



ANNUAL REPORT

2023-24



Contents

Context	2
What Care-Experienced Parents Need	3
Why the Village?	4
What Does the Village Offer?	5
Team Member Support	6
Peer Mentoring	7
The Village in Inverclyde	8
Baby Massage and Yoga	9
Results	10
Who Makes up the Village?	10
What Villagers Are Saying	12
Feedback From Professionals	16
Still Listening, Learning, and Responding	17
Events Attended	19
Funders and Supporters	20
References	21

Context

The transition to parenthood is a time of major identity shifts and changes in social relationships for all new parents. When becoming a parent, having a strong social network is extremely important for ensuring positive parent and child outcomes (Leahy-Warren, McCarthy, and Corcoran, 2009; Nunes et al., 2020). Parents with experience of care, however, are likely to have fewer social networks and to experience isolation as adults, due to adverse experiences in childhood and barriers to developing trusted relationship that are a result of the care system itself (Purtell et al., 2022; Teer, 2021; Tzouvara et al., 2023). This puts care-experienced parents at a disadvantage when navigating parenthood, as a parent’s social network provides them with much of the support necessary for raising a child (Leahy-Warren, McCarthy, and Corcoran, 2009). For many other parents, this support comes from partners, family, and friends, but for parents who have been in care, family breakdown and placement moves make creating such a network more difficult.

In addition to the lack of social and family support, care-experienced parents are statistically more likely to live on a low-income, experience housing instability, and have reduced access to wellbeing support than their peers. Evidence also suggests that young people with experience of care are more likely to experience social disadvantage, become parents early, have poor physical and mental health outcomes, and attain a lower level of education, training, and employment (Roberts et al., 2017). Care-experienced parents are also more likely to experience child protection intervention or have their children removed (Roberts et al., 2019).

This, in part, is likely due to stigma surrounding care-experienced parents and barriers to receiving support from statutory services. Young people transitioning from care are often referred on to several services that do not coordinate with each other, creating barriers and increasing anxiety that may cause the young person to disengage altogether from formal services that provide income, housing, education, and employment support (Purtell et al., 2022). Further, distrust stemming from negative experiences of services and the care system have a large impact on how care-experienced parents receive the support they need. Parents are more likely to view professionals as judgemental rather than supportive and may avoid going to professionals with questions or concerns for fear it will make them look like a “bad parent” (Care Journeys, 2022). They may feel professionals are constantly looking for evidence of child maltreatment rather than working to help the parent improve, which creates what Purtell et al. (2022) refers to as a “surveillance bias,” where services are more likely to make negative assumptions about a person’s ability based on their care-experience.

A study in Wales found that although less than 1% of children are in care in Wales at any time, over 25% of mothers and 20% of fathers of those whose children are adopted or have experience of care themselves (Roberts et al., 2017). The researchers also determined that there was no significant difference in crime involvement or substance misuse between parents who were and were not care-experienced and had their children removed. Despite this, among the sample, for 58% of care-experienced parents, it was their first child who had been removed, while this was true for only 18% of parents without care-experience. These statistics suggest the presence of what Purtell et al. (2022) refers to as “surveillance bias,” where services are more likely to make negative assumptions about a person’s ability to parent based on their care-experience.

Research on care-experienced parents primarily focus on the negative outcomes, but few discuss those for whom parenting is a positive and transformational experience. For many care-experienced parents, having a child may have a “redemptive quality” and allow for parents to correct the wrongs of their own childhood (Either, 2022). Further, evidence suggests that care-experienced parents are no less capable of caring for their children. Parsons, Schoon, and Fitzsimons (2024) examined the long-term outcomes of care-leavers who became parents and their children using data from the 1970 British Cohort Study and the 2000/02 Millennium Cohort Study, both of which included information on health, educational, and socioeconomic circumstances. The evidence tells us that mothers who had experienced out-of-home care (OHC) had a lower socioeconomic status and less psychosocial resources available to them as adults, but despite this, there was no significant difference between care-experienced mothers and controls regarding their ability to provide a safe and stable home for their children. No significant differences between OHC and non-OHC mothers were found in the following: using drugs or drinking alcohol frequently, living in an overcrowded or messy home, having a regular schedule for their child, attendance at antenatal classes, being unhappy about becoming pregnant, or having a baby with low birthweight.

What Care-Experienced Parents Need

Several studies have concluded that what care-experienced parents need and are not receiving is informal and non-judgmental support, similar to what any new parent would expect from family and friends. The transition into parenthood is a time of major developmental changes, where parents are needing to navigate and build the parent-child relationship and experience changes in their own social relationships. Having supportive social relationships is a crucial protective mechanism for

parents and their children that prevents negative outcomes and increases maternal self-efficacy (Either, 2022). A study by Leahy-Warren, McCarthy, and Corcoran (2009) found that social support positively impacted self-efficacy in new mothers, which in turn was significantly correlated with lower levels of postnatal depressive symptoms. Mothers benefitted from four types of support – emotional, informational, appraisal (i.e. reassurance and encouragement), and instrumental (i.e. practical support with parenting responsibilities) – and most mothers noted that partners, their mothers, and friends provided them with all four types of support. Further, another study by Nunes et al. (2020) found that a parent’s support network consisted of, on average, 9 people consisting of family and friends. Care-experienced parents are less likely to have such a wide social support network, which we know can have profound impacts on emotional wellbeing, self-efficacy, and ease of meeting the demands of parenthood. It is also worth noting that in the study by Leahy-Warren, McCarthy, and Corcoran (2009), no association was found between professional support and depression symptoms like there was with informal support. This further illustrates the need to provide care-experienced parents with an adequate social support network, especially when their circumstances up until becoming parents have not allowed for it.

Why the Village?

This is why two years ago The Village was created. Referencing the saying “it takes a village to raise a child,” The Village provides care-experienced parents with a social network and non-judgemental, informal support from team members that parents can link in with if they choose. In a study by Roberts, Maxwell, and Elliot (2019) where the researchers heard input from professionals who work with care-experienced parents, one team manager reported finding it hard to see “the lack of moral support. [Parents] having kind of no trustworthy adult about to kind of guide them through things and to, to be a crutch or a shoulder to cry on” (p. 15). Further, one parent in the study by Either (2022) noted that having a paternal grandmother who knew how to navigate systems such as government aid, housing, and child services was invaluable. Village team members fill these roles, and provide the compassionate, informal practical, emotional, and social support that new parents deserve. Care-experienced parents have also noted feeling that they do not have others in their support network who understand their unique parenting journey, as they sometimes have trouble connecting fully with those in typical parent and child groups, and stated there is a need for support networks targeted towards care-experience parents (Care Journeys, 2022). The Village connects care-experienced parents not only with team members for advice and a listening ear, but with other parents who are going through the same journey, who they can learn from and share with. While there are many organisations in the UK that are targeted towards populations that make them likely to encounter care-experienced parents, such as single parents or parents under 25, to our knowledge, The Village is the first to focus solely on supporting parents with experience of care.

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. Currently The Village has five team members (2.8FTE) who are available to over 70 families regularly, and the other followers who make up The Village. A Steering Group made up of individuals who we had worked with in various capacities co-created The Village and have continued to share their views at each stage of development. Everyone in the Steering Group were parents, and two-thirds of the group have experience of care.

What Does the Village Offer?

The Village offers trusted relationships and opportunities to increase social support networks. It's a safe space for parents to reach out for confidential support, as you would with any social support network. The Village is predominantly facilitated online, through Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. This allows The Village to reach a widespread community geographically and make support accessible to all care-experienced parents across Scotland, especially in areas where resources can be limited. It is also known that parents already rely on the internet for information and social support and may even be more likely to turn to the internet for parenting information and advice than those in their own families (Doty & Dworkin, 2014). Online communities provide parents with the benefit of immediate advice and reassurance, and parents can validate themselves and their experiences through sharing and storytelling with other parents going through similar experiences (Doty & Dworkin, 2014; Haslam, Tee, & Baker, 2017). One study found that parents consistently preferred informal information and other parents' advice more than expert sources because they viewed lived experience from those in their support network as more valuable (Doty & Dworkin, 2014). In creating The Village, the aim was to facilitate this in a way that is specific and relevant to care-experienced parents.

Care-experienced parents, or "villagers," can interact with team members or each other in whatever way suits them – mostly through social media accounts, but also through other means such as WhatsApp if they prefer. Villagers can also seek information and advice from each other through the online Hub. Here they can form connections, ask questions, and have access to a range of resources, including videos on first aid and weaning, and information on Eligible 2s funding and legal rights.

The online blog, "[A View from The Village](#)" written by one of the team members and villagers, aims to give insight into the life of a fellow parent, answer common questions, and give advice on less-discussed topics. Blogs to date have covered topics such as nutrition, child allergies, and a day in the life with a toddler. This year The Village also launched a podcast, "[The Talk of The Village.](#)" The aim is that villagers, or anyone interested in The Village's work, can listen to be introduced to team members, hear from professionals on requested topics, or hear stories from other parents with lived experience. The Village also shares parenting tips, information about benefits, child health information and more on social media channels. For parents who want to engage in-person, there are opportunities for parents to meet and make new friends and develop their support networks, including coffee catchups, walk and talk, and baby massage or baby yoga.



MINI FIRST AID VIDEO SERIES
An Introduction

THE TALK OF THE VILLAGE PODCAST

WITH
AIMEE THURTELL-MUNDY

WHAT TO EXPECT IN THE FIRST TRIMESTER?

- Morning sickness
- Going to the bathroom a lot more
- New food likes and dislikes
- Feeling more tired than usual
- Breast changes
- Heightened sense of smell

IT'S ALLERGY AWARENESS WEEK
22 - 30 April

Discovering that your child has allergies, whether it's to certain foods or environmental factors, can be scary. It can feel like you've just found out your baby's allergic to everything and advice on navigating the journey.

NEW PODCAST EPISODE

LET'S TALK ABOUT WEE CAMPUS!

PEER MENTORING INFORMATION SESSIONS

APR 24 WEDNESDAY 24 APRIL 7PM - 8PM
Another opportunity to connect with other parents and hear our 12th session as part of it by joining us on Google Meet.

MAY 03 FRIDAY 03 MAY, 11.30AM - 12PM
Another opportunity to connect with other parents and hear our 13th session as part of it by joining us on Google Meet.

The support I've had has been incredible. The team 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.

EARLY LEARNING AND CHILDCARE THAT'S FREE TO YOU

Your 2, 3 or 4 year old could benefit from 1140 hours a year of early learning and childcare (ELC). This is free to you, funded by the Scottish Government.

Update on our Care Experienced Parent's Charter

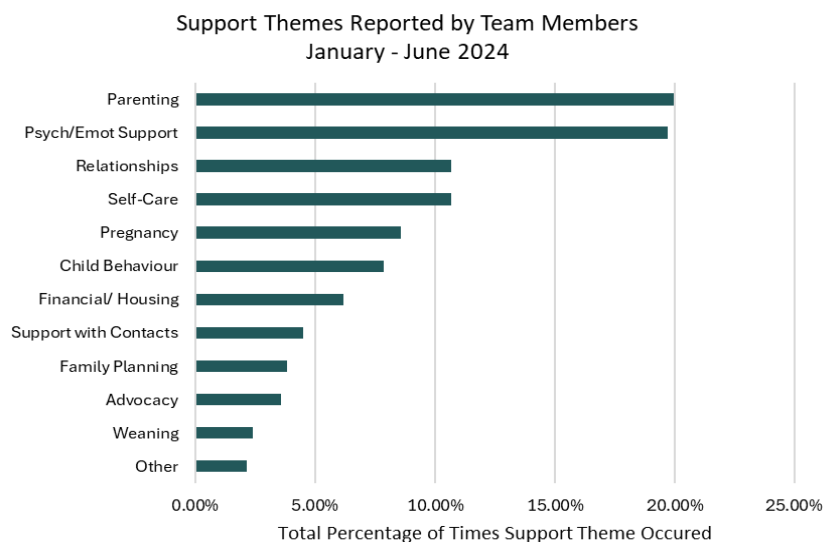
Early Insights:

- 1 Introduce a flexible, non-judgemental 'corporate grandparents' role
- 2 Ensure no age limit on support for care leavers who become parents
- 3 Prioritise trauma-informed, person-centred support tailored to individual needs
- 4 Review pre-birth assessments to be trauma-informed and collaborative
- 5 Ensure the charter's principles are actively upheld

Team Member Support

Parents who wish to engage more and receive more involved support are linked with one of the knowledgeable and compassionate team members. The Village currently has over 70 villagers who are in touch with a designated team member, half of which engage on at least a weekly basis. The Village team supports villagers in any area of their life that they need throughout their parenting journey. Team members are there to answer any questions, and no concern is too small to seek support for. Villagers can engage as much or as little as they wish, some receiving help with a range of needs, and some only with isolated concerns. As The Village is not a service and aims to provide informal support, records are never kept on parents and information is not shared – support is completely confidential unless there are serious welfare concerns.

Weekly feedback was collected from Village team members to gain insight into what support themes come up the most frequently, and what successes team members are seeing for their villagers. Parenting advice was the most frequently occurring support theme, with psychological and emotional support as a close second.



Each week team members indicated other specific support they provided to parents. Many of these included helping parents meet practical needs in their lives. Team members often offered parents maternity or toiletry packs, vouchers for groceries, or Wi-Fi hubs and sim cards to access the internet. Team members were also able to help villagers receive what they are entitled to, including council tax reductions, eligible 2s funding for childcare, and the care-experience bursary for college. Further, in the last year we helped parents receive over **£9500** in backdated payments.

In terms of parenting advice, team members reported giving parents emotional regulation tips for their children, advice on promoting social development in children, and supporting parents to understand how books, reading, and singing benefit language development. Of course, team members were also there for parents going through hard times. One team member noted talking with a parent to explore the impacts of past relationships and offer trauma-informed emotional support. Another was supporting a parent who had their child removed, providing comfort in this time but also assisting them to seek legal advice. Team members further reported helping parents to contact other services, such as social work, addiction services, or the GP. This feedback from The Village team highlights the comprehensiveness of support needed by parents with experience of care, and the work being done to ensure their needs are met across all areas of their lives.

Peer Mentoring

The Village recently launched its peer mentoring programme for villagers. This was born out of a consultation with our care-experienced parents, who said they would benefit from having someone in their lives who can relate to their experiences. While there is no known peer mentoring programme specifically supporting care-experienced parents, some evidence suggests that peer mentoring is a valuable process for new mothers. Peer mentoring has been found to improve outcomes relating to babies and children, increase self-efficacy in mothers, and reduce depressive symptoms (Law et al., 2022; McLeish & Redshaw, 2017; Yamashita, Isumi, & Fujiwara, 2020). Further, peer support for mothers increases social connectedness, empowers parents, and allows them to feel valued and heard (McLeish & Redshaw, 2017). In qualitative study by Law et al. (2022) on a “mummy buddy” programme in Australia, mums reflected on the benefits of having a peer mentor, stating that both family and friends as well as professionals can carry stigma and a certain “agenda” when providing support, while a peer mentor is informal, but still unbiased and non-judgemental. Mothers also noted

how it is good to have someone that they can be open with and vent to, without feeling that they need to provide some form of support in return.

Recruitment and training of mentors has begun and will soon be matching mentors to interested mentees. All mentors are parents and will ideally have either lived or professional experience of the care system themselves, but we judge this on a case-by-case basis and depends on the preferences of mentees. Mentors are there to listen, empathise, and be a positive role model for parents who feel they need additional emotional, social, or parenting support. Mentors themselves are supported with training, access to resources via the Mentor Hub, and opportunities to critically reflect on their mentoring relationship and continue developing their practice.

One villager who is in the process of becoming a peer mentor expressed how she feels the process will help her develop herself and pass on some of the support she has gotten so far, saying:

“I’m getting involved in peer mentoring, we went through the training for it last week. It’s just so good that The Village is able to give you these opportunities.”

The Village in Inverclyde

This year The Village received funding from the Inverclyde Health and Social Partnership to develop it within the local authority. The aim was to trial narrowing in on a specific geographical area to build a strong local Village community, both through engagement directly with care-experienced parents, and through spreading awareness of The Village to local organisations and gaining their support. In a short amount of time, significant progress has been made in this area, with positive relationships established with statutory services and third-sector organisations.



The local authority and HSCP of Inverclyde were vital in making connections in the area and getting engagement. Health visitors and family nurses have also been integral to building up The Village in Inverclyde, making referrals to baby massage classes, facilitating introductions to parents, advertising on their social media pages, and sharing our flyers in first visit packs. Family nurses further offered connections with Family Nurse Practitioner teams throughout Greater Glasgow and Clyde.

We met with a group of local care-experienced parents to gain an in-depth understanding of the specific needs of care-experienced parents in Inverclyde. Based on this learning, we will be able to better connect with the local community, engage more care-experienced parents in The Village, and most importantly, provide the best support possible within Inverclyde.

Due to the demonstrated impact in Inverclyde, we now have agreement from additional local authorities to implement a similar approach and will begin this work in other areas of Scotland in the coming year.

Baby Massage and Yoga

In working to bring new villagers in from Inverclyde, The Village has been holding free baby massage and baby yoga classes in the area. Places in the classes are given on a referral basis, and while parents do not need to be care-experienced to participate, priority is given to care-experienced parents so that the classes can also be an opportunity for more to learn about The Village. After piloting these in Inverclyde, we will be rolling out similar classes across other local authorities.

The classes have been extremely well received, with the next round of baby massage and yoga classes already nearly full. Following the first four weeks of classes, parents reported on feedback forms that learning baby massage helped both parent and baby relax, promoted bonding with their baby, and were an opportunity for parents to learn more about how to support their baby's development. Parents who participated in the classes also noted that they have been a positive social outlet for them to spend time with other parents, and receive additional emotional, parenting, and social support from The Village team member who leads the classes.

One villager wrote:

“Mum and baby have loved this experience. We look forward to it every week. It has been great to incorporate into our home routine. [Instructor] has been so lovely, welcoming, and very knowledgeable with lots of great things we've learned.”

Another commented on how attending the baby massage classes have benefitted her socially, saying:

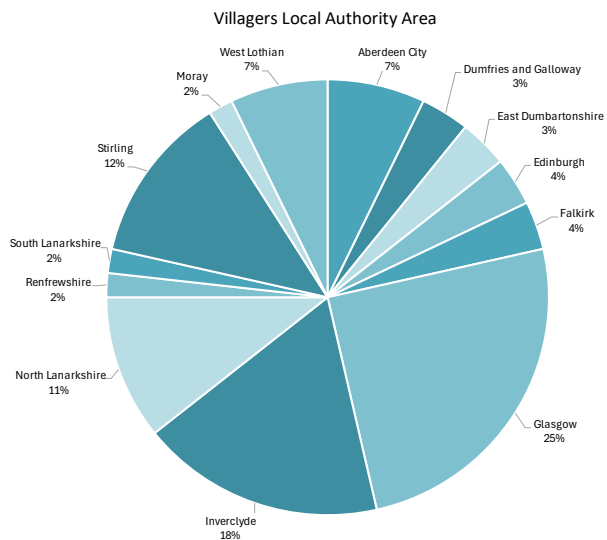
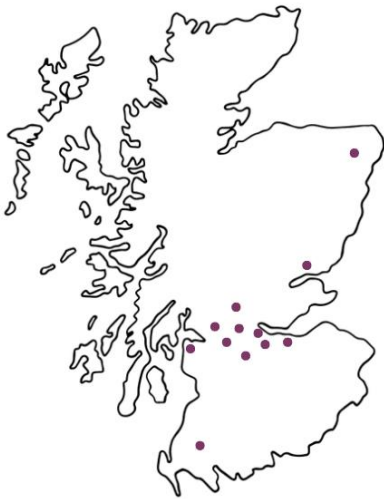
“Through the classes I have made a new friend who I can reach out to and who understands what I am going through.”

Results

In two years of running The Village, there has not been growth in any area as quickly as there has since starting focused work in Inverclyde. In addition to our free baby massage classes and open days, introductions of parents to The Village so far have come from: midwives, health visitors, Women’s Aid, Home Start, and Barnardo’s. This further demonstrates how gaining support from those who already have contact with care-experienced parents is a valuable way to start building relationships with parents themselves.

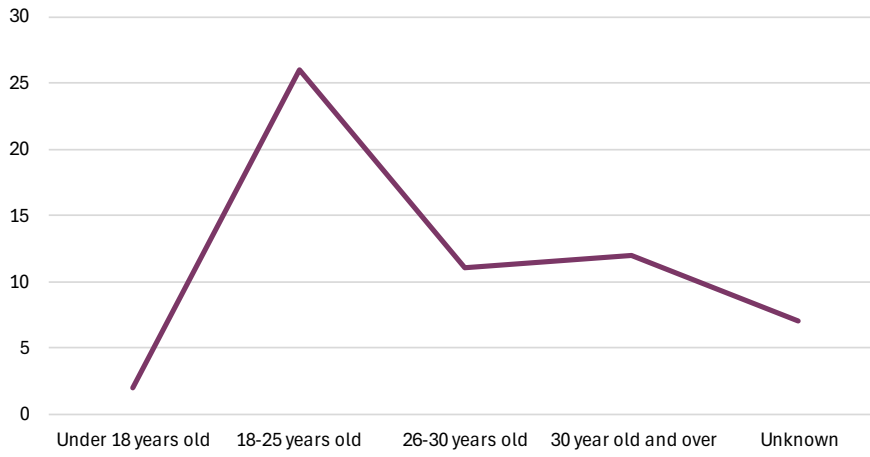
Who Makes up the Village?

The Village is made up entirely of parents with care-experience in Scotland. Most parents in The Village are mums, but about 10% are dads, and we are eager to welcome more fathers into our network. Parents can be any age, and proof of care-experience is never required – if a parent considers themselves to be care-experienced, then they are! Most villagers reside in the central belt of Scotland, although we have villagers from a wide geographical area that engage with The Village virtually. This year, we have seen the most increase in parents joining from Inverclyde, due to our focused work in this area, but have also seen more parents joining from Glasgow, Stirling, and Aberdeen. Below is a map of the geographical areas currently represented in The Village community, and the current distribution of villagers from each area.

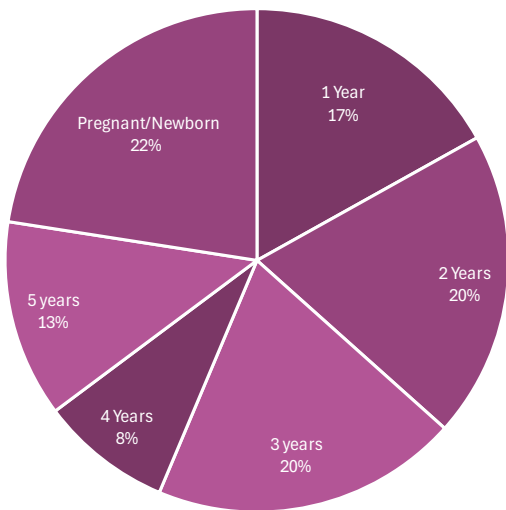


Currently, parents within The Village range in age from 15 up to 39, and the median age of villagers is 25. With nearly half of villagers being over the age of 25, there is a demonstrated need for continued support to care experienced parents past the typical cut-off age of 26. We are committed to providing parents with support for if they need especially when many will not become parents until later in life but will still be care experienced. Over a third of parents are pregnant or have a child under one, and over two-thirds are first-time parents.

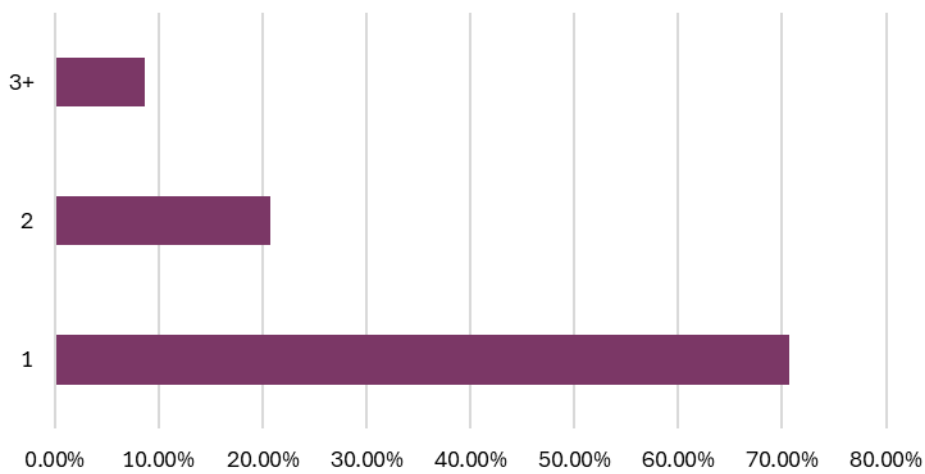
Age of Villagers



Age of Villagers Children



Number of Children in Families



Because The Village does not share records on villagers without consent, in March a survey was distributed amongst parents where they could voluntarily and anonymously provide additional demographic information, to give a more in-depth snapshot of who The Village is currently supporting. About 40% of parents we were supporting at the time responded, and this sample was found to be representative of our villager population. No difference was found in local authority and gender distribution between those who completed the survey and villagers, and there was no significant difference in age distribution between the two groups.

Based on survey data:



* Parents responded as being in both education and part-time employment

Approximately half of villagers are currently in a relationship with someone who shares parenting responsibilities, and 80% of parents have their child living with them. This challenges the common misconception that parents with care-experience are unable to be in supportive relationships with others and be capable caregivers to their children.

What Villagers Are Saying

Through a mixture of surveys and semi-structured interviews with parents, we heard from 25 villagers on what impact being part of The Village has had on them, and what they would like to see offered or improved.

In the feedback survey, twenty parents were asked whether The Village improved their wellbeing, social connectedness, confidence in parenting, and access to resources.

Responses indicated that:

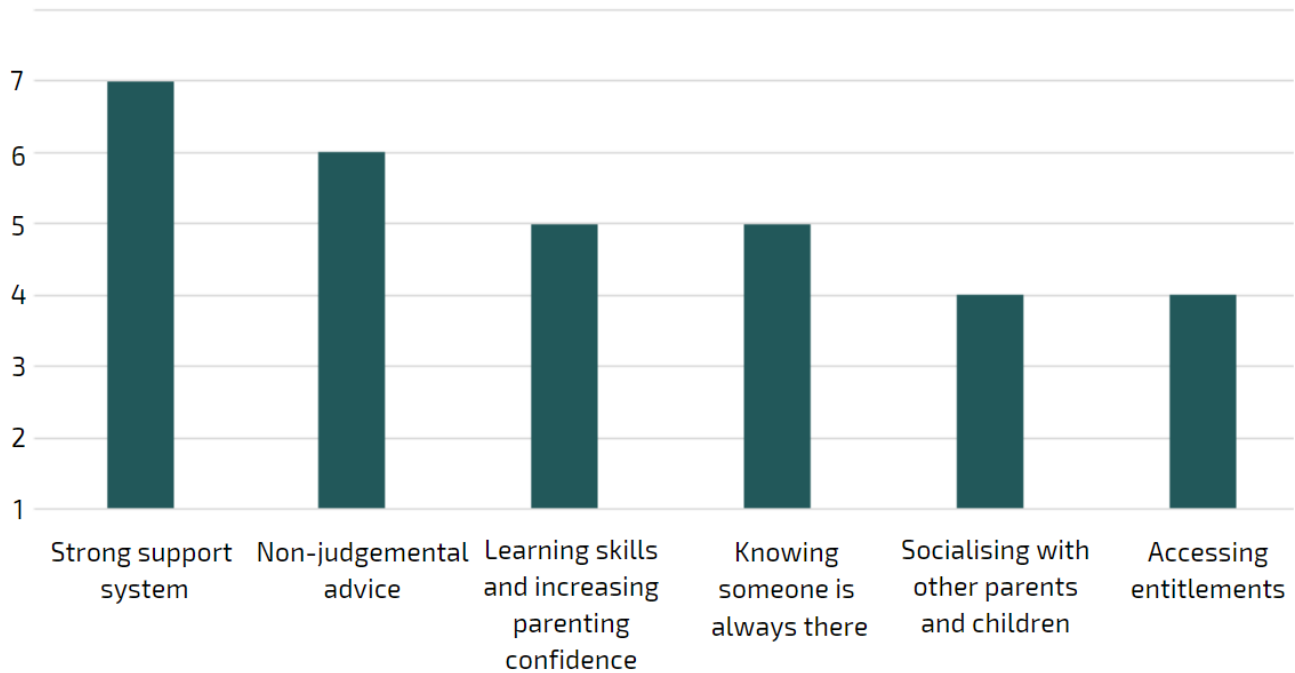
- 100% of parents agree that the advice and support they receive from team members is helpful
- 95% said they feel that in The Village, they have a support network to turn to in times of need, have access to opportunities and resources they would not have otherwise, and feel more comfortable navigating systems and services
- 85% agreed that they are learning the skills they need to feel more confident as parents
- 75% of villagers are now aware of the benefits they are entitled to and how to access these, with the other 25% agreeing that they are at least somewhat aware
- 50% of parents said that they have formed new social connections through The Village

Written feedback generated additional themes. Many parents emphasised how meaningful it is to parents to just know that someone is always there, no matter what. Parents appreciate that they have someone to call if they have a question, and that they will be listened to with compassion and without judgement. Many parents also reported feeling that they have a stronger support system and better social network since joining The Village.

“I feel like I have an amazing support system that helps me grow within myself and being a parent, without judgement.”

“It is really helpful having a safe space to turn to as a care-experienced parent ... It can be isolating being a care-experienced parent because it is hard connecting with other parents who don't have that shared experience. The Village gives me that safety net that I have someone to talk to during the most challenging times. I know I have someone to call.”

Below are the most common themes we gathered from written survey feedback from a group of twenty villagers:



“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.”

Similar themes emerged from our one-to-one conversations with current villagers. The most overwhelming benefit that villagers felt from their engagement with The Village, and their team members in particular, was simply having someone to talk to. Parents noted how great an impact this had on their mental health and wellbeing, as they were able to talk about whatever they needed to in a space that was completely theirs, and therefore did not have to hold on to emotions and stress themselves.

“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.”

“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.”

Parents also reflected on the positive impact that having team member support has had on their parenting confidence, and how far reassurance can go when becoming a parent.

“The reassurance that you’re doing things right, or even just people saying that you’re doing a good job, that’s nice to hear.”

One parent said she joined The Village when she first became pregnant, and that when she first started speaking to her team member, she was very scared about becoming a parent because she was going to have to do it on her own.

“[My team member] was a really good listener and gave me some advice and told me that everything would be okay, and that I’m fine doing it on my own.” Another said how even after having her first child, when she had her second several years later, she felt a bit unsure of how to navigate having a new baby, particularly regarding things like teething and weaning. “They have been really good in helping me build my confidence,” she said. “They would give me advice and a lot of the times it worked, which I was grateful for.”

Another parent noted that they appreciate that their team member is always there when they have questions, offering insightful advice and valuable learning on child development. Several parents stated that it is helpful to have someone to ask parenting questions, no matter how big or small.

“Just having someone you can have a normal relationship with over the phone or that you can call and be like ‘I don’t know how to do that, help.’ I’d never held a baby before [my child] was put on me. So I was a bit like, I have absolutely no idea what I’m doing.”

The next most common theme throughout discussions with villagers was the benefits of having the instrumental support, especially with financial concerns. One parent spoke about an issue they had with securing housing, but that they did not know how to apply for aid at the time. They told us how their team member was able to help them fill out the housing applications and was knowledgeable about getting access to priority housing, and they were eventually able to get their living situation sorted. Other parents noted getting support applying for funding to get gas and electricity vouchers, or help getting food for the house when they did not have any. This type of assistance meeting everyday needs is consistently valued highly by the parents we support.

Some parents told us that, in addition to help applying to benefits from team members, information The Village shares on social media has also helped them become aware of entitlements they had no prior knowledge of.

“I found out through [The Village] that my daughter could go to nursery from two because I’m care-experienced, she has the right to the Eligible 2s which I never would have known if they hadn’t put it on their social media.”

Finally, parents commented on the modality in which The Village is facilitated, acknowledging that an online platform makes it easier for them to engage. One parent shared that due to their anxiety, they sometimes have trouble getting out of the house, making an online platform ideal.

***“I think that’s the good thing about it that it can just be through the phone, just a message, so it’s not as if they phone or things like that, so it’s more comfortable just being able to send a wee text message here and there.*”**

Few parents did say, however, that while connecting with other villagers through social media is encouraged, it can feel daunting to reach out to other parents without establishing that familiarity first. This is where some parents said in-person meetups could further support building those connections.

One parent who has been to in-person meetups shared what a nice experience these were. They commented on how they enjoy the time to have adult conversations and having other parents and team members around them to help tend to the children so that they do not have to do everything themselves and become overwhelmed. Parents generally said that they would be happy with having casual meetups more often, just to get out of the house and have a break from being alone.

“The only thing I’d like to see improved which I think mostly everybody would agree with ... is just to meet up more. In terms of like, out to the park, places that are free and things like that. Like I said meeting up where there’s a big group of you and you all feel safe and you know everybody is looking out for each other, the adult conversation that you don’t really get at home.”

Overall, the parents we spoke to were incredibly grateful for the consistent, compassionate, and useful support that they receive from The Village. “The Village are just such a great kind of asset,” one parent said:

“They’re lovely, lovely people and they genuinely care about you which is really nice to see.”

Feedback From Professionals

It’s not only the parents who are noticing a difference in their lives since joining The Village, but also the professionals who support them. We have had extremely positive feedback from professionals we have connected with, and who have signposted care-experienced parents to The Village.

“One of the mums I work with is engaging with the Village and she is raving about it – and I mean raving. She is getting so much positive support.” - Health Visitor

Many professionals have noted that The Village fills a necessary gap in what is already offered to parents through social and health services. This includes offering a preventative measure to children of care-experienced parents going into care themselves, by supporting parents early to be the best they can be.

“What you are offering makes such a difference to the parents. We have different roles, and both are really important. We cannot do reactive and proactive unfortunately, so it is great to see the proactive being flexibly offered. It’s great we can work together.” - Senior Social Worker, Local Authority

“Early intervention is so important, your team helping parents to learn how to support their children to learn positive behaviours will make such a difference in later years when they start school or nursery.” - Education Professional

“Parents who no longer have their children living with them are just left, it is great that you can offer support to make contact as good as possible or support parents to change their lifestyle so next time they fall pregnant there can be a more positive outcome.” - Social Work Manager, Local Authority

Feedback from professionals has also emphasised their appreciation for having somewhere to direct care-experienced parents to where they can be cared for and supported, especially when the majority of services focus on the children rather than helping the parents.

“The parents are vulnerable and scared; they need someone beside them who is there for them. As a professional group our focus is the babies and children, the parents can get lost.” - Healthcare Manager

“I have reached out to many agencies, and no-one can help [this parent]. They are so alone so having someone to lean on will make such a difference.” - Education Professional

Still Listening, Learning, and Responding

In the last year, The Village has continued to listen to what parents say and respond to themes raised by care-experienced parents. This includes adapting 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’ve done:
Eligible 2s: Parents told us they were unaware of or struggled to access their entitlement to Eligible 2 nursery hours	We developed an exemplar of best practice and worked with the Scottish Improvement Service to highlight the issue and encourage meaningful change. Together we offered a workshop, highlighting issues and offering possible solutions and attended by people from 30 different local authorities. Read the document here .
Parenting Assessment: 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.	We are working with one local authority and health board, in collaboration with parents to review and improve their processes and develop an exemplar that can be shared.

	<p>We are also producing material, including a podcast, to answer the questions parents have told us they were left with.</p>
<p>Parenting Charter: 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>	<p>We brought together other relevant organisations and the academics which led the work in Wales to agree on a way of exploring if a similar charter would be helpful in Scotland. The Promise in Scotland is already promoting positive practice so we were clear the needs in Scotland may be different. Working with Early Years, STAF, The Promise and Aberdeen City Local Authority, we facilitated sessions across Scotland allowing us to understand the perceptions of interested groups of care experienced parents and people in professional roles who support care experienced parents.</p> <p>We are currently finalising our report and working with The Promise to determine the best way of sharing the learning and recommendations. We are keen that the recommendations are embedded alongside other developments, and our report does not end up simply sitting on shelves around Scotland.</p>
<p>Freebies for Parents: Parents put the needs of their children first and often go without themselves to ensure their child's needs are met.</p>	<p>We sourced funding and donations so that we can send pamper packs or occasional gifts to parents, recognising the value they have and the positive impact of sending treats on helping parents feel cared for.</p>
<p>Entitlements: 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>	<p>We created a checklist for all team members so they can ensure all parents are aware of what they may be entitled to and are further supported to apply for these.</p> <p>We have saved parents thousands of pounds. There have been many substantial refunds and £9500 in backdated parents given to our villagers.</p>
<p>Events: Parents asked for opportunities to meet up with other parents in-person.</p>	<p>We have held two Village wide in-person meetups: The Science Centre in Glasgow in September, and Kelvinhall Soft Play in March.</p> <p>We are looking to hold more frequent meetups for villagers over the next year in areas that suit as many parents as possible.</p> <p>In Inverclyde, the regular baby massage and baby yoga sessions have been very well received. We have also</p>

	started regular coffee catchups and walk and talks in the area.
--	---

Events Attended

In the last year, the Village team have been invited to attend and share learning at some powerful events.

Last November, we were invited by Scottish Attachment in Action to give a presentation on The Village at their conference “Connections and Relationships - Helping Communities Thrive.” Here we were able to share our learning, through co-designing our work with those with lived experiences, and through research and experience.

In February, we attended The Promise Stories of Change conference in Edinburgh. We were pleased to hear how other organisations and government are working to Keep the Promise and strengthened our commitment to doing the same. Moira Greentree, our executive director, did a presentation at the Each and Every Child workshop on The Village.

We were also honoured to attend the Scottish Throughcare and Aftercare Forum (STAF) Summit in Glasgow in March. Members of the team presented on The Village, including its history, what we offer, peer mentoring, and our work in Inverclyde. This was a valuable opportunity to share The Village with a wider audience, and those from other organisations gave positive feedback and expressed support of how we support care-experienced parents differently.

We have further been welcomed at important events and meetings within other organisations and services to do inputs on The Village and spread awareness of what we offer. These have included full team meetings for social workers and family nurse practitioners within various local authorities, staff meetings in third-sector organisations, and other local events, such as family wellbeing events. We have participated in voluntary-sector forums in different areas, particularly in promoting and recruiting for our new peer mentoring programme.

Finally, 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, highlighting our impact as a fully online support network for care-experienced parents.

Funders and Supporters

In the last year we have continued to receive wonderful support from many organisations. Without their support what we do would not be as easy and, in some cases, possible.

Thank you to:

Care Visions for their financial support, specialist business support and providing office space as required.

Catalysts for Impact for their financial and behind the scenes support in our future planning and specialist expertise in financial planning.

The Pears Foundation for their Christmas gift.

The Promise, Corra, KPMG Foundation, BFSS, Henry Duncan Grants, Changing Ideas, The Rank Foundation, and Inverclyde HSPC for their financial support for specific projects.

Early Years Scotland, Scottish Attachment in Action, STAF, The Good Shephard Centre, CELCIS, CASCADE and University of Glasgow academic CAMHS team for their support in joint working.

Lush, Christmas Angels, Vodaphone and the Good Things Foundation for their support in offering freebies to our communities.

All the people in our communities who give time, support, honest feedback and take part in what we do to ensure what we do is the best it can be.



References

- Care Journeys. (2022). *Care-experienced parents unite for change: Peer researchers' project exploring the experience of becoming a parent*. Barnardo's.
- Doty, J., & Dworkin, J. (2014). Online social support for parents: A critical review. *Marriage and Family Review*, 50, 174–198. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01494929.2013.834027>
- Either, Kristen. (2022). "Relationships to self, baby, others, and system: A narrative analysis of the transition to parenthood for young mothers in foster care." *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal* (39). 711-34.
- Haslam, D.M., Tee, A. & Baker, S. The Use of Social Media as a Mechanism of Social Support in Parents. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 26, 2026–2037 (2017). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-017-0716-6>
- Law, K. H., Jackson, B., Tan, X. H., Teague, S., Krause, A., Putter, K., Du'cane, M., Gibson, L., Bulles, K. F., & Barkin, J. (2022). Strengthening peer mentoring relationships for new mothers: A qualitative analysis. *Journal of Clinical Medicine*, 11(6009), 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.3390/jcm11206009>
- Leahy-Warren, P., McCarthy, G., & Corcoran, P. (2009). First-time mothers: Social support, maternal parental self-efficacy, and postnatal depression. *Journal of Clinical Nursing*, 21, 388-397. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2702.2011.03701.x>
- McLeish, J., & Redshaw, M. (2017). Mothers' accounts of the impact on emotional wellbeing of organised peer support in pregnancy and early parenthood: A qualitative study. *BMC Pregnancy and Childbirth*, 17(21), 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12884-017-1220-0>
- McTier, A., Anderson, C. A., & Young, E. (2023). *Births to care-experienced teenagers and women aged 14-24 in Scotland: An estimation*. Centre for Excellence for Children's Care and Protection (CELCIS).
- Nunes, C., Martins, C., Ayala-Nunes, L., Matos, F., Costa, E., Goncalves, A. (2020). Parents' perceived social support and children's psychological adjustment. *Journal of Social Work*, 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14680117320911614>
- Parsons, S., Schoon, I., & Fitzsimons, E. (2024). Long-term outcomes for care-leavers who became parents and experiences of their children: Evidence on the intergenerational transmission of disadvantage in two British cohort studies (pp. 1–69) [Research Report]. Nuffield Foundation Centre for Longitudinal Studies. <https://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Children-of-care-leavers-research-report.pdf>
- Purtell, J., Mendes, P., Saunders, B. J., & Baidawi, S. (2022). Healing trauma and loss and increasing social connections: Transitions from care and early parenting. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 39, 735–747. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1007/s10560-022-00860-6>
- Roberts, L., Meakings, S., Smith, A., Forrester, D., & Shelton, K. (2017). Care leavers and their children placed for adoption. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 79. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2017.06.030>

- Roberts, L., Maxwell, N., & Elliot, M. (2019). When young people in and leaving state care become parents: What happens and why? *Children and Youth Services Review, 104*.
<https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2019.104387>
- Teer, P. (2021). The role of informal networks in the lives of young people transitioning from care: A review of the literature. *Scottish Journal of Residential Child Care, 20*, 1-21.
- Tzouvara, V., Kupdere, P., Wilson, K., Matthews, L., Simpson, A., Foye, U. (2023). *Child Abuse & Neglect, 139*, 1-57. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2023.106092>
- Yamashita, A., Isumi, A., & Fujiwara, T. (2020). Online peer support and well-being of mothers and children: Systematic scoping review. *Journal of Epidemiology, 32*(2), 61–68.
<https://doi.org/10.2188/jea.JE20200079>