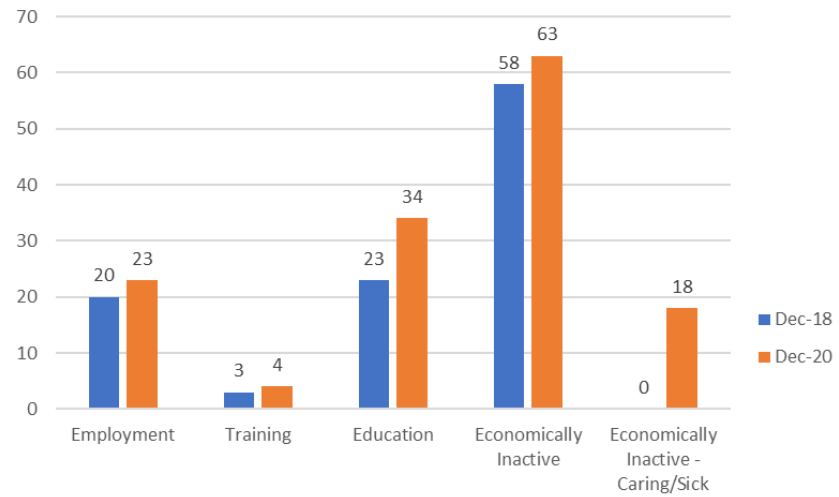
- Chart 3 above provides the % of looked after young people based on placement type, shift in the balance of care is a local priority within our Local Outcome Improvement Plan (2019-2026)

Our care leavers

Employability and Education:

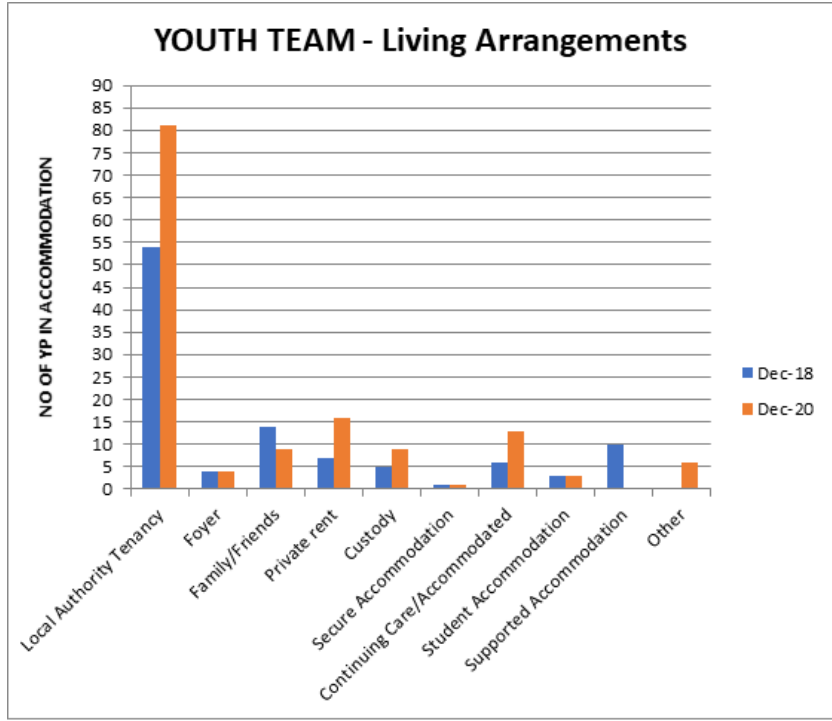
- Improved partnership working is supporting improvements in care leavers accessing **No One Left Behind** and Skills Development Scotland, **16 care experienced young people were** referred in 20/21.
- Six care experienced young people are engaging with providers Working Rite in 20/21, there will be 12 spaces available for care experienced young people with this provider.
- The process of guaranteed interviews for ACC roles, for care experienced young people has been introduced and a system where **apprenticeship opportunities** are shared and highlighted with Youth Team continues to be developed.
- Numbers of care leavers engaging with the Youth Team who are considered economically inactive has **reduced** from 56% in 2018 to 44% in 2021.
- There has been a **47% increase** in those supported in further education and taken up college or university places from 2018-2020.
- The introduction in 2020 of the supported rent scheme for care experienced young people who are students and ACC tenants is being accessed by approx. 14 young people across further and higher education options, with anticipated increases of around 20% in each year until 2023.

YOUTH TEAM Employability, Education & Training



Care Leavers Living Arrangements

- The **Throughcare Housing Protocol** recognises the statutory duties toward care experienced young people and the requirement to support access to housing resource, reducing the risk of homelessness and associated vulnerabilities which can be of lifelong duration.
- The post of **Housing Support Officer** will be co-located in the Youth Team from **April 2021** and seek to offer earlier and preventative supports, the success of the role will be evaluated in **2023**.
- Since 2018/19, increasing numbers of young people have been able to move on to positive sustainable living destinations when they have left care, with increasing numbers **sustaining a permanent tenancy** and decreased use of temporary accommodation arrangements.
- The comparative information below also indicates the growing numbers of looked after young people remaining in placement on a Continuing Care basis, thus promoting their opportunities for successful transition.



Digital Connection

- From March 2020 to date there has been an over 400% increase in followers on the **Youth Team Facebook** page, this will be further developed in light of new and emerging technology during the period of this plan.
- Online activities which young people have attended including **cooking, movie nights and crafts** will continue, supporting the young people to continue to feel connected to others and reduce periods of isolation.
- In February 2021 **Connecting Scotland provided 100 of our care leavers with either an iPad, Chromebook or 2-year MiFi device.**
- **Digital connection** for care leavers scheme will be developed in 2021.

Aftercare support and keeping connected

- There has been an increase of 52% of numbers of young people receiving Aftercare Support from the Youth Team, increasing from approx. 70 in 2018 to **152** young people receiving **Aftercare Support**.
- Duration of contact and **maintenance of relationships** between care experienced young people and the workforce has also positively increased.
- This is now a planned and structured local residential **aftercare** programme delivered as part of core local residential children's home support.
- The local residential aftercare provision supports **20 young people** in the community with the same relationships utilised in their aftercare supports based in the children's home they lived in.
- 180 support hours per month has been allocated across local children's homes to support their sustainment of moving on options delivered to young people by those with whom they have **existing trusting relationships**.



The **Aberdeen Young Person's Rights Service**, previously known as the Children's Rights Service, actively promotes a rights-respecting and trauma-informed stance in the delivery of children's social work with colleagues and partners. Voice and participation are core to the ethos of the Service. A **functional review** of the Rights Service was undertaken during 2019. The review was underpinned by a clear set of objectives, including ensuring 'best fit' with wider strategic priorities and alignment with the UNCRC and its incorporation into domestic law. The service is underpinned by **'three P's of Children's Rights'**:

- **P**articipation – to have your say and be listened to.
- **P**rotection – to be safe.
- **P**rovision – to be well looked after.

Another **'P'** - in the context of (Corporate) Parenting- represents the cultural backbone of the Service.

Young People's Rights Service - Participation in practice:

- **Expanded** its care experienced remit to include children and young people who are or have been involved in child protection processes which may lead or have led to Child Protection Registration. This was in response to review feedback and to findings within the Aberdeen City joint inspection on services for children and young people in need of care and protection (2019) to **seek to increase** these referred by 10% from 2021-2023.
- Consulted with young people to 'vote' on the **new Service name** to better reflect the 0-26 age range and the characteristics, circumstances and needs of those it should be accessible to.
- Co-produced a new [Service Leaflet](#) showing that the Service is available to a large number of children, young people and young adults in need of care and protection.
- Seek to support greater numbers of **care experienced young people in conflict with the law** during the period of this plan.
- The Service has contributed to a range of single and multi-agency training/development activity related to rights and participation e.g. multi-agency **corporate parenting training**, training for newly qualified social workers, the provision of regular 'bulletins' focusing on rights and participation related issues and 'drop-in' information sessions for workers and carers. **Offer 4 work force skills development** sessions each year of this plan.
- This runs alongside commitment to **supporting participation** through, e.g., the Champions Board and Mind of My Own. The Service is also working on developing a more human approach to data in keeping with key messages reflected within **#KeepThePromise**.
- The impact and challenges presented by Covid-19 has essentially affirmed the functional review findings and sharpened focus moving forward. This is well represented by this [Visual](#), pulled together during the summer of 2020, highlighted what our young people told the Service, what the Service did and how this is informing planning for the future.

Summary

Our Corporate Parenting Plan for 2021-2023 will be developed from a position of strength, building on our capacities for engagement and participation, we will do so by continuing the investment in our partnership with Who Cares? Scotland in seeking to expand opportunities for collaboration and co-production in our role as Corporate Parents. We will do this while being mindful that in their evidence to the Independent Care Review, many of those with lived experience shared their experiences of being parented in the care system which was without the investment and love they required. The recommendations of **The Promise** seek to activate cultural, systems and service shifts to create care experiences which provide more opportunities for compassion and recovery to be voiced. This is at the heart of our role as Corporate Parents. To be effective Corporate Parents we must seek opportunities to make these changes and to shift away from a term which fails to properly describe relational commitment. ('corporate parent' reported in ICR as a term that feels demeaning and an example of cold, process driven relationships)


We must ensure in its delivery our Corporate Parenting practices reflect compassion and love in how children and young people experience the care which we provide for them.

Appendix 2



Aberdeen City
Champions Board
#KeepThePromise Plan 2021-23

No.	Corporate Parenting Objectives
1.	Providing safe, secure, stable, and nurturing homes for looked after children and care leavers.
2.	Enabling looked after children and care leavers to develop or maintain positive relationships with their family, friends, professionals, and other trusted adults.
3.	Upholding and promoting children's rights.
4.	Securing positive educational outcomes for looked after children and care leavers.
5.	Ensuring 'care' is an experience in which children are valued as individuals, and where support addresses their strengths as well as their needs.
6.	Ensuring physical or mental health concerns are identified early and addressed quickly.
7.	Increasing the number of care leavers in education, training, and employment.
8.	Reducing the number of looked after children and care leavers who enter the youth and criminal justice systems.

No.	 The Promise Foundations
1.	Voice - Children must be listened to and meaningfully and appropriately involved in decision-making about their care, with all those involved properly listening and responding to what children want and need. There must be a compassionate, caring, decision-making culture focussed on children and those they trust.
2.	Family - Where children are safe in their families and feel loved they must stay – and families must be given support together to nurture that love and overcome the difficulties which get in the way.
3.	Care - Where living with their family is not possible, children must stay with their brothers and sisters where safe to do so and belong to a loving home, staying there for as long as needed.
4.	People - The children that Scotland cares for must be actively supported to develop relationships with people in the workforce and wider community, who in turn must be supported to listen and be compassionate in their decision-making and care.
5.	Scaffolding - Children, families and the workforce must be supported by a system that is there when it is needed. The scaffolding of help, support and accountability must be ready and responsive when it is required.

OUR CHAMPIONS BOARD:

VISION:

Our care experienced children and young people have a right to participate in decision-making about their own lives and have their voices heard.

Participation = consulting together, acting together, deciding together, learning better together.
Trust and positive relationships between children/young people and adults are key to effective participation.

APPROACH:

- Build a culture which demands and values participation, using **co-production**.
- Strengthen practice by improving ways of engaging children and young people to support their participation individually and as a group.
 - Develop structures to make sure that planning and service delivery takes account of children and young people's views
- Review these structures to evaluate the impact of children and young people's participation on decision-making and outcomes.

STANDARDS:

- Our children and young people are listened to and free to express their views on all matters that affect them.
 - These views directly influence decision-making at all levels.
- **Our children and young people are diverse and are given equal opportunities to be involved in participation activities.**
- We make sure adults are trained to effectively listen to and support them using a range of different participation methods.
- Our children and young people are safeguarded within all participation activities and experience participation as positive and empowering.

Participation approaches will reflect a range of capacity building opportunities alongside opportunities to play, have fun and feel connected.

OUTCOMES

Participation = improved individual outcomes for children and young people alongside improved services, now and into the future.

Champions Board - Delivery Plan 2021-2023

Champions Board Plan and Commitment

Outcome	Actions	Timescale
<p><u>As Champions we will act:</u></p> <p><u>LISTEN TO AND LEARN FROM THE VOICE AND EXPERIENCE OF OUR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE</u></p> <p>When children and young people make their contribution to champions they will be listened to, understood and be able to hold champions to account for their follow up actions.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="719 464 1688 587">1. The MOMO App (https://mindofmyown.org.uk/) has been effective in gaining the views of our children and young people. This is one example of how we are developing our creative connections. <p><i>Champions will have a quarterly report on the themes raised by young people who are using Mind of My Own App. The use of this App will be targeted to those young people looked after at home, kinship, and those for who we have child protection concerns.</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="719 871 1688 1082">2. We provide a model of engagement which young people agree meets their needs for a forum. Learning from COVID 19 has demonstrated the positive options afforded by digital technology. We will be mindful that not all care experienced young people can access devices or connections. <p><i>The Champions Board will be operating as a digital platform and will seek to secure reliable connectivity and devices for care experienced young people.</i></p>	<p><i>April 2021-April 2022</i></p> <p><i>April 2021-April 2022</i></p> <p><i>By June 2021</i></p>

	<p>3. Digital platforms will be fully used to keep in touch and better progress actions. It is hoped that there will be capacity for one physical Champion Board session in support of a larger co-production session.</p> <p><i>Direct connection sought for care experienced young people with Champions Board supporters and allies.</i></p> <p>4. In partnership with Who Cares? Scotland we will seek to recruit a Participation Officer who will take forward and co-produce Champions Board engagement and activities which can be accessed by Aberdeen care experienced young people.</p> <p><i>Activities and planning engagement actions will take account of the range of placement options from Aberdeen live in. Reaching out to such a dispersed group and capturing their voice will be a priority. Audit activity will be undertaken by WCS post holder to establish the baseline for approaches.</i></p> <p>5. Promotion and awareness raising around Corporate Parenting duties is fundamental to the role of Champions Board members. Each member should represent their own organisation's training plan around Corporate Parenting and able to report back on levels of uptake and impact.</p> <p><i>The Champions Board planning group which is supported by care experienced young people will request twice yearly information from Champions on their plans for the above, and in the adoption of the multi-agency Corporate</i></p>	<p><i>April 2021-Dec 2021</i></p> <p><i>April 2021</i></p> <p><i>April 2021-Sept 2021</i></p>
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	<p><i>Parenting training launched in Oct 2020. The rate of change toward an equitable position between those who are care experienced and peers remains high. Rates of prosecution and involvement in criminal justice systems are high.</i></p>	
<p><u>As Champions it is our aim to seek and promote opportunities which bridge the gap:</u></p> <p><u>OUR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE THE SAME LIFE OPPORTUNITIES AS THEIR PEERS</u></p> <p>Care Exp young people have been impacted on by COVID 19 in particular ways which reflect their, at times, social and emotional connections, and networks (any ask of CB around this?)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Champions will contribute their information to a baseline dataset which allows comparisons to be made regarding the outcomes for care experienced children and young people with their peers. <p><i>Each champion will be accountable for how their service, area or ward promotes our children and young peoples’ access to and understanding of ‘what’s out there’.</i></p> <p><i>The Corporate Parenting performance and Improvement Group will share information provided by Champions to create a data set which monitors this performance.</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. We will establish a range of participatory and engagement opportunities for our children and young people of all ages and stages. <p><i>Regardless of age or stage there will be opportunities for all care experienced young people to have their views shared and expressed. MOMO and digital connection is available to all care experienced young people and care leavers.</i></p>	<p><i>April 2021-April 2023</i></p> <p><i>May 2021-April 2023</i></p>

	<p>3. Accommodation and housing resources which support young people to access good quality accommodation and sustain relationships will be promoted.</p> <p><i>The Care Leavers Housing Procedure will be adopted and supported in its delivery by co located Housing role within Care Leavers service.</i></p>	
<p><u>As Champions our behaviours and decision seek to:</u></p> <p><u>EMBED A CHILDREN'S AND YOUNG PERSON RIGHTS APPROACH INTO SERVICES</u></p> <p>Policy and procedures update will be compliant with and informed by children's rights in realising our Corporate Parenting responsibilities.</p>	<p>1. Policy and Procedures being updated will reflect and be influenced by both international and national convention.</p> <p><i>Champions Board members will be Promise Keepers acting with the intention of supporting the Transformational Change activities being developed by the local Promise Implementation Plan.</i></p> <p><i>The principles and support intentions of the Children (Scotland) Act 2020 will be carried out with children's views foremost in mind.</i></p> <p><i>Each Champion will support the adoption of the Incorporation of the UNCRC into practice within their own areas of responsibility.</i></p>	<p><i>June 2021-April 2023</i></p>

	<p>2. Support the three P's, <i>Participation, Protection and Provision</i> of Children's Rights in our engagement opportunities with children and young people.</p> <p><i>Aberdeen Young Person's Rights Service will facilitate awareness raising session around key themes of children's rights.</i></p> <p><i>We will join with colleagues to create a unified approach to children and young peoples' participation in Aberdeen which is mindful of their needs in their communities of origin.</i></p>	<p><i>April 2021-April 2022</i></p>
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Aberdeen Care Experienced

ACE

Annual report: May 2020 to March 2021



At a Glance

This is the final report of the current Life Changes Trust funding arrangement. May 2020 through to March 2021, has been an exceptionally challenging and difficult time for Care Experienced young people. The impact of the lockdowns, restrictions and changes has been enormous. In addition, the inability to meet and participate together in ways we are used to, has been very difficult to manage.

Nevertheless, we have managed some amazing achievements. Developing creative responses to the crisis that has impacted us for the past 12 months, has meant that we have moved a number of activities online. This has meant greater levels of direct participation and influence by young people. We have developed highly responsive approaches to meet the emerging needs of young people. We also successfully applied for more than £15,000 in grants to distribute and directly support children, young people, and families.

In addition, we have been able to forge greater collaborative responses with Corporate Parents and others to ensure the best outcomes for young people. None of these achievements would have occurred had it not been for the critical need to respond to these needs in the midst of the COVID crisis.

ACE Update

Throughout 2020 and into 2021, we have managed to maintain the same numbers of ACE Advisors as the previous period. This has meant much higher level of additional support, being available late at night and into the early hours of the morning for some and being aware of and

sensitive to the fatigue and support issues many young people experienced throughout this period.

Our LCT funding comes to an end in March 21. Aberdeen City Council have shown their commitment to ongoing participation and voice by securing funding to continue the Development Officer post for a further 3 years covering 2021 – 2024, with a possibility of two further years beyond 24. This allows for a moment to review the scope and purpose of the post and work on reaching a wider mix of care experienced children and young people who are from Aberdeen. We are very excited about this further period and what it could bring.

Peter Melrose, our current DO has made the decision to return to his home in Australia and although he will be leaving the post, he is committed to staying in touch with the group and helping to make some global connections. Our virtual online practice during lockdown has shown us that distance is no barrier to connection and we will plan regular Scotland/Australia catch ups with Peter.

Our Core Activities and Outcomes

	Activity	Outcome
1	Youth engagement and participation	Care experienced young people will have opportunities to share their views across a range of media.
2	Young people development	There will be examples of young people making contributions to Aberdeen City Champions Board.
3	Partnership working	Core partners will engage in Champions Board and each will demonstrate and impact.
4	Information, awareness-raising, and promotion	Co-produce events which highlight corporate parenting role.
5	Monitoring and evaluation	Gather, hold evaluate information concerning core activities impact on young people and investment in exit planning strategies.

DATA May 2020 to March 2021

Data for this year reflects the unique challenges of the work and how this necessitated a different approach in the period 01/05/2020 through to 31/03/2021, compared to the two previous years. A number of the previous data points have changed in line with the new activities that have taken place. For a start, we had to stop meeting face to face, and almost all of our activities had previously relied on face-to-face meeting. Next, we had to develop new responses to emerging issues such as meeting wellbeing needs related to self-isolation, fears and anxieties. This meant the Development Officer needed to be far more available out of hours to young people and on a more flexible one to one basis.

Who Cares? Scotland developed a helpline to respond to a range of challenges young people were experiencing, and also made crisis funds available to pay for things such as food, utilities etc. The Development Officer was involved connecting young people from Aberdeen with this and understanding their needs.

The following data has been collected from a combination of the Who Cares? Scotland database where our ACE and helpline/crisis aid activities are recorded and local data collection by the DO.

ACE Meetings and one to one sessions

Number of activities 115

Age	Total
0-5	0
5-12	0
12-16	1
16 - 19	5
19 +	11
TOTAL	18

This consists of 54 ACE meetings which are online meetings with more than 2 young people, and 54 one to one sessions with individual young people these including wellbeing checks and being available after hours to young people.

Who Cares? Scotland funds and helpline (Aberdeen only)

Number of activities - 27.

Age	Total
0-5	0
5-12	0
12-16	0
16 - 19	15
19 +	12
TOTAL	27

These figures represent the numbers of care experienced young people from Aberdeen who reached out to the national helpline and who were then followed up by our DO. This includes 8 young people from Aberdeen but who live away from the city and throughout Scotland, due to their living arrangements or college. The individual young people were offered emotional, practical and financial support.

ACE Hardship Fund – 73 children and young people across 38 applications for support. £10,000 received and £10,000 spent.

Age	Total
0-5	23
5-12	28
12-16	12
16 - 19	5
19 +	5
TOTAL	73

The Development Officer successfully applied for £10,000 from the Lord Provost Hardship fund for activities that would create positive memories (see below for a full description).

The referrals for this are considered individual activities due to the amount of work involved in each referral.

Wi-Fi Fund – 9 young people. Received £5000 and spent £1514.

Age	Total
0-5	0
5-12	0
12-16	0
16 - 19	4
19 +	5
TOTAL	9

The Development Officer successfully applied for a grant of £5000 to provide Wi-Fi connection for young people to assist with connection college etc. At the same time, ACC were involved in pursuing a larger scale investment from the Connecting Scotland Project.

The Development Officer worked collaboratively with ACC to modify the initial funding which was for 12 months of Wi-Fi funding to pay for more short-term Wi-Fi until the Connecting Scotland project was successful and implemented in Aberdeen.

Data Summary

There was a total of 119 individual young people to the age of 26 years, who were engaged at some level for the past 12 months, across 189 separate events. Who Cares? Scotland data notes that there remains a core group of 18 young people, these are made up of ACE Advisors and a few others who will get involved in some activities. Importantly, there remains a core group even with the effects and impacts of COVID on face-to-face participation.

The positive impact on the representation of children aged up to 16 years, and in foster and kinship care or 'edge of care' is the direct result of successfully applying for a funding grant and our ability to directly support children in this regard.

The Challenges

May 2020 saw a deepening of the global COVID crisis. As noted in the previous report, we were beginning to experience a number of activity cancellations due to lockdown and redeployment of partner organisations. In fact, it was challenging to find Corporate Parents (mainly executive level) to engage in any activities due in large part, to redeployment and needing to respond to COVID issues. Although the impact of COVID during this time cannot be overstated, the re-deployment of staff left care experienced young people feeling disconnected from many of their Corporate Parents, especially as in the previous year there had been many successful connection activities with them and more communication.

However, these issues only deepened through May and beyond. All of our planned activities were cancelled by May 2020, primarily due to lockdown and restrictions on movement, as well as a lack of availability from partner organisations and their personnel.

Young people were isolated and afraid, personnel and partner organisations were responding to a range of crises that would arise and anxiety levels in young people and colleagues began to rise as well. Across the Country groups of staff and organisations worked together to create local solutions to emerging issues until the nationwide crisis settled a bit and more strategic plans were in place.

The Achievements

Many of these achievements have resulted in advancing practice in general, using technology, rapid responses to emerging needs, rallying partner organisations, accessing funding options to meet increasing needs and increasing participation in a range of areas for young people. These achievements will likely be in place for some time, and many will impact our work well into the future.

While balancing the issues directly related to the COVID crisis as it unfolded, we also had to develop rapid responses beyond the previous requirements of the Development Officer role. While trying to ensure participation, we also needed to work on ensuring that wellbeing and immediate needs were met and supported.

Immediate Responses

Initially, maintaining contact and ensuring wellbeing of young people became a focal issue for the Development Officer in Aberdeen. Contact was made with all young people working with ACE and any others known to the Development Officer within the first few weeks. This was via telephone and social media platforms.

- **Bug-in bags**

Just prior to lockdown announcements, the Development Officer consulted with young people about what would help them during self-isolation and together they developed 'Bug-In bags' which would include a range of emergency items and food to sustain a young person who was isolated for about two weeks.

The Aberdeen Youth Team were able to gather the items and distribute these to the young people who would need them. This concept has inspired other Local Authorities to develop similar resources early on for isolated young people.

Over 200 'Bug-In Bags' were delivered across Aberdeen city to isolated young people, many of whom had no other way to obtain food and emergency provisions.



- **'Window Visits' (Wellbeing Checks)**

As young people with pre-existing conditions, or with increased anxiety about COVID were told to isolate, the Development Officer commenced 'window visits' whereby young people could be visited with and meet at their door, or window to talk and see what supports were required.

These visits would be later used to deliver food supplies as part of the **Cooking with...** activity which moved online in July, once Corporate Parents were available to engage in a roster of monthly cooking.

Nevertheless, these Window visits were an excellent way to informally meet and chat with young people, and assess any level of need, as well as to inform them of new supports as they became available.

In all, 12 vulnerable young people were visited this was and there were 17 such visits between May to June.

- **Mask Supply**

As part of the visiting concept, the Development Officer purchased masks for young people, many of whom said they did not have any, and distributed these to young people who needed them to go out if necessary.

A total of 15 masks were distributed to vulnerable young people who did not have masks previously.

Information Provision and Increased Use of Social Media

Getting reliable information to young people about changing rules, lockdown and restrictions proved a significant and ongoing challenge. It also fed into the increasing levels of anxiety experienced by many young people. Information about lockdown and restrictions was often confusing along with fears of contracting COVID.

In order to support this, we ensured that young people were linked into the ACE social media platforms including Facebook and messenger. This meant that the Development Officer was able to directly respond to any issues that arose. In addition, the Development Officer worked closely with Youth team staff to ensure that all young people were receiving some level of direct support. We would meet and discuss young people to ensure that relevant support personnel were aware of the needs and any issues. This proved to be a vital response as the Development Officer would pick up on areas of significant support needs for individual young people and we were able to develop highly responsive plans to support them together.

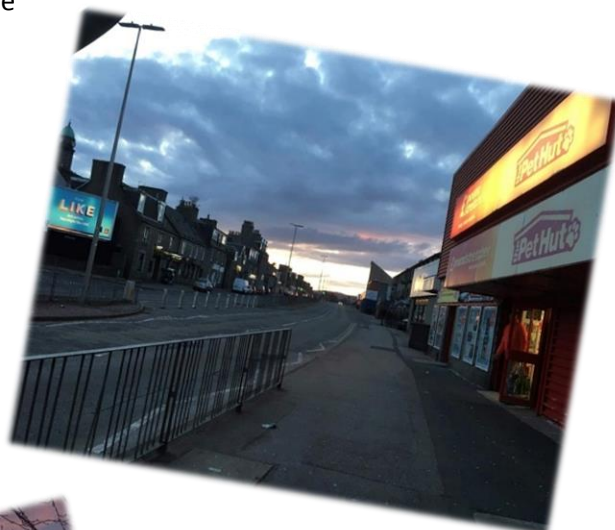
- DO ensured that information was provided by CPs to young people.
- Asked for messages of reassurance from CPs, several engaged.
- The Who Cares? Scotland Helpline provided a door through which to access the support of the DO.
- Young people living elsewhere said that this helped them to feel connected when they previously felt isolated and alone:

“It was so frightening feeling so isolated. It meant so much having (Development Officer) contact me and talk to me and provide support and tell me I would be okay... connection is so important just now”.

Photos of Home

With a focus on being inside, the Development Officer asked young people to take photos of what home meant to them. Some of these were to be used later (after the COVID crisis) when talking to Housing about the concept of home.

In the meantime, the quality of photos and creativity was so moving that we created a collage that was used in Speak Out, the National Who Cares? Scotland magazine.



COVID Report: Interviewing Young People

In August 2020, the Development Officer began writing a report on the lived experience of Care Experienced young people in Aberdeen during what would become the first lockdown. This became a collaborative effort with the Youth team and Children Rights Services also providing information from young people with whom that had spoken about similar issues.

This report, ***“I’m Scared I’m Going to Die Alone”: Impact of LOCKDOWN on Care Experienced young people in Aberdeen***, directly informed how Corporate Parents can respond to young people who are experiencing isolation and the mental health and other issues this causes. It has since gone on to become a foundational element of a National report from Who Cares? Scotland which is going to inform outcomes nationally. [Link to the report](#)

Move to Online

One of the most significant shifts we achieved was to move all of our work into an online environment. While it does not seem like it now as so much of our work is now occurring in an online environment, at the time (just a few months ago) this was a major shift for many young people and for Corporate Parents, that presented a number of challenges for everyone.

One of the first challenges was people learning to use platforms, and actually getting used to online meetings becoming a regular and primary way of working. Many Corporate Parents, other workers and young people found this difficult to navigate initially. Another major issue was that local authorities throughout Scotland had effectively banned the use of the ZOOM platform by their staff, as they believed there were security issues, this meant that they were limited to Microsoft Teams. The issue is that this platform uses a great deal of bandwidth, and young people still have limited access to internet and hardware in order to use more complex platforms. In short, they could not use it reliably.

Access to tech and Wi-Fi was also a major barrier to young people being able to stay connected. Many only had their existing phone data packages for connection which did not support hours of being online on virtual platforms and they also had limited access to tablets or laptops.

Importantly, young people said that the online environment was no match for meeting face to face and being together. Young people soon began to get fatigue with online meetings and the use of ZOOM and other social media platforms.

Nevertheless, by everyone becoming more comfortable with online environments for meeting and getting things done, this had the effect of being able to broaden the role of the Development Officer further. It meant that we moved to a more fluid work environment that would often be more active in the evenings with young people in conversation than during the daytime.

Additional Supports After Hours

The Development Officer was able to respond to concerns and issues of young people directly and in a timely way. There were many distressed young people who often needed someone to respond to them after 7:00PM and we achieved this on Messenger which worked best for young people for conversations.

We held regular, short Messenger chats, video calls and text discussions together. These were very casual and often were essentially just checking in with young people. Young people have said that this flexible approach really had a comforting effect for them.

“This is such a hard time, but it’s good to know that (Development Officer) is around to chat to when I’m lonely and everyone else has gone home”.

Critical Issues Support

This was never more apparent than several occasions very late at night when young people were alone and frightened, or struggling. There were several reports of instances of young people self-harming, and other reporting this to the Development Officer, not knowing who else to contact. These occasions were after 11:00pm and sometimes after midnight. This meant that the Development Officer was able to ensure that young people were safe, calm other young people, share the risks, and ensure appropriate follow up.

“I was so frightened for (young person), it was after midnight and I had no one else to contact. I contacted (development Officer) and (he) talked to me and sorted it, even though it was so late. I was so scared, but it worked out”.

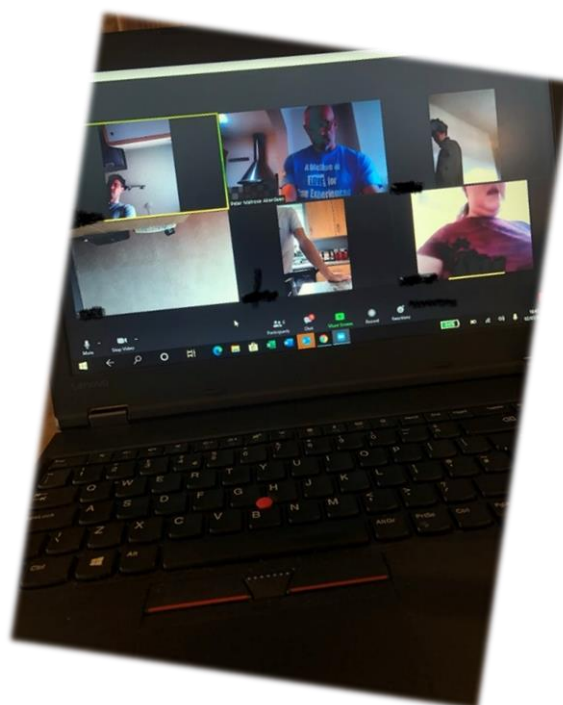
Champions Board Moves Online

Initial issues included working with current ACC policies regarding online platform usage. Young people cannot use Teams as it requires large bandwidth, and devices often beyond their availability.

So, the Champions Board has...Moved to Zoom.

Increased engagement by young people and confidence in the platform. This meant that adults were limited in number due to the online environment which meant that more young people could participate and ensure a 50/50 split. This was far better than having up to 9 young people in a room with up to 40 adults in the larger face to face Champions Board (CB) meetings.

Despite the challenges, we had 5 online Champions boards: April, June, July, September, and December 2020.



The Zoom platform increased their engagement significantly and resulted in many outcomes being achieved and quickly. Openness of communication was noticed by everyone. Young people said that they want to keep this online platform as the predominant way CBs occur and that this would be enhanced by two larger meetings each year, ensuring compliance with COVID restrictions.

Cooking with... sessions online.

Being able to encourage Corporate Parents to engage online added another dimension to this important activity. Being able to join together in our own homes, added a more relaxed level of interaction and conversations were lengthy, and more fruitful. For example, Corporate Parents and young people were able to build better relationships, more trust and to make plans to move issues forward.

We changed the name of the sessions to **'Cooking with... (name of the Corporate Parent)'**. A meal would be planned based on what young people said they wanted to learn, ingredients would be purchased by the Development Officer and young people would collect these from Westburn. In January 2021, this moved to depositing funds in each of their bank account for them to purchase the ingredients themselves. This was possible, because the confidence of those involved has grown significantly, along with their food and nutrition awareness. In addition, a number of young people participating have opened themselves up to vegetarian cooking and often meat alternatives are requested. This further increases their creativity and food awareness.

The cooking has become more complex as well, moving from pizzas when we first started, to vegetarian stews, lasagne, mac and cheese etc, all with multiple and unusual ingredients for them to use.



ACE Funds

Making Better Memories £10,000

The Development Officer successfully applied for a Hardship Grant of £10,000 from the Lord Provost Hardship Fund. These funds were distributed to children who are considered on the 'edge of care' and can have unique challenges.

Distribution was decided by a panel of ACE advisors who provided additional lived experience and contextual awareness to the grant applications.

ACE chose to distribute funds to children based on experiences and items that they would like to improve life during lockdown and restrictions.

We wanted to create happy and positive memories out of a time of real crisis.

This included,

- Many bikes, scooters (and helmets) to enhance outdoor activities and time.
- Overnight trips away to visit family.
- Zoo and fun park visits.
- Bedroom decoration and furniture.
- Shared fun activities for communities, including a jumping castle.
- Specialist equipment for children with additional needs.
- Winter clothing for children and young people. £5,000 for Wi-Fi LP hardship fund



WIFI Fund £5000

ACE received a further £5000 for WIFI connectivity through the Lord Provost Fund. The Development Officer applied for a grant of £5000 to provide Wi-Fi connection for young people to assist with connection for college etc. At the same time, Aberdeen City Council had sought to participate in a larger connection project, Connecting Scotland. The Development Officer worked collaboratively with ACC to modify the initial funding which was for 12 months of Wi-Fi funding to pay for more short-term Wi-Fi until the Connecting Scotland project was successful and implemented in Aberdeen.

Cooking With... Corporate Parents! £500

As a result of the lockdown and move to more online activities, Who Cares? Scotland made funds available to support this. ACE successfully applied for £500 to assist with purchasing ingredients for the cooking session we held.

Walking Group Walk – Stonehaven.

Walking had become one of the most important activities that young people really enjoyed. Lockdown and restriction meant that this could no longer happen. Nevertheless, during a short reprieve from restrictions, we were able to organise a day walk at Stonehaven. While some other shorter, local walks were also arranged, weather and changing restrictions meant that these had to be cancelled.



In any event, the Stonehaven walk was a success, and young people really enjoyed the experience of being together and many had not been to Stonehaven before. We also were able to share fish and chips and an ice-cream making it a proper day at the beach.

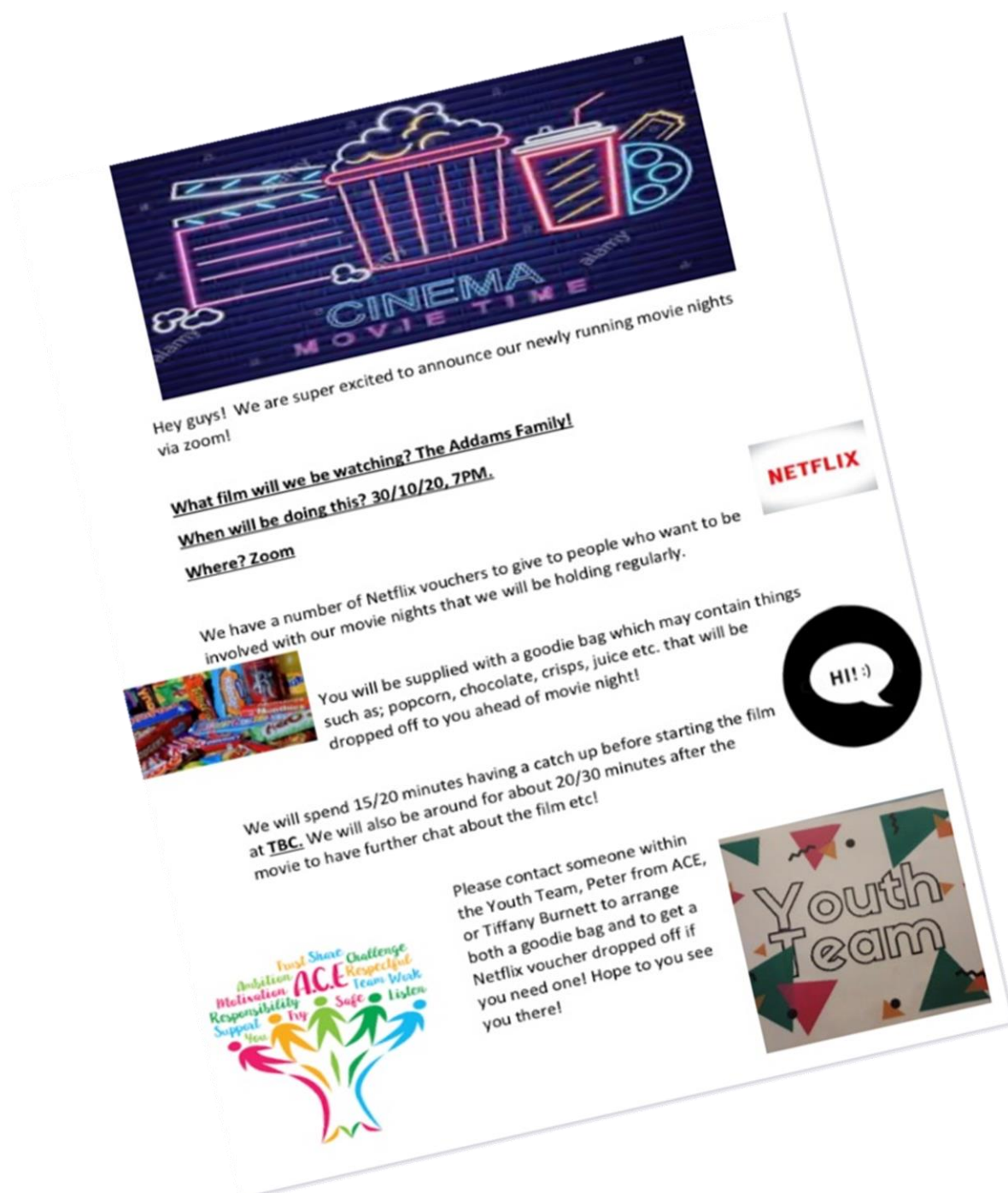
Previously we were successful in being awarded almost £3000 for hillwalking. While COVID restriction has meant that this could not be spent to date, we have been given an extension of this period until September 2021.



Movie nights

During the later stages of 2020, young people decided to arrange online movie nights together. The Development Officer supported this by purchasing and providing snacks for the evening.

Importantly though, young people arranged these nights, and organised the Netflix vouchers for each other. Currently, young people plan these on a week-by-week basis together and they have invited other young people along who would not ordinarily participate in other activities.




Hey guys! We are super excited to announce our newly running movie nights via zoom!

What film will we be watching? The Addams Family!

When will be doing this? 30/10/20, 7PM.

Where? Zoom





We have a number of Netflix vouchers to give to people who want to be involved with our movie nights that we will be holding regularly.



You will be supplied with a goodie bag which may contain things such as; popcorn, chocolate, crisps, juice etc. that will be dropped off to you ahead of movie night!

We will spend 15/20 minutes having a catch up before starting the film at **TBC**. We will also be around for about 20/30 minutes after the movie to have further chat about the film etc!

Please contact someone within the Youth Team, Peter from ACE, or Tiffany Burnett to arrange both a goodie bag and to get a Netflix voucher dropped off if you need one! Hope to you see you there!



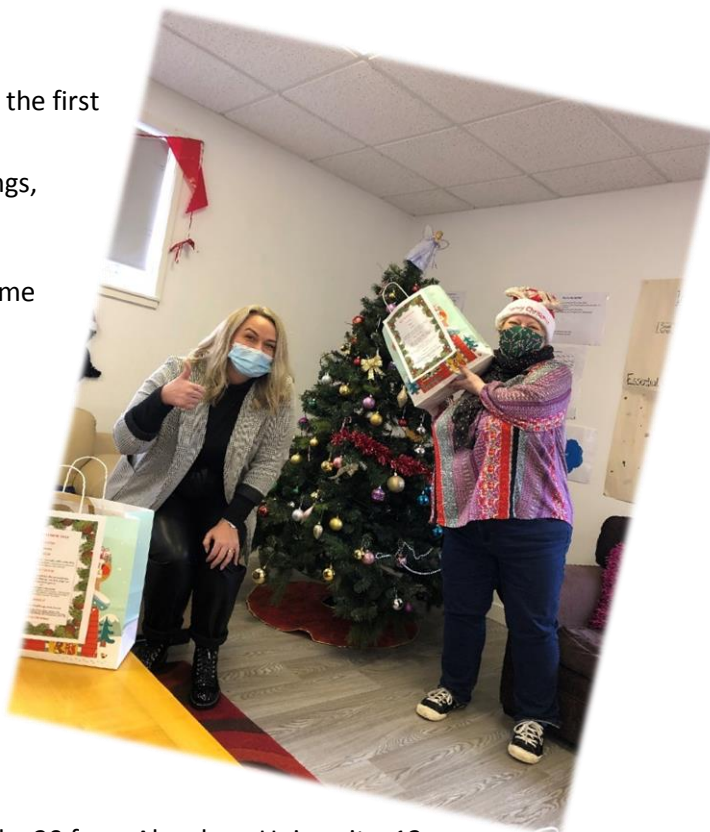
Christmas month

Christmas 2019 involved a huge Christmas party, the first such event for Aberdeen. However, changing restrictions and rules around COVID and gatherings, meant that we had to arrange a different event.

This became a Christmas month of online and some face-to-face activities (restrictions permitting). It was challenging to arrange as during the period rules were changing and a new lockdown was looming.

The calendar of over 15 different activities, were arranged in collaboration with many others who directly provided activities online including: craft making and cooking sessions, movie nights, quizzes, and get togethers. We also had a Christmas tree lighting event at Westburn.

A number of trees were donated for young people, 20 from Aberdeen University, 12 from Child protection Committee and Counsellor Lesley Dunbar also donated a Christmas tree. These were distributed to young people along with decorations.



While unable to have a Christmas Day party, Christmas Day also saw us work in collaboration with ACC and staff and many volunteers to deliver Christmas Dinner to around 30 families. This happened because of the uncertainty around us being able to have an actual Christmas party like last year. We were determined to still provide some connection and Xmas dinner for young people and families.



Since January 21

During the first week of Jan 21, Peter our Development Officer tested positive for COVID 19. He became increasingly unwell which resulted in a hospital admission and a long recovery period. Not only was this a very difficult time for Peter and his family, but it also significantly impacted on our ability to maintain our levels of connection and participation activities with young people.

The group of ACE advisors have been connecting with one of Peter's colleagues from Who Cares? Scotland, however due to capacity, this has been a more responsive approach rather than proactive.

In partnership with Aberdeen Libraries, we have been running ACE it with Poetry workshops which are focussed on the experiences of being young women growing up in care. These workshops are ongoing and will produce a video of the groups work.

A calendar of connection activities is currently being planned to maintain some connection throughout the next couple of months, until we appoint a new person to the DO post.