

The logo for VOYPIC, featuring the letters 'VOYPIC' in a bold, sans-serif font. The 'V' and 'P' are yellow, while the 'O', 'Y', and 'I' are blue. The 'O' is stylized as a speech bubble.

VOICE OF  
YOUNG PEOPLE  
IN CARE

A young man with light brown, wavy hair is smiling broadly, looking towards the camera. He is wearing a dark grey and blue striped hoodie and is sitting on a rocky ledge. The background is a solid blue color with a pattern of small, glowing yellow squares.

**ANNUAL REPORT  
2024 - 2025**

# Welcome

Welcome, on behalf of the Board of Directors, to this year's Annual Report for the financial year ending April 2025.

This year VOYPIC supported 25% more young people than last year, continuing to deliver advocacy and participation services that make a real difference in their lives.

Our work reached across Northern Ireland, supporting young people in a wide range of settings, from children's homes and foster care to supported accommodation and independent living.

We also launched Leading Change, our new Youth Leadership Programme supported by The National Lottery Community Fund.

This initiative recruited young leaders to complete bespoke training and work towards an Open College Network Award in Youth Leadership. Investing in these young leaders is an investment in VOYPIC's future, as our Young Reps continue to play a vital role in shaping our strategic direction.

Our Young Reps are the voice of VOYPIC. They represented care-experienced young people at events, workshops, and policy discussions, including with elected representatives at the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Advocacy remains at the heart of what we do. Through the Department of Health SPPG-funded Independent Advocacy Service, we resolved 715 advocacy issues. Of those who evaluated our service, 96% felt listened to, 92% said they influenced decision-making, and 98% would use VOYPIC Advocacy again.

Our participation programmes were equally strong, with 304 children and young people taking part in programmes that built skills in speaking up, decision-making, and leadership.

The VOYPIC Board continued to focus on the organisation's long-term sustainability and best practice in governance. This year, we embedded the learnings from last year's proactive, externally facilitated governance health check and began an organisational review to ensure VOYPIC is well-positioned to meet the needs of the young people we serve.

None of this would be possible without the commitment of our staff and the support of our funders. We remain deeply grateful to all who enable VOYPIC to empower children and young people to influence decisions and strive for personal and societal change.

**- Peter McClenaghan, Chair**



# Message from the Chief Executive

I am delighted to present VOYPIC's annual report for 2024-25. The report demonstrates our ongoing commitment to promoting the rights and voice of children living in and leaving care, despite the challenging environment in which we are all working.

Day in and day out, our independent advocates work tirelessly to find resolution to the issues raised by children and young people. Given the pressures across children's services, both financially and within the workforce, achieving resolution is neither quick nor easy.

This year we noted a change in the top three reasons why young people need independent advocacy support. Support with placements and for family time are still within the three priorities for children under 15 years of age, in all care settings. However, support for education is now also in the top three reasons for referral to the service. For young people aged 16+, education/training is in the top five reasons for requesting independent advocacy support.

During the year, we developed our independent advocacy offer by piloting a project to support young people involved in child protection case conferences in the northern area.

With support from the National Lottery Community Fund, we also provided advocacy support to care leavers, aged 21+, who no longer had access to statutory support services. These young adults received help with housing, finance, and accessing community services.

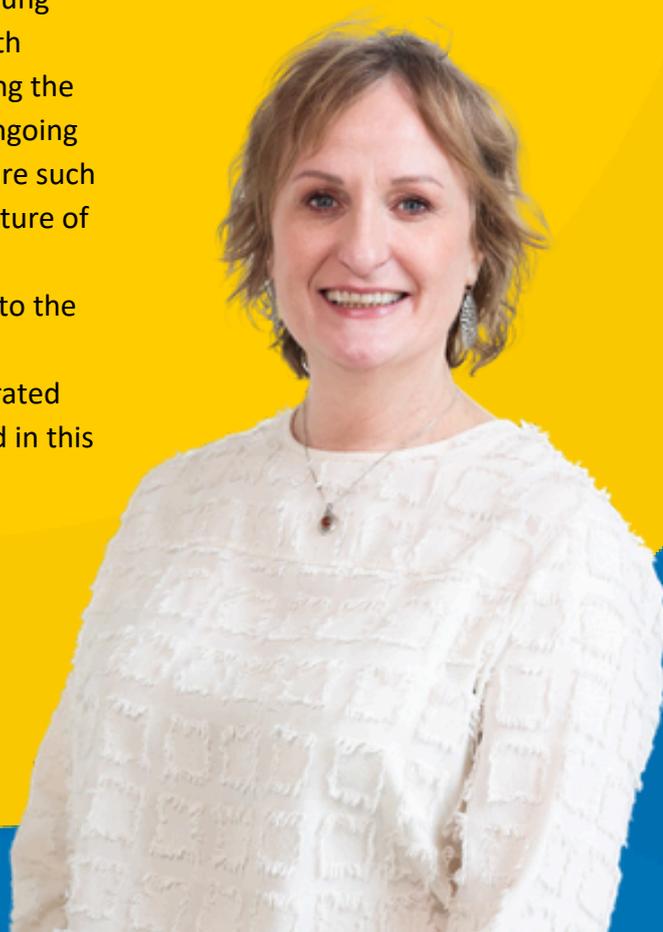
The Engagement and Policy Team have continued to engage with decision and policy makers, at home and further afield, to ensure the voice of children and young people with lived experience of care is heard. For example, in partnership with NICCY, two young people attended the European Network of Young Advisors (ENYA) Forum in Bratislava, Slovakia and worked with peers from across Europe to develop a series of policy calls for decision makers in the various jurisdictions. The team also began supporting young people to develop their manifesto for change.

Participation workers provided lots of opportunities for young people to come together, share experiences, and meet with decision makers. A particular focus this year was developing the youth leadership programme 'Leading Change', and the ongoing support for the VOYPIC Young Reps. These young people are such passionate advocates for their peers. It's safe to say the future of VOYPIC is in good hands!

Finally, I would like to extend my thanks and appreciation to the incredible team of staff and volunteers at VOYPIC for the dedication, persistence, empathy, and creativity demonstrated throughout the year. Without you, the great work outlined in this report would not be possible.

Thank you.

**- Alicia Toal, Chief Executive**



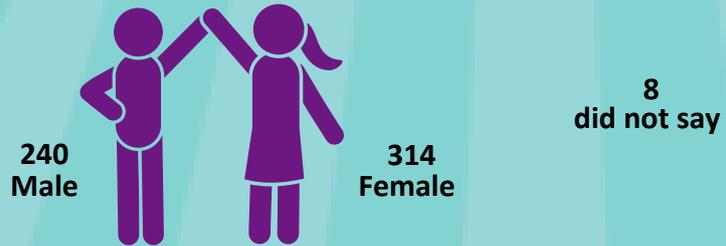
This year we worked with

**777**

children & young  
people

Through our Independent Advocacy and Participation services, we supported 620 children and young people, with 157 attending activity days.

Of the 620 in receipt of services:



**444** children and young people received advocacy support through DoH SPPG funded Independent Advocacy

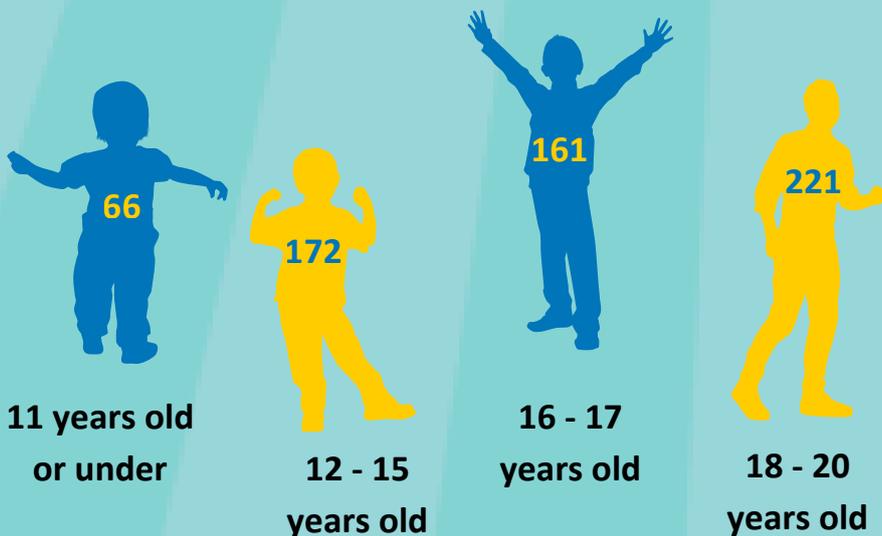
**132** children and young people took part in participation forums

**55** children and young people accessed our independent advocacy service at Beechcroft

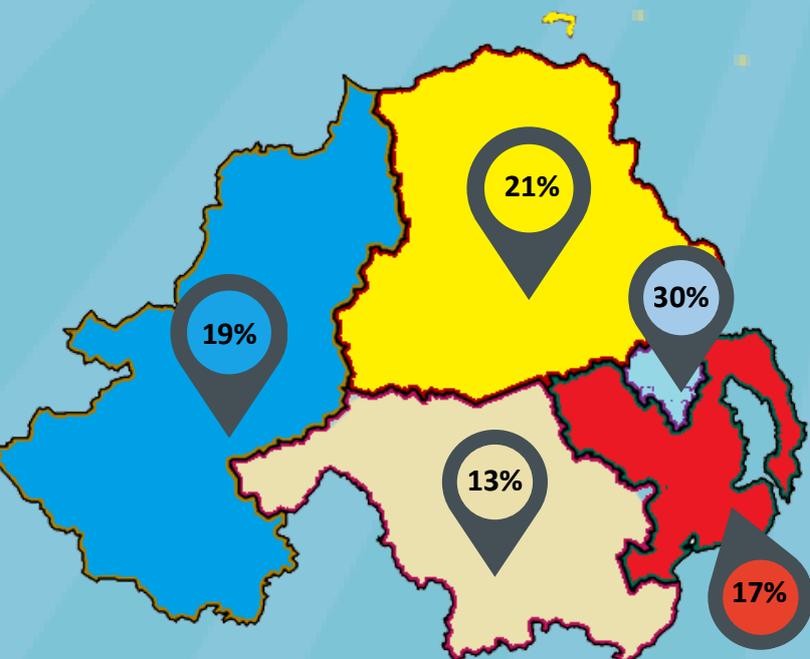
**52** young people received support through the Leading Change programme

**35** young people received mentoring and coaching support

**26** young people received support through our Speak Up Independent Advocacy Service



# Where do they live?



\* on referral to VOYPIC services



children and young people lived in children's homes



children and young people lived with foster carers



young people lived independently



young people lived with extended family (kinship care)



children and young people were in a hospital setting



young people lived in supported accommodation



children and young people lived at home with a parent



young people were homeless



young people were in Lakewood Secure Care Centre



young people were living in hostels



young people were living in supported lodgings



young people were in JJC/prison



young people were living with former foster carers in a GEMS arrangement



young people were living outside Northern Ireland

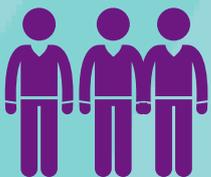
Who else  
did we  
reach?



83 young people took part in focus groups to inform development of the manifesto



196 children and young people were members of MyVOYPIC



255 carer & professional workshops/info sharing sessions



174 students at workshops and presentations



104 children and young people completed a survey to inform development of a new manifesto



300 children and young people took part in CARE DAY events

## Independent Advocacy Support

VOYPIC delivers the Independent Advocacy Services for Children in Care and Care Leavers, funded by the Department of Health Strategic Planning and Performance Group (SPPG).

**For children and young people living in care or receiving leaving and after care services**

444 children and young people

843 reasons for referral

715 advocacy issues resolved

353 visiting advocacy session

19 activity days, with 153 children and young people attending

24 advocacy workshops, with 258 children and young people attending

### Advocacy Support for Children in Children's Homes

We supported 122 children and young people living in children's homes

The most common for referral was in relation to where they live (placement moves)

- *"I was worried about being bullied by another young person in the house. My advocate helped me tell the staff how I was feeling and now the staff stay with me when the other person is about"*
- *"I was able to have my wishes and feelings about moving into a children's home read out at my meeting. I was allowed to stay with my Granny."*
- *"I was able to move from a children's home that was far away from my family to one that was closer to them."*



### Advocacy Support for Children Living with Foster Families

We supported 112 children and young people living with foster carers

The most common reason for referral was in relation to family time (contact with family).

- *"Knowing I can stay with my foster carer has helped me to feel safer."*
- *"My life story was explained to me by my social worker and now I understand why I can't live with Mum."*
- *"My advocate helped us achieve our goal of seeing our Judge and to keep our time with mum. (He also took us out for ice cream, which was pretty cool.)"*



## Independent Advocacy Support

### **Advocacy Support for Children Living with Extended Family (Kinship Care)**

We supported 89 children and young people living with extended family (kinship care). The most common reason for referral was in relation to family time (contact with family).

- *“I was able to let my social worker know about when I wished to see my family and also how I felt on my move to nanny’s. Also, I got a tutor which has helped me a lot.”*
- *“I was able to speak up at my meeting and talk more openly to my Granny about how I was feeling.”*
- *“I can see my friends more. I am in the school where I am happy. Happy to live with my sisters”*

### **Advocacy Support for Care Experienced Young Adults**

We supported 257 care experienced young adults aged 16 years old and over. The most common reason for referral was in relation to where they live (placement moves), followed by financial support and leaving care planning.

- *“I applied to do a course at NWRC but retracted my application as I thought I had to pay the fees. I was also told by my social worker that he was closing me as I was 21. My advocate then contacted 16+ and a pathway plan was convened to explore my educational options. As a result, I am not closing to 16+ as I am remaining in education doing a foundation degree in hospitality, tourism and events management and my student finances have been sorted out.”*
- *“I need helped with my university application, reimbursements for flights and getting new permanent PA and my advocate helped me get all these things.”*
- *“I felt that i had great support at meetings and making sure that my wishes and concerns were heard. I was to move into my accommodation and had waited a very long time on this – My advocate then found out that my name had been taken of the list without my knowledge and she supported me to challenge this and I was then able to move into my supported accommodation.”*

### **Advocacy Support - Secure Care**

We supported 40 young people to participate in decisions taken about them by the Regional Multi-Agency Panel for Admission to Secure Care.

- *“I was in secure and was in bad place. They really helped me get out and become a better person”*
- *“My voice was represented through secure panel.”*
- *“My day to move to secure was changed and really upset me. My advocate organised for me to speak to the chair of the panel and tell her how upset I was and hope that this doesn’t happen to other children”*



## Reflections from the VOYPIC Team

### Financial Abuse

*"I was working with a young person who was being financially abused by family members. The challenge was getting him to realise that this was not okay. I supported him by advocating for him to get short term accommodation, and then to secure a place in supported accommodation, away from his abusers."*

### Support in Education

*"A young man came to me during a visit to a children's home, to ask for support with school. He had only gone to school a few times in the past two years. I worked with the young person, to build his trust, and I advocated for him to move to a school which met his needs. He is now attending daily, and working towards his exams."*

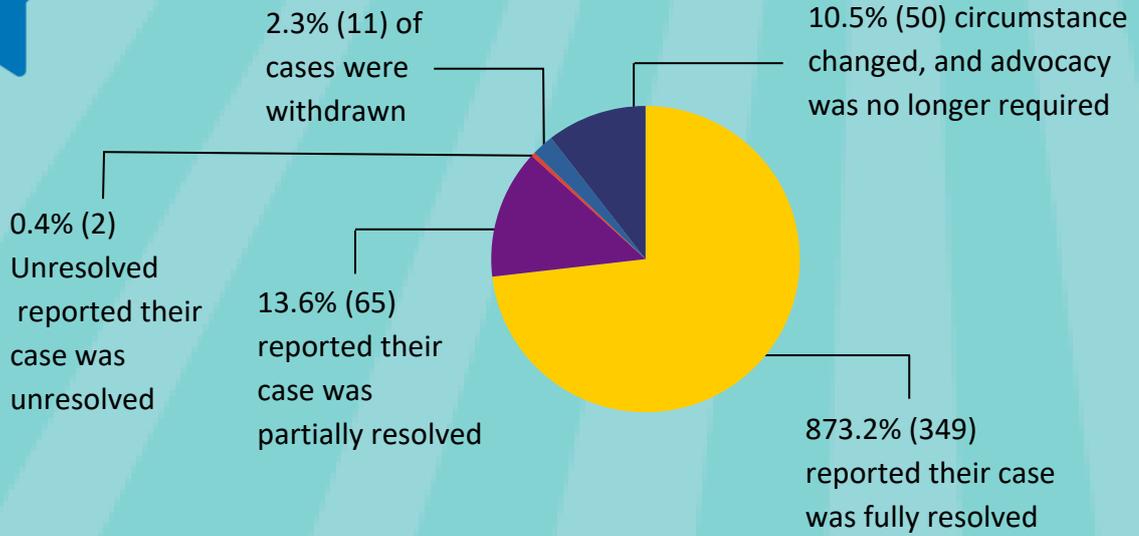
### Family Time with Mum

*"I am working with a young person that had no communication with her mum at all. There seemed to be no prospect of her ever returning home, and she said she had not been allowed to attend her review meetings due to 'sensitive discussions about mum'. She was not allowed to have a mobile phone, due to concerns that there would be ongoing CSE risks, but no work had been carried out with her with regards to online safety. She and I worked side-by-side to advocate for what she wanted. As a result, she now has regular, unsupervised family time with her mum. She has also had support on online safety, and is now able to have a mobile. There are plans in place to work towards her getting to move home with her mum in the future."*

## Independent Advocacy Support

### Advocacy Support - Case Resolution

335 advocacy support cases were completed.



181 young people completed an evaluation of the Independent Advocacy Service.

### Young people's views on Advocacy Support

#### How well did we do?



96% felt listened to



98% would use the VOYPIC Advocacy Service again

#### Is anyone better off?



92% said they had influenced decision making



77% said their rights were protected



# VOYPIC's Participation Services



304 Children and young people took part in our participation programmes, through:

- \* Participation Forums
- \* Peer support groups
- \* Young Leadership Programme
- \* Activity Days
- \* Information Sessions
- \* Young Reps Forum

## Young People's Skills Development



Speaking Up  
62%



Building Better  
Relationships  
60%



Listening  
51%



Decision Making  
41%



Leadership  
36%

## Leading Change – Young Leadership Programme

This year we launched our new youth leadership programme, Leading Change, with support from The National Lottery Community Fund. A group of 13 young people, aged 14-18, were recruited, from all over Northern Ireland, to be the first cohort of VOYPIC Young Leaders.

The new Young Leaders have been taking part in a bespoke training programme, working towards an OCN in Youth Leadership, including taking part in a two-day residential in September.

The young people all agreed that the training so far has been:

*Insightful*

*Well-Delivered*

*Informative*



## The VOYPIC Young Reps Forum

The VOYPIC Young Reps are care experienced young people who represent and advocate on behalf of all young people in and leaving care, and advise the VOYPIC Board and leadership team on how to deliver the VOYPIC Strategic Plan. There are currently 15 VOYPIC Young Reps, including two ex-officio members of the VOYPIC Board of Directors.

This year the VOYPIC Young Reps Forum:

- \* took part in 6 meetings
- \* represented their peers at 7 events or workshops
- \* met with MLAs at Stormont
- \* reviewed findings of manifesto survey and focus groups
- \* organised VOYPIC's participation in the Belfast Pride parade
- \* delivered training to VOYPIC staff

The Young Reps said their proudest moment was:

“ When I did a presentation for a PSNI strategy launch. I think it clicked for the first time that what I was doing with VOYPIC isn't in just in that sphere, but it goes wider and allows the voices of young people in care to be heard further. ”

“ Getting to go to these events and opportunities, as I wouldn't have these experiences if I was not part of VOYPIC and part of a community that cares. Being on the news was a moment of realisation that I've actually done this and we're starting to get somewhere with everything that VOYPIC advocates for through their policy and participation. ”

“ I just feel absolutely overjoyed with the fact that I can make a difference, make a change and make things happen for the next people coming in after me. To ensure they have more support and advocacy to make their lives better, that's what makes me most proud. ”



“ We get to help make change and give hope, like going to Stormont as a community is where we shine the brightest. It really does make a difference. ”

## Coming Into Care - Animation Resource

In June we launched our new animation for young people, all about coming into care. Designed by young people in the Belfast Participation Forum, the animation tells the story of what happens when a young person comes into care, and the support available to them. The animation is also a great tool for social workers and other professionals to use when working with children coming into care, to start conversations to help young people understand what's happening.

The Lord Mayor of Belfast, Cllr Micky Murray, visited the group to launch the animation. In January and February, the young people led a series of workshops for professionals, raising awareness of the resource and building capacity in using it with young people.



✓ **100%** of those who attended the workshops said the information provided helped to increase their knowledge of advocacy and children's rights

**100%** said the training was excellent in increasing their knowledge of the importance of young people's participation in decisions on their lives



- *"Created much more awareness about the experiences of coming into care so can better support the young people with better understanding."*
- *"Excellent video, and breakdown of information required was excellent. Super impressed, really well done everyone involved!"*
- *"The training will help me to be more open to ask questions about what would help a young person to be more comfortable with making their voice heard and then preparing for reviews."*
- *"As a student, this is very inspiring! A handy tool to carry with me through my career."*

## Young People's Standards for Participation in Review Meetings

This year we delivered eight workshop training sessions, involving 112 practitioners, on My Meeting: Young People's Standards for Participation in Review Meetings.



**100%** of those who attended the launch training said the information provided helped to increase their knowledge of advocacy and children's rights

**100%** said the training was excellent in increasing their knowledge of the importance of young people's participation in decisions on their lives



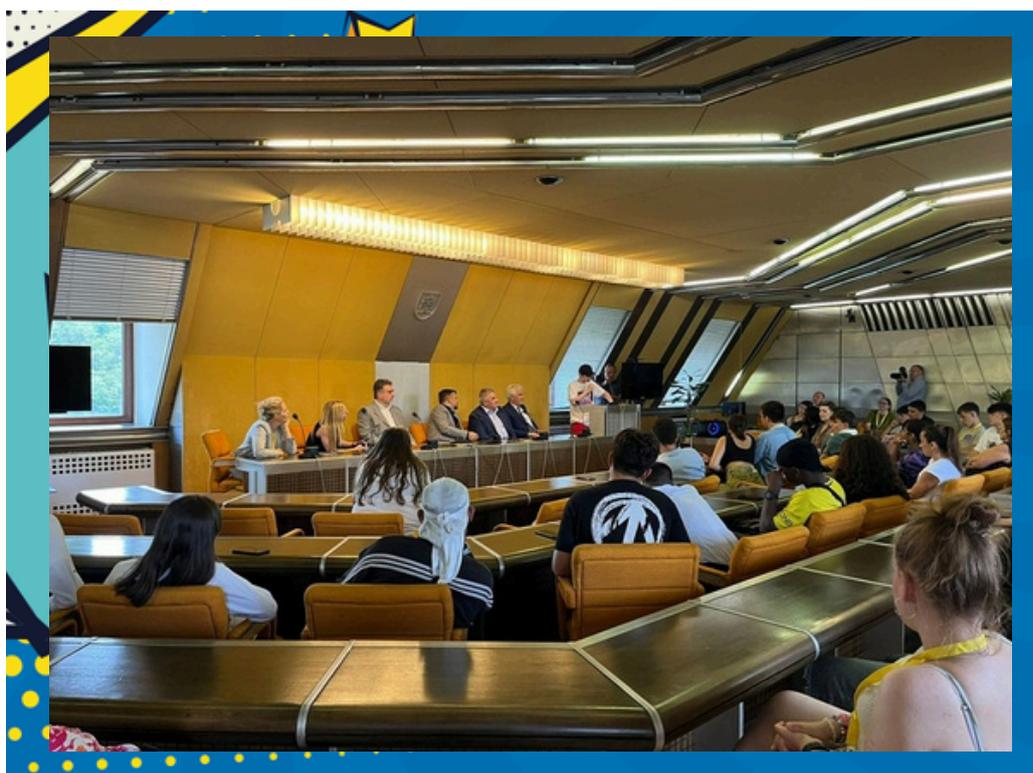
- “Very informative. It helped me to understand the child's views more. I felt inspired to do better and think before we use certain phrases, LAC, Contact etc.”
- “With the stresses and pressures of social work sometimes the needs of the children are not promoted at the extent they should be. This was a great refreshment of what we should be practicing.”
- “To take into consideration always the child's input as it is their life- always give them the best opportunity to have a voice.”

Throughout the year we have engaged with decision and policy makers at all levels, ensuring the voice of children and young people with lived experience of care is heard.

## European Network of Young Advisors

In partnership with the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY), we supported a group of 15 young people to explore the rights of young people in care, through a series of local workshops.

In July, two young people attended the European Network of Young Advisors (ENYA) Forum in Bratislava, Slovakia. The young people, Brandan and Michelle, worked with peers from across Europe to develop a series of policy calls for decision makers, ensuring the views of young people from Northern Ireland were reflected in the report.



One young person was selected to represent her peers at the European Network of Ombudspersons for Children (ENOC) conference in Helsinki, Finland. Working alongside the NI Commissioner, Michelle presented findings from the ENYA Forum to Commissioners and Ombudspersons from across Europe, calling for policy change to better meet the needs and uphold the rights of children and young people with experience of care.

*“Walking into the conference was a bit overwhelming at first, but as soon as I saw our wee clan I felt more at ease. I knew what I was going to say, so I felt ready for my role on the panel, and presenting my part of the presentation myself and the other Young Advisors prepared. Being part of this conference made me realise how many people actually want to make things better for children and young people in alternative care. I also learned so much from hearing about care systems in other countries.*”

*“One of the biggest things I’ll take away from this experience is confidence. On our way home, Chris (NI Commissioner) asked me what my takeaway was? I said that I realised I am capable of a lot more than I thought I was.”*

*~ Michelle*

## **Children’s Services Reform Programme**

Following on from the Independent Review of Children’s Social Care Services, we have continued to support young people to have their voice heard on the delivery of reform. We worked with Health Committee of the NI Assembly to establish an engagement programme, to ensure young people can inform and influence the Committee’s scrutiny of the reform programme and the delivery of the recommendations of the Review. A workshop was held in October, where ten young people with experience of care met with members of the Committee to explore key recommendations of the Review, and develop indicators which will show whether the changes are having an impact for young people. They also drew up questions for the Health Minister regarding the delivery of the Review recommendations.

*“It was a really good session. It was really useful for us to engage with the young people, particularly on the implementation of the Ray Jones Report, and its recommendations. I’d like to thank the staff for putting it together, and the young people for being part of it. I hope we can do more work like this, because it was certainly very, very valuable.”*

*~ Liz Kimmins MLA,*

*Chair Committee for Health*





Care Day 25 was held on Friday 21 February, under the theme 'Celebrating and Connecting the Care Experienced Community'. This was the tenth annual Care Day campaign, and was delivered in partnership with the members of the 5 Nations, 1 Voice alliance across the UK and Ireland.

## Celebrating and connecting the care experienced community



In the lead up to the day, young people participated in a range of engagements with Lord Mayors and Mayors of Belfast City Council, Armagh Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council, Lisburn City and Castlereagh Borough Council, Derry City and Strabane District Council, and Mid and East Antrim Borough Council.



To mark the special anniversary of Care Day, we asked councils to plant trees in public spaces, as a sign of the value and importance of the care experienced community in each Borough. The young people also joined the Lord Mayors, Mayors and representatives of three councils for tree planting ceremonies.

The flagship event of the Care Day campaign was the second annual Care Day Awards Ceremony, held in Belfast City Hall. We were thrilled to have 76 nominations across six categories, making a really hard job for the panel in selecting the winners.

Over 200 people attended the Care Day Awards Ceremony, hosted by BBC journalist, Mark Simpson, in Belfast City Hall. The event was a celebration of the achievements, successes and contributions of some incredible young people in and leaving care, and the wider care experienced community.



**Special Recognition Award Winners - Rachel McCaughey & Viki Balciunaite, with Alicia Toal, VOYPIC CEO**



**Spirit of VOYPIC Award Winners: Matthew Doyle, Natalie Devine & Thomas Magee.**

- ✓ 95% of those who attended said it was "Good"
- ✓ 99% agreed that it should be repeated next year

We asked those attending what the best bit was.

Here's what they said:

*The feeling of love in the room.*

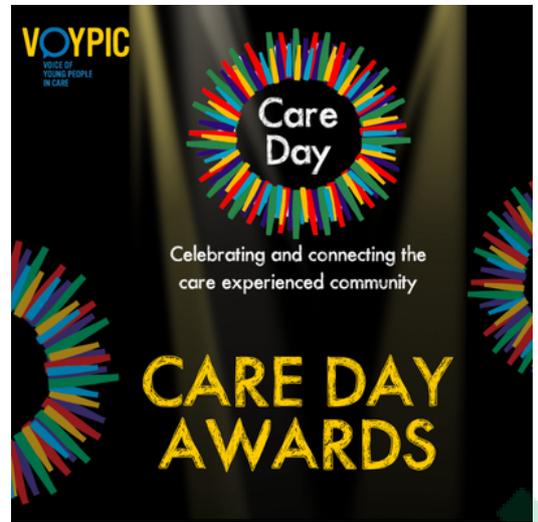
*Meeting others from different areas in similar situations.*

*Everything. I loved watching people get awards and their big smiles!*

*Having an opportunity to celebrate many exceptional care experienced young people.*

*Recognising achievements of the young people in care inspiring those coming up through the system.*

*Inspiring stories for young people in care, celebrating young people who deserve it!*



## We would like to thank our sponsors for Care Day 25



# Financial Year

We would like to acknowledge and thank all our funders, donors and partners 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.

## Funders:



## Donations Received From:



# Staff List

**Alicia Toal**

**Abi Guynes**

**Alex Cowan**

**Angela Adair**

**Brenda Kilpatrick**

**Caitlin Kelly**

**Caoimhe Coyle**

**Chasity O'Neill Rankin**

**Chiyanne McGrotty**

**Christina Howarth**

**Deirdre McMahan**

**Donna O'Kane**

**Fiona Nolan**

**Geraldine McGuigan**

**Grace Conroy**

**Iain Black**

**Jo Irvine**

**Karen Stirling**

**Katie Taggart**

**Lee Kane**

**Lydia Searle**

**Margaret Guy**

**Nicola McCready**

**Nyree Mulholland**

**Paul McCafferty**

**Rebecca Graham**

**Tracy Hanssen**

**Victoria Gilloway**

**“I just feel absolutely overjoyed with the fact that I can make a difference, make a change, and make things happen for the next generation of young people in care coming in after me. To ensure they have more support and advocacy to make their lives better. That’s what makes me most proud.”**

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