



What progress has been made to date with your organisation's work to keep the Promise? (including what has worked well and what hasn't)

West Dunbartonshire has a wide range of activities on-going in relation to our ambition to keep the promise, and we have attempted to capture what has been working well, where we have experienced challenges, and our hopes for going forward within this report. There are additional updates from Education and Working4U attached within the e-mail, as well as the reports and summaries of work referenced within this report.

Between the publication of The Promise and May 2022 West Dunbartonshire had begun awareness raising around the Promise, as well as some focussed work around implementing The Promise. This was without any additional resource, and the Promise lead also having a full-time operational role. Work was done around the adoption of "Shannon's box" providing a nurturing welcome box when children and young people come into care. Two local foster carers also set up their own charity "Bags full of love", providing rucksacks full of personal and practical items to support a child or young person coming into care. Additional funding was allocated to recruit 10 new foster carers, with a view to recruiting carers who could support sibling groups. Additional funding was allocated to allow all of our Children's Houses staff to benefit from Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy training. This has been received very well by staff, and has been embedded within the practice of our Children's Houses. A language campaign was also launched by young people within one of our Children's Houses; "Words Matter Campaign", around supporting people to reflect on the language of the care system. Over this time there was a focus on re-starting or re-configuring work that had been impacted by the pandemic.

In May 2022 the Lead Officer for The Promise took up post, funded by Promise Partnership Corra Funding (matched by West Dunbartonshire Council) . This post is dedicated to support the implementation of The Promise across West Dunbartonshire. This funding will end in May 2024, but will be made permanent, allowing this work to continue and reflecting West Dunbartonshire's commitment to The Promise

A Keeping the Promise sub-group was created in July 2022, which reports to our Children's Services Partnership, the Nurtured Delivery Improvement Group (DIG). This group has representation from 23 different services, including Children and Families social work, education, health, Police, Residential child care, Youth Justice, Family Placement team, SCRA, CHS, Who Cares Scotland?, Partners in Advocacy, Further Education, Welfare Rights, Health Improvement, Elected Members, local kinship carers group, Y-Sort It (local 3<sup>rd</sup> sector organisation) and The Promise Scotland. This group is very well attended and engaged with; members are committed and passionate about the work around The Promise. This has been a great way to increase awareness of The Promise, with members acting as champions and sharing updates with their respective teams, as well as feeding in information from their colleagues and the community they work with.

The role of this group is to support and drive forward the recommendations of The Promise, and meets quarterly. Short working life groups were established from the Keeping the Promise group to look at specific issues in more detail and enlist membership from relevant parties. The three initial working groups were for Continuing Care (Moving on), Brothers and Sisters and Language. They report progress to the Keeping the Promise Group, and take action to progress these priority areas.

The “Moving On” group focussed on how we can have a more consistent and clear approach around the implementation of Continuing care. This has hinged on the creation of a Continuing Care policy for West Dunbartonshire, which is in the final stages of completion. A plan around implementation of this will follow to ensure the policy is widely understood and used.

The Language group has gone through a journey, similar to many other local authorities and organisations, where we’ve identified words our children, young people and families don’t like and tried to create alternatives. When reviewed we have found that the words used to describe people’s lives are really personal, and that our goal should really be around following certain principles around language (strengths based, easy to understand) to influence practice and personalise language for our care experienced children and young people wherever possible. The summary of our Language work is attached, and is currently on-going.

The Brothers and Sisters group began in March 2023 by gathering our local data to establish a baseline for how we are doing in keeping brothers and sisters together, alongside efforts to establish how decisions and being made, and how we are supporting on-going relationships when siblings are separated. A Brothers and Sisters plan was created with the findings of this data. A repeat gathering of this will be done in March 2024 to consider our progress in this area. The summary of our Brothers and Sisters work is attached, and is also currently on-going.

We are in the progress of establishing the next areas of priority that we will look at within Promise activity, and areas that have repeatedly come up are around Voice, Right to Education and Workforce Support.

Four Independent Reviewing Officers were appointed in May 2023. This is a new role for West Dunbartonshire. They conduct all reviews for looked after and accommodated children within West Dunbartonshire. This has brought increased accountability, consistency and independence to these reviews, and supported improving the experience of children and families in making meetings more accessible and child friendly.

We have seen the uptake of independent advocacy provided by Who Cares Scotland? and Partners in Advocacy increase significantly over the past year for our care experienced children and young people. One potential reason for this could be the introduction of our Independent Reviewing Co-Ordinators, who now consider advocacy at every review meeting. We are in the process of increasing our advocacy provision to ensure that every care experienced child and young person has the opportunity to access advocacy.

We currently use Viewpoint, a software tool to gather children and young people’s views to inform their care planning. We are also about to launch a pilot with our foster carers around the use of the Viewpoint app, which has a “My Story” section; a function to upload photographs and videos accompanied by narrative. We are hoping that this leads to a more consistent collection and storage of photos/materials to support care experienced children’s life story, contributing to a coherent narrative around their time in care, now and in the future.

An area identified within our Promise work has been around infant voice and how we promote infant mental health. Within our wider agenda of ensuring the voice of those with lived experience of care is embedded within our planning and delivery of services, ensuring we are equipped to hear and act upon the voices of our youngest is essential. We are looking at how we can incorporate the recommendations within the Keeping the Promise to Infants (NSPCC,2023) report as well as using the Scottish Government’s Voice of the Infant: best practice guidelines and infant pledge as a basis for this work.

The HSCP was successful in obtaining Promise Partnership funding in October 2023 to create a Participation Lead and a Data and Insights Lead posts. This service has been commissioned to a 3<sup>rd</sup> sector provider who will provide a participation Lead and a data analyst. A Project summary is attached to give fuller detail around this work.

We have had difficulties in re-establishing our Champions Board. Our Champions Board and Corporate Parenting Manager left their post in 2023, which has impacted on our participation work with care experienced children and young people. This has been recognised as an area of required attention, and steps have been taken to ensure we are in a better position this coming year. We are currently in negotiations about commissioning a service to support our Champions Board, as well as increasing our Advocacy provision. The creation of the Participation Lead and Data and Insights Lead should make a considerable difference to how well we can create meaningful opportunities for participation and co-design with our children, young people, parents/carers and adults with care experience. These posts will support participation across the full range of children and young people, from those accessing early, preventative family support, to those on the edges of care and those with care experience – across the full spectrum of those affected by work around The Promise.

Better links have also been made with those involved in wider participation work with children and young people in West Dunbartonshire, for example our Youth Council, Members of the Scottish Youth Parliament. More joined up working within young people's participation should increase visibility of The Promise and support wider engagement around the issues important to children and young people. Links have also been created with those working alongside adults with lived experience, particularly in areas like Recovery.

We are also about to embark on work alongside NSPCC Scotland's Local Campaign's team which will support a group of care experienced young people run a campaign on an issue that is important to them. Supporting young people to express their voices, feel empowered while gaining valuable skills and experience.

Our Whole Family Wellbeing work is being led by Education with a multi-agency working group supporting this. Following wide scale consultation with parents/carers and children and young people via surveys and focus groups, WD For Families Hubs have been established. These are three bases within the local community where people can access a wide range of supports including parenting groups, outreach support, attend a specialist clinics provided by range of support agencies. Consultation had shown that people wanted a "one stop shop" where they could easily access a range of supports, but were most acutely in need of financial support, support around neurodiversity and accessing support that felt non-stigmatising. It emerged that people did not feel they knew what supports were available, and a Family Support resource directory was also created, which is an accessible website signposting to a wide range of local and national supports, and can be accessed here [www.wdwellbeing.info](http://www.wdwellbeing.info)

We are at the start of a 5 year re-design of Children's Services: Improving Lives with Children and Families in West Dunbartonshire- What would it take? This is about creating better outcomes for our children and their families, and is very closely aligned with The Promise, GIRFEC, UNCRC and Trauma Informed Practice.

We have recently employed a Programme Lead for Trauma Informed Practice, who will work across the local authority to promote training and implementation of trauma informed practice. In 2023 a Scottish Trauma Informed Leaders Training session was held in West Dunbartonshire, with

representation of leaders from across Children's Services and Justice Services, and involved learning as well as planning how to take this work forward. This be continued this year.

A Better Hearings group is being re-established in West Dunbartonshire, involving SCRA, CHS and the local authority, and will look at how to improve the experience of children, young people and their families relating to Children's Hearings, as well as looking ahead towards implementing changes as recommended within the Children's Hearings Redesign. Some of the challenges experienced by SCRA locally have been around their own staffing shortages, and around the increase in the level of unallocated cases (related to social work capacity). This has an impact on reports being completed, social work attendance at Hearings, and the ability of Panels to make decisions in the absence of crucial information. A system has been put in place to increase social work attendance at Children's Panels for unallocated cases with basic updates so decisions can be made. Whilst far from ideal, this should allow better use of time and resources, decreasing the need for Hearings to be re-arranged. This is a direct impact of the pressure on the Children and Families Area Teams at present, and is unlikely to improve until the teams have more capacity. Our workforce, particularly within Children and Families social work, continue to experience staffing difficulties. Recruitment and retention of social workers is a significant issue nationally, and is felt within West Dunbartonshire. Supporting existing staff whilst attracting new staff to West Dunbartonshire is a priority for us.

Police Scotland have nationally introduced the Not At Home (NAH) process as well as the Philomena protocol in all children's care homes, with the desired outcome of reducing the disproportionate criminalisation of care experienced children and young people. Within West Dunbartonshire, this has been introduced into each of the children's houses in the area. The NAH process has helped to reduce the stigma attached to children within children's houses with unnecessary police involvement when the children fail to return home for a certain time. This is an attempt to create a more "family" orientated home. This had teething problems in its introduction, however so far it is working well.

The focus for our local Police officers relating to The Promise in the coming year is to introduce a further process within the children's houses. This process would be at the return of a child who was reported as missing to the police. Part of the police investigation is to conduct a return interview with the child in order to ascertain their whereabouts during their period of being missing and if they were the victim of any crime. However it has been recognised that these interviews having been conducted by the police aren't beneficial. It is being considered that staff within the children's houses conduct these interviews on behalf of the police as they are the best people and again reduces the police involvement with the children.

A number of key documents have been reviewed and re-designed, heavily informed by the aspirations of The Promise. One of these is our new "My Assessment and Plan", and accompanying guide, which aims to ensure The Promise impacts on reports for children and young people. The guidance highlights that workers must:

- Remember who assessments are for, considering the impact of words and narratives on children and young people, both now and in the future
- Avoid stigmatising, system-led language
- Use plain, child-friendly, strengths based language
- Limit the use of technical terms, jargon, references to theory and policy
- Use first person perspective    new Creation of new Assessment and Plan

There has been a drive to ensure there is a basic level of awareness amongst workers in West Dunbartonshire. Awareness raising sessions across 2022- 2023 reached over 100 people. There are

plans for 2024 to roll out the Promise Badge in Education, developed by the West Partnership, which consists of attending training on The Promise. Building on the work of other local authorities, including Renfrewshire and Inverclyde, there are also plans to introduce an online module on The Promise which can be accessed on a much wider basis, promoted within the Council, private businesses, other organisations and members of the community.

Having a dedicated post to Keeping The Promise has allowed the space and time required to do this work. Considering how strained capacity is within the wider workforce, having this responsibility sit alongside other operational roles would be very challenging.

The support received from our Promise Delivery Partner, Laura Sharpe, at The Promise Scotland has been invaluable. Laura has supported our work around The Promise by attending our Keeping the Promise group, supporting development sessions, providing guidance and highlighting developments occurring nationally. She has facilitated a Regional Promise group for the areas that she supports, where the Promise leads from these local authorities meet regularly, sharing ideas, developments and practice related to the Promise. This has promoted a more rapid sharing of good ideas and approaches and developed supportive relationships across authorities.

We are fortunate in West Dunbartonshire to have a very active and committed community support group, Kinship Carers of West Dunbartonshire, who are part of the wider Kinship Care Alliance group. Their role is to provide peer support to fellow kinship carers, and this group has grown significantly over the past two years. They now have their own larger premise, are supporting over 100 local kinship carers and their families, and providing additional groups and support in relation to children's mental health and carer's emotional and physical health. They have joined our Keeping the Promise group, and are able to bring the voices of kinship carers to the forefront.

### What will be the focus in the coming year, and what are the challenges in doing so?

#### - Workforce support

Recruitment and retention of staff is a priority in relation to being able to keep the Promise. This is probably most acutely felt within our Children and Families social work staff and also within foster carers. Considering how we can attract people to these posts, and then ensure we are supporting them, offering training and development opportunities, ensuring manageable workloads and that they feel valued for the work they do is crucial. This will require creativity, resource and ensuring we learn from those who are already working with us, and those who have left, to better understand how we can improve this area.

#### - Right to Education

We have work to do ensuring that our care experienced children and young people are known, valued and nurtured within education. Reducing the rate of exclusion for care experienced children and young people is an important part of this, alongside ensuring we have the additional supports in place to achieve this.

#### - Understanding our data and voices of experience – and acting upon this

The work we have planned alongside our Participation Lead and Data and Insights Lead means that this work will have a significant level of capacity attached to it, and we are hopeful that great strides can be made this year. Ensuring we have a sustainable model of participation and co-design

embedded within our systems should help to make meaningful change. Co-creating a remuneration policy will feature within this work, to ensure that we are valuing and recognising lived experience as expertise, and that the remuneration works best for them.

- Improving Lives with Children and Families in West Dunbartonshire: What would it take? (5 year re-design)

The strategy to deliver sustainable services and better outcomes for children, young people and their families within Children and Families social work. This includes safely reducing the number of children looked after away from home, and ensuring families are central to decision making and planning for their children. This re-design is based upon the principles of GIRFEC, UNCRC and The Promise, and will involve addressing some of the key areas identified within the Promise, like foster carer recruitment, support to kinship carers, enhancing family support, and ensuring our workforce are nurtured.

- Getting our own Promise plan finalised, knowing the outcomes and indicators we will be using to ensure we can evidence our progress.

We are in the process of finalising our Promise plan, considering local indicators we have identified as well as incorporating indicators being suggested by COSLA via their work with local authorities and the Improvement Service (though these indicators not yet finalised).

### What is needed to make sure your organisation can make the contribution it needs to keep the promise?

National support around workforce support – how do we make Children and families social work a more attractive area of work and study? Can there be incentives? A campaign to reframe the narrative around this type of work? This needs to be large scale and national. Without a resilient and robust Children and Families social work workforce keeping the promise is not a reality.

National support around foster carer recruitment – More sharing and opportunity to scale up innovation – what is working nationally? How can we, more rapidly, share learning and then move to implement on a wider basis?

More opportunities to share learning - Rapid learning of what is working nationally, what is not. Increased networking around themes. Some of the changes to The Promise Scotland's support offer may assist with this given their national overview and the more intensive support offers on particularly areas/locations.

## West Dunbartonshire Promise Update

More support around ideas like “follow the money” – how we shift money to preventative support whilst “keeping the show on the road”. Tangible support and learning around the ideas about de-investing and reinvesting would be valuable.

On-going funding opportunities – Promise Partnership funding to continue to support ideas that just would not be possible otherwise.

Thank you for taking the time to read about our work to keep The Promise in West Dunbartonshire. We look forward to further discussions and opportunities to shape the next part of the Plan over the coming months.