



VOYPIC

VOICE OF
YOUNG PEOPLE
IN CARE



**ANNUAL REPORT
2021 - 2022**



Welcome

Welcome on behalf of the Board of Directors to this year's Annual Report for the financial year ending March 2022.

Over the past financial year we have experienced a return to relative normality after the COVID-19 pandemic and VOYPIC staff have returned to face-to-face interaction with the young people we support. In doing so, the VOYPIC staff team have continued to perform exceptionally, including in addressing the multitude of challenges that the pandemic created for children and young people in care; many of which endure.

Happily, the pandemic has not impacted on VOYPIC's financial sustainability or services to care experienced children and young people.

As we exited the pandemic, we set the organisation's direction for the foreseeable future with the publication of our new Strategic Plan and by breaking ground in the construction of our future home.

Our new headquarters building, 100 GPS, is a fantastic collaborative project between Include Youth, VOYPIC and Vlable Corporate Services that has been years in the making. Once complete, the new building will provide exiting new opportunities for the young people we serve, for collaboration between the organisations, and will provide additional revenue raising potential.

While we put down new roots VOYPIC young people continued to make waves. This influencing included continuation of the language of care campaign, mass participation in a reference group for the Independent Review of Children's Social Care Services, highlighting the significant challenges faced by young people during the pandemic as part of a project supported by Children in Need, giving evidence to the Northern Ireland Assembly Health

Committee, and creating a series of standards for young people's participation in their care planning and review meetings which was launched in Parliament Buildings.

It has been another successful year and, despite the difficult economic outlook that is likely to impact young people hard, one that has provided many positives to build upon.

- Peter McClenaghan, Chair



A message from the Chief Executive

The year ended 31 March 2022 was another hugely challenging year for children and young people living in and leaving care. The ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the community and on vital support services, along with high levels of vacancies within children social care teams, is being felt by the most vulnerable children and young people.

Children and young people have faced a range of difficulties, from disruption to their education or training, limited access to financial and social care support, and low levels of engagement in decision making. This has been reflected in our work over the past year. Young people's needs have increased and the demand for our independent advocacy service has become more critical and demanding. As restrictions eased throughout the course of the year, we were able to resume our face to face group work. This was a much-welcomed return to 'normal'. Children and young people achieved great things working together; from the story book 'Kindness and Superpowers' to the standards for young people's participation in their care planning and review meetings. Young people's voices were heard loud and clear.

During the year we were very grateful that with support from the Community Foundation Northern Ireland and the Hobson Fund, we were able to launch the 'Move on Up' bursary and befriending scheme, providing bursaries and coaching support to young people leaving care, aged 16-25.

In 2021-2022 twenty young people received bursaries totalling £11,000, to help with expenses to continue or return to education, to get help and support for their mental health and wellbeing or to access new opportunities.

Bursaries helped young people buy driving lessons, gym memberships, language classes, bicycles, textbooks, laptops and course fees.

Once again, the VOYPIC team pulled out all the stops to support children and young people across Northern Ireland, actively demonstrating our values every day. I thank each staff member, volunteer, and student on placement for their contribution to our important work.

Together, with children and young people, we will continue to work hard to achieve our goals, as outlined in our new strategic plan 2021-26. By empowering children and young people, we will innovate practice and policy development, and ensure that young people are an integral part of positive change.

As the year draws to a close, we look forward to supporting young people to engage with the Independent Review of Children's Social Care Services. We hope that the review will be the catalyst for

the much-needed change required to how we better support children, young people and families across Northern Ireland.

Children's experience and voice must be at the heart of the review and of the change required to ensure the improved health and wellbeing of children and young people with a lived experience of care.

- Alicia Toal, CEO

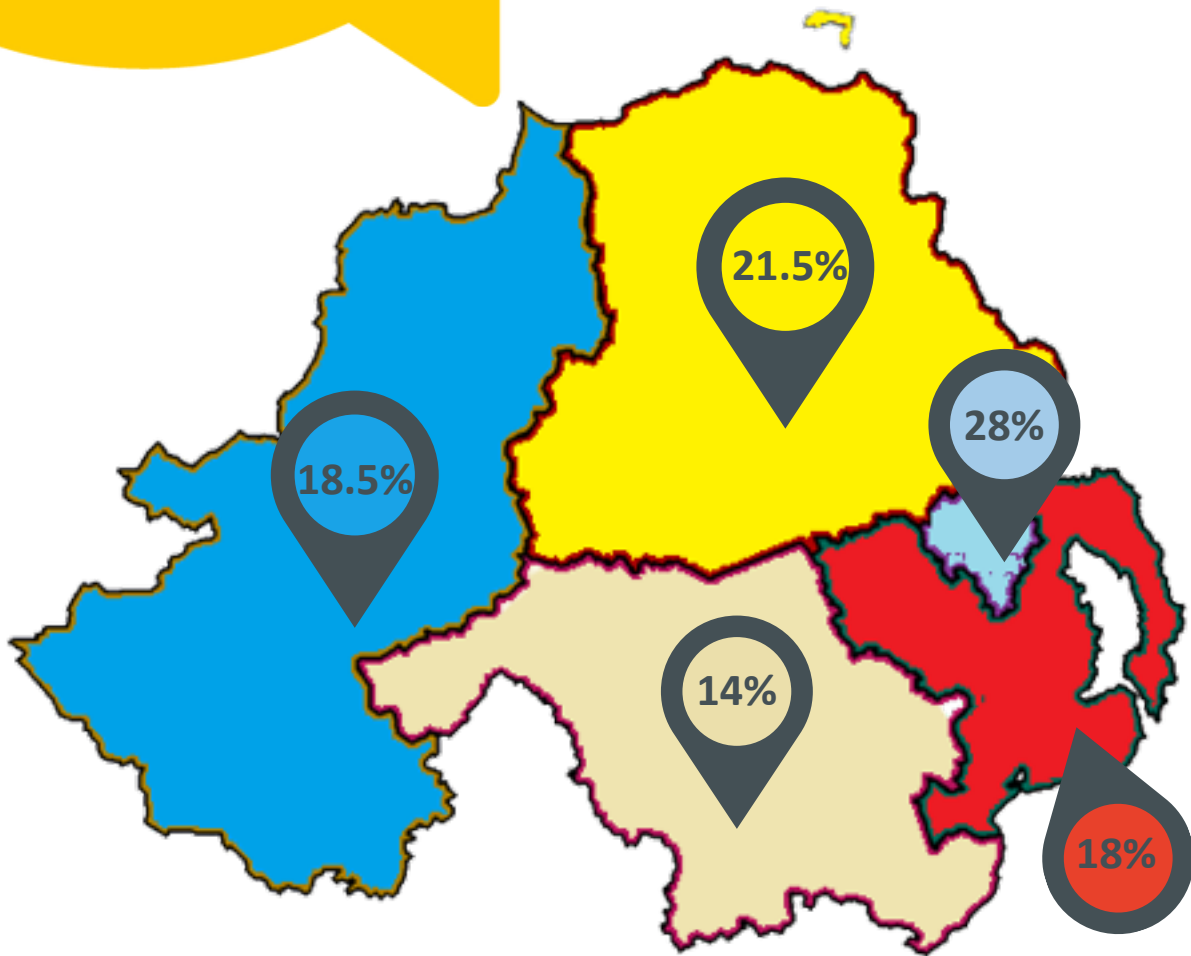


We supported 551 children and young people

224
Male



327
Female



62
11 years old
or under



152

12 - 15
years old



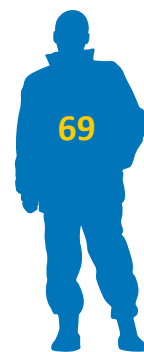
131

16 - 17
years old



137

18 - 20
years old



69

21 years
old or over

Where do they live?



were living in supported accommodation



were in a hospital setting



were living in foster and kinship care



were living in a Secure Care Centre



were living in children's homes



were living in a hostel



were living independently



were homeless



were living at home



were living in a Juvenile Justice Centre

How did we support them?



411 children and young people received advocacy support



24 children and young people received one to one support and coaching



95 children and young people took part in participation forums



59 children and young people took part in group work programmes



37 young people took part in our youth leadership programme



61 children and young people accessed our independent advocacy service at Beechcroft.



Advocacy Support

During the year 220 children and young people were referred to VOYPIC for advocacy support.

In total, we supported 411 children and young people in 476 advocacy cases on 1323 issues.

The top three reasons for new requests from young people requiring advocacy support were:

- to be heard in decision making (Voice)
- help with where they live (Placement)
- support to access their rights and entitlements

Children and young people sought support from the advocacy service to have their voice heard in decisions about their care, including:

- support to understand, influence, or challenge aspects of their care or pathway plan
- support to prepare for and actively participate in on average three review or professional meetings during the year
- support to have their views represented at the Regional Multi Agency Panel for Secure Care
- support for child protection case conferences
- support in family group conferences

Children and young people sought support from the advocacy service to have their voice heard in decisions about where they live, including:

- support moving home (placement move)
- support when at risk of having to move home (placement breakdown)
- support while living somewhere unsuitable
- care leavers who wanted support were moving home (placement move)
- care leavers who wanted support were living somewhere unfit to meet their needs

Children and young people sought support from the advocacy service to have their voice heard in decisions about their rights and entitlements, including:

- support to access their statutory entitlements
- support about their social welfare benefits
- support to access their social work files
- support about seeking asylum

Throughout the year, 88 children and young people received advocacy support to represent their views to the Regional Multi Agency Panel for Secure Care



What did we do?

We organised



304 visiting advocacy sessions in children's homes

13 advocacy activity days, attended by 135 children and young people

We hosted



23 advocacy workshops, attended by 157 children and young people, on a range of issues, including:

- UNCRC Rights
- Support Leaving Care
- Review Meetings
- Accommodation
- Play
- Identity & Voice

We coordinated



12 responses to policy consultations and requests

Our Impact

Advocacy

159 young people, whose advocacy case was closed this year, completed an advocacy evaluation.



137 got the help and support they needed from their advocate

143 were satisfied with the support provided by VOYPIC



139 would use the VOYPIC Advocacy Service again

Our Impact

The Outcome of Advocacy Support



81 said they had influenced decision making



64 were supported to challenge a decision



95 were supported to make their own decision



55 were supported to appeal, complain, or raise a concern



58 were supported to access information

117 said their rights were protected



105 said they know more about their rights

Our Impact

The Impact of Advocacy Support



71 said they have a better quality of life



10 said they are better off financially



39 said they have better health and treatment



12 said they have been protected from harm



53 said they have more access to community services



61 said they have more personal dignity and respect



59 said they have more independence

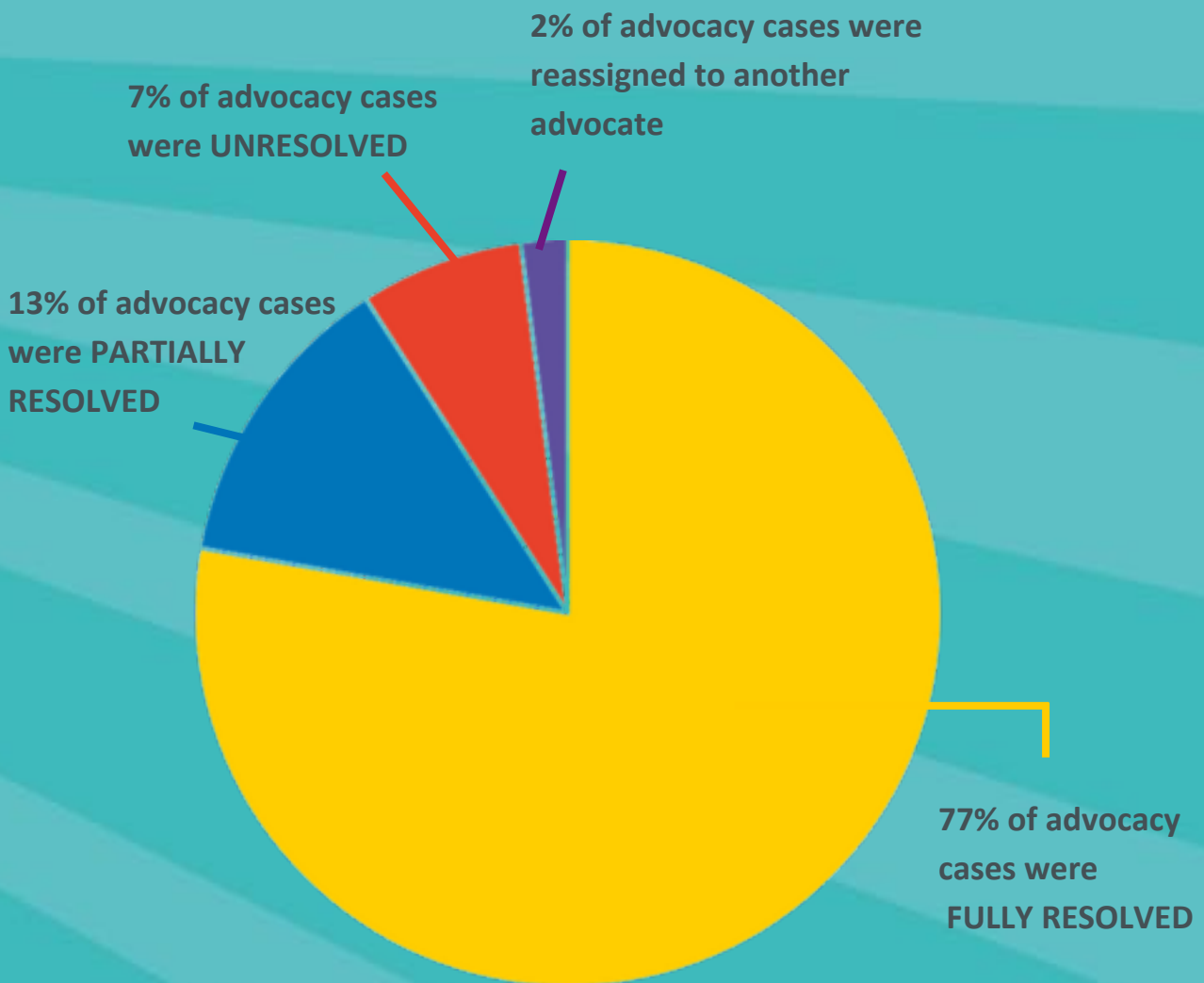


12 said they have more access to their social worker or other support

Our Impact

Advocacy Resolution

Advocates completed an evaluation following closure of each of the 335 advocacy cases.



Young people told us

With help from my advocate...

I go to my meetings myself now.

I am now more able to speak out for myself.

I was able to get my own flat.

I was supported to get my own flat. Now I can live without being annoyed all the time with fights and I don't have my money or my possessions taken off me.

I now have a flat and I get my PIP entitlement.

I got to spend some time at home at Christmas with my family. Didn't get all I wanted but I had to compromise.

I felt supported at my last pathway plan and with their help I applied for PIP and I got it.

I'm going back to school.

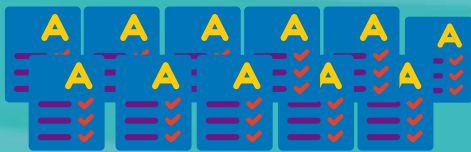
Social worker listened to me.

I got support throughout lockdown, I got support to sort out banking issues and I got help to access a solicitor.

I shared my thoughts and feelings about my relationship with with sister and how it was affecting me negatively in my placement. We did this by making a video because I didn't want to write anything down.

Our Impact

Participation



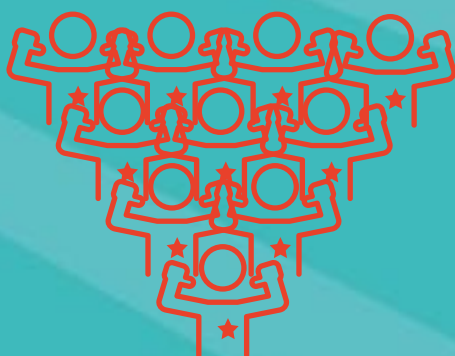
97% of children and young people thought their group work programme was 'great' or 'good'



90% of children and young people thought their group work leaders were 'great' or 'good'



50% of children and young people feel they are better at speaking up after taking part in our group work programmes



100% of young people feel more confident after taking part in our group work programmes

Young people told us

Taking part in group activities...

Really helped me to build my confidence by creating opportunities to speak at. This has helped improve my social anxiety. I'm now not as nervous about speaking in front of people.

In my life VOYPIC was the only consistent thing.

Gave me something to do. I always looked forward to it.

I was able to participate as they were very welcoming.

Different activities meant that there was options for everyone to enjoy.

I get lots of opportunities.

I have never been in a group like this.

The activities were very good.

I met new friends.



1

Empowering Children and Young People

MyVOYPIC Membership Scheme

We continued to grow the membership of MyVOYPIC, open to any young person in Northern Ireland up to 25 years of age with a lived experience of care. The scheme provides a safe space for young people to connect and share their experiences, access information, influence decision-making, and hear about opportunities offered by VOYPIC and our partners across the sector. Young people can join the scheme through our the dedicated webpage – www.MyVOYPIC.org



VOYPIC Participation Forums

We ran Participation Forums for young people with experience of care across all five HSCT areas. While the year started off meeting online, by the summer it was clear that young people needed to meet in person. Therefore, as soon as restrictions allowed, we adapted our practices to bring the young people together in a safe way.

At a VOYPIC Participation Forum, young people are supported to come together, to discuss their care experience with local decision makers, and to work together to explore how we can better care for children and young people.

Empowering Children and Young People



The Belfast Participation Forum had a great day out at Spruce Meadows Farm, and a Halloween workshop, welcoming more new members to the group.

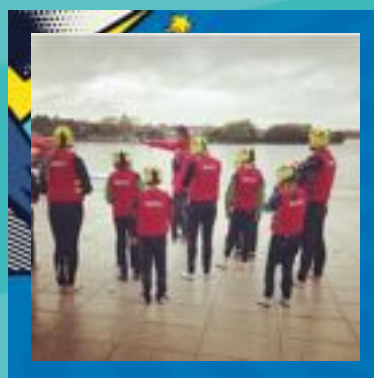


The Northern Participation Forum worked together to build awareness of care in their community.

The Western Participation Forum got outdoors, for a weekly 'walk and talk'. They also created cool new art celebrating children's rights.



The Southern Participation Forum faced their fears, going on an adventure in Lurgan Lakes.



The South Eastern Participation Forum worked on issues around youth justice, talking about their experience within their communities.



Empowering Children and Young People



SAFE – Movie Premier

Three young women– Martha, Ayah and Georgia – worked with a Belfast filmmaker to produce a short film exploring their experiences of coming into care. SAFE received its premier as part of the Belfast Film Festival, before touring festivals across Ireland. The team were invited to join the stars for the premier of Hollywood blockbuster, Belfast, at the Waterfront Hall.

Northern Ireland Youth Assembly

We worked with colleagues at the Northern Ireland Assembly to encourage young people with lived experience of care to apply to be a member of the first ever Northern Ireland Youth Assembly. This included delivering a series of online information sessions, as well as showcasing the opportunity with young people in our Participation Forums.

VOYPIC Young Leader, Maddison, was successful in her application, and took her seat in Stormont.



Empowering Children and Young People



Move On Up

Supported by the Community Foundation Northern Ireland and the Hobson Fund, the Move on Up bursary and befriending scheme provided bursaries and coaching support to care leavers aged 16-25. Twenty young people were awarded bursaries totalling over £8,000, covering expenses such as driving lessons, gym memberships, language classes, purchase of bikes to get to work and education resources, including textbooks, laptops and course fees.

Olivia's Story

Olivia received a £1000 bursary. With this funding, she was able to get essential textbooks for the course she was studying. She was also able to get a printer, desk and chair to work on which helped her focus and remain motivated to work. Olivia is working towards a qualification in English, and used some of the money to get support from a tutor.

John got offered a new job, but it was further from his home, and the early start meant there was no public transport available to get him to work. With a Move On Up bursary, he was able to buy an electric bike, helmet, and all-weather clothing, allowing him to take up his new position.

John's Story

2

Innovating Through Participation and Co-Production

My Meeting: Young People's Standards for Participation in Review Meetings

With support from the Children in Need Next Steps programme, a group of young people worked together to gather their peers' experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic. This work highlighted the significant challenges faced by young people during this time, especially the impact on their right to be involved in decisions affecting their lives.

To improve young people's involvement in decision making, the group created a series of standards for young people's participation in their care planning and review meetings. These twelve standards, which are available on the VOYPIC website, help to make meetings more accessible for young people. The standards were launched on 16



February in the Long Gallery, Parliament Buildings, by Colm Gildernew MLA, Chair of the Committee for Health. The resource was welcomed by all members of the Committee and the Commissioner for Children and Young People.

www.voypic.org/standards

Innovating Through Participation and Co-Production



Time to Care – Corporate Family Training

VOYPIC's Engagement Ambassadors designed and delivered a programme of awareness raising and support to non-HSC professionals to promote a greater understanding of care and their role as a member of the Corporate Family.

These sessions attracted over 100 participants, and were well received, with all participants reporting they developed a better understanding of care through the training. A further session was delivered to all Year 4 students in Stranmillis University College.



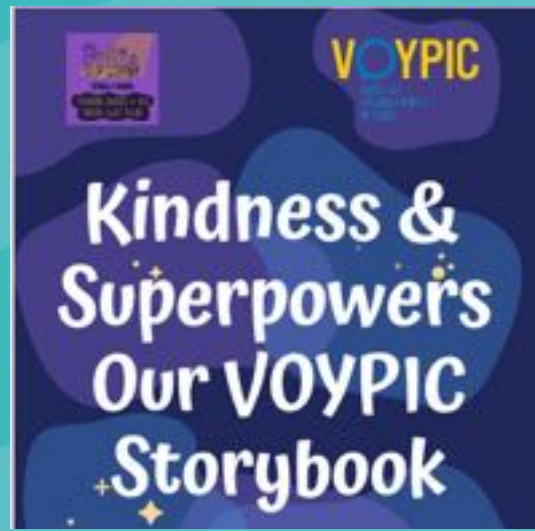
Act for Change Together Festival

We participated in the youth-led Act for Change Together Festival. A VOYPIC Young Leader was a member of the organising committee for the festival, and hosted a number of events over the week.



Three young people from VOYPIC came together with care experienced staff to create a podcast, exploring the stigma faced by young people with experience of care in education. This podcast, available on the VOYPIC website, confronts the negative opinions held by some of young people in care, and seeks to 'see beyond the statistics' that young people in care don't succeed in school. The podcast is one of a series created as part of the festival. www.actforchangetogether.org.uk

Innovating Through Participation and Co-Production



Young Authors - Kindness and Superpowers

We launched a new story book, 'Kindness and Superpowers', to help raise awareness of the care experience across Northern Ireland.

Written by young children, in partnership with local story-telling organisation, Still I Rise, as their first social action project, it tells the story of Maya, a young girl living in care, and her mission to spread kindness through simple acts during her day.



The VOYPIC Manifestival

Members of the MyVOYPIC scheme came together at Ballymena Showgrounds for our first large scale event following the COVID-19 lockdowns. The Manifestival gave young people an opportunity to meet up and socialise, while exploring key themes for a manifesto for change.



Innovating Through Participation and Co-Production



The VOYPIC Manifesto, co-designed by young people in the Northern area, was structured in three zones:

Ideas Zone

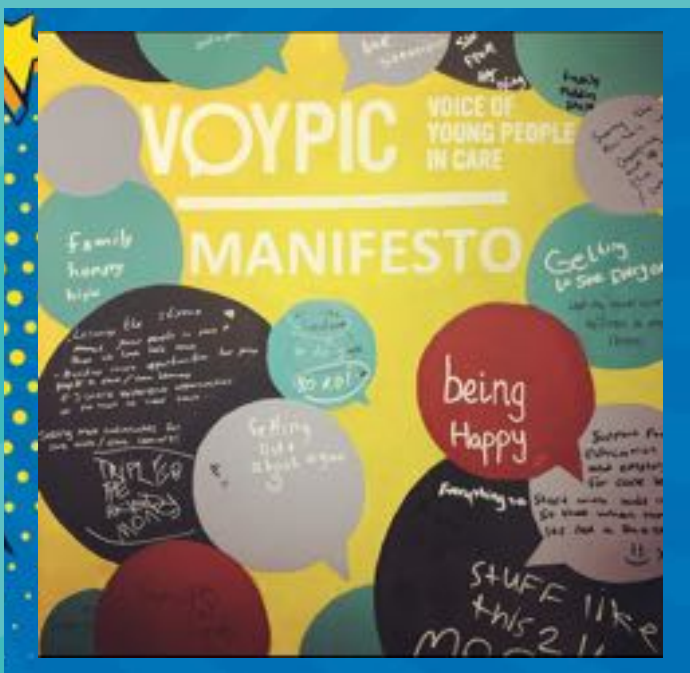
Young people participated in a series of engaging activities, aimed at gathering their ideas and opinions on a range of pertinent issues. This includes issues related to care (eg. Review Meetings, Social Work Practice, etc), education, housing, policing and justice, and health and wellbeing. Information gathered on the day is helping to inform the initial stages in the development of a VOYPIC Manifesto for Change. RQIA also attended the event, gathering information on the involvement of young people in inspections of children's homes.

Young people had great fun with a range of giant inflatable games and obstacle courses, as well as a petting farm and other lawn games.

Fun Zone

Food Zone

We had different food trucks, offering hot food, sweet treats and ice-creams, to keep everyone full of energy!



3

Creating Change

Adoption and Children Bill

We supported young people with lived experience of care to engage with the NI Assembly Health Committee during their consideration of the Adoption and Children Bill. The young people raised their concerns about key aspects of the provisions of the Bill, and made suggestions for how it could be strengthened, to better support young people in and leaving care. The

young people were in the Public Gallery in Stormont for the Final Stage of the Bill, where amendments based on their suggestions were made.



Tracing the Review – Youth Justice



In partnership with Children's Law Centre, NIACRO and Include Youth, we commissioned a study into progress made on the Youth Justice Review 2011. The report was launched at Stormont in November, and supported calls for urgent action related to key recommendations made by the Review ten years earlier.

Creating Change



Little Voices, Big Decision – PANDA Project

Along with Queen’s University Belfast, we hosted an online learning event as part of our involvement in the PANDA Project, a European project that seeks to promote the participation of young children (aged 12 years old and under) in decision making in child welfare services. Little Voices, Big Decisions attracted an audience of over 60, with local colleagues being joined by those from Norway, Belgium and Spain. Jenny and Nicola, VOYPIC Youth Rights Workers, shared their experience of supporting younger children to engage in decisions about their care.

Informing Policy

We worked with young people to ensure their voices were heard in twelve projects and public consultations, informing government policy, legislation and guidance. This included the proposed extensions of temporary modifications to Children’s Social Care Regulations during the COVID-19 pandemic (Department of Health), the development of an Anti-Poverty Strategy (Department for Communities), the use of Spit and Bite Guards (PSNI), the development of a Strategic Framework for Youth Justice (Department of Justice), and proposals for a new Regional Model of Service for Separated and Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Young People.

Independent Review of Children’s Social Care Services

In January, the Health Minister announced an Independent Review of Children’s Social Care Services in Northern Ireland. The Review is led by Professor Ray Jones, supported by an Expert Advisory Panel. To ensure the voice of young people is central to the process, VOYPIC is establishing an Experts By Experience Reference Group, to directly inform the Panel over the next 18 months.

4

Growth and Stability

Our New Home - Redevelopment of 100 Great Patrick Street

In January, work began to convert a former industrial warehouse at 100 Great Patrick Street into our new head office and dedicated youth space- 100GPS. Located in Belfast's iconic Cathedral Quarter, the new facility will be home to VOYPIC, Include Youth and our joint social enterprise, Viable Corporate Services.

The building has been designed in partnership with young people we work with, and will feature a range of specialist youth spaces, including a teaching kitchen, multi-media suite and sensory room.



The redevelopment was made possible through the support of a range of funders, including the Department for Communities, Department of Health, Department for the Economy, The Tudor Trust, Garfield Weston Foundation, The Clothworkers Foundation, Ulster Garden Villages, Groundwork, Community Finance Ireland, and Atlantic Philanthropies.

Construction started in January 2022 and is will be complete by Autumn 2022.

Growth and Stability



Welcome to VOYPIC - Our New Film

Over the past few years there have been many changes, both in VOYPIC and in the world around us. Working in partnership with young people, we produced a short film to remind everyone what VOYPIC is all about, and how we work to support children and young people with lived experience of care. The film tells the stories of five young people, and how VOYPIC helps them with their care journey, through advocacy, participation, policy and campaigning. Shot across Belfast, the film features young people and staff from across the organisation.



Watch the film on the VOYPIC website homepage

www.voypic.org

Growth and Stability

Volunteering at VOYPIC

To help us better support young adults leaving care, we launched a volunteer coaching and mentoring scheme this year, supported by the National Lottery Community Fund and The Community Foundation. Young people who benefited from the support of a volunteer mentor included Paul from Belfast, and Caitlin from Strabane.

Paul

'I find it lonely and isolating living on my own, and I get a bit anxious about trying new things. My volunteer mentor helps me get out more, going to the gym, trying new things. He's helping me work towards getting on a course or finding something to do.'

'Sometimes I felt stressed throughout the process of completing my nail tech course, but my mentor was there to be a listening ear and to help me overcome any problems. She helped to make me feel accomplished. She was my cheerleader, and was always there cheering me on from the sidelines.'

Caitlin

VOYPIC Supporters

We'd like to say a huge **THANK YOU** to everyone who has supported our work over the past year. Thanks to everyone who donated online and who supported us through Amazon Smile. Special thank to our friends at All State and the Barber Collective, Ballymena. In the run up to Christmas, we were overwhelmed by your generosity, donating gifts and vouchers for young people in and leaving care, through our Be a VOYPIC Elf campaign. Thank You!



CARE DAY

Our seventh annual CARE DAY took place on Friday 18 February, under the theme

Together we create community



Conversations with the Care Community

Alongside our partners in the Five Nations One Voice alliance, we worked with young people across the UK and Ireland to co-produce an online event, providing space for young people to come together and explore key issues related to their care experience. Our online village focused on four key areas: School (education), Sports Centre (sport and hobbies), Library (accessing information), and the Bridge (leaving care). Discussions in each space were hosted by young people from the five organisations, and a plenary discussion exploring the issues raised was recorded and published as a podcast.



Listen again at www.voypic.org/careday

CARE DAY

Care Day- Coming Together

While the COVID-19 pandemic meant that we weren't able to get together for one big, regional event, the VOYPIC team worked with young people to deliver a series of local events to mark Care Day 22. Each event focused on creating community together, through a range of exciting activities.



Northern Area - Together we create community, at the movies!

In the Northern area, young people created community together at the movies- a special gala screening of Sing 2 at Antrim Omniplex, with goodie bags from Bob and Bert's.

Belfast & South Eastern Areas - Together we create community, with fun and games!

Young people in the Belfast and South Eastern areas came together to create community through fun and games! Over two sessions, young people took part in a range of fun activities and challenges, had a football tournament, and got up close and personal with some creepy spiders and snakes!



CARE DAY



Southern Area - Together we create community, by going on an adventure!

Young people in the Southern created community by going on an adventure. Splat Attack in Lurgan was the venue for a morning filled with fun and adventure, as teams faced off in a low-impact paintballing challenge around the course.

Western Area - Together we create community, by jumping in!

In the Western area, young people created community by jumping in! Young people took on the challenge of Xtreme Jump Trampoline Centre, followed by food, fun and games.



Over the course of Care Day 22, 188 young people took part in a VOYPIC event!

Care Day- Where You Are

As many were still unable to join local events, we again produced a Care Day pack, allowing young people and the adults that support them to mark Care Day wherever they were.



The packs featured newly designed posters, bunting, balloons, stickers and fun craft activities, as well as Madlug Activity Books, and were distributed to all children's homes and supported living accommodations.

Financial Year

We would like to acknowledge and thank all our funders and donors who have supported VOYPIC throughout this last year. Without this support it would not be possible to deliver such a range of services and support to care experienced children and young people.

Total Income: £1,110,662

Income



£773,425
**Health & Social
Care Board**

£157,934
**National Lottery
Community Fund**

£54,666
**Belfast
HSCT**

£51,179
**Department
of Health**

£30,000
**Children in
Need**

£9,000
**DoH Training
Support**

£19,196
Donations

£13,386
**Other Restricted
Income**

£1,876
**Unrestricted
Income**

Expenditure

£62,255
Staff Costs

£77,345
Property
Costs

£49,140
Activity Costs

£882,287
Salaries

**Total
expenditure
£1,174,490**

£103,463
Other
Fixed Costs



Funders

Health and Social Care Board

Act for Change

Belfast Health & Social Care Trust

The National Lottery Community Fund

Children in Need Next Steps Programme

The Community Foundation NI

Department of Health

PHA Clear Blue

Esmee Fairbairn Foundation

Erasmus +

Donations received from AllState NI, and online through Amazon Smile and Just Giving.

Staff List

Aine Mulholland

Aisling Meenan

Alicia Toal

Aoife Clarke

Brenda Kilpatrick

Briega O'Connor

Caoimhe Coyle

Caroline Hunter

Christina Howarth

Courtney McBride

Deirdre McMahon

Debroagh Webb

Donna O'Kane

Fiona Morrison

Gavin Canning

Iain Black

Jennifer Wright

Jo Irvine

Karen Stirling

Lee Kane

Margaret Guy

Nicola McCreedy


Niamh McLoughlin

Nyree Mulholland

Roisin McComb

Seamus Kealey

Trevor McDaid



9-11 Botanic Avenue
Belfast
BT7 1JG

1st Floor
6 Garfield Place
Ballymena
BT43 6EH

9 Queen Street
Derry-Londonderry
BT48 7EG

Flat 12
Mount Zion House
Edward Street
Lurgan
BT66 6DB

www.voypic.org



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