



Engagement with Care Experienced Young People

A report to inform Police Scotland's Corporate Parenting Plan communication and awareness-raising

Scottish Youth Parliament
November 2025

Contents

Acknowledgements	01
Recommendations	02
Introduction	04
Our Approach	05
Results	07
Conclusion	30

Acknowledgements

The Scottish Youth Parliament would like to thank colleagues from MCR Pathways who provided their support and expertise throughout this piece of work.

We would like to thank the young people who took part in this piece of work by sharing their views through focus groups at:

- St Matthews Academy, Saltcoats.
- Baldragon Academy, Dundee.

Focus groups were facilitated by Debbie Hammell, Participation and Programmes Manager, and Andrew Kinnell, Participation and Programmes Officer, Scottish Youth Parliament.

This report was written by Rosy Burgess, Head of Participation and Programmes, Scottish Youth Parliament.

Recommendations

When communicating with Care Experienced Young People, Police Scotland should:

- **Meaningfully involve young people** - give young people space and time to share their views and experiences; actively listen to young people's views and acknowledge their lived and living experiences as valid; and involve young people in co-designing communications for others.
- **Use trauma-informed communication** - avoid discussing traumatic experiences unless appropriate and with consent; be aware of cultural and emotional sensitivities, avoiding assumptions based on background or appearance; and approach each young person as an individual.
- **Communicate with young people as equals** - avoid talking down or patronising young people; use language which is accessible for everyone; and avoid jargon or terminology which is unfamiliar to young people.
- **Ensure all Police Scotland staff are trained on how to communicate with young people** - training should include practical skills for effectively communicating with young people, and should increase understanding of the issues affecting young people.

Police Scotland should raise awareness of the Corporate Parenting Plan to young people by:

- **Using multiple digital and media channels.** This could include:
 - Sharing adverts and posts on social media platforms commonly used by young people.
 - Co-designing social media adverts and content with young people to increase accessibility for Care Experienced Young People and to ensure promotional materials feel relevant to young people's lives.
- **Engaging with young people in education settings and through existing groups and clubs.** This could include:
 - Integrating awareness-raising into existing school events and the curriculum, ensuring young people are given advance notice when police officers will be visiting to avoid causing anxiety or worry.
 - Speaking about the Corporate Parenting Plan in assemblies and classes.
 - Working with schools and other youth groups to create spaces for young people to share their views and experiences with Police Scotland in a safe and inclusive environment.
 - Providing games and activities to give young people creative and engaging ways to learn about the Corporate Parenting Plan.

- **Ensuring trusted adults are aware of and understand the Corporate Parenting Plan and can communicate this effectively to young people.** This could include:
 - Ensuring all Police Scotland officers and staff understand the Corporate Parenting Plan, what their role in delivering this is, and how to communicate this to the young people they interact with.
 - Providing training and resources for adults who work with and support Care Experienced Young People, such as social workers, teachers, and foster carers, to help them understand and be able to effectively communicate the Corporate Parenting Plan to young people.

Introduction

Following the publication of Police Scotland's Corporate Parenting Plan 2024-27 [1], Police Scotland commissioned the Scottish Youth Parliament to engage with Care Experienced Young People to help Police Scotland understand how best they can communicate with Care Experienced Young People and raise awareness of their Corporate Parenting Plan.

The aim of this project was to understand Care Experienced Young People's views and experiences to inform Police Scotland's communication and awareness-raising plans.

This report outlines the findings from focus groups with two groups of Care Experienced Young People aged 14-18 and makes recommendations based on young people's ideas discussed during the sessions.

What is a Corporate Parenting Plan?

Police Scotland's purpose is to improve the safety and well-being of people, places and communities in Scotland.

Children and young people are an integral part of our communities, and their needs must be represented in all aspects of policing. We recognise that our Care Experienced children and young people are a community with different needs, expectations and experiences of engaging with and seeking the assistance of Police Scotland.

In 2015, The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 created the legal framework for 33 statutory organisations, including Police Scotland, to become Corporate Parents, and to improve, where possible, the lives of Care Experienced young people in Scotland. In simple terms, the legislation says that all public authorities in Scotland should seek to make the lives of Care Experienced children and young people the best they can be, as any good parent would.

As part of this, public authorities must create a Corporate Parenting Plan every three years which says what they are going to do to make this happen. Police Scotland's current Corporate Parenting Plan (2024-27) is available on the Police Scotland website [1].

In 2024, the Scottish Youth Parliament worked with Police Scotland to consult Care Experienced Young People about their experiences with Police Scotland, and to find out what they thought should be included in the next Corporate Parenting Plan. The responses from our consultation were fed into the 2024-27 Plan, which was published in December 2024. Information about how we involved young people, and what the Corporate Parenting Plan says, is available on the SYP website [2].

- [1] Police Scotland (2024) Corporate Parenting Plan (2024-27). Available at: <https://www.scotland.police.uk/spa-media/rwwphspf/corporate-parenting-2024-2027.pdf>
- [2] Scottish Youth Parliament (2024) Engagement with Care Experienced Young People. Available at: <https://syp.org.uk/project/engagement-with-care-experienced-young-people/>

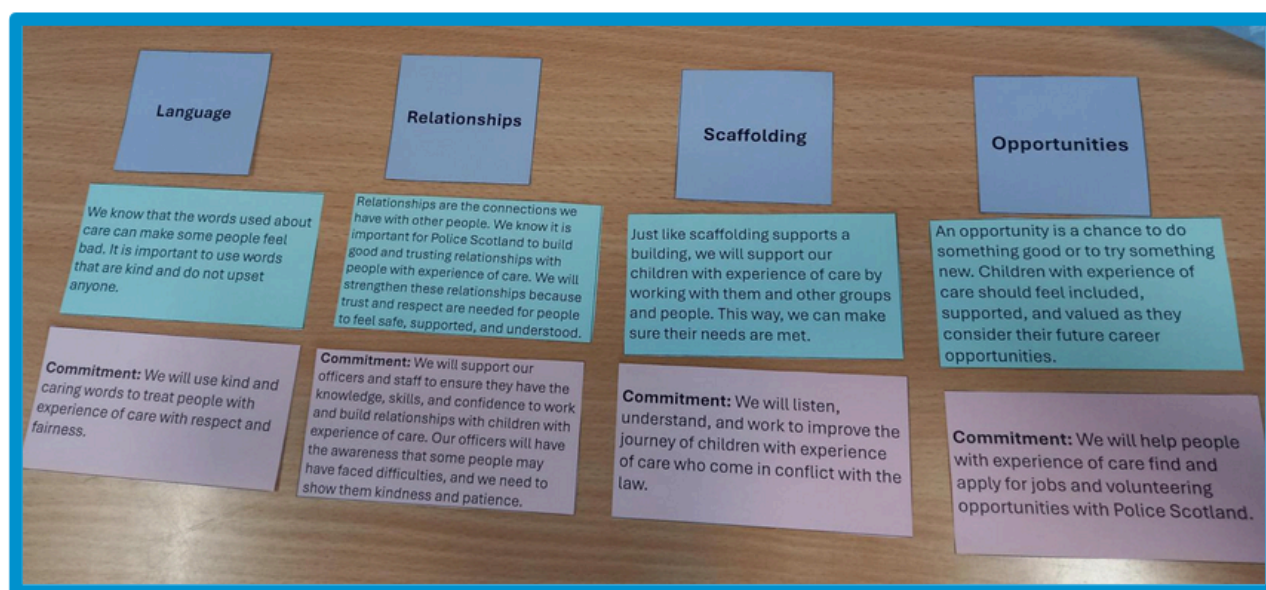
Our approach

The Scottish Youth Parliament uses participatory methodologies to ensure meaningful engagement with young people. SYP's Participation Framework is underpinned by the Lundy Model of Participation and [The Right Way](#), which outlines the key components of meaningful participation. We design spaces to create conditions for meaningful voice, and work to bring together the decision-making audiences to create conditions for genuine influence.

To ensure we heard from young people in different areas of Scotland, SYP carried out workshops with two groups of Care Experienced Young People aged 14-18 in Saltcoats and Dundee. These groups are currently working with MCR Pathways in school-based settings, which helped to make sure the young people felt comfortable in the sessions as they already knew each other. The sessions took place in each group's usual meeting place, so the young people were also familiar with the space.

Each group took part in two focus groups to share their views and ideas. These sessions were structured as follows:

- **Session 1:** An introduction to Police Scotland and the Corporate Parenting Plan 2024-27. This activity started with a short presentation about the Corporate Parenting Plan, using the definition shown on page 5 of this report. Young people then took part in a card-matching activity, where they worked in small groups to examine the summarised commitments outlined in Police Scotland's Corporate Parenting Plan summary document [3] (pages 6 - 7). The image below shows this activity in action.



[3] Police Scotland (2024) Police Scotland Corporate Parenting Plan Summary 2024-2027. Available at: <https://www.scotland.police.uk/spa-media/ngscuiqq/corporate-parenting-plan-2024-2027-summary.pdf>

After the introduction, participants took part in activities and a group discussion about how young people like to be communicated with, and the communication barriers young people face. The instructions for each of these activities are outlined in the Results section of this report.

- **Session 2:** This session focused on how young people would like Police Scotland to communicate with them, and what Police Scotland could include in their communications about the Corporate Parenting Plan. The instructions for each of these activities are outlined in the Results section of this report.

By the end of the two sessions, participants were able to

- Share how they currently engage with different communications channels.
- Share their experiences of Police Scotland, and how they want Police Scotland to communicate with them.
- Feel their views and experiences had been listened to and taken seriously.
- Understand what will happen next after the focus group.

Our approach included a user journey mapping exercise. User journey mapping is user-centred, based on lived experience, and developed through direct engagement with Care Experienced Children and Young People (CEYP). The user journey mapping process is an interactive and creative form of engagement through which the Police Scotland Corporate Parenting Plan (CPP) can be shared and communicated with CEYP as part of the process. Following the workshops, we reviewed participants' user journey maps and used these to create five different case studies outlining Care Experienced Children and Young Peoples' user journeys. These case studies have been mapped against the Corporate Parenting Plan 2024-27 to show this in action.

In total, seventeen Care Experienced Young People took part in this project.

While our approach enabled us to gather a range of different views, we recognise that this is a small overall group size, and therefore the findings may not be fully reflective of all Care Experienced Young People's views and experiences.

Results

This section outlines the combined results from each of the focus groups. Each subsection begins with an outline of the activity instructions, followed by a summary of the responses from young people.

How young people engage with different communication channels

What we did...

The first session started with an activity to understand how young people engage with different communication channels. Participants were split into groups of three or four and were given ten images showing the following methods of communication:

- Social media: Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn. We didn't include TikTok and Snapchat in this image because Police Scotland does not currently use these social media platforms.
- Emails
- Text messaging apps (eg, WhatsApp / Messenger)
- Online Influencers
- News articles
- Trusted adults (eg, teachers/youth workers)
- Posters/Flyers/post (noticeboards)
- School assemblies
- National campaigns run by emergency services
- Young Scot website

These images were laid out on a table in front of each group so they could choose which communication channels they wanted to focus on to respond to the questions outlined below. This enabled the activity to be participant-led.

To understand how young people use each of these different methods of communication, they were asked three questions, with five minutes to answer each question on a different coloured post-it note. They were asked:

1. Green post-it note: How do you use this method of communication?
2. Pink post-it note: Do you trust the information you get from this method of communication? Why?
3. Blue post-it note: Should Police Scotland use this method to communicate with young people? Why?

As well as having the choice of which communication channels to focus on when answering these questions, participants had limited time to respond. As such, some of the images received more responses than others. Additionally, the overall number of young people who took part in workshops is relatively low. The lower number of responses for some of the communication channels does not necessarily indicate young people are not using or interacting with these communication channels, and the results should not be viewed as such.

Young people told us...

Overall, there were mixed responses to all three questions. However, the most popular communication channels young people felt Police Scotland should use to communicate with them are:

- Social media
- School assemblies
- Trusted adults

A summary of participants' responses is shown below, ordered by the channels which received the most comments from young people. As outlined above, although some channels received fewer comments than others, this does not necessarily mean young people are not using or interacting with these channels.

Social media (Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn)

Young people told us they use social media for texting, scrolling, posting pictures or videos, and responding to other people's posts. There were mixed responses in relation to whether young people trust the information they get from social media, but most were unsure whether they trust this information. Some young people don't see a need for police to use social media (especially TikTok), while others think Police Scotland should be more active on these platforms.

School Assemblies

Young people told us they use school assemblies to get information about school and other topics. Some young people trust the information they get in school assemblies, although others feel they are boring and unhelpful. Young people suggested Police Scotland could use school assemblies to communicate with young people if they are more engaging and interactive.

Trusted adults i.e. teachers/youth workers

Young people told us they talk to trusted adults, and that they mostly trust the information they get from these adults. Young people suggested Police Scotland could communicate with young people through trusted adults and that Police Scotland could teach trusted adults more.

News articles

Half of the young people who took part in focus groups said they don't use news articles, while the other half said they use this communication method to find out information about what is happening in the world. Most young people said they partly trust the information in news articles, although there was some recognition that news articles can include false information. Young people said Police Scotland could use news articles to share information or to talk about serious topics.

Emails

A very small number of young people said they use emails for college, but others said email is for older people. There were mixed responses in relation to whether young people trust the information they get from emails. Overall, participants didn't think Police Scotland should use emails to communicate with young people.

Text Messaging Apps (WhatsApp, Messenger)

Young people said they use text messaging apps for keeping in touch with friends and family, and to take part in group chats. Most young people said they trust the information they receive through text messaging apps. There were mixed responses on whether Police Scotland should use text messaging apps to communicate with young people.

Online Influencers

Young people gave mixed views on whether Police Scotland should use influencers to communicate with young people because it can be hard to connect with some influencers, and some young people just scroll past them.

Posters/ Flyers/ Post (noticeboards)

Young people told us they use posters / flyers / post and noticeboards to find specific information. However, they are not seen as very effective, as young people often ignore them. Therefore, young people don't think Police Scotland should use posters, flyers, noticeboards, or post to communicate with young people, as they don't engage with the material.

National Campaigns by Emergency Services

The majority of participants did not respond to this question. The group that did respond said they use national campaigns by emergency services to gain information, they weren't sure if they trust the information in national campaigns by emergency services, and Police Scotland should use this method to communicate with young people.

Young Scot website

The majority of participants did not respond to this question, although this does not necessarily mean that young people are not using the Young Scot website. The group that did respond said they use the Young Scot website to win prizes, they trust the information on the Young Scot website, and Police Scotland should use this channel to communicate with young people.

Communication blockers

What we did...

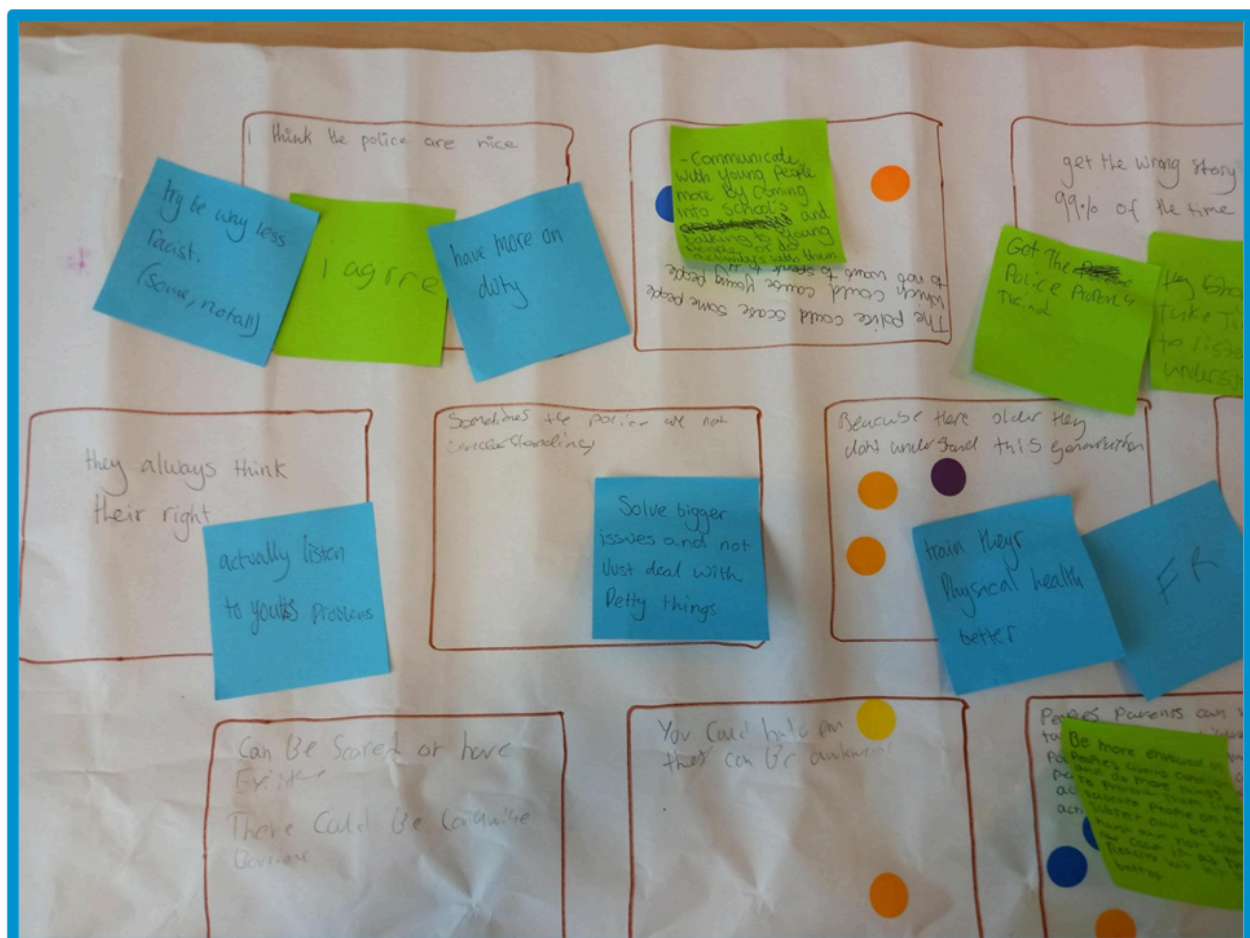
The second activity during the first workshop aimed to explore what doesn't work well for communication with young people.

For this activity, participants were given a graffiti wall - a long roll of paper which was designed like a brick wall. They were asked to draw or write examples of communication blockers. They were asked the following questions to help them think about their responses:

1. What makes communications difficult for you to engage with?
2. Have you seen any examples of organisations communicating with young people in an unsuitable/unrelatable/inappropriate way?
3. Are there any physical communication barriers? (eg, internet access, access to devices, words or images being used, etc)

When participants had identified as many communication blockers as they could think of, they were each given three sticky dots to stick next to the three biggest communication blockers from the ideas on the graffiti wall.

An example graffiti wall is shown in the picture below.



Young people told us...

“They could be older, and therefore out of touch with current generational issues”

“The police could scare some people which could cause young people to not want to speak to them”

“They came into my house in a negative way and it was really stressful and traumatic, sound people though”

“People’s parents can block police talking to their children and police need to talk more about people’s parents’ living conditions and actions which cause their children’s actions and involvement to the police”

“Not understanding the subject of the conversation”

“I think the police are nice”

Young people identified the following blockers that make communication difficult for them to engage with:

Language and barriers to understanding

Young people highlighted communication barriers such as English not being their first language, not understanding the topic being discussed, and the use of jargon or ‘fancy words’.

Additional support needs

Young people suggested having additional support needs, such as dyslexia, or being deaf or non-verbal would be a communication barrier for some young people.

Social and emotional barriers

Young people suggested social and emotional barriers such as fear or anxiety in relation to the police would be a communication blocker. Some young people shared examples of negative experiences with Police Scotland which highlighted the impact these had on their perceptions of Police Scotland. Young people suggested police officers and other adults shouting, and the way other adults talk about Police Scotland could be a communication barrier.

Perceptions and power dynamics

Some young people shared their perceptions of Police Scotland, suggesting they feel the police are scary and ignore young people, or that older officers are out of touch with issues affecting young people. They suggested the power dynamic between Police Scotland and young people could be a communication blocker.

Technology and environmental distractions

Barriers such as ad blockers, lack of access to Wi-Fi or other technology, and being blocked or removed from chats would make it difficult for some young people to communicate.

Communication boosters

What we did...

This activity took place at the start of the second workshop.

To explore young people's ideas for good communication, they were asked to look at the communication blockers they identified on the graffiti wall they created in the first focus group, and to draw or write actions they think could be taken to overcome or boost communication in relation to each of the blockers.

To help with this activity, participants were given the following prompt questions:

1. What is the action that could be taken?
2. Who could/ should take this action?
3. How important is it that this action is taken?

Young people told us...

"Talk to young people more by coming into schools and talking to them or doing activities with them"

"Get someone to help translate it to non-fancy words"

"They should take time to listen and understand"

"Be more involved in people's living conditions and do more things to prevent them like educating people on the subject and being a bit harsh and not sugar-coating it as the reality will hit them better"

"Get the police properly trained"

Young people identified the following communication boosters:

Effective clear communication

Young people highlighted effective communication includes both written and verbal communication methods, use of accessible language with no jargon, and more direct interaction between Police Scotland and young people. They would also like to see more accessible forms of communication, including British Sign Language and communications interpreted in different languages.

Improved relationships and empathy

Young people told us they don't want to be ignored; they want Police Scotland to create space and take time to listen to and understand young people to help improve relationships between young people and police.

Physical and technological support

Young people suggested improved access to Wi-Fi and other technologies, more visibility of police officers, and more positive police presence in young people's day to day lives would help to improve communication between young people and Police Scotland.

Police officer training

Young people suggested police officers should be trained to be less scary and to better understand young people's lives.

User Journey Mapping

What we did...

To understand young people's experiences with Police Scotland, participants worked in small groups on a collaborative user journey mapping activity.

In groups of two or three, participants were invited to draw a roadmap that shows the different interactions they might have with Police Scotland. Through this activity, young people were invited to think about all the different ways Police Scotland might communicate with them, whether that is for a positive or a negative reason.

As it can sometimes be upsetting or uncomfortable for young people to talk about their lived and living experiences, they were first asked to create an imaginary young person. This helped to depersonalise the activity, as they could focus on the experiences of their imaginary young person, but draw on their own personal experiences if they wanted to. Some participants chose to draw their imaginary person, while others created their person using Lego.

Groups were given the following prompt questions to help with this activity:

1. Where might your young person interact with the police?
2. What happens during the interaction?
3. Is each interaction for a positive, neutral, or negative reason?

After each group had drawn their roadmap, they were asked to look at their roadmap and answer the following questions:

- Think about the feelings or emotions their young person might have been feeling at each point - draw that emotion on their roadmap.
- Pick one interaction from the map. On the back of the piece of paper, ask participants to draw or write what went well and what could be even better about their young person's interaction with Police Scotland.
- How could Police Scotland communicate with the young person before, during and after the interaction, to help that person?

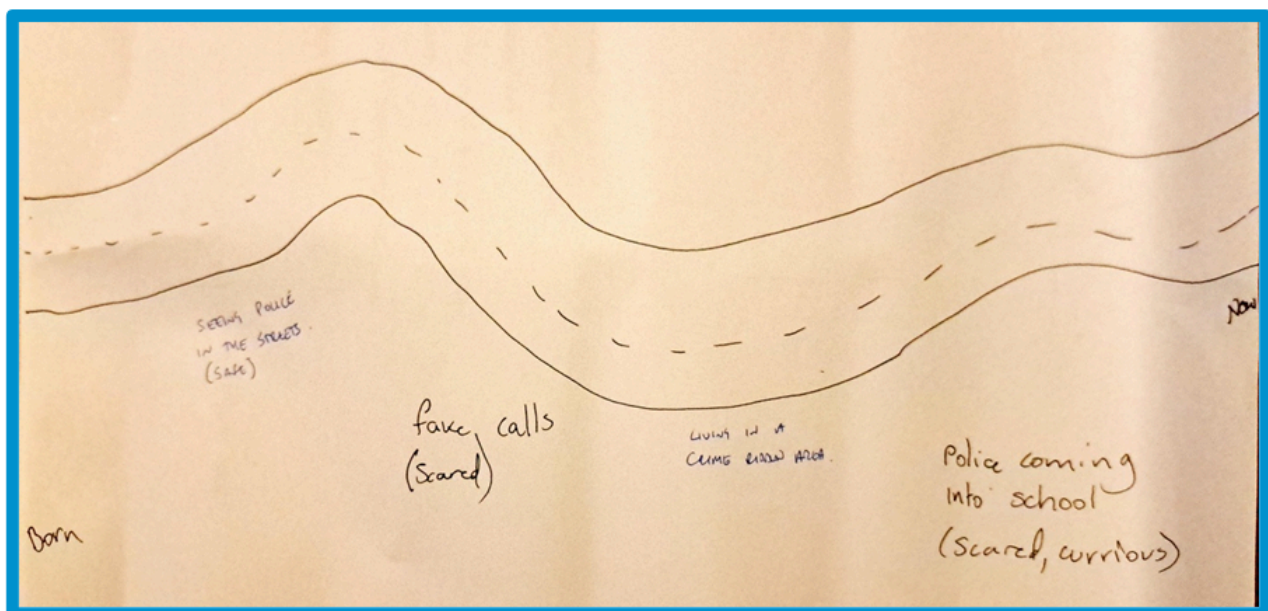
User Journey Maps were drawn in a range of different ways and show a mixture of imagined and real experiences. In some maps, young people shared personal information, and these images have been cropped to protect individual identities.

Negative interactions with Police Scotland

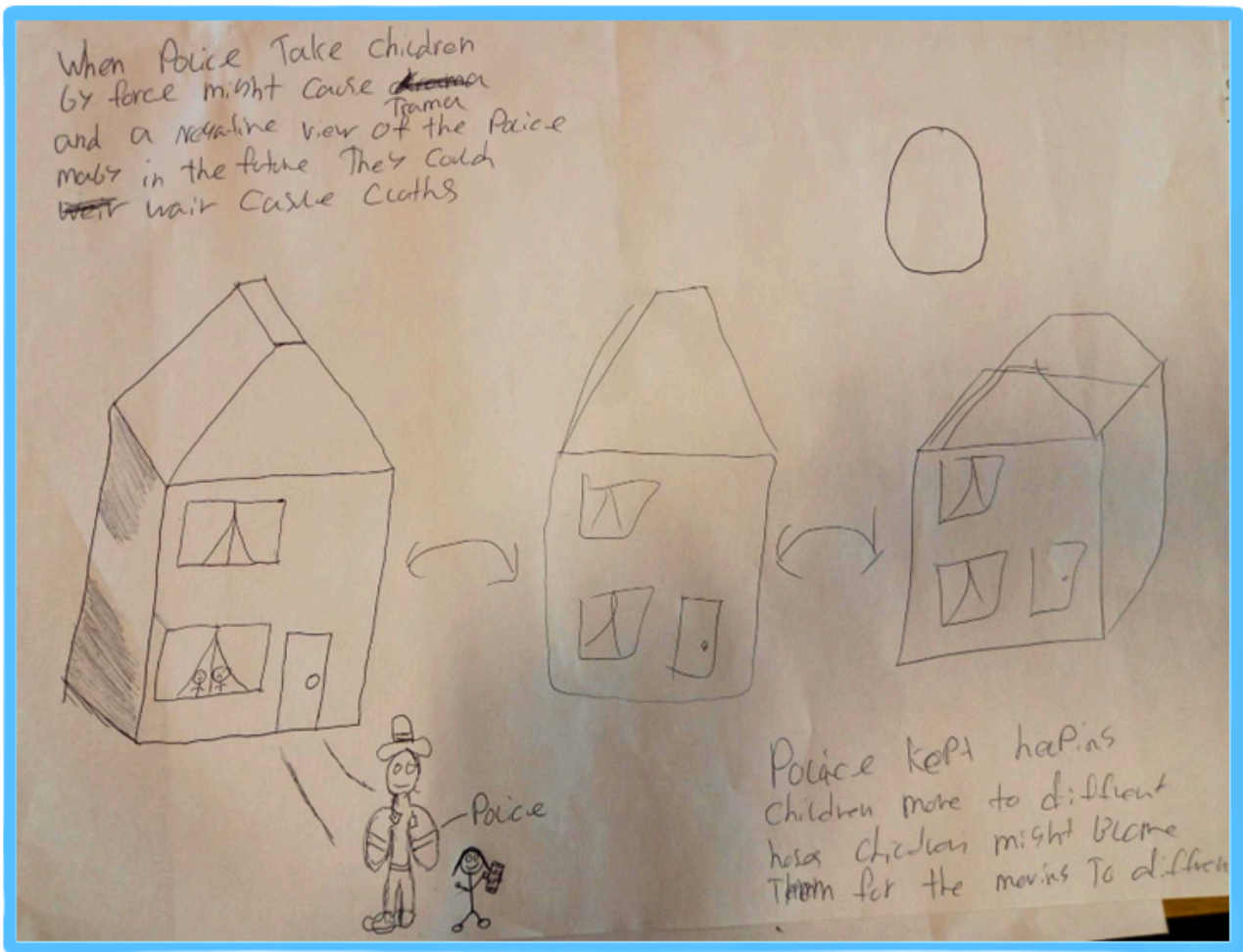
Most of the young people's user journey maps showed some negative interactions.

In these interactions, participants indicated the emotions the young person might be feeling. These emotions included fear, worry, overwhelm, stress, anger, sadness, and shame.

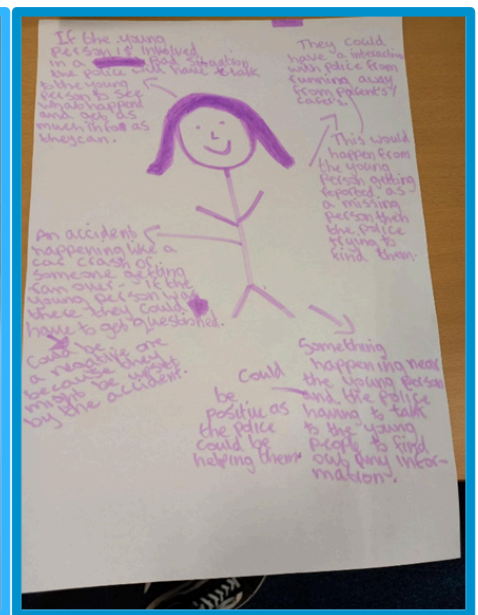
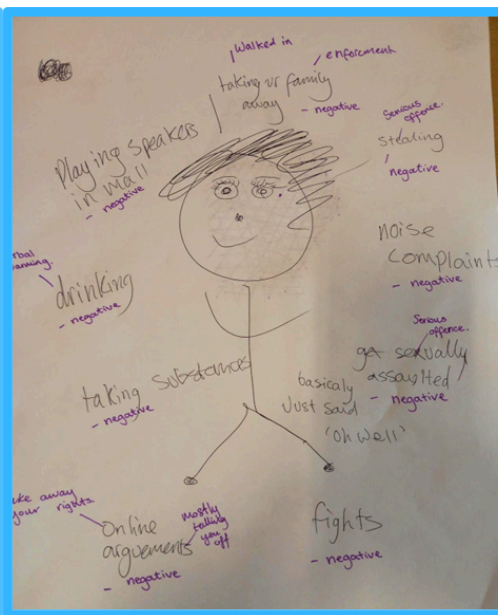
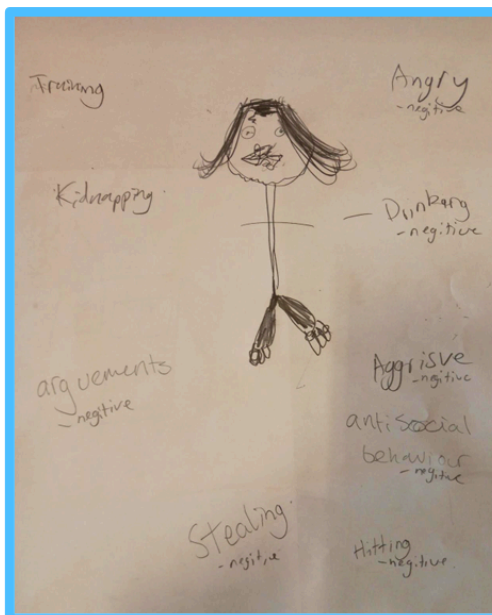
One group drew a map showing a range of both positive and negative interactions. However, when asked to pick one of these interactions to focus on in more detail, they chose to focus on 'Police always in my crime-ridden area', which was an experience they felt was negative. In their notes on this map, the group suggested police officers were 'always shouting', and young people felt stigmatised and ashamed because of where they lived. The group suggested this led to young people feeling scared, fearful of 'ending up in jail', worried, overwhelmed, and that they were always 'having to try and convince people'.



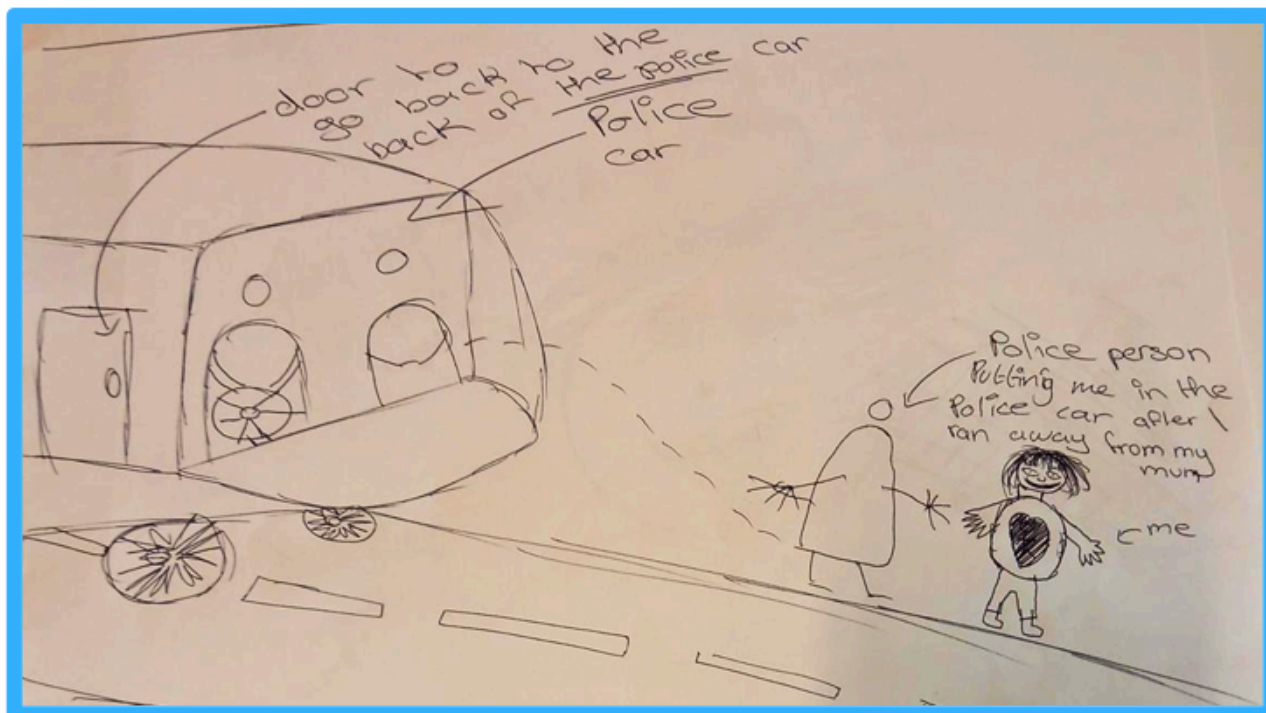
One group suggested that when police officers are involved in taking children into care, it might lead to trauma and create a negative view of the police. This group suggested that if police officers are involved in helping the child to move to different homes, the child might blame the police for this. The group suggested police officers could wear casual clothes when helping children to move homes.



Three groups drew a picture of a person, and wrote examples of interactions with the police around their person. Two of these groups shared examples of interactions which they felt were negative, while the third included examples of both positive and negative interactions. The interactions these young people viewed as negative primarily involved young people being involved in or being victims of crime or anti-social behaviour.



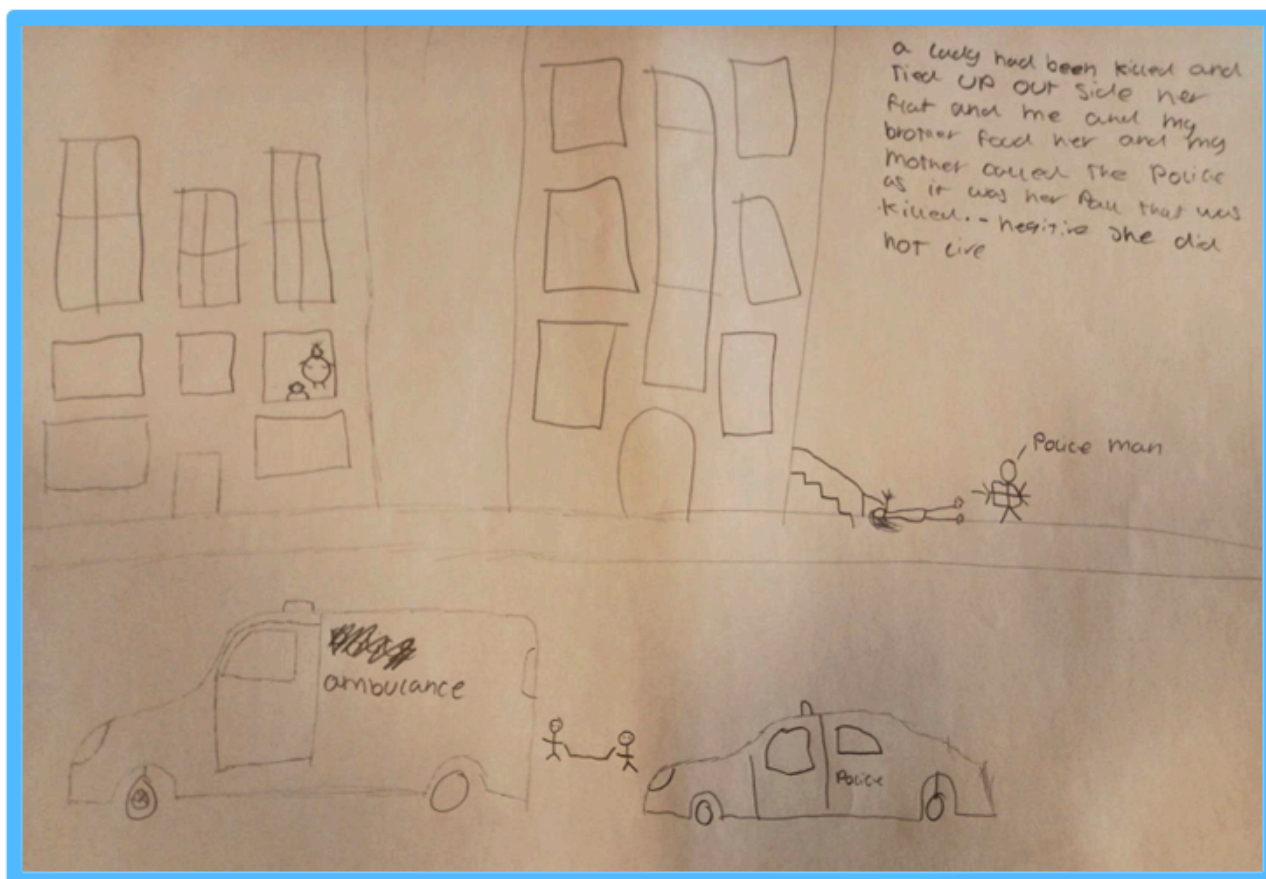
One group drew a map showing a young person's experience when they ran away from home because they wanted to live with their gran instead of the parent they lived with. In their map, they showed a police officer putting the young person in the back of the police car. In another part of the map, they showed the young person being 'lifted' by another police officer after being taken home - in this image, the young person has a sad face. This map also showed a picture of the parent's house, and the parent is described as a 'bad person'. The map shows that the young person tried to run away five times, and they felt they were not listened to when they tried to explain why they had run away. This group's map has been cropped because it includes information which may identify the people involved.



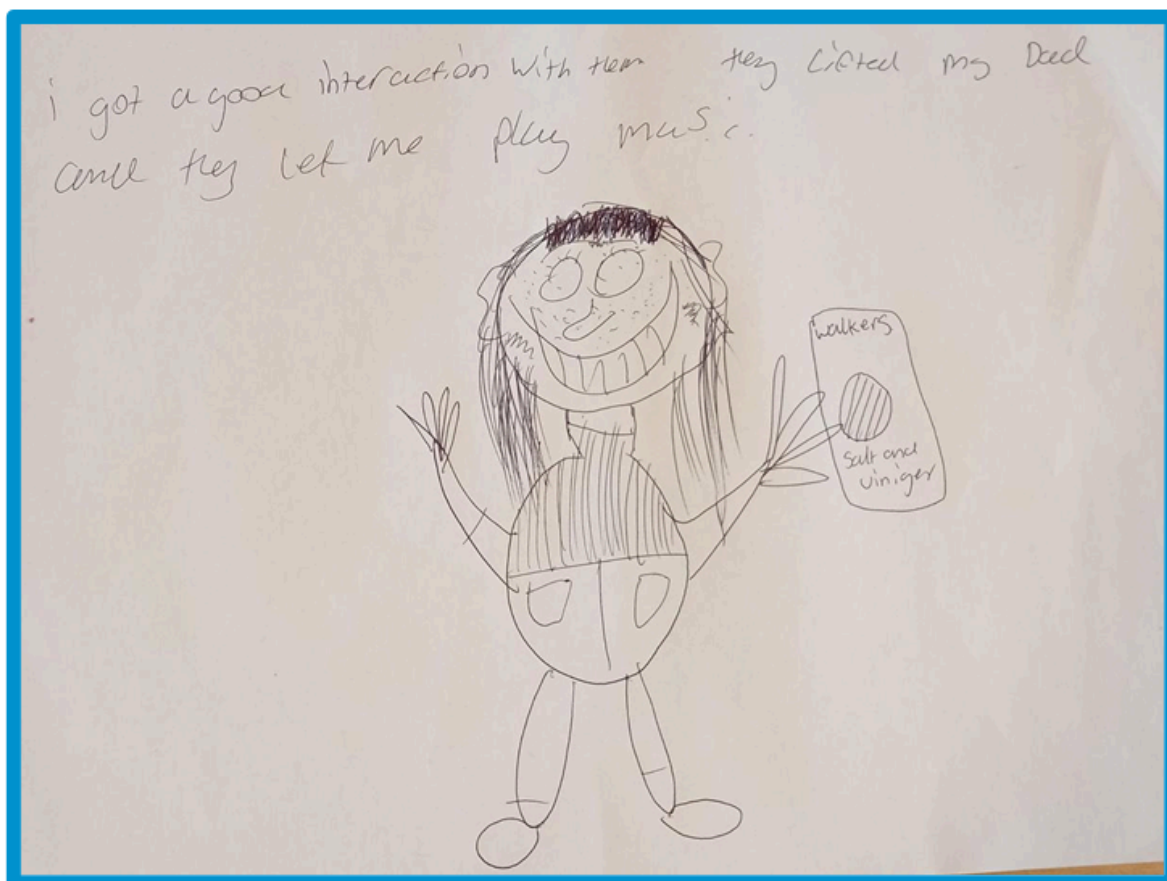
Positive interactions with Police Scotland

Some of the young people's user journey maps showed positive interactions. In these interactions, participants indicated the emotions the young person might be feeling. These emotions included feeling safe and feeling that the police were helping them.

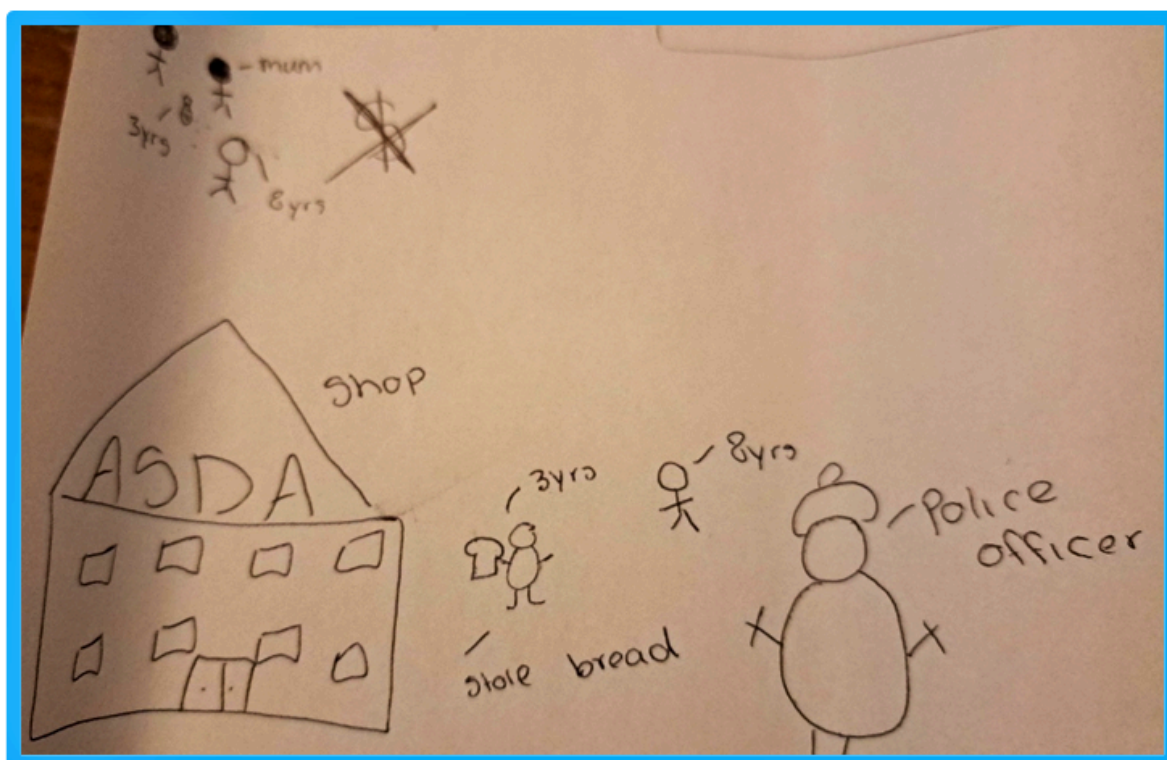
One group drew a map which showed a young person finding a person who had been tied up and attacked. In this map, they showed police officers coming to help. While the group suggested police presence helped them feel safe, they saw this interaction as negative because the person who had been attacked sadly died.



One group shared an interaction in which a young person's dad was arrested. The group suggested this was a positive interaction because the police officers let the young person play music. In their picture, this group showed the young person smiling and holding a bag of crisps.



One group drew a family who had no money, and the three-year old child stole some bread from a supermarket. The group who created this map identified the child might be feeling sad and nervous, but they said that the child was taken home by a police officer which was a good thing.



After drawing their maps, participants were asked to pick one of the interactions they included in their user journey maps, and to draw or write what went well.

Young people told us...

“Being patient”

“Coming to the door in casual clothes”

Participants were also asked to pick one of the interactions included in their user journey maps and to draw or write what could make this interaction even better.

Young people told us...

“Get the foster parents to meet the child first”

“Learn the whole story”

Finally, participants were asked how Police Scotland could communicate with the young person before, during, and after the interaction to help that young person.

Young people told us...

“They can be calm in a stressful situation.”

“They could’ve been gentler, grabbed my arm (I was 5 years old)”

“Be kind”

Developing recommendations for Police Scotland

What we did...

The final activity aimed to develop solutions and suggestions for Police Scotland to take on board when they are communicating with young people and raising awareness of the Corporate Parenting Plan.

Young people spent ten minutes in pairs looking at all the activities they completed through the workshops. They were asked to answer three questions on a worksheet:

1. How could Police Scotland communicate with Care Experienced Young People?
2. How could Police Scotland raise awareness of the Corporate Parenting Plan to young people?
3. What should Police Scotland not do when communicating with young people?

After answering these questions, each pair joined with another to make a group of four. They were given blank cards and were asked to draw or write the actions they identified on their worksheet onto separate pieces of card. They then worked together to organise the cards into a diamond shape by order of priority, with the most important action at the top and least important action at the bottom.

The actions young people identified through this activity have been incorporated into the recommendations outlined on pages 2-3.

How could Police Scotland communicate with Care Experienced Young People?

Young people's responses were grouped into the following themes:

Active listening and empathy

Participants told us they want Police Scotland to listen to them, to understand young people's views and experiences, and to recognise that young people have feelings.

Approach and tone of communication

Participants told us they want police officers to stay calm and be gentle while talking with young people.

Involving trusted adults, such as social workers

Participants told us they want to be communicated with through their social workers or carers, and they want to interact with the same police officers.

Engagement through education or group settings

Participants told us they want to be communicated with through assemblies, groups held in schools, and other clubs and support groups. Some participants suggested Police Scotland could provide activities or games young people could play to help them understand.

Young people told us...

“Actually want to listen and learn to understand that kids do have feelings as well, and just because you’re a ‘adult’ doesn’t mean you can reject what we have to say.”

“Come out and talk to us with our knowledge and to listen and understand.”

“They could sit down and be nice and gentle while talking to you.”

“Assemblies and with information to play games.”

How could Police Scotland raise awareness of the Corporate Parenting Plan to young people?

Young people’s responses were grouped into the following themes:

Digital and media platforms

Participants suggested Police Scotland could raise awareness of the Corporate Parenting Plan to young people through social media platforms, websites, and online adverts.

Care settings

Participants suggested Police Scotland could raise awareness of the Corporate Parenting Plan to young people through their parents or carers, through foster homes, and through other charities who work with Care Experienced Young People.

Schools and education-based settings

Participants suggested Police Scotland could raise awareness of the Corporate Parenting Plan to young people by visiting schools and other education-based settings. Approaches could include teaching about the Corporate Parenting Plan in classes, sending emails to parents/ carers, speaking in assemblies, hosting events, and creating opportunities for young people to speak about their views in group discussions.

Young people told us...

“At assemblies and giving information to play games”

“Speak about our views and our situations in group discussions”

“Reach out to foster homes / parents or carers”

“Post on social media”

What should Police Scotland not do when communicating with young people?

Young people told us that when communicating with young people, Police Scotland should:

Avoid aggressive or intimidating behaviour

Young people told us they want to be treated with consideration. They don't want to be shouted at or feel threatened. Some young people said they won't listen or find it intimidating when adults shout or use aggressive body language. Young people want adults to be honest with them.

Avoid talking down or being disrespectful to young people

Young people told us they want to be treated as equals, not as problems or inferior to police officers. They don't want adults to act like a child to get their attention as it feels awkward.

Avoid pressuring or overwhelming young people

Young people told us they feel uncomfortable and defensive when they are pressured to speak or questioned too intensely. They don't want to be pushed for information or bombarded with too many questions.

Avoid prejudice and be more emotionally aware

Young people told us they don't want Police Scotland to talk about incidents that happened or to mention trauma. They don't want to feel judged for their backgrounds and experiences. They want adults to be aware of how young people might feel when they are being talked to by Police Scotland.

Young people told us...

“[Don't] Speak to us like a kid - speak to us like a human and not someone who is lower than you - don't speak down to us.”

“Don't act like a child to get the attention of a child.”

“Don't push for information”

“[Don't] Bombard them and overwhelm them with too many questions.”

“Not shout, not reject what we have to say, and not make our feelings feel uncared for.”

“They shouldn't be harsh or shout or the young people won't listen.”

“[Don't] Yell at them, and allow them to actually be honest with them.”

Case Studies

Following the focus groups, SYP has created five case studies, influenced by Care Experienced Young People's user journeys and recommendations shared during the focus groups.

These case studies show fictional characters, adapted and inspired by the views shared by young people during the focus groups.

Case study 1: Mia

Mia is 14 and has lived in foster care since age 12. Before entering care, she grew up in a high-crime area where she regularly saw people being arrested, which made her anxious. Her foster family reassures her that police officers help keep people safe, but Mia remains confused and scared. Recently, a conflict with her foster sister led Mia to worry about getting into trouble. When she saw a police car at school, she avoided going inside and spent the day in the park instead.

Challenges

- **Fear and anxiety linked to past experiences:** Mia associates police presence with negative events, which may create emotional barriers.
- **Lack of clear, accessible communication:** Mia didn't know why the police were at school, which made her feel more anxious.
- **Risk of isolation:** Avoiding school could lead to missed education and opportunities for support from school staff.

Police Scotland's Corporate Parenting Plan 2024-27 commits to:

- Refresh our training for our staff to continue raising awareness of our duties as Corporate Parents. We will highlight the appropriate use of language, outlining how our language can impact those with experience of care.
- Through participation and engagement with children, adults and our partners, we will continue work to change the way we talk and write about people with experience of care to show empathy and compassion making them feel respected and understood.
- Continue our work towards becoming a trauma informed and responsive organisation ensuring our staff understand and respond to trauma appropriately.
- Support our officers and staff to ensure they have the knowledge, skills, and confidence to work with children and adults with experience of care in a trauma-informed way.

Recommended Actions

To support Mia in this scenario, the following actions could be taken:

- **Pre-emptive communication:** Police officers could inform schools and foster carers about planned police visits so they can explain the purpose to young people in advance. Police Scotland could provide schools with accessible resources, such as short videos or infographics (co-designed with young people), explaining why police officers engage with schools and how this supports safety.
- **On-site approach:** Police officers could wear casual clothing during non-enforcement visits, and use calm, empathetic language and allow time for questions to reduce anxiety.
- **Follow-up support:** Provide opportunities for Mia to share her feelings in a safe space, supported by a trusted adult such as a teacher, youth worker, or foster parent.

Case study 2: Rachel

Rachel is 14. She lives with her older brother and his girlfriend, and visits her mum at weekends. One weekend, her mum was arrested in the street outside her flat. Rachel was with her, and a police officer took her to sit in the back of a police car. She was scared, but the police officer spoke to her kindly, let her play music, and gave her a bag of crisps, which helped her feel calmer. While they were waiting for her brother to pick her up, the police officer told Rachel about her job, and Rachel is now thinking about applying to be a police officer when she is older.

Challenges

- **Emotional impact of witnessing her mum's arrest:** Seeing her mum being arrested in public could make Rachel feel embarrassed, scared, or confused. This might affect her sense of security and trust in other adults in her life.
- **Stigma and peer relationships:** News of her mum's arrest might spread among peers and the wider community, which may lead to bullying or isolation.
- **Future aspirations:** While her positive interaction with the police officer inspired her future career aspirations, she might face barriers such as low confidence or self-esteem because of the impact of witnessing her mum's arrest. Other family members might also have a negative view of the police.

Police Scotland's Corporate Parenting Plan 2024-27 commits to:

- Support our officers and staff to ensure they have the knowledge, skills, and confidence to work with children and adults with experience of care in a trauma-informed way.
- Support and mentor people with experience of care when applying for a career within Police Scotland.
- Continue to run focused recruitment and awareness events for people who have experience of care.

Recommended Actions

To support Rachel in this scenario, the following actions could be taken:

- **Trauma-informed communication:** Police officers could explain what is happening in simple language, reassure young people, and acknowledge young people's feelings, to avoid overwhelming young people and help them feel safe. Offering comfort items, such as music, snacks, or fidget toys, and allowing time for questions will also help young people to feel safe.
- **Follow-up support:** Provide opportunities for Rachel to share her feelings in a safe space, supported by a trusted adult such as a teacher or youth worker. Connecting Rachel with Police Scotland community engagement programmes, mentoring, and/or events for care experienced young people could help to build her confidence and positive experience of the police, and to find out more about a career in policing.

Case study 3: Archie and James

Archie was 8 when he and his 5-year-old brother James found a woman unconscious and beaten in the street outside their house. They told their foster parent, who called the police. Police officers set up barriers around their house. There was a lot of shouting and sirens, bright flashing lights, and people in uniforms. A police officer took Archie and James to sit in the back of a police van and asked them lots of questions. James was crying, and Archie was scared he would get into trouble. They never learned what happened to the woman.

Challenges

- **Emotional trauma and fear:** Witnessing a violent incident could cause significant distress. Archie and James may experience anxiety or fear of similar events happening again.
- **Uncertainty and lack of closure:** Not knowing what happened to the woman could leave Archie and James feeling confused and unsettled.
- **Relationships and perception of police officers:** The intense police presence and being questioned in a police van could make Archie and James scared or mistrustful of police officers.

Police Scotland's Corporate Parenting Plan 2024-27 commits to:

- Continue our work towards becoming a trauma informed and responsive organisation ensuring our staff understand and respond to trauma appropriately.
- Support our officers and staff to ensure they have the knowledge, skills, and confidence to work with children and adults with experience of care in a trauma-informed way.
- Continuously improve the experience for all children and adults where it is proportionate and necessary for them to be brought into a Police custody setting. We will ensure we adopt a trauma informed approach and always ensure their rights are upheld.

Recommended Actions

To support Archie and James in this scenario, the following actions could be taken:

- **Trauma-informed support:** Instead of sitting in the back of a police van, police officers could ask a trusted adult to take Archie and James to a quiet, safe space away from flashing lights and loud noises. Police officers could use clear, calm, age-appropriate communication to explain to Archie and James what is happening, that they are not in trouble, and what will happen next and why.
- **Follow-up support:** Provide opportunities for Archie and James to share their feelings in a safe space, supported by a trusted adult such as a teacher, youth worker, or foster parent. Although the police might not be able to share what happened to the woman after the incident, this could be explained in an age-appropriate way to Archie and James, so they are not left with uncertainty.
- **Build positive relationships with police officers:** Deliver interactive assemblies or activities for all children and young people at Archie and James's school and invite Archie and James to a community engagement activity or to visit a local police station, to rebuild trust and reduce their fear of the police.

Case study 4: Luca

Luca is 13. He has lived with his aunt and her two children for six weeks. He used to live with his dad in a one-bedroom flat, but he had to move into his aunt's house when his dad got sick. Luca wanted to live with his gran, but no-one asked him, and all the adults seemed worried about his dad, so he didn't tell anyone he didn't want to live with his aunt. When his cousin started bullying him, Luca ran away. He was trying to find his way to his gran's house but was found by the police and taken back to his aunt's house. Luca was angry and tried to explain to the police officer why he didn't want to stay there, but he felt she wasn't listening to him.

Challenges

- **Lack of voice and choice:** Luca was not consulted about where he wanted to live, which can lead to feelings of powerlessness and frustration. This may impact his trust in adults and his sense of autonomy.
- **Emotional distress:** Moving away from his dad and not being able to live with his dad could cause sadness, worry, and insecurity. Being bullied by his cousin creates a hostile living environment, which could exacerbate this.
- **Negative perception of police officers:** Luca felt the police officer wasn't listening to him, which could give him a negative perception of the police and make him reluctant to seek help in the future.

Police Scotland's Corporate Parenting Plan 2024-27 commits to:

- Refresh our training for our staff to continue raising awareness of our duties as Corporate Parents. We will highlight the appropriate use of language, outlining how our language can impact those with experience of care.
- Through participation and engagement with children, adults and our partners, we will continue work to change the way we talk and write about people with experience of care to show empathy and compassion making them feel respected and understood.
- Continue our work towards becoming a trauma informed and responsive organisation ensuring our staff understand and respond to trauma appropriately.
- Support our officers and staff to ensure they have the knowledge, skills, and confidence to work with children and adults with experience of care in a trauma-informed way.

Recommended Actions

To support Luca in this scenario, the following actions could be taken:

- **Trauma-informed support:** Police officers could use empathetic, non-judgemental language when speaking with Luca, and avoid dismissing his concerns. They could reassure him that his views matter and that they will help him to share these with his family or other trusted adults.
- **Meaningfully involve young people in decisions affecting their lives:** Police officers could take time to listen to and hear Luca's concerns, acknowledge his experiences, and support him to share his views and experiences with a trusted adult such as a social worker, teacher, or youth worker.

Case study 5: Kayden

Kayden is 15. He lives with his gran and his little sister, Jemima, who is 10. His gran gave Kayden some money to take Jemima to the local shop to buy some sweets. As they were leaving the shop, an alarm went off and a security guard shouted for them to stop. His sister was carrying an expensive toy that had a security tag on it. Kayden took the toy off his sister and tried to explain it was an accident, but the security guard wouldn't listen and phoned the police. Kayden was scared the police would arrest him and he would be taken away from his sister.

Challenges

- **Fear of criminalisation:** Fear of being arrested could lead to Kayden feeling anxious and increase his mistrust of the police, which might result in him being scared to interact with police officers in the future.
- **Stress about family separation:** Kayden feels responsible for his sister and may feel pressure to protect her. If he feels he isn't being listened to, he might try to take the blame to protect his sister.
- **Emotional distress and shame:** Being accused of theft in public could cause embarrassment, guilt, or anger, and might lead to bullying or isolation by his peers. This might affect his confidence and self-esteem.

Police Scotland's Corporate Parenting Plan 2024-27 commits to:

- Reduce the disproportionate and unnecessary criminalisation of children with experience of care.
- Continuously improve the experience for all children and adults where it is proportionate and necessary for them to be brought into a Police custody setting. We will ensure we adopt a trauma informed approach and always ensure their rights are upheld.
- Improve justice outcomes for children and adults with experience of care ensuring they receive the appropriate support, and are signposted to, and provided with opportunities to access support services.

Recommended Actions

To support Kayden in this scenario, the following actions could be taken:

- **Trauma-informed support:** Police officers could take Kayden and his sister to a quiet, safe space to avoid public speculation. They could ask a trusted adult to support Kayden during the conversation, avoid intimidating behaviour, speak calmly, and actively listen to Kayden to understand what happened. They could also positively acknowledge Kayden's responsibility for his sister, reassure him he is not in trouble, and clearly explain the next steps.
- **Raise awareness of rights:** Take proactive steps to raise awareness of children and young people's rights within the community and help adults such as the security guard understand how to communicate with young people and reduce incidents like this happening again.
- **Follow-up support:** Provide opportunities for Kayden to share his feelings in a safe space, supported by a trusted adult such as a teacher or youth worker. Provide information about local support services to Kayden and his gran.

Conclusion

This project has highlighted the importance of listening to Care Experienced Young People and ensuring their voices shape how Police Scotland communicates and delivers its Corporate Parenting responsibilities. The findings show that young people value clear, empathetic, and trauma-informed communication, and want to be treated as equals. Through engagement with Care Experienced Young People, they have shared practical ideas for improving engagement, from using accessible language and working with trusted adults, to creating opportunities for dialogue between young people and police officers in schools and community settings.

The case studies illustrate real challenges young people face and the impact that positive or negative interactions with police can have on their trust, confidence, and wellbeing. By implementing the recommendations outlined in this report, Police Scotland can strengthen relationships with Care Experienced Young People, reduce unnecessary criminalisation, and ensure that every interaction promotes young people's safety, respect, and understanding.

Children and young people's meaningful participation is not a one-off exercise but their right, as outlined in Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), and should be an ongoing commitment. Continued collaboration with young people and partners will be essential to ensure Police Scotland's Corporate Parenting Plan delivers on its promise to make the lives of Scotland's Care Experienced Young People the best they can be.



**The Scottish Youth Parliament is Registered in Scotland: SC227548,
Scottish Charity Number: SC032662**

Scottish Youth Parliament, Norton Park, 57 Albion Road, Edinburgh, EH7 5QY
www.syp.org.uk @OfficialSYP hello@syp.org.uk