

Engagement with Care Experienced Young People: Results and Recommendations to inform Police Scotland’s 2024-27 Corporate Parenting Plan.



Scottish Youth Parliament
November 2024

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Acknowledgements

The Scottish Youth Parliament (SYP) would like to thank colleagues and volunteers from our partner organisations who provided their support and expertise throughout this piece of work, and for helping SYP to engage with young people within their organisations.

In particular we want to thank Juliet Henderson, Kevin Ditcham, Gordon Todd, Grant Trainer and Tamar Jamieson from the Children and Young People team at Police Scotland.

Additionally, we would like to thank:

- Michael Archibald MSYP, Who Cares? Scotland
- Police Scotland's Corporate Parenting Advisory Group
- Callum Holt, Who Cares? Scotland
- Good Shepherd Centre
- SYP's Local Authority and National Voluntary Organisation Support Workers
- YMCA
- Rossie's Young People's Trust

We would like to thank the young people who took part in this piece of work by sharing their stories and experiences with SYP. For anonymity reasons individual participant names will not be shared.

A huge thanks is extended to the young people who were involved in the co-design and evaluation of this work to ensure the readability and accessibility of the survey. We'd like to specifically thank Michael Archibald MSYP for leading the working group.

We would also like to thank the young people at the Good Shepherd Centre for contributing their thoughts and lived experiences during our focus groups. Their additions have aided in sense checking and prioritising the key recommendations as set out in the interim report while also expanding on their experiences with Police Scotland.

This report was written by Zander Newman and Hope Taylor, Youth Engagement Workers at the Scottish Youth Parliament. Hope and Zander led on SYP's project with Police Scotland to ensure Care-Experienced Young Peoples' lived experience is directly informing Police Scotland's Corporate Parenting Plan 2024-2027.

Hope and Zander were supported through this project by:

- Debbie Hammell, SYP Participation and Programmes Manager.
- Rosy Burgess, SYP Head of Participation and Programmes.
- Lucie Paradis, Shannon Donoghue, and Isla Baxter, SYP Participation and Programmes Officers.



Recommendations

We have identified four key themes from our findings and have developed the recommendations from these. All quotes included are from Care Experienced Young People who responded to our survey or took part in our focus groups.

1. Police Perception of Care Experienced Young People and Resulting Stigma.

“I feel as if from the moment an officer hears I have experience of the care system, they have already decided who I am, and who I truly am will never change the picture they have painted of me in their mind.”

31% of Care Experienced Young People who responded to our survey reported feeling treated like criminals, dismissed as ‘troublemakers,’ or accused of being on substances when it was discovered they were care experienced, even when they were the ones reporting an issue.

Care Experienced Young People in our focus groups shared similar experiences with one Young Person saying

“Complaint takes ages, they don’t listen, and it doesn’t go anywhere”

- **Recommendation:** Update Police Scotland’s mandatory Care Experienced Moodle course to educate police officers and other Police Scotland staff who may come into contact with Care Experienced Young People about the stigma surrounding Care Experienced Young People. These young people may already be facing judgement from their peers; there is no reason that negative stigma should affect a police officer’s judgement and reaction to a young person needing help.

2. Care Experienced Young People’s Perception of the Police and resulting stigma.

“The Boys in blue, but in all seriousness, they are here to help the community.”

Very few Care Experienced Young People who responded to our survey or our focus groups reported having neutral interactions with the police; they were either positive, or negative, and police are often perceived as a threat by Care Experienced Young People.

“I’ve had traumatic encounters with police that have strongly affected my view of the officers in my area and the way the profession treats vulnerable people in society.”



A Young person from our focus groups shared:

“I Went missing 7-8 officers took me down, I’m only 16”

Young people who reported positive views of police officers also reported that meeting the police in non-stressful situations helped them feel better in stressful situations.

- **Recommendation:** Explore opportunities for wider engagement with Care Experienced Young People, such as community outreach days, to enable young people to meet with police officers in non-stressful situations particularly in places where young people already spend their time and are comfortable.
- **Recommendation:** Trauma informed responses are vital, and all police personnel should feel confident in what ‘trauma informed’ means and looks like in their day-to-day interactions.
- **Recommendation:** Training needs to be renewed or developed so that it focuses on building trust and relationships with the young people who may be involved when police are called to a scene.

3. Care Experienced Young People do not feel informed about their rights around justice and arrest.

54% of young people who responded to our survey and have been in conflict with the law reported not feeling fully informed of their rights when in police custody.

Young people in our focus group also supported this and shared their experiences and thoughts surrounding their rights when in police custody.

Young people in our focus group reported negative experiences, with two young people recounting their experiences:

“I was put in cell with 6 puncture wounds without being taken to hospital.”

“I was pinned and stripped just because they ‘needed evidence.’”

- **Recommendation:** Create educational materials, for example video resources that Care Experienced Young People with lived experience are in, that young people can have presented to them within a custody setting or before. Teaching young people about what will happen when taken into custody so they know what to expect next can decrease the stress of a situation, making both the young person’s and police’s time easier.



- **Recommendation:** Continue with the Test of Change proposed in the 2021-24 Corporate Parenting Plan to prevent over criminalisation of Care Experienced Young People.
- **Recommendation:** Provide signposting to other support services that can help young people in custody settings. Signposting should be available in custody settings and in other places where young people are spending time.
- **Recommendation:** When working with a young person in relation to an incident, police officers should ask if the young person is Care Experienced. There could be issues in their home life that are influencing their decisions in the moment.

4. Young people's perception of the Corporate Parent.

While 92 young people responded to the question 'What does the phrase Corporate Parent mean to you?' only 10.8% of young people showed any indication of understanding what a corporate parent is.

When asked how they would like Police Scotland to keep Care Experienced Young People engaged with what they are doing, 29% of Young People responded that they would prefer to be updated via Instagram, and 20% asked for updates on Police Scotland's Facebook.

- **Recommendation:** Have a dedicated social media launch of the Corporate Parenting Plan aimed at young people.
- **Recommendation:** Have a page on Police Scotland's website to explain what a Corporate Parent is to young people; this webpage should signpost young people through online spaces they are already accessing such as social media and posters. The information should be accessible to young people and able to be found in places such as schools, health centres and youth centres.

Further recommendations from Care Experienced Young People:

In addition to the four main themes identified through our survey, the following recommendations are derived from further comments made by a smaller number of Care Experienced Young People who responded to the survey and further by those who took part in our focus groups.

1. Understanding antisocial behaviours

"Empathy, understanding, support, the stigma & bullying. A lot of bad behaviour is due to being in care & all the emotions as above. Not giving up on us."



Care Experienced Young People do not have the same home structure as their peers, and this can lead to antisocial behaviours as an attempt to take control of one aspect of their everchanging lives.

They are more likely than their peers to struggle with substance abuse issues, mental health problems and have poor academic engagement¹. They should not be judged or treated negatively for how they have learnt to cope with trauma.

2. Dynamic homes

“More respect for the effort with diverse parenting dynamics”

“Not all of us live with our parents”

Not everyone has or lives with their parents, and for many Care Experienced Young People being asked about their parents when they don't have any or are not in contact with them can make a bad day worse.

Young people should be asked about 'parents or carers/guardians' in every situation where parents are referred to.

3. Mentorship programmes

“Education for police employees to improve Engagement/employment with care experienced representation in police Scotland.”

Creating opportunities for Care Experienced Young People was mentioned in the last Corporate Parenting Plan.

Multiple young people who responded to our survey expressed their desire for programmes and initiatives that specifically address the needs of the care experienced community, such as mentorship, counselling, and community engagement activities.

4. Continued engagement and representation

“Provide ways for CEP [Care Experienced People] to easily, regularly, and meaningfully feed into Police Scotland policy and service delivery.”

Young people are keen to get involved and speak up for themselves, and in line with Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), they have the right to share their views and to have these taken seriously. While Police Scotland has prioritised engagement

¹ Braciszewski JM, Stout RL. Substance Use Among Current and Former Foster Youth: A Systematic Review. Child Youth Serv Rev. 2012 Dec 1;34(12):2337-2344. doi: 10.1016/j.childyouth.2012.08.011. PMID: 23504534; PMCID: PMC3596821.



with Care Experienced Young People in the development of the 2024-27 Corporate Parenting Plan through SYP's project, this should be continued to ensure Care Experienced Young Peoples' voices are heard in all decision-making processes that affect their lives.

This could be done directly through Police Scotland's Care Experienced engagement and/or by working in collaboration with organisations who work directly with children and young people in Scotland such as Who Cares? Scotland and The Promise Scotland.



Introduction

This report details the work carried out by the Scottish Youth Parliament's (SYP) Youth Engagement Workers, in partnership with Police Scotland, to gather Care Experienced Young People's views to inform the 2024-27 Police Scotland Corporate Parenting Plan.

The aim of this project was to gather young people's views surrounding Police Scotland's interactions with Care Experienced Young People, review the previous Corporate Parenting Plan, and make recommendations for the 2024-2027 plan. These recommendations have been developed from the lived experience of Care Experienced Young People and their opinions on how the police might better engage with the care experienced community going forward.

To ensure Care Experienced Young People's voices were at the forefront of this project, two Youth Engagement Workers were recruited to design, deliver, and evaluate an engagement programme. Both of these Youth Engagement Workers have direct experience of care. Additionally, this project was co-designed with care experienced members of the Scottish Youth Parliament (MSYPs) who collaborated in the survey creation process and in analysing the results gathered from Care Experienced Young People.

This project was made possible thanks to funding from Police Scotland and their continued support. SYP staff and Police Scotland's Children and Young People team have collaborated throughout every step of the process to ensure the consultation reached as many Care Experienced Young People as possible, and that their contributions were relevant to the aims of the Corporate Parenting Plan.

This report outlines the findings and recommendations from Care Experienced Young People, gathered through a Scotland-wide survey aimed at Care Experienced Young People and via focus groups.



Our approach

This consultation began in June 2024 with the 2021-2024 Corporate Parenting Plan review being analysed by SYP's Youth Engagement Workers and discussed with Police Scotland's Children and Young People team.

The findings from the review helped to identify key themes where young people's views could be gathered to understand their experiences of Police Scotland as Corporate Parents. This review of the previous Corporate Parenting Plan and relevant actions taken between 2021-2024 led to the development of 'meta questions'. These were the big questions that, when broken down, would provide the basis for the consultation to inform the 2024-2027 Corporate Parenting Plan.

The 'meta questions' were used to develop a set of survey questions, which were agreed with care experienced MSYPs and with Kevin Ditcham, Grant Trainer and Gordon Todd from Police Scotland's Children and Young People team to ensure the questions were accessible and would enable young people's meaningful participation.

Survey: 'Care Experienced Children and Young People: Making Policing in your Area Better'

The survey "Care Experienced Children and Young People: Making Policing in Your Area Better" was published on 17th August 2024 and was open for four weeks. During this time, 286 people across Scotland responded, 115 of which were Care Experienced Young People. This report outlines the responses from the 115 young people who said they have experience of care.

The survey was designed to reach young people experiencing every type of care experience, and we had responses from those who have been in foster homes, secure care, those involved in the justice system, kinship care and more. Through the survey, Care Experienced Young People were given the opportunity to provide their opinions, through a mix of quantitative and qualitative questions.

After sorting the survey data to ensure we only validated responses from Care Experienced Young People, we analysed aggregate responses to Likert scale questions and conducted a thematic analysis of open-ended responses. Finally, we used these outcomes to best reflect young people's lived experiences through the recommendations at the start of this report.



Focus Groups with Care Experienced Young People

The survey findings and recommendations outlined in our initial report were then used to inform focus groups with Care Experienced Young People, which enabled a more in-depth understanding of young people's experiences. We held three small focus group sessions with Young People in a secure care unit, with 1-3 people in each session (with 5 Young People in total). Having small groups created an environment that was safer and more comfortable to allow young people to share their views without pressure. All the Young People who took part in the focus groups had direct experience with the Police and the Justice system of varying degrees.

The findings from these focus groups corroborate and support the results gathered from the survey and allowed us to confirm young people's prioritisation of the various recommendations made in our interim report.

Care Experienced Young People in our focus groups were asked 2 main questions, Does the term corporate parent make sense to you? What do you think it should be called? and What has your Experiences of the police been as a Care Experienced young Person? Young People were then given cutouts of each recommendation that had been simplified to ensure accessibility, Young People then ranked the recommendations based on priority from 1 to 10 with 1 being the most important and 10 being the least.

By collating young people thoughts one of the most impactful outcomes of running the focus groups was hearing first hand testimonies from young people to better inform our recommendations. These testimonies are important as they come from young people who have had direct contact with police officers and the justice system so can offer unique insights into how Care Experienced Young People are treated by Police Scotland when in conflict with the law.

Creating an intentionally safe and respectful space for young people who often don't have a platform to have their voices heard was an incredibly meaningful part of this research project. This was achieved in part by ensuring that young people understood that the focus group facilitators - i.e., SYP's Youth Engagement Workers - were care experienced themselves. Recognising this shared lived experience aided in the comfort and authenticity of the focus group sessions, fostering a safe environment to encourage young people to share their opinions.

Throughout all these activities, regular meetings were held between the Youth Engagement Workers and the Children and Young People Team at Police Scotland to ensure a collaborative approach was taken. In addition, there were multiple feedback and update sessions held with Police Scotland's Corporate Parenting Advisory Group.

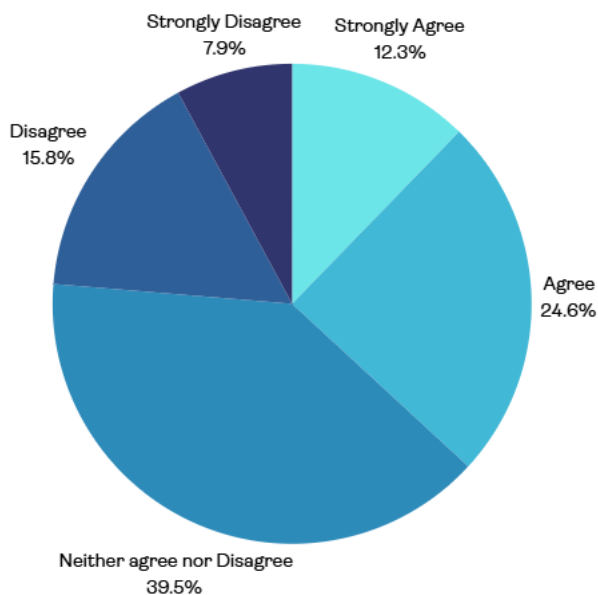
Results

Survey Results

The results below from the national survey have informed the recommendations made in this report.

They are presented in the order they appeared in the survey and relevant quotations from Care-Experienced survey participants appear alongside to add further context.

As a Care Experienced Young Person, to what extent do you agree or disagree that you are treated differently than your peers by Police Scotland?



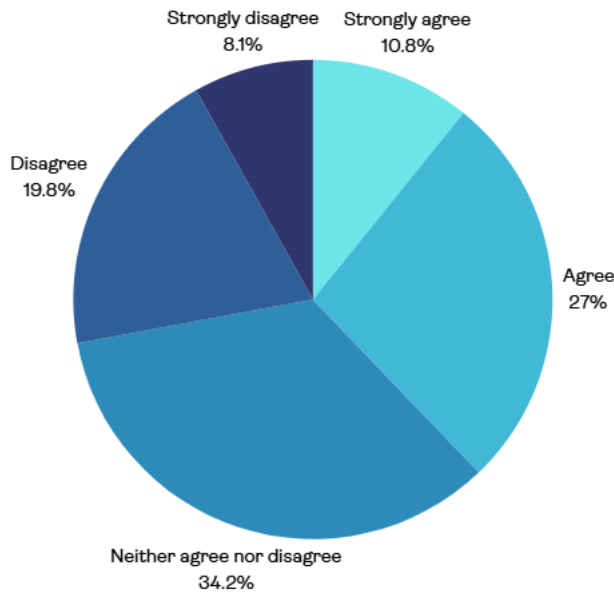
In total, 36.9% of Young People who answered agreed (24.6%) or strongly agreed (12.3%) that they were treated differently by police once it was discovered they were Care Experienced.

A small number of this 36.9% reported that they were treated better with more compassion and patience shown towards them. However, the majority of young people reporting a difference in treatment, reported that they felt they were criminalised by the police before any sort of incident had occurred, were perceived as being ‘bad kids’, and were treated with more scepticism or disbelief when reporting an issue.

“I fell that care expired children and teens are treated differently as people assume we will take substances or be a troublemaker”



To what extent do you agree or disagree that you have a positive view of police in your local area?



Just over one third of respondents agreed (27%) or strongly agreed (10.8%) that they have a positive view of police in their local area, compared with just under a third who disagreed (19.8%) or strongly disagreed (8.1%) with this statement.

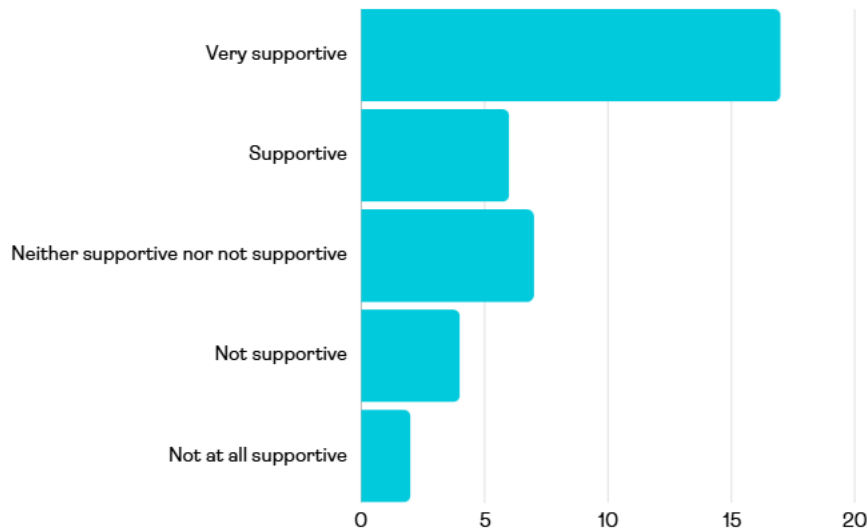
Not all young people who contributed to this question left further comments. Of the 46 further comments, 12 of them were positive, 7 neutral and 27 negative. From the answers to this question, it's very clear that opinions differ from area to area with certain areas having a good positive response.

Many of the young people who added a further comment said that neither they nor their friends have had positive interactions with police officers, even though they understood that the police exist to help people. There was further commentary about being perceived negatively due to their care experience/living situation and how, despite having positive interactions with local police, there have been situations where a responding officer's personal bias has had a huge negative impact on how both young people and their families are treated.

“Even though the police have good policies in place to help it is very uncommon in my experience and through people I know that have actually had a good experience with the police”



Police custody staff don't have any way of knowing if a young person in their care has Care Experience. How supportive would you be to the idea that police custody staff are made aware that a young person is Care Experienced?



Very Supportive	47%
Supportive	16.6%
Neither Supportive nor Not Supportive	19.4%
Not Supportive	11%
Not at all Supportive	5%

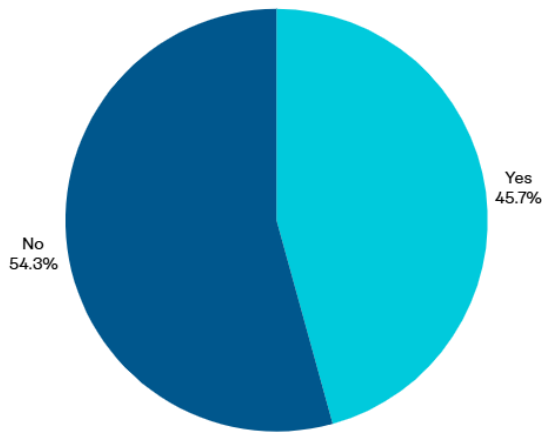
Young people who had been involved in the criminal justice system expressed that having a “Are you Care Experienced?” intake question could be beneficial in understanding the situation. This would also be a way of informing police that this young person has likely experienced some form of trauma in their lives, so care is needed.

“If you know we are Care Experience you may be more aware of the impact being detained can have based on past trauma”

“I think “are you Care Experienced?” should be one of the questions you are asked by the custody Sargent”



Do you feel that the police and/or custody staff kept you properly informed of what is happening and your rights whilst in custody?



Of those Care Experienced Young People who had experience of the justice system, the majority (54.3%) of young people did not feel fully informed of their rights and/or the situation in general when in police custody.

In what ways would you like Police Scotland to keep Care Experienced Young People engaged with what they are doing to improve their service delivery? For example, how you

would like to stay up to date.

Communications Method	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Instagram	30	28.6%
Email newsletter	12	11.4%
Police Scotland website	14	13.3%
Police Scotland Twitter/X	10	9.5%
Police Scotland Facebook	21	20%
Other	18	17.1%

By responding to this question, it was made clear that young people would like to be kept updated on Police Scotland’s efforts with the care experienced community.

This could be as simple as simply advertising on Instagram about care specific events the police may be holding and signposting towards relevant resources.

What does the phrase 'Corporate Parent' mean to you?

“Not sure, never heard of the phrase”

“I’ve never heard this phrase. Perhaps a parent who is absent, at work all the time?”

When young people were asked what the phrase ‘Corporate Parent’ meant to them, 92 people responded. The majority of these responses indicated that young people felt it was an unclear phrase. Most associated it with social workers and schools.



Focus Group Results

(All quotes provided are from Care Experienced Young People)

During our focus groups we asked Care Experienced Young People to answer questions covering their thoughts on the term Corporate Parenting, their experiences with Police Scotland, and their thoughts on our current recommendations.

Does the term Corporate Parent make sense to you? What do you think it should be called?

“I wouldn’t look at it [the Police Scotland Corporate Parenting Plan].”

“Assisted Parenting is better.”

We asked this question as a follow-up to the survey question “What does the phrase ‘Corporate Parent’ mean to you?”, to explore young people’s awareness and understanding of the term in greater detail. The focus group responses were similar to those we received through the survey. Most focus group participants were unfamiliar with the terms ‘Corporate Parent’ and ‘Corporate Parenting.’

After we explained what ‘Corporate Parenting’ means, we asked what wording would be better suited to and be more accessible for Care Experienced Young People as a whole. One young person suggested ‘Assisted Parenting’ better reflected their understanding of the role of corporate parents. They elaborated that they associate the term ‘corporate’ with businesses and that the term felt like it lacked sensitivity. Young people in every focus group agreed with this. Young people said that a term such as ‘Assisted Parenting’ would better reflect the diverse levels of relationships and attachments that corporate parents have with Care Experienced Young People, as ‘corporate’ is quite distancing.

What has your experience with the police as a Care Experienced Young Person been? What would you like it to look like?

Care Experienced Young People highlighted a great amount of inconsistency in how police officers interacted with them. Certain actions were presented to the young people as ‘protocol’ in one interaction and not present in an identical situation later.

“They shouted ‘down, down down!’ at me, but didn’t give me enough time. They need to communicate with me, because it was confusing. They don’t give you enough time to react - they just tell you what’s happening then BANG.”

We asked this question within our focus group as a follow-up to the survey questions to get a more in depth understanding of what Care Experienced Young Peoples experience with the police where like, particularly as this group of young people had significantly more direct experience with the police and within a custody setting.



Young people experienced being cuffed tightly to the point of pain and marks being left when travelling in police vans where there were multiple officers already sitting around them, even though they were complying with instructions.

“I was cuffed Thursday on way to Edinburgh [From secure care unit] - there were 3 officers, I was complying, yet they refused to take off cuffs its really Inconsistent.”

Some young people noted contrasting experiences with one young person sharing a rather positive experience with Police officers further highlighting inconsistencies.

“On the way here [secure care unit] they took me to McDonalds and ...didn't cuff me.”

It was also shared that young people in custody situations felt some police officers took actions simply to show they were in charge or because they don't understand how secure unit's work.

“They need to be more thoughtful I've been here [secure care unit] a month and a half, today - they searched me even though I've been here ages they don't understand about being in secure centers”

Young people also highlighted the need for officers to go at a slower pace, this was shared by young people who were neurodiverse with some finding that they much preferred custody officers to officers on the street as they noted they took more time to talk with, explain and listen to them.

“Officers rush things, they just want to get you to the station.”

“They treat you the same as a drunk Adult, ADHD and Autism isn't the same as being a drunk adult.”

Care Experienced Young People in our Focus Groups noted they had better experiences with officers who themselves had lived experience of Care.

“The ones that understand know how to treat ppl. Other officers where more intolerant”

“More helpful when Police have similar experiences and aren't going to grass back”



Priority of Recommendations

When working with the focus groups, we simplified the recommendations that are included in the first section of this report to make the language more accessible and youth friendly. We then asked young people to rank these simplified recommendations from 1 to 10 according to which ones were the highest priority to Care Experienced Young People with 1 being the highest priority and 10 the lowest priority.

Young people’s average final ranking was as follows:

Recommendations	Ranking
Police to try engaging more with Care Experienced Young People in the community.	1
Police should continue to limit arrests of Care Experienced Young People when called to a home.	1
Update Police Education to talk about stigma surrounding Care Experienced Young People.	3
Police should be understanding of Care Experienced Young People's possible trauma or difficulties.	4
Police’s training should be updated so they can focus on building trust with young people.	4
Police should ask if a person is Care Experienced if involved in an incident and understand things may be going on at home.	6
Police should have information videos about custody, so they know what is going to happen.	7
Police should direct young people to other support if arrested and in other places young people may be spending time.	7
Police should let young people know on social media that the corporate parenting plan has been released.	9
Have a page on Police Scotland’s website to explain what a Corporate Parent is to young people.	9

Some young people also had additional comments about the recommendations.

In regard to the recommendation that a video should be made available to young people entering custody settings one young person commented:

“The video should be from other young people who have been in that position”



Demographics

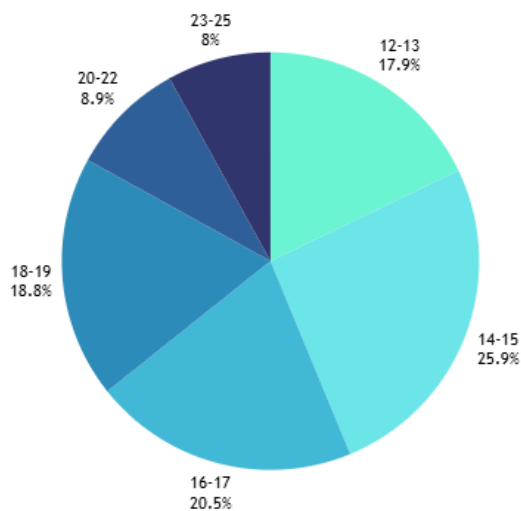
The survey was filled out by a total of 286 people. Of this a total of 115 were Care Experienced. This survey gathered responses from 27 out of 32 local authorities in Scotland.

We did not include demographic data for those who took part in our focus groups due to concerns of Young People losing their anonymity particularly as those involved in the focus groups were in overall smaller numbers than those who took part in the survey.

32% of the young people who responded to the survey had experience within the justice system.

The age of participants was between 12-25.

Age range of survey respondents:



No further demographics were asked for in the engagement phase as it was not felt necessary for this piece of work.

There are additional concerns around including further demographic data within this report due to the small nature of the Care Experienced community and in the interest of protecting Care Experienced Young Peoples anonymity.

We recognise the need for an intersectional approach throughout this work as to ensure that the lived experiences of the Care Experienced community as a whole are accurately reflected while also being mindful of the barriers Care Experienced Young People may face when engaging in this work especially those who are part of other seldom heard groups.



Annex

We simplified recommendations shared during focus group to create a more accessible format for Care Experienced Young People. These simplified recommendations were then placed on paper allowing Young People to order the recommendations from 1-10 as most to least important.

Recommendation: Update Police Scotland's mandatory care experienced Moodle course to educate police officers about the stigma surrounding Care Experienced Young People. These young people may already be facing judgement from their peers, there is no reason that negative stigma should affect a police officer's judgement and reaction to a young person needing help.

Update Polices Education to talk about stigma surrounding Care Experienced Young People.

Recommendation: Explore opportunities for wider engagement with Care Experienced Young People, such as community outreach days, to enable Young People to meet with Police officers in non-stressful situations.

Police should try to engage positively with Care Experienced Young People within the community and build positive relationships allowing Young People to meet with officers in calm situations.

Recommendation: Trauma informed responses are vital, and all police personnel should feel confident in what 'trauma informed' means and looks like in their day-to-day interactions.

Police should be understanding of Care Experienced Young People's possible trauma or difficulties.

Recommendation: Training needs to be renewed or developed so that it focuses on building trust and relationships with the young people who may be involved when police are called to a scene.

Polices training should be updated so they can focus on building trust with young people

Recommendation: Create educational materials, for example video resources, that Young People can watch in schools or have presented to them. Teaching Young People about what will happen when taken into custody so they know how they will be treated can decrease the stress of a situation, making both the Young Person's and Police's time easier.

Police should have information videos about custody, so they know what's going to happen.



Recommendation: Continue with the Test of Change proposed in the 2021-24 Corporate Parenting Plan to prevent over criminalisation of Care Experienced Young People.

Police should continue to limit arrests of Care Experienced Young People when called to a home.

Recommendation: Provide signposting to other support services that can help Young People in custody settings. Signposting should be available in custody settings and in other places where Young People are spending time.

Police should direct Young People to other support if arrested and in other places Young People may be spending time.

Recommendation: When working with a Young Person in relation to an incident, police officers should ask if the Young Person is Care Experienced. There could be issues in their home life that are influencing their decisions in the moment.

Police should ask if a person is Care Experienced if involved in an incident and understand things may be going on at home.

Recommendation: Have a dedicated social media launch of the Corporate Parenting Plan aimed at Young People.

Police should let Young People know on social media that the Corporate Parenting Plan.

Recommendation: Have a page on Police Scotland's website to explain what a Corporate Parent is to Young People.

This recommendation was not simplified as we felt the recommendation was already accessible to Young People.

Survey questions:

1. Are you Care Experienced?
2. 'Care Experienced' means you are or were formerly looked after by a local authority, in the family home (with support from social services or a social worker) or elsewhere, for example, in foster care, residential/secure care, or kinship care (with family friends or relatives).
3. As a care experienced young person, to what extent do you agree or disagree that you are treated differently than your peers by Police Scotland?
4. If so (agreeing with question 2) in what ways?
5. To what extent do you agree or disagree that you have a positive view of police in your local area?



6. Please provide any further comments
7. What do you think is important for Police Scotland to know when interacting with Care Experienced Young People in general?
8. Have you ever been in police custody or involved with the justice system?
9. Police custody staff don't have any way of knowing if a young person in their care has Care Experience. How supportive would you be to the idea that police custody staff are made aware that a young person has Care Experience when they are in police custody, so that they can provide the appropriate support?
10. Do you feel that the police and/or custody staff kept you properly informed of what is happening and your rights whilst in custody?
11. What does the phrase 'Corporate Parent' mean to you?
12. When you think about Police Scotland, what comes to mind?
13. In what ways would you like Police Scotland to keep Care Experienced Young People engaged with what they are doing to improve their service delivery? For example, how you would like to stay up to date.
14. To what extent do you agree or disagree that you are able to contact the police to report an incident or crime?
15. What do you think Police Scotland's priorities should be to make things better for Care Experienced children and young people?