

# Aberdeen Young Person's Rights Service Annual Report 2022

*'A Service which #KeepsThePromise to support our children, young people and young adults to enjoy and have their rights listened to and fulfilled.'*



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## Foreword From Graeme Simpson, Chief Social Work Officer

‘World Children’s Day, celebrated every November, had as its focus last year **‘a better future for every child’**. This is something we all in Aberdeen City Council’s Children’s SW work tirelessly to deliver. However, our work cannot simply focus on the future, we also need to be concerned about how we support and empower children to claim their rights today. All children, no matter their age, are rights holders and we have a duty to ensure that in the discharge of our statutory duties we give full respect to their rights in all that we do.

As with so much of what we do in children’s social work, this task is not easy one.

The remit of our Young Person’s Rights Service is to provide advocacy, guidance and support to Aberdeen children, young people, and young adults, aged 0-26 years old, who are care experienced or are or have been involved in child protection processes, wherever they live. The Rights Service Annual Report 2022 highlights strengths to our current practice but inevitably it also notes areas where OUR children, young people and young adults have reported they feel they could be better supported by social work staff (and other corporate parents) to claim their rights. We are often required to balance the right of the child to be kept safe with their right to family life. In doing so we must ensure we continue to put children’s rights and their voices at the centre of our practice. This means listening to children, their views, ideas, and experiences – giving full effect to participation.

The Promise reminded us that those with care experience and those on the edges of care still face significant challenges to claim their rights. While advocating for children for whom we have intervened in their lives is important, of greater importance is how we ensure they are aware of and empowered to claim their rights. As one young person with experience of care noted – **‘It’s important to know your rights so they can’t be taken away’**.

Recent policy and legislative changes highlight the extent to which the rights of young people have been compromised and the journey we still have to travel to ensure that the children, young people and young adults we support are empowered to fully claim their rights:

- The Children (Equal Protection from Assault) (Scotland) Act 2019 now means children have legal protection from physical punishment. Despite this we continue to see the use of restraint and seclusion in schools and some care settings where we place children & young people.
- The minimum age of criminal responsibility was increased from 8 to 12 in December 2021. Despite this it is still two years below the international minimum standard. Scotland’s low age of criminal responsibility and the continuing detention of children in prisons, of which care experienced young people are overrepresented, tells us we still have a way to go to fulfil our commitment to

children's rights. The Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Bill aims to address some of these issues, but our practice will need to evolve with the legislation.

- Poverty remains one of the most significant issues to impact on children's rights, with one in four children living in poverty. It affects every aspect of children's lives and robs them of their childhood. Our data clearly tells us that care experienced young people and those on the edges of care including children with a disability are disproportionately impacted by the impact of poverty. Ensuring we adopt a rights-based lens to considering the impact of poverty, will continue to influence our family support offer and enable us to support children to remain within their family where it is safe for them to be so.

The Rights Service Annual Report 2022 provides us with a mirror to reflect on where we all could do more to empower the children, young people and young adults we support to claim their rights. It is not the sole responsibility of the Rights Service to this on our behalf. Nor is it something we should postpone until the Scottish Government incorporate the UNCRC into Scots Law. It is for all teams and individuals to consider what steps we can take that better enables more children to be empowered to claim their rights so we can truly make **'a better future for every child'**.

To initiate this, I intend over the summer and autumn to engage in a series of conversations with colleagues from across the service which hopefully can begin to identify steps you feel we can all take to more effectively empower children to claim their rights. I look forward to engaging with as many of you as possible in this important conversation'.

**Graeme Simpson, Chief Social Work Officer.**

## Welcome the Aberdeen Young Person's Rights Service Annual Report 2022

Rights are inherent in [The Promise](#) and one of the fundamentals of [The Promise Plan 21-24](#), valuing that these are for all children and young people in or on the edge of care, as well as those with experience of care. It asserts the rights-based approach required by the forthcoming implementation of the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child \(UNCRC\)](#) into Scots law. Though the Convention is focused on children, its principles and rights should be seen to also have relevance to **those young adults with care experience for whom we have corporate parenting responsibilities.**

Other noteworthy Bills and Scottish policy ambitions include the [Children \(Care and Justice\) \(Scotland\) Bill](#), and the proposed formation of a [National Care Service](#).

The Promise refers to 44 pieces of primary legislation, 19 pieces of secondary legislation and 3 international conventions. This is difficult enough for a workforce to grasp, let alone children, young people, and young adults.

As a partnership and as corporate parents, it is recognised that those children, young people, and young adults who need care and protection are more likely to require support to understand their rights and have these upheld in their day to day lives through practices and services which promote their participation and voice.

'Voice' describes real involvement. It means more than seeking children, young people, and young adults' views, it considers all other aspects of their presentation. Voice encompasses how we actively listen to what they tell us, through whatever means of communication they use, to build their personal confidence and growth, promote understanding of their life story and best influence their own plan as well as wider service improvements.

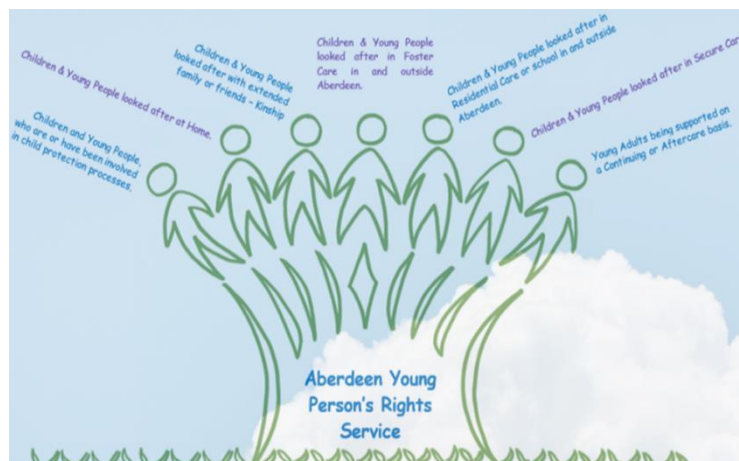
**Promoting a rights-respecting culture is the responsibility of the whole workforce.** This report consequently gives an overview of how our children's social work workforce, plus other multi-agency partners, used the Service with and in the best interests of our children, young people, and young adults. In addition, we saw an increase in children, young people and young adults self-referring for advocacy, guidance, and support.

This report tells the workforce and the Chief Social Work Officer what the main rights-related themes have been over the year. It updates on work on the Rights Service 2022 Action Plan, highlights some proposed or progressing actions and concludes with its priority improvement areas for 2023.

Even as the pandemic was seen to wane in 2022, the impact of Covid has been undeniably significant. It has been something that children, young people, and young adults continue to talk about, reflect upon, and worry over. This report should therefore be read through a 'post covid' lens.

As ever, we have supported the voices of some remarkable children, young people, and young adults over 2022. This report is testament to what matters to them.

## Remit



Those within the child, young person or young adult's network are usually relationally best placed to advocate for and promote their rights. Many children, young people and young adults therefore do not need or want to access the Young Person's Rights Service. There may be times, however, where there is a need or expressed wish for additional and independent support related to their lived experience.

The remit of the Service is to provide independent, relational, trauma-informed advocacy, guidance and support to children, young people, and young adults, aged 0-26 years, who have experience of care, or who are or have been involved in child protection processes. Where they cannot access this Service themselves, due to age or disability, the Service can affirmatively promote their voice through '[non-instructed](#)' advocacy.

We remain conscious that both the workforce and those children, young people and young adults who can access the Service do not always know about it.

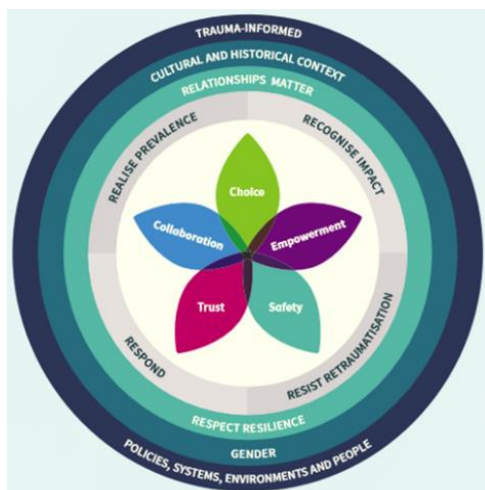
In terms of awareness raising, we therefore continued to actively promote the Service remit through our digital leaflet and 'voice snapshots' information, and through consultation and participatory activity such as our monthly rights walks and workforce 'drop-in' sessions. Based in Westburn Resource Centre continued to aid positive collaboration with the Youth Team and other colleagues as well as making us accessible and responsive to those children, young people and young adults who use the building.

Based on improvement work related to inclusive communication (of more later), we recognised a need to extend the ways in which we raise awareness about the Service.

**A short video version of our service leaflet has therefore also been developed.**

'Drop-ins' and referral consultation discussions continued to raise workforce awareness about rights, and about the Service ethos and remit. Through these we saw increased workforce confidence and understanding about everyone's' role to promote and uphold rights, evidenced through, e.g., agreement that a referral was not required as the worker themselves could or was already promoting voice.

## Trauma-informed Relationships



[The Scottish Psychological Trauma Training Plan](#)

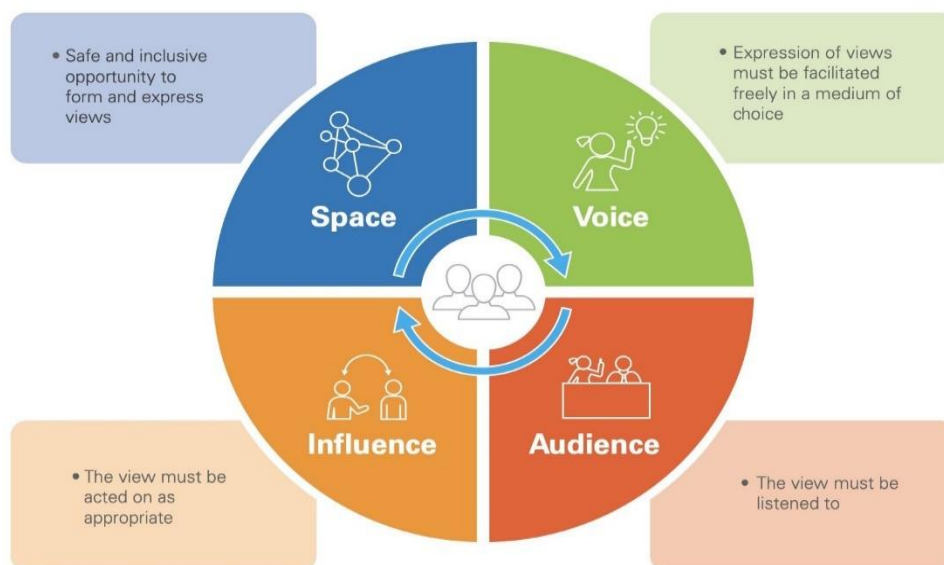
The Service understands that the children, young people, and young adults it supports are having or have had traumatic lived experiences. Consequently, they may find it hard to develop trusting relationships which are central to upholding rights.

This means that we try to build safe, trustworthy connections and relationships in individualised ways to minimise re-traumatisation and support trauma recovery.

The Service connected face to face and virtually with children, young people, and young adults to advocate for and support their voice in their homes, at school or out in the community, in and outside of Aberdeen.

This was done in whatever way best suited individuals. Some just wanted to ‘check things out’. Most of the support provided tended, however, to be direct or virtual advocacy or participatory support at or for a range of activities or meetings, either their own or related to their child/children. Reflecting their expressed or observed voice in written form or in other formats e.g., video or drawings, was done on most occasions. Sometimes this required several visits to help them process what they wanted to say, how they wanted to express this, who they wanted to share this with and, if in written form, to edit their voice and views to their satisfaction.

### Features of meaningful participation



*L. Lundy - Voice is not enough: Conceptualising Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. British Educational Research Journal. 2007 Dec 33(6)(6):927-942*

Some referred children, young people and young adults did not wish to be supported by the Service and this was respected. For those that did, we found that the support provided was sometimes 'one off' or short-term but increasingly, existing and developing relationships meant that this became longer-term or recurring.

From a participatory group perspective, our established monthly 'Rights Walks,' continued. These generally consist of a core group with some coming and going as determined by their circumstances and interests. The walks are enjoyed as a participatory opportunity for exercise, discussion, food, and fun.



Individual and group discussions have covered a range of themes and topics, including the Ukraine War, politics, parenthood, relationships, bereavement, poverty, cost of living worries, housing worries, health inequalities, the impact of Covid and post-Covid and physical and mental health and wellbeing. In some instances, information shared has prompted follow up discussions or interventions to the benefit of that individual(s).

Those who have come along to the walks have said that they enjoy the company, the 'chat', food and the walking itself, exploring different parts of Aberdeen and beyond. Some have also expressed appreciation that issues that they may have raised have been listened to and followed up.

## Service Reach and Referrals

In line with its remit, the Service is available to those Aberdeen children, young people, and young adults wherever they live.

2021 and 2022 data were less directly comparable due to several changes in its collation. However, the data showed a slight drop in referral numbers compared to 2021 but with a balancing increase in the duration and recurrence of support provided.

Here are some key points in relation to the 2022 data:

- Most referrals noted '*advocacy*' as the primary reason.
- Referral age profiles were variable.
- 33.21% of all referrals were self-referrals.
- It remained that referrals were mostly for children and young people who are currently looked after – 61.25% in total across the year.
- There was a steady increase in referrals related to those children and young people involved in child welfare and protection processes, rising from 7.14% of all referrals between January to March 2022 to 25.49% of all referrals for the period October to December 2022.
- There was a sustained % increase of referrals related to young adults with experience of care and being supported on an aftercare basis. This averaged out at around 24.46% of all referrals for the year.
- Whilst requiring consultation and discussion, around 33% of referrals did not result in the service connecting directly with children, young people or young adults referred. Reasons for this included:
  - referral did not meet the Service remit;
  - child, young person or young adult did not want to access the Service;
  - discussion between workers and the Service affirmed that workers were already actively promoting voice and/or an additional worker could cause unnecessary distress or trauma to the child, young person or young adult;
  - Service instead provided advice and guidance to workers around e.g., inclusive communication tools to support them, through their relationship, to promote the child, young person or young adult's rights.



## Organisational Systems

Much workforce time mid 2022 onwards - and continuing into 2023 - was centred on getting ready for Microsoft Dynamics 365 'going live'. Its intended benefits to improve service delivery, promote community engagement and empower a connected workforce, are aligned to applying a human rights-based approach across our social work service.

We have tried to hold onto this as we have tackled getting used to a new system. We also have some concern about how such a system change may impact on the time and attention the wider workforce has to think about the benefits or need of making a referral to the Service. Our intention for 2023 is to continue working with colleagues to support use of the system to make Rights Service Referrals and to improve our data collation, analysis, and reporting.

As part of the D365 build, we reframed our referral procedure, **identifying 4 key referral strands**. More than one can apply:

### Advocacy

Provide an individualised service for children, young people, and young adults to ensure that their voice, views, and opinions are being heard and considered in all assessment, planning, and decision-making systems relevant to their lives. Importantly this will include those who may communicate their views in alternative ways or are non-verbal through age or disability.

### Safeguarding

Take action to promote the rights and welfare of children, young people, and young adults to ensure that they are cared for, supported, and treated respectfully and safely. This can involve responding to identified safeguarding issues or our service highlighting issues presented as part of our direct work. Safeguarding issues could include physical restraint, seclusion or restrictive practices which fall outside of normal parenting response.

### Consultation

Provide and seek advice and guidance through consultation with children, young people, and young adults and those carers and professionals who care for and protect them to ensure rights are being respected and implemented into practice.

### Participation

Actively empower children, young people, and young adults to access all kinds of available participation activities for connection, fun. Inclusion and to contribute to service development and improvement, encouraging and supporting others to do likewise.

## Service Support

### Family Life

The predominant focus of referrals was Family Life as was the case in 2020 and 2021 also.

Referrals spanned rights issues related to being brought up within your own family, being removed from the care of family, being reunited with family, being cared for with brothers or sisters if living apart from your family, and associated challenges when being cared for geographically far from home and community.

Where 'family time' was a feature of any care plan, children, young people, and young parents with experience of care highlighted rights issues linked to frequency, timing, venue, location, travel and supervisory or supported arrangements. Whilst there were some positive examples shared about supervised or supported family time, related mainly to trustworthy relationships, this was offset by contrary concerns or confusion expressed about purpose, structure, recording, 'attitudes' and 'judgement'.

We actively linked in with some teams and services to think together about some of these issues, as well as feeding these into improvement groups and teams such as [Write Right About Me \(WRAM\)](#), which is supporting a change in the way the workforce writes for, with and about the children, young people, and adults it supports.

The two main family life associated areas requiring or seeking service support also remained the same as 2021:

- **children, young people, and young adults in conflict with the law/being criminally exploited.**
- **young parents with experience of care.**

Those children, young people, and young adults and/or parents told us of people and services which they experienced as positive, relational, trauma-informed, and compassionate.

However, this was overshadowed by expressed experiences of systemic disadvantage and disproportionate criminalisation or scrutiny, and of feeling unheard, judged, mistreated and stigmatised.

It is of cultural concern that these experiences have persisted.

## Children, Young People and Young Adults in Conflict with the Law

The link between developmental trauma and increased likelihood of being in conflict with the law is unequivocal.

Commitment to the [Whole Systems Approach](#) and to promoting the rights and voice of those children, young people, and young adults in conflict with the law or being criminally exploited, the Service is a member of the [Youth Justice Improvement Group \(YJIG\)](#), the Participation Forum, a subgroup of the YJIP, and the Local Outcome Improvement Plan (LOIP) Charter ‘*higher supports needs young people*’.

This commitment included developing our own and/or contributing to wider workforce learning and improvement around aspects of legislation, policy, and practice such as The Age of Criminal Responsibility (Scotland) Act 2019, Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Bill, child criminal exploitation and review of the Best Practice for Children and Young People with Higher Support Needs, incorporating the Framework for Risk Assessment Management and Evaluation (FRAME), Care and Risk Management (CARM) and Sexual Harmful Behaviour (SHB).

Involvement in these and a developing relationship with the [Whole Systems Approach](#) Co-ordinator, better ensured that the voice and views of those children, young people, and young adults in conflict with the law that the Service supported were heard.

As a key focus of/for this, we were excited to be involved in establishing the Participation Forum, its central principle being is that participation should be part of everyday practice.

The forum met regularly to explore how best to ensure voice and views were shared with those who can take action. The Rights Service fed in children, young people and young adult’s experiences linked to:

- contact with the Police; young offenders’ institutions; detention; attending court; physical restraint and restrictive practices; and access to legal advice and representation.

In 2023, the forum will continue to learn from children, young people and young adults’ experiences and further how they can collaborate in improvements moving forward.

The Rights Service also contributed to the design and co-delivery of related workforce development sessions. For example, 3 ‘*Children’s Rights and Children in Conflict with the Law*’ Webinars were co-delivered with the WSA Coordinator, which sits alongside the ‘*Needs not Deeds*’ session.

**The existing ‘Children’s Rights and Children in Conflict with the Law’ session has been extended to be face to face, and including more on participatory practice and on how voice and views can better inform service improvement.**

**A short rights-focused ‘talking head’ input to complement the existing FRAME and CARM Webinars has also been developed.**

## Young Parents with Experience of Care

### 2022 Referral Data Snapshot:

- 11 young parents with care experience referred or self-referred.
- This comprised of 10 mothers, 1 father (initially part of a couple, mother also with care experience but now separated).
- 6 of these parents (including the 1 father) were already known to the Rights Service and had previously been supported.
- Referral sources included Children’s Social Work and Family Nurse Partnership.
- Rights Service relationship-based practice led to more self-referrals.
- Referrals resulted in the provision of general financial/legal signposting, connections made to other teams or local authorities and significant and enduring advocacy/support.
- Enduring advocacy/support was required/sought due to e.g., permanence plans being contested or delayed.
- There was a noted need to promote an understanding of process, of corporate parenting obligations and of rights to legal representation. This sometimes included providing support to young parents to help them articulate where they did not understand aspects of legal advice.
- 2 mothers referred their own babies or infants to the Service.
- In some instances, parallel advocacy was provided to babies/infants.
- Growing value of the voice of babies and infants was evident through associated referrals.

The recurring themes, challenges and concerns voiced by our parents with care experience over the last few years (much of which is also seen nationally e.g. [Believe in Us - Who Cares? Scotland 2022](#)) necessitated the presentation, by the Rights Service and the Lead Officer for Corporate Parenting, of a briefing paper to the multi-agency Corporate Parenting Performance and Improvement Group in June 2022.

As ‘*corporate parents and grandparents*’, this paper underlined the strategic importance of recognising the lifelong needs of our parents with care experience and that of their children in line with the demands of the Promise and in our design and delivery of whole family support.

Around the same time, NHS Grampian were awarded Promise Funding for a project to explore how best to support parents who have a child permanently removed from their care which presented some crossover linkage.

Multi-agency improvement work is being planned or is ongoing and it is anticipated that one output could be a co-produced Best Practice Charter to strengthen corporate parenting support for young parents with care experience.

## And their Children?

A key message the Service promotes is that children and adults' needs are essentially compatible – they are not 'either/or'. The central challenge is one of safety.

The voice of pre-birth or new babies and infants can play a key role in upholding the right to both bring up your own child and be brought up within your own family, where it is safe to do so. Keeping focus on their meaningful participation and voice irrespective of their preverbal or still developing language can be hard when adults have a lot to say. Workers continued to consult with the Service around their worries that these voices would be overlooked.

Though still a relatively small percentage - **7.5% of all 2022 referrals** - the Service promoted the voice of **20 infants under 5 years old, 6 of whom were babies under 1 years old**. This represented a small but noteworthy increase in the provision of non-instructed advocacy.

We have hypothesised that some of this increase could be attributed to a developing workforce appreciation and understanding of non-instructive advocacy and of voice inclusive practice. We have seen, for example, workers progressing referrals following a consultation, or attendance at a 'drop-in' or rights-related workshop.

The Service was also involved in WRAM work, which is ongoing, related to how the workforce use language to write about and for children, young people and young adults who are non-verbal, representing and giving agency to their voice.

It is intended that the learning from this can be rolled out across other services within the city who support babies, infants, children, young people, and young adults with individual communication needs.

## Independent advocacy in the Children's Hearings System

We sustained our collaboration with those [independent Advocacy Service \(IAS\) Providers](#) aligned to the National Practice Model: Who Cares? Scotland and Aberdeen Advocacy Services.

Regular meetings allowed for jointly considered referrals, practice discussions and learning and development planning.

This collaboration convenes around key principles such as ensuring children are aware of their right to advocacy support, that they can choose whether to access this or not and if so, that they are supported to make an informed and relational choice about who they want to advocate for them.

This partnership also meant that a trauma-informed eye was focused on safeguarding children from not being expected to tell and retell their story unnecessarily, for example where a panel believed that it would be helpful for a child to meet with an independent advocate, even where their voice/views were already known.

Such an example sometimes required the Service to write to the Children's Reporter, explaining why we were not going to meet with a child.

We continued to experience occasions which required challenge where our Service 'independence' was questioned by parents or their solicitors with a proposal that others be asked to provide advocacy.

We found that in instances where a child already had a relationship with an individual worker, they generally wanted that person to continue to support them. Once or twice, a child wanted our Service and one of the IAS providers to advocate for them together and this was managed to good effect.

The IAS providers cannot support children out with the Hearing system. There were times therefore where this informed the Rights Service as being best placed to provide advocacy where it was anticipated that support would likely be required beyond the Children's Hearing context.

Against this backdrop, referrals related specifically to advocacy within the context of the Children's Hearing system increased in 2022. They equated to around **21% of all referrals where advocacy was noted as the primary referral strand.**

Feedback suggested that most panel members appreciated when our Service presented views or voice on behalf of a child. We heard that they especially liked when these reflected a sense of that child's character, especially when they were not attending.

During 2022, awareness raising was ongoing within the workforce and with panel members about what independent advocacy is, who provides it and under what circumstances. This included the Service contributing to training and development.

As already noted, the Service saw an increase in referrals related to **children and young people involved in child welfare and protection and higher support needs processes.**

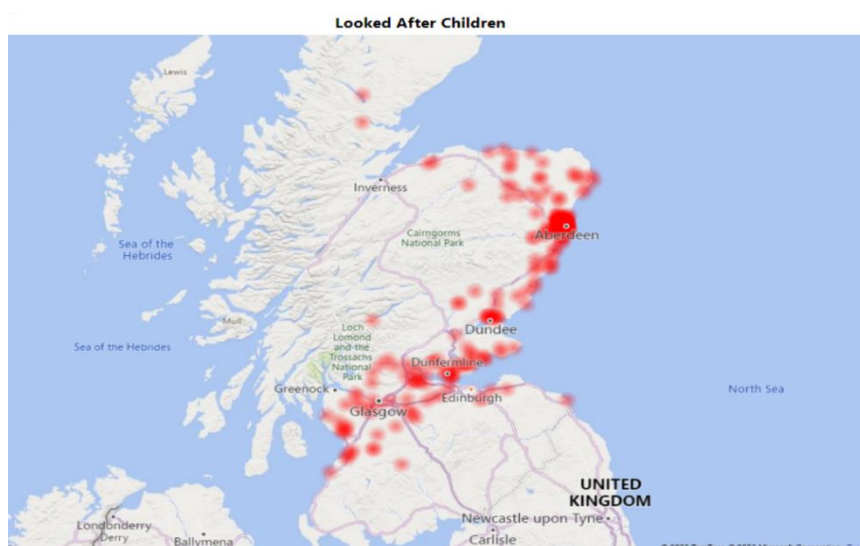
It remained difficult to determine if this increase resulted from active consideration of our remit within these processes or whether it was connected to existing relationships or previous experiences of accessing the Service.

Another reason could be linked to our contribution to a range of practice development and improvement work not already mentioned, such as review of the Interagency Referral Discussion (IRD) guidance and review of the Secure Care Procedure.

**Work around data collation and analysis will continue in 2023 so we can be clearer about referral routes, numbers, and rationale.**

## Children, young people and young adults being looked after or living outside of Aberdeen

Children, young people and young adults being looked after or living outside of Aberdeen and the associated balance of care considerations have always been held in mind by the Service.



We worked hard to connect, doing so digitally and/or through face-to-face visits, as determined by each individual's preferences and needs. This connection included wider championing of the [Mind of My Own \(MOMO\) App](#) as well as promoting participation opportunities either in their current area or with a view to their eventual return to Aberdeen.

Championing use of the MOMO App, with its capacity to change into any language, extended also to its potential use with those unaccompanied asylum seeking children and young people coming to Aberdeen to promote their understanding of their rights.

Like 2021, 2022 saw a range of referrals related to **previous and current care experiences** spanning rights issues associated with:

- disruptions, most often of a permanent care arrangement.
- at times of transitions, whether emergency or planned, to a new care arrangement outside of Aberdeen, return to family, return to another living arrangement in the city, onto adult services provision and change in legal status.
- 'independence' either through returning to Aberdeen or through 'staying put' elsewhere in the country.
- restrictive practices or physical restraint, by care or school staff or Police.
- emotional and physical health and wellbeing.
- education.

We also continued to proactively reach out to children and young people, when made aware of their circumstances through the Children's Services Specialist Forum, to offer them additional advocacy and safeguard.

## Formal Representation and Complaint

Being able to exercise your voice through the process of formal representation and complaint remained a little used but important area of Service support. Several young people and young adults sought Service support to explore making a complaint related to their previous care experience but decided not to progress this at that point in time.

Planned improvement work in conjunction with the Customer Feedback Service to reframe the language used in written findings and letters was impacted for several reasons and only picked up again at the end of the year, this crossing over with wider WRAM work. This is timely with our Service having some stakeholder involvement in the 2-year [Scottish Public Services Ombudsman \(SPSO\) Child Friendly Complaints](#), tasked with co-designing and implementing a new public sector complaints service.

## Corporate Parenting and the Champions Board

As key corporate parents, and as aligned to the [Corporate Parenting](#) Plan and associated Champions Board Action Plan priorities, we continued to support those with care experience to be heard, to participate, and have their rights amplified and respected.

This encompassed anyone with care experience whether directly or indirectly connected to the [Aberdeen Care Experienced Network](#), known as ACE. This involved supporting their engagement, participation and contributory capacities in corporate parenting activities and consultations, for example **the Champions Board, Care Experienced week, and National Care Day**.

This commitment included working collaboratively with the Development Officer, Who Cares? Scotland whose role was to support opportunities and spaces for engagement for those with care experience to express their voice and views, and so meaningfully influence the future design and delivery of services.

This role has been vacant since the latter part of the year and so aspects of some of these priorities have been impacted. The model of delivery is currently being reviewed.

The Service also continued in its lead role in relation to **Opportunity Grants**. As was the case in 2021, the Grants aimed at countering, to some degree, the impact of structural disadvantage through focusing on provision for those looked after at home and in kinship care and those aged 18+ with care experience. Grants supported capacity building and skills development through funding related to skills, hobbies and ambitions.

Young adults with care experience continued to be part of the decision-making panel alongside children and family services representatives with this opportunity building their capacity and skills also.



The funding stream ran until March 2022. **87 applications were received. 81 were subsequently awarded funding.** The remaining applications did not meet the criteria or remained incomplete. The majority of applications were from those aged 16+ and mainly related to driving lessons to increase job opportunities, reduce social isolation and promote mental health and wellbeing.

Our **'Voice Snapshots'** give a fuller flavour of the themes of 'what mattered' to our children, young people, and young adults across 2022.

Over the course of last year, we presented these in various ways and in various formats. A review of how we best communicate 'voice' across the workforce in 2023 is currently underway.

## Improvement and Learning

From a rights and participation perspective, the Service promoted its own learning, and contributed to and/or led on several children's social work and multi-agency workforce improvement and learning activities, both local and national.

Examples not already mentioned included:

- the established monthly 'drop-in' is now included in the children's social work training calendar. It has also been refined to include the option of being accessed for team consultation, discussion and learning.
- providing input to inductions processes and to the Newly Qualified Social Workers training programme.
- supporting the planning and roll out of the annual Recognising Success Awards.
- involvement in the local Promise Investment Project.
- involvement in national groups such as the Scottish Children's Rights Officers Network (SCRON) and the Scottish Physical Restraint Action Group (SPRAG).

One priority within our 2022 Action Plan was to *'further raise awareness and promote rights through the provision of direct workforce learning opportunities that translates rights into practice'*.

This was borne from what the workforce told us, through referral discussion or consultation. Aspects included conversations around relational practice, promoting voice, lack of confidence, time, or capacity to communicate inclusively and expressed motivation to further develop knowledge and skills and to have 'space' to explore and try these out.

The Service, with two children’s social work colleagues, thus planned and co-delivered pilot **Inclusive Communication Workshops**, supported by a Teams Channel for those who attended with a view to this developing into a community of learning.

**Feedback has been positive. The pilot programme will be evaluated to inform its commitment and focus for 2023.**



*Inclusive Communication Starter Pack*



*Some pictures from the Inclusive Communication Workshop*

## Feedback

Another priority 2022 Action Plan area was to launch a digital [feedback](#) mechanism for children, young people, and young adults as **one** way in which they could tell us about the Rights Service and the wider Children’s Social Work Service itself.

A simple Microsoft form has been developed and made available to those children, young people, and young adults we support. We also adapted our existing workforce survey into a corresponding Microsoft form, extended to all adults – internal, external, carers, family and kin.

These are relatively new feedback options and their use to date has been infrequent – most feedback we receive is via other means. Here are some of the themes related to our 2022 Service feedback received from children, young people, young adults, their families or carers and the wider workforce:

- challenge or query related to our Service independence, objectivity and remit, linked to our attendance at meetings or the provision of written voice/views, one or both of which being experienced as overly critical or blinkered to the service planning or delivery context.

- positively individualised and creative provision of written or video submission of voice/views.
- Service ability to ‘bring alive’ the child, young person, or young adult; their character, interests, views and wishes and so keep them and their rights central to any process or system.
- relational and trustworthy Service - children, young people and young adults feel able and confident to ‘reach out’.
- relational Service for the workforce also – prompt (in meeting tight timescales), consultative, compassionate, and helpful.

## Conclusion

If we are to capture the key themes for 2022 into one statement, it would be that **there remains the need for ongoing cultural shift to applying a relational, trauma-informed practice model which centres and connects the rights of those the workforce support to their day to day experiences and lives.**

Several UNCRC provisions reflect the right to participation. Participation is one of its guiding principles, as well as being one of its basic challenges. The practical meaning of the right to participation is critical. It needs to be experienced as real.

**UNCRC Article 12** asserts that children have the right to express their voice and views - if they wish to - to participate in decision-making processes that may be relevant in their lives and to influence decisions taken in their regard—within their family, school or community. This includes babies, infants, children, young people and young adults who could be assumed to be unable to participate because they are unable to or have not yet learnt to talk.

Successful participation requires inclusive communication. This means providing opportunities for children, young people, and young adults to participate in ways that everyone can engage with and understand. It helps build their awareness of opportunities, events, and available services. It supports them to express their voice and to receive information, as best suits their communication needs and preferences. It also supports them to contest their rights freely and openly.

Part of this extends to how their voice and views can best be shared to improve service design and delivery in ways which also ensure follow-up of their recommendations and concerns. **The need for a ‘feedback loop’, outlined as a children’s social work priority in last year’s Annual Report, is significant, even more so when you consider some of the legislative and policy changes, both current and forthcoming.**

There remain areas reflected within this report which highlight enduring rights related cultural and practice concerns. At the same time, our workforce continues to want to improve their knowledge and skills about rights, participation and trauma and be open to re-examining their own opinions and attitudes.

With all this in mind, **two overarching priorities will provide the focus for the 2023 Rights Service Improvement Plan - these priorities also featuring in the Children's Services Strategic Plan 2023-2026.**

These are mindful of the multi-agency work required in realising the cultural transformation required by the Promise, the welcome demands placed by UNCRC, and other national legislative and policy drivers to ensure that planning for and with our children, young people, and young adults looks to give full effect to their rights, participation, and voice.

## Aberdeen Young Person's Rights Service Improvement Plan 2023

### Priority areas

1. Further develop the use of inclusive ways of observing and communicating with, and/or on behalf of children, young people, and young adults which support their rights, participation, and voice. This particularly applies to those who may communicate their voice/views in alternative ways or are non-verbal through age or disability.
2. Further raise awareness and promote rights through the provision of direct workforce learning opportunities that translates rights into practice.

In terms of the children's social work service, the Chief Social Work Officer, in his foreword, has indicated intention to engage in a series of collaborative conversations with the workforce which will shape a wider right focused improvement plan, informed by what our children, young people and young adults have told us matters to them.

