



The Village

The Village

A year of listening,
learning and creating



Introduction

In the space of a year, the Village has grown into a caring, empathetic, safe space, where care experienced parents and parents-to-be can seek and receive support and guidance, in confidence, free from judgment or stigma. The dedication of the team and the positive, trusting relationships they have created within the community have emboldened parents in a range of ways.

The Village is unique in its approach and outlook — an accessible, independent community which rightfully prides itself on the breadth of knowledge and support provided to care experienced parents and parents-to-be. One of the most appreciated aspects of the Village is that referrals are not accepted from third parties. Parents are instead empowered to have full control over their involvement and when it comes to participation, the ball is very much in their court. There is also never a requirement to prove care experience. All are welcomed into a trauma-informed, safe and confidential space where support and guidance are made available in a manner which best suits those accessing it.

The pervasive stigma which continues to exist around those with care experience can be exacerbated further when they become parents. One of the key aims of the Village is to break this down and to ensure that the parents and parents-to-be who are engaging, in whichever manner they choose, feel as if they are in control. Without question this is one of the reasons the community has been so successful to date — support and guidance is driven by what parents and parents-to-be themselves want and need; not what others think they require.

One of the main reasons that the Village has grown into such a successful community is that everything has been developed collaboratively, with co-production and active participation front and centre. The notion of “nothing about us without us” underpins everything, from activities to means and levels of support available. Those with care experience can often feel anxious about engaging with services as a result of negative experiences, fear of stigma and concerns around their parenting and them as individuals being subject to assessment and scrutiny. Within this community, however, no records are kept, nor are any assessments undertaken. Unless there are serious concerns about anyone’s welfare, “what’s said in the Village stays in the Village.”

Our dedicated, highly skilled, qualified team have built strong, trusting relationships with all of the families who have engaged with the community, regardless of their chosen level of involvement. Since the Village was established, the team and Villagers have worked together to recognise and realise that all parents want to be the best they possibly can be and that through participation in the community, everyone will do all that they can to make this happen, without criticism, judgment or stigma.

The Village was created as a result of a partnership between Care Visions, Early Years Scotland and Scottish Attachment in Action, with support from the Promise Partnership and Care Visions Fostering. All three organisations involved have worked with care experienced families and are dedicated to embedding the principles of the Promise directly into all that they do.

The Village

There for you... it takes a village to raise a child

Care experienced led collaboration supported by
CareVisions, Early Years Scotland, Scottish Attachment in
Action and The Promise

**A LISTENING EAR
COMMUNITY**

**SUPPORT
INFORMATION
ONLINE SESSIONS**

**LIKE-MINDED
CONFIDENTIAL**

The Village has three part-time team members who come from the partner organisations. The steering group is made up of individuals who we had worked within different environments, who would be able to share their views at each stage in the process and who through their professional roles brought to the group additional skills and experiences. Everyone involved in the Steering Group is a parent, and two-thirds have experience of care. At the inception of the community, the Steering Group created a Charter, which outlines its values and principles¹. The Village also has an Oversight Board, which meets regularly, and which is made up of the Chairs of three organisations, offering governance and supporting the operational decisions of the Steering Group.

How it works

In order to make the community as inclusive as possible, the Village is facilitated online, predominantly via Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. This takes into account the varied geography of Scotland where, particularly in rural areas, access to this type of support can be extremely limited. Engagement in this manner is also effective in removing physical barriers to access, such as being wary of entering a building where the reason for attending would be clear. Parents and parents-to-be are often online, browsing their own social media and, as such, this type of engagement was felt to be the most effective — both in terms of resource and the Villagers' time. There is also an acute awareness of digital exclusion and, as such, the Village has provided internet hubs/mobile data to those without access so that they are able to fully participate within the community.

At present, the team are providing direct daily support to 30 families via telephone/video calls, texts and direct messages. The Village has 97 followers on Instagram, 133 on Facebook and 227 on Twitter. The team distribute a range of content through the Village channels, posting about topics such as both physical and mental health and wellbeing, car seat safety, weaning and baby essentials, as well as celebrating national holidays and events, such as World Book Day and Chinese New Year. All posts offer soft supportive messages, in the hope that parents and parents-to-be who see them will start to engage and, ultimately, go on to become a Villager. In doing this, individuals complete a participation agreement, detailing what values Villagers can expect to experience as well as what information will be kept, our safeguarding policy and how to raise concerns or complaints.

Pregnancy and birth can be a daunting, anxiety-inducing time. Parents are preparing themselves for a seismic change to their lives which can be very difficult to imagine or understand. For those with care experience this can be an even more challenging time, as they may not have had positive experiences of being parented themselves. The team are completely cognisant of this and, as a result, establish trusting relationships with parents and parents-to-be in order to support them as much as possible through their journey. The provision of practical support, ideas and information has been both welcomed and praised by Villagers, who know they are able to approach the team on any topic or issue without fear of judgment. The team have provided practical support, both via awareness raising posts on social media and more targeted engagement with parents and parents to be around the following:

- Midwife appointments
- Scans
- Birth and the aftermath
- Bathing and feeding baby
- Potty training
- Weaning
- The toddler stage
- Available resources and entitlements.

As the community has grown, the team have been supported to provide a broader range of information on income maximisation, ensuring families are in receipt of all that they are eligible for, as well as the likes of entitlement to nursery, health, employment etc. The team are also able to signpost Villagers to other organisations if they do not have the full knowledge or expertise in a specific area. This has been positive in terms of creating new working relationships with like-minded support mechanisms.

¹ Appendix 1

It is also important to recognise the range of parents and parents-to-be who are part of this community. There is perhaps a perception of the 'type' of individual or family who would engage with the Village — much of this is a result of the pervasive stigma which exists around care experience, as well as perceptions within the media and wider society. This narrative is, however, completely false, and does a disservice to care experienced individuals. Our community is made up of parents and parents-to-be with varied socio-economic status, working in a range of sectors at all levels, from throughout Scotland. Again, the digital platforms upon which the Village is facilitated means that our team can reach more remote and rural Villagers, which is recognised as vital given the difficulties faced around accessing support and guidance in these areas. This is particularly the case at present, where the cost-of-living crisis is creating additional pressure and stress for families, as well as forcing local authorities and the Scottish Government to make tough choices which are, unfortunately, going to result in the closure or reduction of a range of support mechanisms currently in existence.

Key findings from the midpoint review

The midpoint review was an important exercise which gave Villagers the opportunity to express, in their own words, what participation meant to them. The review also allowed the team to take stock of what was working about the Village and how they could move the community forward. Through conversations and engagement via an online survey platform, it was clear that the Village is quite literally “a service like no other”. The unique nature of this community is without a doubt the main reason for its success — it is the only dedicated space for parents-to-be and parents of children under 5 to come together in a safe, confidential and non-judgmental way. The strength of the relationships both between the team and the Villagers, as well as amongst the Villagers themselves, has helped the community to grow organically, based on trust and empowerment.

Another key finding was the positive way in which the team have supported families. Nobody involved in the community claims to know everything about everything, however the team will strive to do all they can to support queries and concerns, seeking advice and information where necessary from other organisations, then come back to the families themselves with the answers. This approach has been welcomed as it takes away the need for Villagers to repeat their situations and circumstances, which can be difficult and traumatising.

As well as the strength of the emotional support on offer, the posts on social media were informative and extremely useful. Again, the positive relationships between participants and the team have empowered Villagers to ask for more information about topics already addressed, as well as suggesting new areas for consideration.

Empowerment was a key theme throughout the midpoint review. Participants made clear that engagement with the community has made them much more confident in their parenting and feel much more able to seek support and reassurance without fear of stigma or judgment. Villagers were also empowered by their peers and by the team to consider their futures.

“As a parent it's easy to doubt yourself, especially when you're doing something you didn't have experience of in your own childhood. It's good to know that I can approach the team to double check and it feels good when they agree with me.”

A final key finding was the impact on other agencies and organisations. While the Village does not share information with other agencies, followers on social media work for a range of services and have signposted their families to our community for support. The team have also worked hard to raise awareness of the Village amongst the likes of health, social work and the wider third sector, so that they are able to inform more families about what's on offer.

Overall, the midpoint review clearly demonstrated how the Village was working both with and for the people it was created for and, perhaps more importantly, the potential for the Village to be rolled out further. This community is new and innovative and provides genuine independent support to care experienced parents and parents-to-be.

Impact on Villagers

This community has, quite simply, been a lifeline for the families involved. The importance of accessing relevant information and support in a completely non-judgmental way cannot be underestimated. For some parents, just knowing that there is someone who cares about them and who will check-in regularly is enough.

In establishing the impact that involvement with this community has had on families, the team sat down with parents individually and asked them their thoughts on the following:

- What's the best thing about the Village?
- What one thing, if any, would you change about the Village?
- What difference has the Village made to your life?
- What impact has being part of the Village had on your parenting?
- If you were to sum the Village up in 3 words, what would they be?

While responses varied from person to person, there were common threads running through each answer. Our families range in age, with parents from 18 years old to 40 years old. Some are engaging with the Village with their first baby, while others have other children again within a varied age range.

What's the best thing about the Village?

Key words and phrases raised were '**non-judgmental**', '**friendly**' and '**support**'.

Families appreciate that the support they access is very much on their terms, and in a manner which best suits them. Some have wider support networks and, as such, take a more 'light touch' approach to engagement, however those who do not have this are able to be much more involved. The advice and support which they receive is extremely important to them as a result.

“It's a relief some days, knowing there's someone there who cares. The best thing is that the girls check in on me, just to make sure I'm ok.”

The real sense of community, in which it is recognised that parents are not alone has been of significant benefit. Villagers have made this clear in their feedback.

“I can share my emotions with people who I know are going through or have gone through the same experiences as me. We're all in this together.”

Another positive aspect of participation which Villagers commented on is the strength of the relationships they have built with the team. Parents feel confident and comfortable in asking questions about a range of topics which, had they not had the support of the community, they would have not been able to gain information either because they did not know where to go, or they were worried about their parenting being judged if they asked services they may have been in contact with.

“The support I've had has been incredible. The girls have answered questions I've had at random times - that maybe doesn't seem like much but to me it's huge. I'm a first-time mum and it's helped so much having someone to tell me about things like weaning in an honest and supportive way.”

“The team actually help and make you feel like part of a family. I'm a single mum with barely any support at all. I'm so grateful for the ladies who are there when I need a chat or a rant! Nothing is too big or too small and I love that about them.”

As well as the advice and information, the provision of practical support has made a significant difference to families. Ensuring that they are accessing financial support they are eligible for has helped to maximise their incomes. Some Villagers have noted that without this, they would have had to seek to borrow money from friends/family, which can be embarrassing and can cause fractious relationships, or alternatively they would have had to take out the likes of pay day loans, which come with higher interest and can be more financially damaging in the long run. We've seen first-hand for years the devastating impact that poverty has had not only on individuals, but on whole communities. Add a pandemic and an exit from the EU into that already extremely precarious situation, and those who were already suffering are pushed further into challenging circumstances - the importance of direct provision of vital financial support cannot, therefore, be underestimated. Put simply, families cannot tighten their belts if there's no belt left and without the "lifeline" of this community, the situation that parents could have found themselves in is unthinkable. We were able to offer some direct financial support to families due to additional funding received, which was welcomed by all.

What one thing, if any, would you change?

It was extremely heartening to hear Villagers say that there is nothing that they would change.

“ Nothing - it's a fab service. ”

“ I like that it's online and I only need to share what I want to. ”

Those who did have suggestions were keen to further grow the community in a positive way. There was strong support for an in-person meeting at some point in the future, which would allow parents to physically meet up and their children to play together.

“ It would be nice if we could have an in-person meet up in nicer weather in a park so it wouldn't have to cost anything. ”

“ It would be nice to meet up with other parents. Maybe some kind of celebration of what's been achieved. ”

As well as this, suggestions were made around extending the age of children to beyond five, so that the community could become more open and available to a wider range of parents with care experience which, in turn, would be of benefit to their children and the family overall.

How would you have managed over the last year if you hadn't had the support of the team?

In measuring the impact participation in the Village has had on parents and parents-to-be, it would have been remiss not to examine exactly how important being part of this community over the last year has been. The majority of participants have made clear that they do not know what they would have done, or now do without, the support of the Village — it has, in many cases, been life-changing for parents and parents-to-be with care experience.

“ I've been able to come off anti-depressants since finding the Village - I think that just shows how much of a change I've experienced in my life. ”

Families spoke candidly to the team about the ways in which they “would have struggled” or “wouldn't have managed” if they hadn't become involved with the community. Many have little in the way of support networks and have benefitted greatly from simply having someone to talk who will listen, won't judge and will provide counsel and support in a way that best suits the parents. The knowledge that their parenting is never being evaluated and that the team are listening in a trauma-informed way makes Villagers feel at ease and empowered to open up and talk to the team, knowing that they are in a safe and confidential space.

The financial situations of many families would have been much worse without the practical support provided by the Village. Similarly, many parents would not have had the confidence to think about their futures, with some having been both encouraged to do things like apply for a place at college and prepare a CV. Others have been supported to sustain employment through access to early learning and childcare (ELC) for their children from age 2, as per the Scottish Government's flagship 1140 hours ELC policy which means that the children of parents with care experience are entitled to access their funded entitlement from this age.



“It's been the hardest year as a parent - sometimes I've felt like I didn't know what I was doing or if I was enough, but the Village were there for me and completely reassured me.”

Villagers have reported a positive impact on their parenting as a result of participation within the community

Having a dedicated team to talk to has also meant that families have accessed more concrete, practical advice and information. Prior to having this community, families who may not have had anyone to ask questions to instead turned to Google, which was overwhelming and, in some cases, provided misinformation and further confusion. Being part of the Village has meant this is no longer the case, and the relationship built with the team has empowered parents and parents-to-be to be open and honest, feeling that they can broach any subject without fear of judgment.

The importance of this community and, as such, the potential for widening support available to more care experienced parents and parents-to-be, cannot be underestimated.

“To put it bluntly, I'd be lost without them. I wouldn't know who to go to or what to do if anything happened. There have been times I have wanted to cry or share my happiness or general chit chat and they've listened and encouraged me. It's nice as they ask how I am, so it's not about the baby all the time. That shows me they care. The Village is there for me and my family - it literally feels that if I was to fall they would catch me. That's how much I trust The Village.”

What impact has being part of the Village had on your parenting?

Villagers have reported a positive impact on their parenting as a result of participation within the community. In general, there is a real feeling of improved confidence among parents for a variety of reasons. The relationships established between the team and Villagers have fostered a real sense of trust, without judgment, which has empowered parents to be more confident in asking for both practical and emotional support. Children are benefitting significantly from this as a result.

Parenting can be extremely daunting, particularly if families have little to no support networks they can turn to. Researching information on the internet has been described as a “minefield”, given the amount of conflicting and misinformation that comes from a general search. As a result, Villagers have very much appreciated the guidance provided by the team, who have not only been able to offer practical support and information, but who have also signposted families to other organisations, websites etc. This has bolstered parents knowledge base which, in turn, has taken away many of their anxieties and has enabled them to concentrate on their child and addressing the issues or questions they have had with confidence.

“The village has allowed me to learn more about parenting with no judgement. I really feel that if I have any questions I can ask, and I’ll be supported. I have been struggling with my son’s tantrums. When we go to groups he doesn’t share, and he’s also started hitting. The team have been really helpful in giving me practical parenting advice. His behaviour was making me feel that I didn’t want to come to group, however I’ve really been taking note of what they’ve said and am using their advice on a daily basis. I have also spoken with nursery so that we’re all doing the same thing, which is already making a difference.”

Some aspects of raising children can be extremely stressful, such as weaning and potty training. During these times it is easier for parents’ confidence to dip, given the patience required in order to support their children with these developmental milestones.

“I want to be the best parent I can be, but it is hard. The team have helped me with potty training and their advice has been incredible. I was dreading this stage, but I feel so supported and much more able to tackle this task.”

If you were to sum up the Village in 3 words, what would they be?

The image on the right highlights the key words Villagers used in summary of the community which has supported, encouraged and cared about them in a trustworthy, confidential and trauma-informed way. It is heartening to read that the words used are all positive and underline the importance of the relationship between the team and families.



One parent was unable to answer this question, however in a very positive way.

“I can’t just sum it up in three words. The support is off the charts. They are doing what they say they will. They are a village.”

Impact on Policy

As well as the positive impact the Village is having on the families who are engaging, an unintended consequence of the community has been its vital work on the Scottish Government’s flagship policy of expansion of early learning and childcare.

As of August 2021, all 3–5-year-old and eligible 2-year-old children in Scotland are entitled to access 1140 hours of funded early learning and childcare (ELC) per year, an amount which is equitable to the time that older children spend in school. Parents/carers can take up this entitlement in a way which suits them, whether that be with a local authority or private setting, childminder or a mix of providers. As part of this policy, it was agreed by the Scottish Government that children of parents with care experience would be classed as eligible 2’s and, as such, can take up a funded place from that age. There is no means-testing for care experienced parents — their financial status is irrelevant as their children are automatically eligible.

It became clear to the team that there was a lack of awareness around this entitlement and, as such, they provided the relevant information and support so that parents could apply for a place within a setting for



It became clear to the team that there was a lack of awareness around Eligible 2s entitlement

their child. Villagers from three separate local authorities who had two-year-old children were keen to benefit from the policy, as at that time they were paying for private nursery spaces, which took up a large part of their income. The parents contacted the relevant department in order to claim their entitlement, the savings from which would make a significant impact on their household budgets. They were, however, met with unnecessary barriers to uptake, such as a lack of awareness on the part of the person at the Council, or the presumption that there was still some form of financial threshold applicable.

Some of our parents noted that they would feel more comfortable if the process was less stigmatising and, infact, some described it as a retraumatising experience as they had to disclose their care experience and “tell their story”. Some told us that they had to repeat this to several staff members.

Conversely, it is also important to note that we had some parents who described their application experience positively, which demonstrates inconsistency of approach throughout Scotland. Further consideration of local authorities’ approach to awareness-raising of entitlement of this policy found that while information is available on each local authority website, it is inconsistent and, in some cases, incorrect.

“Some councils seem to suggest that this offering is means-tested, while others advise that the child themselves must be looked after. The information available is confusing and means that folk aren’t getting what they’re entitled to, which isn’t very in-keeping with the Promise.”

The lack of awareness within relevant council departments can also cause delays for parents — for example, via the collection of inaccurate data which has led to the need for an appeal. In these cases, funding is not backdated to the date of the original application, meaning that although parents are eligible, they are still having to pay nursery fees into the hundreds of pounds. There is no way to recoup this money.

As a result, in line with the philosophical basis underpinning the Village that “support and learning help me, stigmatisation and shaming does not”, a Charter² has been developed ensuring a best practice guide is available to local authority managers and workers who deal with these queries. In creating this document, we have been working with Dr Louise Roberts, The Why Not Trust, The Promise and others to understand if there is a need for such a charter in Scotland, a collaboration agreement has been agreed and the initial meetings have been very positive.

It is likely that had the Village not come into existence and brought this issue to light, a number of care experienced parents with eligible 2-year-old children would continue to be unaware of their entitlement to funded ELC, let alone taking up places as a result. Until the Charter is fully embedded into each local authority, there will still be parents who are given inaccurate information. The Village as a community is, therefore, fully committed to ensuring that this is no longer the case. We will continue to liaise with both COSLA and individual local authorities to share best practice around awareness-raising, so that care experienced parents not only know their children are entitled to access ELC, but they are properly supported to do so. We are working with the improvement service to provide a development session where all local authorities can come together, the challenges and enablers can be shared and where possible solutions found and improvement supported.

² Appendix 2



The Village @TheVilla... · 09 Feb
 To [#KeepThePromise](#) we are listening & learning. Sharing our learning as we go. Our charter for our steering group. twitter.com/i/status/15986...
[@ThePromiseScot](#) [@CVFostering](#)
[@saiaorg](#) [@earlyyearsscot](#)
[@thewhynottrust](#)



The Village @T... · 02 Dec 22
 Ensuring the voice of experience is at the root of all we do is essential, but it can come at a cost. Our steering group produced a charter detailing ho...



The Village Scotland

2 Feb ·

We are always on the look out for new recipes - especially quick and easy ones. Let us know in the comments what you enjoy eating as a family and we can create another list to share with everyone, to help them with their meal planning.
[#familymealsideas](#)



thevillagescotland



Liked by [lmccarthy77149](#) and 3 others
thevillagescotland We welcome a number of New Babies into The Village and just want to say "Congratulations" we will be sharing the benefits of Baby Massage this week and offering online classes. If anyone wants to participate PM us and we can arrange a day/time
 31 October 2022



thevillagescotland

I keep hearing it takes a village to raise a child.

Do they just show up?
 Or is there like, a number to call?

Instagram video call



thevillagescotland



The Village Scotland

13 Feb ·

Deadline for school Age Payment approaches. Applications for the one-off payment of £267.65 per child, which can be used for books, bags, clothes and equipment for school, have to be submitted by midnight on the 28th February 2023.

[#ScottishGovernment](#)
[#Schoolagepayment](#)



School Age Payment applications close on Sunday 28 February for children born between 1 March 2015 and 29 February 2016.



thevillagescotland

Did you know if you have a 2 year old child, you are eligible for 1140hrs funded childcare?

Either you or your child has experienced of being looked after in foster care, residential care or kinship care (care experience) can apply.

What you earn isn't a factor.

Do you need help to apply?

Get in touch with The Village Scotland.



thevillagescotland

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU

On behalf of The Village Scotland, thank you for your support and for following us on social media. We've created a short survey to get a feel for how the online community has worked, what kind of topics have been most popular and what more could be done to strengthen the service. Your voice and input is really important to us.



thevillagescotland

"Clean up all of the toys you see on the floor"

My kids:



Impact on Wider Involvement

The Village has undoubtedly had an extremely positive impact on parents and parents-to-be with care experience. It is, however, also important to recognise that everyone involved within this community — from the oversight board to the steering group and the team — has been impacted by being involved. As well as this, there have been a range of learnings which these individuals have been, and will continue to be, taking forward within both their personal and professional lives. As such, the oversight board, steering group and team were asked to consider the same questions that Villagers themselves answered.

What's the best thing about the Village?

Being part of a community which puts care experienced parents at the heart of everything it does, and being instrumental in the development and delivery of this, is cited as one of the best things by those with wider involvement. Again, the unique nature of the community was highlighted — the fact that the Village offers something that nowhere else does, in a manner which best suits those engaging with it, is so important and valuable. The complete lack of judgment and referrals, as well as the confidential and independent nature of the community, was also commented on as a positive aspect.

“Putting in place support for care experienced parents in a way which is non judgmental, not assessed by Social Work, and the self-referral aspect answers every aspect the Promise is seeking to change about reducing stigma, support at family level, breaking cycles.”

The fact that everyone involved in the community has direct care experience or has worked with those with care experience is seen as arguably its most positive aspect. Not only does the Village give parents a voice to be heard without fear of judgment or assessment, but it does this in a way that involves them at every step. Co-production has been a key value of the community since its inception and as the Village has grown, so too have the trusting, reciprocal relationships which facilitate this.

What one thing, if any, would you change?

While the Villagers themselves had few suggestions as to changes which could be made, those with wider involvement offered more in the way of ideas to further develop and grow the community. It is interesting to note that some of their comments echoed those of participants, namely physical meetings with other Villagers in order to further build relationships. It is clear there is a demand for this across the Village, but at present capacity simply does not allow for this.

“Personally, I feel you can only do so much and form a relationship to a certain degree online. Having something face to face would be so beneficial for families.”

Following on from this, those with wider involvement highlighted the need for the Village to be able to reach its full potential, building on the success of the work which has been done and the groundwork established over the past year.

“Not so much change, but more time - the pilot was only the first step and it's become clear that this can be developed for the community to achieve its full potential. Achieving more of a national reach would be so welcomed, particularly for those in rural areas.”

Steering Group members have noted the importance of being able to further grow the community and the only way in which this can properly come to fruition is with additional resource. The success of the Village thus far demonstrates its scalability — there is no doubt that this method and means of support and guidance has the potential to positively impact on the lives of so many more care experienced parents

and parents-to-be, but this cannot happen without recognition of its importance and the funding needed to be able to make this happen.

One piece of constructive criticism received from the wider Village community was a suggestion around communication, namely the possibility of a review of the way in which this is done. There was a perception that the process in place to become a Villager was somewhat confusing, and was also perhaps limiting engagement by only being facilitated on social media. An exploration of the user journey for accessing the service would also be welcomed in ensuring that both the team and parents/parents-to-be are maximising the community's full potential.

What difference has the Village made to your life?

One of the key themes emerging around this from the steering group and oversight board was the awareness of the entitlement of 1140 hours per year of funded early learning childcare for children of care experienced parents. This has been of significant benefit — both financially for families but also for their children's development being able to access a nursery place. As highlighted in section 5, there are strides to be made by local authorities in raising awareness of this policy, as Villagers who have undertaken the process have faced barriers in taking up that which they are entitled to. The support of the Village has empowered parents to “persevere with the process” until funding was approved, with a feeling that the community “had their back”, which is integral to the overall aims and principles.

As well as this, gratitude was demonstrated around the ability to reflect within a safe environment, and connection with a bigger picture of the team, Villagers and wider involvement overall. Recognition of the flexibility and commitment demonstrated by the team also came through strongly in discussions.

If you were to sum up the Village in 3 words, what would they be?



Have you had any learnings as a result of being part of the Village that you're going to take forward?

It is clear from conversations with the steering group, oversight board and team have gained so much from being part of this amazing community, from which there have been a range of learnings. As is a strong theme through this review, the creation of a safe, trusting and respectful place which allows time for reflection and honesty has been an integral reason for the success of the Village. As such, the creation of this community has emboldened those involved to ensure that processes encountered by care experienced parents and parents-to-be are made easier, are trauma-informed and perhaps most importantly are free from stigma.

There was also very much a 'get things done' attitude within the whole community — time was spent in taking positive action to develop the Village and support families rather than just talking about what needed to be done. From there, however, there are learnings around how to balance effective co-production with providing a “lifeline” for families, as it was felt by some that the collective engagement of the steering group was lost somewhat as the community developed.

For those with direct care experience, there have been clear learnings through participation in the Village.

“I’ve learned that I don’t need to disclose my care experience to make my arguments clearer or stronger, nor do I need to open myself up to people I don’t know in order to make a difference.”

This is so important, as one of the founding principles of the community was — and continues to be — that the barriers and stigma which pervade those with care experience are not only addressed but are understood and broken down. Empowering care experienced parents to talk about their lives as much or as little as they feel comfortable doing, as well as their voices being used to shape such an important community, has undoubtedly been one of the main reasons for its success.

Many care experienced parents have, in the past, perhaps not had the opportunity to engage with others who have shared experiences to them. This has in some ways been challenging for those involved, however has ultimately provided positive learnings. The importance of listening has also been highlighted, with participants noting the importance of sometimes “taking a step back” from talking and allowing quieter voices to be heard. The team noted how becoming an active listener through involvement in this community has been replicated in other aspects of their work, which is extremely positive.

“Everyone has such different care experiences and views and it’s important that everyone feels valued in using their voice. Everyone in the steering group has equally valuable childhood and family experiences that may not necessarily be deemed as care experience however their views and lived experiences are just as important and to be listened to and valued. It’s the coming together of all life experience and professional experience across the board that makes it work.”

The use of language has also been highlighted as a learning from the Village. The team have learned the significance of the way in which they use their words when speaking to families, as well as when talking about the Village more widely. There is much more of an awareness of the impact that language can have on care experienced individuals, which the team are committed to taking forward in both their professional and personal lives.

More practically, members of the oversight group have noted that participation has influenced them both as individuals and organisations to collectively commit to upholding The Promise. This is vital in ensuring that every child in Scotland has the best start in life and grows up loved, safe and respected.

Appendix 1

The Village Steering Group Charter

Introduction

A founding principle of The Village is to offer a positive, non-stigmatising, supportive experience to new and expectant parents (with care experience). An offering where participants feel valued and where we focus on building strengths and developing new abilities through trusted equal relationships. It is therefore important our values are explicit, and the resulting culture is evident throughout all we do.

Our values are

- Respect
- Appreciation
- Inclusion
- Accountability.

This will mean but will not be limited to:

- Every person will be treated with respect. We will recognise the impact of our vocabulary and use respectful language. We will be reflective within our actions and aim to consider the impact of our actions on all involved in The Village.
- We will appreciate each person, recognising everyone is doing their best in the circumstances they are in. We will recognise understanding and support is helpful, and criticism and judgement is not.
- We will encourage inclusion by ensuring our behaviours are welcoming and opportunities for feedback are plentiful. We will recognise the and strive to combat power inequalities.
- We will all be accountable for our actions and behaviours. We will aim to do whatever we have said we will do, on time and to the standard expected. Our organisational partnership processes will be transparent.

To ensure our principles are upheld within the steering group, we all pledge to create an ecosystem of learning within which we will:

- Recognise everyone brings experiences, some of which can be triggered by our work, therefore we will ensure processing, reflection and relational time is incorporated in each interaction and to meet each person's style.
- Use superhuman listening ensuring that everyone has a chance to speak and be listened to. (Superhuman meaning we will listen to hear not listen to respond.)
- Be mindful our behaviours words and actions can have unintentional impacts on others and ensure safe and supportive opportunities for the impact to be shared. Thus allowing the personal and professional growth of all.
- We will support each other to maintain safe boundaries. No individual story will be used unless there is an explicit request from the owner of the story and it is agreed by all, using the story would not be detrimental to the individual. Permission can be retracted at any point.
- We ask people to bring their experience to shape what we build together, which is recognised as being different than asking people to share their experience, mitigating the risk of personal cost.
- We will develop non-identifying composite stories, clearly labelled as such, to use. The composite stories will be publicly available.

Agreed by all Village Steering Group members (Insert date)

Appendix 2

Eligible 2's Charter - The Village

Background

The Village is a safe online community for parents with care experience, established through collaborative partnership of care experienced parents, Care Visions Fostering, Early Years Scotland and Scottish Attachment in Action. The Village is funded through investment by The Promise Scotland and Care Visions Fostering.

While promoting the availability of funded early learning and childcare for eligible 2s through the Village, it became evident that for many parents, this had life changing significance, allowing individuals to return to work and removing some from an in-work poverty status. A really positive way of closing the pervasive poverty-related attainment gap which persists within Scotland. It also supports parents particularly mothers to return to work and continue on their own career path which in turn provides them with a level playing field and the same opportunities as other parents and supporting a diverse workforce.

Although the intention of offering eligible 2 places was sincere, the dissemination of information was not uniform across all local authorities in Scotland and the process experienced by applicants was described as complicated and potentially stigmatising. Local Authorities we have spoken to have recognised there are challenges and have been keen to engage with us to look at possible improvements. In order to support the improvement process, raise awareness and reduce stigma, we have developed a charter of good practice. This Charter has been developed by bringing together best practice from differing authorities into one document. The aim is for the Charter to be shared with all Local Authorities, encouraging them to sign up to best practice protocols and support standardisation of practice across the country.

At present, each LA website offers differing information and inaccuracy exists around eligibility, with some suggesting the child must be looked after, some suggesting eligibility is means tested and some not including care experienced parents as part of eligibility criteria when undertaking the automated application process. Our Villagers have also experienced situations where some information shared by council employees during the application process has been inaccurate and, as a result, the process has taken longer than it should. Where appeals have been undertaken in cases of the provision of inaccurate information, funding is not backdated to the original application and instead a new application has been required and funding only given from the outcome of the secondary process. We are aware of too many cases where the nursery fees incurred during the appeal process have run into hundreds of pounds.

The processes of claiming for eligible 2 nursery places differ across the 32 authorities, however one common area is the need for the claimant to evidence their care experience. Obtaining evidence has proven challenging for some of our Villagers and anxiety provoking for others. No authority articulates the easiest ways in which information can be gained, what information will be shared about the claimant's care experience, or who it will be shared with. This causes unnecessary stress and potential re-traumatisation for care experienced parents who are merely attempting to access that which they are entitled to.

The intention of this Charter is to ensure the process is as transparent, non stigmatising, anxiety free and simple as possible for all parties, while continuing compliance with Section 2 of The National Standard For Early Learning And Childcare Operating Guidance - Funding follows the child and the national standard for early learning and childcare providers: operating guidance - gov.scot (www.gov.scot).

Continued over.....

Template

Template eligibility letter to be provided by Local Authority on headed paper

Dear Sir/Madam,

I can confirm that (state name of claimant) has care experience.

Yours sincerely,

Name - Designation - date.

Eligible 2's Charter

- Information stated on the website will expressly include care experienced parents as eligible, will clearly state that funding is not means tested and that the child does not need to be known to the social work department.
- A clear process for obtaining proof of care experience will be published by each authority.
- A shared template will be used, which shows only that the individual was in receipt of local authority care and is eligible for associated benefits. There is no requirement for dates, reasons, or type of care to be included. A copy of the completed template will be given to the claimant. It will be kept general so the claimant can use it if needed again in the future for this or other situations.
- A clear statement will be given, outlining who the information that the recipient is eligible will be shared with. While it is recognised the information will need to be shared with the person who deals with accounts and billing in the care environment, it does not need to be shared with individual employees undertaking the nursery care of the child. It is recognised that in the case of childminders or smaller provisions, someone providing care may also be the person who manages the payments. Please make the claimant aware of this.
- While it is agreed professional values should ensure there is no element of stigmatisation from information being shared, this has unfortunately not been the experience of many and therefore information sharing will be on a strictly need to know basis. This will be made clear on our documentation and website and will be explained to the claimant, so they are informed and reassured. We will not assume they know.
- Trauma informed practice will be adopted ensuring all involved have the skills and knowledge to deal sensitively with all parents and their children.
- The template eligibility letter will be used ensuring individuals know the level of information being shared.

Pledge

(name of LA) pledge to support care experienced parents by meeting the requirements of the eligible 2's charter. Following the charter will ensuring we give clear and accurate information through all our communication channels including digital and in person processes.

Signed:

Date:

Role:

