



**The Village**

**2023-24**

# **ANNUAL REPORT**

## **Summary**

The Village is an online support network for care experienced parents in Scotland. It is led by The Why Not? Trust in collaboration with care experienced parents, Early Years Scotland, and Scottish Attachment in Action.

# Overview



The transition to parenthood involves big identity shifts and changes in social relationships. A strong social network is important for positive outcomes, providing practical, emotional, informational, and appraisal support. However, care experienced parents can struggle to maintain a secure support system due to barriers that are a result of the care system itself, leading to feelings of isolation. The Village aims to build social networks for care experienced parents, offering the informal and comprehensive support that every parent deserves.

The Village is a community, not a service, for care experienced parents in Scotland. Engaging with services can carry stigma for parents, who might distrust support due to negative past experiences. They may avoid professionals for fear of being judged or having their parenting questioned. However, research shows that care experienced parents are just as capable of providing a safe and stable home. We believe that supporting the parents ensures the well-being of their children, so we are committed to offering non-judgemental and compassionate support within our community.

The Village exists almost entirely online, enabling parents to connect through platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, WhatsApp, and our online Hub. Here, they can share experiences, receive one-to-one support, and access practical assistance such as parenting advice, council tax discounts, nursery funding, and fuel vouchers. We share knowledge via social media, podcasts, and blogs, acknowledging that parents often seek advice online. Our emphasis on storytelling reflects research showing a preference for lived experience over professional advice. By being virtual, The Village aims to remove barriers care experienced parents may encounter when seeking support, ensuring accessibility for all.

“I can’t thank The Village enough; they have been incredibly supportive during some really challenging times. They sent me a card and gift recently and it was wonderful knowing that someone was thinking of me and encouraging me to hang in there. I feel connected to something special, a community that really cares.” - Villager

“Speaking with [team member] has helped my emotional wellbeing a lot. I’m feeling better within myself because I’ve had that person to speak to about everything that’s going on.” - Villager

# Team Member Support

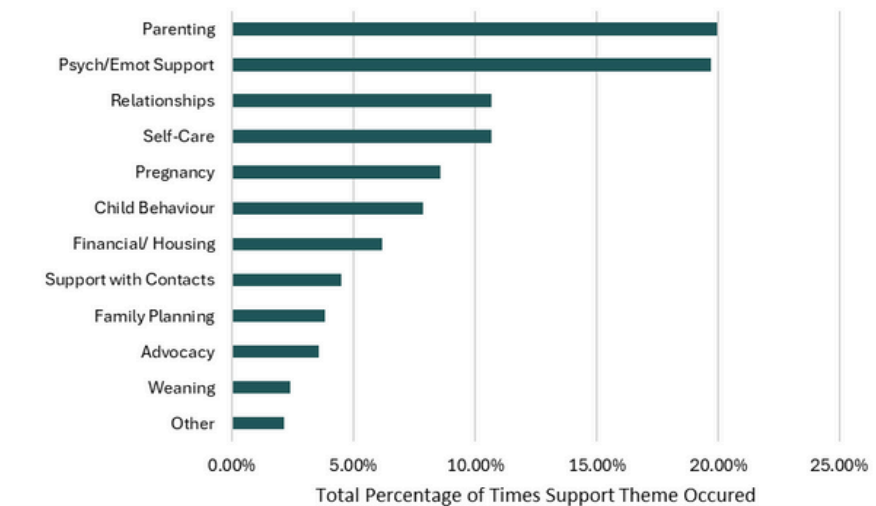
Parents who wish to engage more directly with The Village and receive consistent one-to-one support are connected with one of our team members. We currently have over 70 villagers who receive support from a team member. The Village team assists parents with any area of their life throughout their parenting journey—no concern is too small! Team member support is friendly and informal, and we never keep records on parents or share personal information.

Based on team member feedback, we collated the most frequently occurring support themes for this year, from January through June 2024:

Parents choose what support they would like. So far, this has included:

- Parenting hints and tips
- A listening ear or emotional support
- Self-care tips
- Support developing relationships
- Freebies including data packages, pamper packs, hospital packs, or sensory packs
- Help accessing benefits or advocacy
- Support with contacts for parents with children in care
- Signposting to specialist agencies

Support Themes Reported by Team Members  
January - June 2024



Team members indicated other specific support they provided to parents, many of which related to practical needs. Parents received maternity or toiletry packs, vouchers for groceries, or Wi-Fi hubs and sim cards to access the internet. By helping parents with applications for funding, we have helped them save thousands of pounds, including council tax refunds, care-experienced bursaries for college, and Eligible 2s funding for childcare. In the last year we helped parents receive over £9500 in backdated payments alone.

“They have been really good in helping me build my confidence. They would give me advice and a lot of the times it worked, which I was grateful for.” - Villager



# Who Makes Up The Village?

The Village is for all care experienced parents in Scotland with children under 5. Many villagers also have older children with younger siblings. We support anyone in a parenting role, whether they have current statutory support or not.

Villagers' ages range from 15 to 39, with a median age of 25. Over a third of parents are pregnant or have a child under one, and over 70% are first-time parents. Most parents in The Village are mums, but about 10% are dads, and we are eager to welcome more fathers into our network.



50%

Live alone, 35% with a partner or family, and 15% are in supported accommodation.



35%

Consider themselves to have a disability.



75%

Are unemployed, 20% are in part or full-time employment, and 10% are in education.



80%

Have their child living with them, and half are currently in a relationship with someone who shares parenting responsibilities.

Since we do not share information on villagers without specific consent, we distributed a voluntary and anonymous survey to parents in March 2024. The purpose was to gather additional demographic information and gain a more comprehensive understanding of those we are currently supporting. Approximately 40% of the parents responded, and this sample was found to be representative of our village population.

# What's New?

## Peer Mentoring

We recently launched our Peer Mentoring programme for villagers, inspired by feedback from care experienced parents who wanted relatable support. Peer Mentoring benefits babies, children, and parents by increasing self-efficacy, reducing depressive symptoms, and fostering social connections.

We are now recruiting and training mentors to match with mentees. Mentors, ideally with personal or professional experience of care, provide empathetic support and positive role modelling for parents needing extra help. They receive training, resources from the Mentor Hub, and opportunities for reflective practice.

If you or someone you know is interested, visit [our website](#) for more information.

## The Village in Inverclyde

This year, we received funding from the Inverclyde Health and Social Care Partnership to develop The Village within the local authority. Our aim was to focus on a specific geographical area to build a strong local village community by engaging directly with care-experienced parents and raising awareness among local organisations to gain their support. In a short time, we've made significant progress, forming positive relationships with statutory services and third-sector organisations. Inverclyde has shown the quickest growth in number of villagers out of all other local authorities represented by The Village so far.

Additionally, we have met with a group of local care-experienced parents to gain a deeper understanding of their specific needs, enabling us to connect better with the local community, engage more care-experienced parents, and provide optimal support. To attract new villagers, we've held free baby massage and baby yoga classes, which have been well received. Parents reported that these classes helped them and their babies relax, promoted bonding, supported their baby's development, and provided a positive social outlet, offering emotional, parenting, and support.

## Talk of The Village Podcast

This year we also launched our very own podcast, '[The Talk of The Village](#)'. The aim is that villagers, or anyone interested in our work, can listen to be introduced to team members, hear from professionals on requested topics, or hear stories from other parents with lived experience. Episodes so far have included information on Peer Mentoring, the benefits of baby yoga and massage, and exploring brain development with a doctor specialising in baby and child development.

[You can listen to our podcast 'The Talk of The Village' on Spotify.](#)



# Events Attended

Over the past year, The Village team has had the honour of being invited to several significant events to share our work.

In November, Scottish Attachment in Action invited us to present at their conference, "Connections and Relationships - Helping Communities Thrive." We shared insights from our co-designed projects, developed with individuals with lived experience, and highlighted our research and practical experience.

In February, we participated in The Promise Stories of Change conference in Edinburgh. It was inspiring to learn how various organisations and the government are striving to Keep the Promise, reinforcing our dedication to the same goal. Moira, our Executive Director, presented at the Each and Every Child workshop, showcasing The Village.

In March, we were privileged to attend the Scottish Throughcare and Aftercare Forum (STAF) Summit in Glasgow. Our team presented on The Village's history, support areas, peer mentoring, and our initiatives in Inverclyde. This event provided a valuable platform to reach a broader audience, receiving positive feedback and support for our unique approach to supporting care experienced parents.

We were also proud to be nominated and shortlisted as finalists in the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO) Charity Awards. We were selected as finalists for the Digital Difference category, recognising our impact as an online support network for care experienced parents.



# Learning From This Year

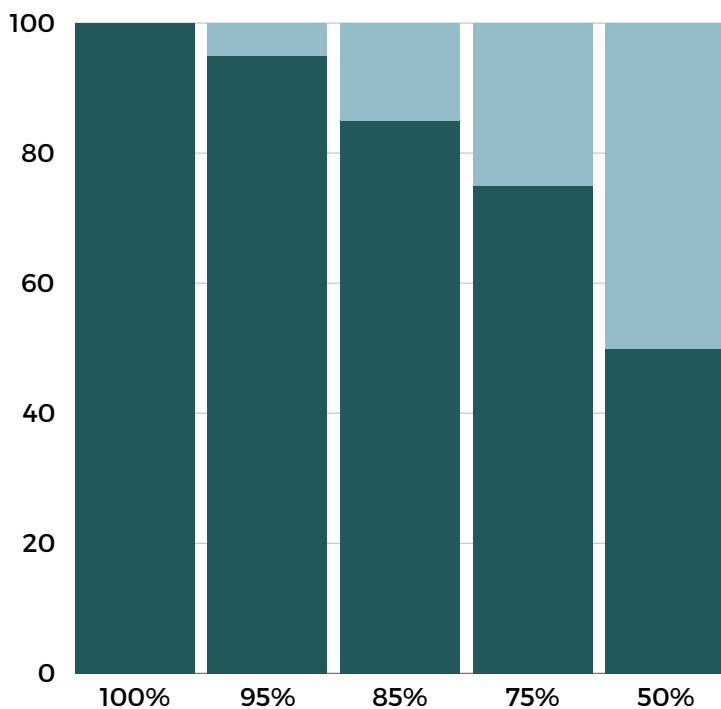
In the last year, we have continued to listen to what parents tell us and respond to themes raised by care experienced parents. This includes adapting our own practice, and working to influence policy that will improve the practice of professionals across Scotland that work with care experienced parents.

What we heard:	What we did:
<p><b>Eligible 2s:</b> Parents told us they were unaware of or struggled to access their entitlement to Eligible 2 nursery hours</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developed exemplar of best practice</li> <li>• Worked with Scottish Improvement Service to encourage change</li> <li>• Offered a workshop attended by 30 different local authorities</li> </ul>
<p><b>Parenting Assessment:</b> Parenting assessments both pre-birth and post-birth bring a lot of anxiety for parents, and often parents feel in the dark as to what is involved in the assessment and what their rights are regarding the assessment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working with a local authority and health board in collaboration with parents to review and improve processes</li> <li>• Producing material, including an exemplar to be shared &amp; information for parents</li> </ul>
<p><b>Parenting Charter:</b> There is currently a Charter for Care Experienced Parents in Wales, which local authorities have signed up to and promotes learning and impacting on practice, therefore improving the experiences for care experienced parents.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Worked with the relevant organisations and academics, including CASCADE, STAF, The Promise, and Aberdeen City to develop a similar work in Scotland</li> <li>• Facilitated sessions with care experienced parents and professionals to collate their views</li> <li>• Currently finalising our report and working with The Promise to determine the best way of sharing this</li> </ul>
<p><b>Freebies for Parent:</b> Parents put the needs of their children first and often go without themselves to ensure their child's needs are met.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sourced funding and donations to send pamper packs or gifts to parents</li> </ul>
<p><b>Entitlements:</b> Many parents told us they do not know the number of entitlements that are available, from council tax reductions and rebates to free gym passes, nursery hours, and health-based benefits.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Created a checklist for all team members to ensure they are informing parents of entitlements and supporting applications</li> <li>• Saved parents thousands of pounds so far and have seen many substantial, backdated refunds given to villagers</li> </ul>
<p><b>Events:</b> Parents asked for opportunities to meet up with other parents in-person.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Held two in-person meetups: The Science Centre in Glasgow in September, and Kelvinhall Soft Play in March.</li> <li>• Gathered feedback from parents on what types of meetups they would like to see in the future and are working to arrange these</li> <li>• Started routine coffee catch-ups and walk and talk in Inverclyde</li> </ul>

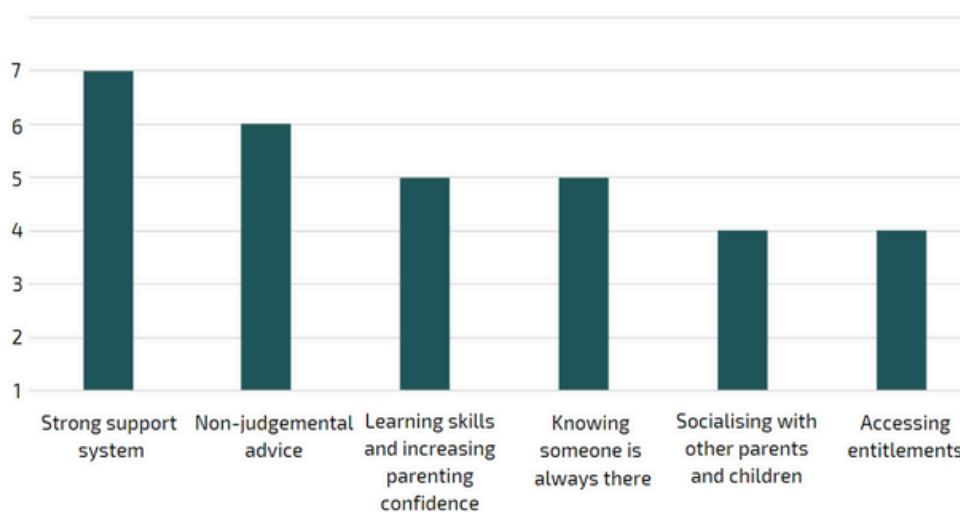


# Villager Feedback

We conducted surveys and semi-structured interviews with 25 villagers to understand the impact of The Village and identify areas for improvement. In the survey, 20 parents shared their views on how The Village affected their wellbeing, social connectedness, parenting confidence, and resource access.



- 100% of parents find the advice and support from team members helpful.
- 95% feel The Village provides a reliable support network, access to unique opportunities and resources, and helps them navigate systems and services comfortably.
- 85% agree they are gaining the skills needed to become more confident parents.
- 75% are aware of the benefits they are entitled to and how to access them, while the remaining 25% are somewhat aware.
- 50% have formed new social connections through The Village.



Feedback from our survey revealed additional prominent themes. Here are the most frequently gathered ones.

“I think that’s therapy in itself and a stress reliever, you can message and be like ‘this happened today, help, can I get this off my chest’ or whatever. It means you’re not keeping stuff pent up and you’re getting it off your shoulders and not just dwelling on stuff.” - Villager

To read the full report, please visit: <https://thewhynottrust.org/the-village/evaluations-and-reports>