



**VOYPIC**

VOICE OF  
YOUNG PEOPLE  
IN CARE



**ANNUAL REPORT  
2022 - 2023**

# Welcome

On behalf of the Board of Directors I am delighted to share with you this year's annual report for the financial year ending April 2023.

The past year has been one of innovation and celebration.

In October 2022 construction work on our new headquarters building 100GPS finished and the staff team moved into our new home in November 2022. This was a fantastic reward for our team given the immense effort applied to the construction project while they continued to deliver high quality services for young people.

Completion of this fantastic facility after years of effort is a reason for huge celebration. 100GPS provides our young people with bespoke youth spaces, our staff with a high-quality working environment, and provides the organisation with greater security and additional revenue raising opportunities.

100GPS is a fantastic collaborative project between Include Youth, VOYPIC and Viable Corporate Services and we continue to foster the partnership between the organisations while retaining VOYPIC's distinct identity as the charity for children and young people with a lived experience of care in Northern Ireland.

As the cost-of-living has crisis deepened it has exacerbated many of the challenges faced by children and young people in care. However, it has not deterred our young people from immersing themselves in innovative projects with the desire to drive positive change on behalf of their peers.

This includes participation in the European PANDA project promoting the involvement of young children in welfare decision-making, publication of "A-Z of Care in Our Words" to

change the language of care, and involvement in the Experts by Experience Reference Group to the Independent Review of Children's Social Care Services.

Despite the bleak economic outlook VOYPIC as an organisation, and the young people we work with to create change, can look forward with justified confidence based on our achievements this year.

- Peter McClenaghan, Chair



# Message from the Chief Executive

Welcome to VOYPIC's Annual Report for 2022-23. I am proud to present an overview of the great work delivered by the staff, volunteers, children and young people of VOYPIC this past year. The circumstances in which we have operated have been challenging.

The ongoing impact of the Covid Pandemic, a cost-of-living crisis, and rising energy prices, have had a significant impact on children and families. The political vacuum and precarious financial and funding situation has harmed the voluntary and community sector and exacerbated workforce issues across statutory Children's Services.

The VOYPIC team has worked hard to protect the individual rights of young people, widen peer support networks, and build the capacity of children and young people to engage directly with decision makers.

This report sets out our achievements this year; the scope of our advocacy work, social action projects, campaigns, and the many ways in which we brought care experienced children and young people together to connect and support each other.

Thank you to the incredible team of staff and volunteers for your hard work, dedication and creativity throughout the year!

**- Alicia Toal, Chief Executive**



VOYPIC's participation and independent advocacy services supported 544 children and young people.



children and young people received advocacy support



young people took part in peer support groups



children and young people took part in participation forums



young care experienced adults received advocacy support



children and young people took part in social action programmes



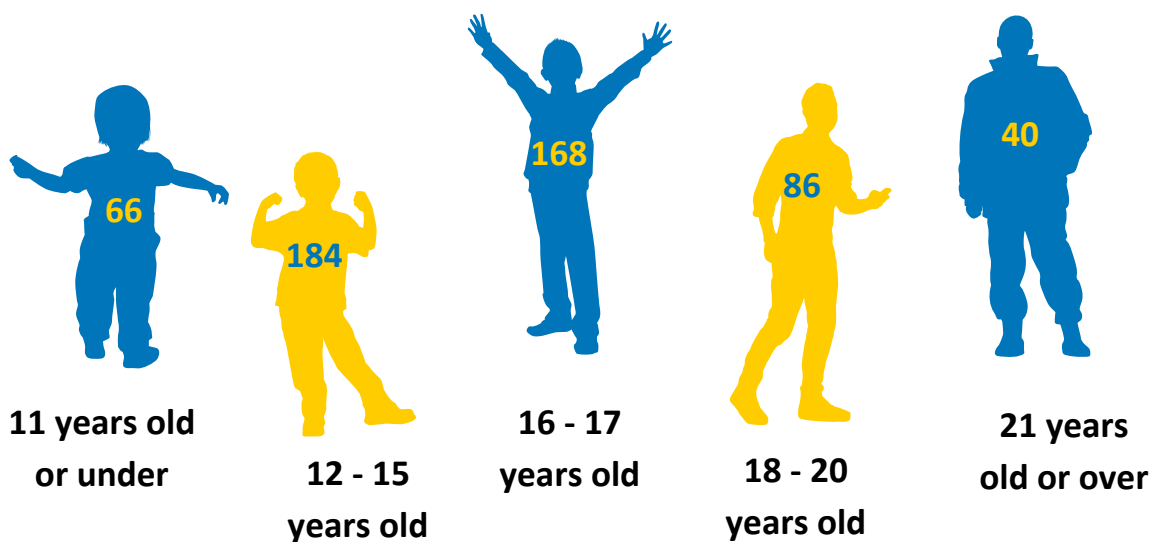
young people took part in our youth leadership programme and Young Reps Forum



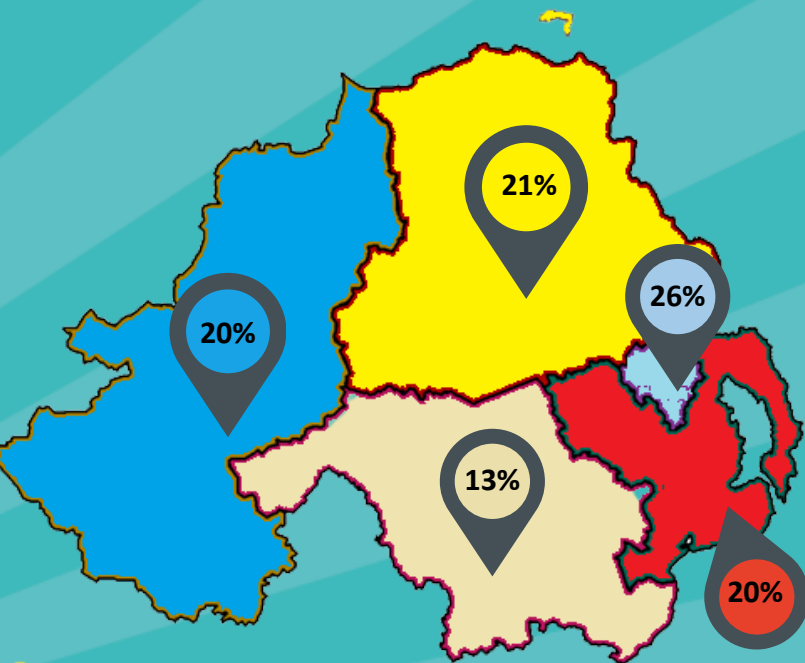
children and young people used our independent advocacy service at Beechcroft



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



## Where do they live?



young people lived in supported accommodation



young people were in Lakewood Secure Care Centre



children and young people lived with foster families



young people were homeless



children and young people lived in children's' homes



young people were living independently



children and young people were living with extended family



young people were in Woodlands Centre



young people were in a hospital setting



young people were in Hydebank Wood



were living at home with a parent



young person was living outside Northern Ireland

## Who else did we reach?



26 children and young people were members of the Experts by Experience Reference Group, supporting the Independent Review of Children's Social Care Services



34 children and young people attended activity days



127 children and young people were members of MyVOYPIC



100 children and young people took part in policy consultations



300 children and young people attended our CARE DAY fun day events

### **We coordinated and submitted nine responses to policy consultations:**

- \* UK Report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (Children's Law Centre)
- \* SBNI Strategic Plan (Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland)
- \* Protocol for HSCTs/PSNI Interface (PSNI/HSCB)
- \* Publication of RQIA Inspection Reports on Children's Homes (RQIA)
- \* Custodial Arrangements for Children (DoJ)
- \* Raising the Minimum Age of Criminal Responsibility (DoJ)
- \* Amendments to Independent Guardian Service (DoH)
- \* Support for Care Leavers (DoH)
- \* Foster Placement and Foster Agency Regulations (DoH)

# Independent Advocacy Support

VOYPIC provides independent advocacy services for a range of children and young people. These services support children and young people living in care or receiving leaving and after care services; care experienced young people aged 16+ who no longer receive help from social services; and children and young people placed in Beechcroft.

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

353 children and young people

396 advocacy cases

654 support needs.

312 visiting advocacy sessions.

24 activity days with 235 children and young people

22 advocacy workshops with 282 young people



Department of  
**Health**

An Roinn Sláinte  
Máinystrie O Poustie

## Advocacy Support for Living Arrangements

152 children and young people sought support about their living arrangements.

- “I am happy living with my foster carer and this is now my forever home.”
- “I am back living with my mummy. I get to see my daddy and my grandparents.”
- “I did not want to be in a children’s home and wanted to live with my mummy. I have got to move home with her and my brother. I am also going to school.”
- “I wanted to live with my granny and felt no one was listening to me. I attended my meetings and it was agreed my granny would be assessed for me to move in with her.”

### The top three reasons for referrals

1. Where they live (placement)
2. Rights and entitlements
3. Family Time (contact)

## Advocacy Support and Rights and Entitlements

118 children and young people sought support to secure their statutory rights and entitlements.

- “I’m now able to have my friend over that I wasn’t allowed before.”
- “Swimming Lessons being found, maths tutor being sorted, Family Holiday being looked in to with my passport issues being resolved, and got a laptop from the Trust.”
- “I have a social worker now, I didn't use to have one.”
- “After speaking with my advocate I learnt what I was entitled to at university and I was able to get £1000 bursary and get a laptop.”



## Advocacy Support for Family Time

152 children and young people sought support about their living arrangements.

- “I feel everything went ok, I feel people listened to me and I see my Mummy more.”
- “I get to be with Granny and Granda for Christmas. I chose how many times I see mummy.”
- “I was able to say who I didn’t want to see in my family.”
- “I am now able to have more contact with mum”.

## Advocacy Support in Lakewood Regional Secure Centre

VOYPIC Advocates support young people being presented at the Regional Multi Agency Panel for Admission to secure care. 66 young people were supported to represent their views to the Regional Multi Agency Panel for Admission to Secure Care. people sought support to secure their statutory rights and entitlements.

- “I didn’t want to go to secure and I wanted someone to speak to my social worker and attend a meeting to discuss if I still met criteria to go or not. VOYPIC attended the meeting and explained how I was feeling, I did join in on zoom as well and was able to say how I felt.”

**For care  
experienced young  
adults**

27 young adults aged 21-25 supported with

- Accommodation
- Rights and entitlements
- Training and employment
- Access to support services
- Access to files
- Attending case conferences



61 young people supported by an INDEPENDENT Advocate in  
BEECHCROFT Child and Adolescent Mental Health Hospital



**For young people in  
Beechcroft Child and  
Adolescent Mental  
Health Hospital**



71% said they got the help and support they needed from their advocate

69% said they were satisfied with the support provided by VOYPIC



79% said they would use the VOYPIC Advocacy Service again

6% reported their case was unresolved

13% reported their case was partially resolved



81% reported their case was fully resolved, an increase of 4% from last year

#### Young People's Views on Resolution

- "I decided after 2 meetings I didn't want support anymore, as I've too much going on in my life... I know that VOYPIC is there for me whenever I need it."
- "I wanted contact with my son but was not in a place to progress the case."
- "I didn't get into the school I wanted but I know why."

## Advocacy Outcomes & Impact

50% of young people influenced decision making

41% of young people challenged a decision

28% supported to access information

77% of young people reported their rights were protected

44% said they have a better quality of life

23% said they have more access to their social worker or other support

# VOYPIC's Participation Services

234 children and young people took part in our participation programmes, through:

- \* Regional and local participation forums
- \* Peer support groups
- \* Social Action Projects

## Young People's Skills Development



Leadership  
42%



Building Better  
Relationships  
72%



Coping with Stress  
46%



Listening  
69%



Decision  
Making  
50%



Speaking Up  
64%



Keeping Calm  
42%



Motivation  
39%



Understanding  
Things Better  
58%



Problem Solving  
34%

- "Very helpful, taught me a lot about the care system and I made friends."
- "It helped me meet more people and learn more stuff about care"
- "Loved Stormont and talking to the MLA's"
- "I get lots of opportunities to speak to decision makers"

Peer support groups in Belfast, Derry, and Ballymena supported 64 young people aged 16-25 years. These groups provide a safe place to connect with peers and discuss matters important to them.

- "Like being with other people who have also been in care and are now living on their own."
- "We meet up and talk about what is going on for us."
- "You get to meet more people in similar situations as you, so you feel less alone."

## Peer Support Groups

VOYPIC's participative programmes were supported by the National Lottery Community Fund, Community Foundation NI, and the Strategic Planning and Performance Group (SPPG).

# 1

## Empowering Children and Young People

This year, **64** young people at VOYPIC completed **nine** Social Action Projects. The young people worked together, to explore issues around them, and develop actions to make a difference.

### Safety Key Chains

Young women in Belfast designed and made personal safety kits, to give out to young women with experience of care. The kits, accompanied by safety advice, were advertised on VOYPIC's social media channels. The group was really excited to pass these on to other young women, hopefully helping them to feel safer when out and about!



### Its Christmas Time, think Article 9 Campaign

Young people from the Ballymena area launched a region NI wide campaign calling for all Christmas Family Time visits to be arranged by mid-December.

As young people in care, we have the right (UNCRC, Art 9) to see our families, so long as that's what we want, and it's safe for us to be there. It's important that we know in advance where we will be spending Christmas, who we will be spending it with, how we will get there, and how long we will be there for.

### Care to Swap

In December a group of young people organised a clothes swap shop- Care to Swap- bringing together their peers in an attempt to de-stigmatise the use of pre-loved clothing. Money raised from the event was then used to purchase backpacks from Ten Foundations, a charity supporting vulnerable children, families and communities in the Philippines, which were then donated to young people in care. The group hopes they can be used to transport personal items, when a young person moves home.





## Good Relations Award

In February, the Belfast group behind 'Care to Swap' was named as Runner-Up in the Youth Award category at the Good Relations Awards, organised by the Northern Ireland Community Relations Council (NICRC). The award recognised the young people's project supporting a diverse community of care experienced young people from across the greater Belfast area.

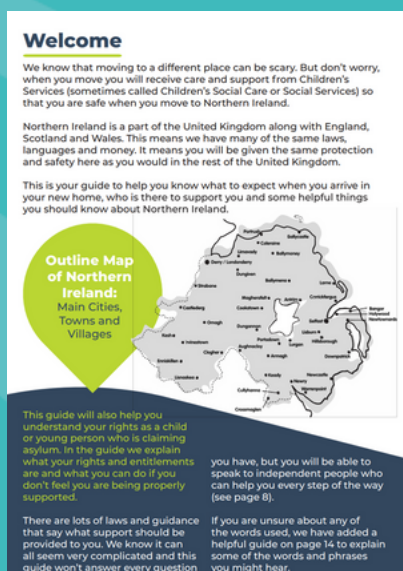
[www.voypic.org/goodrelationsaward/](http://www.voypic.org/goodrelationsaward/)

## Moving On Up Bursary and Befriending Scheme

We distributed £18,000 in bursaries to 37 young care leavers this year on behalf of the Hobson Fund and Community Foundation NI. Thirteen young people also received mentoring support through the scheme.

## Help for Young People New To Northern Ireland

We helped design a guide to living in Northern Ireland for young people who might arrive here to seek asylum. The guide provides young people with information on their rights whilst claiming asylum and their rights and entitlements in care.



# 2

## Innovating Through Participation and Co-Production

### VOYPIC Young Reps

Young Reps are the youth leaders of VOYPIC and advise the Board and leadership team on the implementation of our Strategic Plan. They represent and advocate on behalf of young people living in and leaving care.

Young Reps were appointed in December at the VOYPIC AGM. Some of the group came together in March to plan their first Residential together this Easter.



### PANDA Panda Project: Promoting the voice of young children in child protection decision making



Working with colleagues from across Europe, this exciting project aims to promote the participation of young children (aged 12 years and under) in decision making in child protection and welfare services.

With our colleagues in Queen's University Belfast, we welcomed the project partners to Belfast for a study visit in October.

The visit provided participants with an overview of social work in the context of Northern Ireland, including hearing about social work in contested spaces. Young people from VOYPIC, and Catherin O'Kane from SEHSCT gave an overview of young people's involvement in service and policy development. During a visit to Stormont, Colm Gildernew MLA, former Chair of the Health Committee, provided an input on user involvement in policy and legislative development and Judge McCaffery provided an overview of court processes. The study visit also included a session a presentation on participative practice in early years, and a session with Laura Lundy (QUB) on her model of participation.

The Reach website hosts all information about the outputs and products from the PANDA project, <https://reacch.eu/>

## Experts by Experience (EBE) Reference Group to the Independent Review of Children's Social Care Services

The Independent Review of Children's Social Care Services commenced in early 2022. VOYPIC was tasked with supporting the Review to hear the voice of children and young people with lived experience of the services being considered.

26 young people participated in the EBE Reference Group

Over the year, this group met regularly to consider key questions posed by the Review Chair, Prof Ray Jones, and the Advisory Panel. Two members of the group represented their peers at meetings of the Advisory Panel, and the whole group met regularly with Prof Jones and the panel to discuss key issues, concerns and potential solutions.



## World Social Work Day

An VOYPIC Expert by Experience delivered a presentation to an event organised by BASW at Stormont, sharing her experiences and insights as a young people engaging in a co-production activity. She highlighted the need for young people's voices to be at the centre of such projects, and encouraged attendees to explore more how they deliver true co-production.

# 3

## Creating Change

### Changing The Language of Care

The Language of Care resource was published to coincide with World Book Day, 2 March 2023. This resource aims to change the way we talk to, and about, children and young people with lived experience of care. The resource, designed by young people, takes readers on a journey of the language young people hear from the professionals in their lives, and refocuses discussions to put the young person at the centre of the conversation. For example, young people no longer want to be referred to as a LAC child, as this has very negative connotations.

The resource also sets examples of alternative words and phrases and the young people's rationale for these new terms. [www.voypic.org/languageofcare/](http://www.voypic.org/languageofcare/)



### 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.

To become a member of MyVOYPIC and find out more about the membership scheme, go to [www.myvoypic.org](http://www.myvoypic.org)

## Independent Review of Children's Social Care - Workshops

We coordinated a series of workshops for young people to share their experiences, views and ideas on the Independent Review of Children's Social Care Services.

In July, Prof. Jones and Marie Roulston met with a group of younger care experienced children (under 14), to hear about their experiences of children's social care.

In August, VOYPIC ran a full day of workshops with Prof Jones, including sessions with Care Experienced Young Parents, Care Experienced Young People (14+) and Care Experienced Adults (26+).

These workshops provided the wider care experienced community to share their thoughts on the Review, and highlight issues that the panel should consider.



In partnership with Action for Children and Barnardo's, we held a workshop for young carers who provide care for a family member, to talk about the unique ways they experience children's social care services, what challenges they face, and how this can be improved.

## United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child: Meeting the Committee

Following the submission of NGO reports to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, VOYPIC along with the Childrens Law Centre (CLC) and Include Youth were invited to give evidence at the Committee hearing in Geneva.

Abbie and Brandan worked with young people from Northern Ireland, Wales, Scotland and England to prepare an input for the Committee, as part of their periodic review of the UNCRC in the UK. The group had lots of preparation meetings, both locally and online with other nations, before travelling to the UN in Geneva in February.

This was an amazing experience for Abbie, Brandan and all the young people who took part in the session. The Committee will consider the evidence and present their concluding observations in May.



## Candidate Conversations with the Care Experienced Community

In the run-up to the Northern Ireland Assembly Elections in May, young people met with candidates from the main parties at events in Belfast, Ballymena and Derry-Londonderry.

These events- 'Candidate Conversations with the Care Experienced Community'- provided an opportunity for young people to meet with candidates, learn more about their stance on issues, and set out their priorities for action should the candidate be elected.



## Midsummer Tea Party Meet & Greet at Stormont

On 21 June, young people hosted the 'Midsummer Tea Party Meet & Greet'. This event brought together young people with experience of care from across Northern Ireland, to informally meet with new and returning MLAs, to discuss issues important to them, and call for action in the new Assembly. The event was attended by ten MLAs, as well as party staff representatives, from across the five main parties, including the Health Minister, the Justice Minister and the former Chair and Deputy Chair of the Health Committee. Young people from across Northern Ireland took part in the event, hosting informal roundtable discussion sessions with the politicians, as well as showcasing key areas of VOYPIC's work.



All the young people attending (100%) said they felt listened to by the politicians during this event, and 94.4% said they felt more informed about the politicians and their policies.

## TRIUMPH - Youth Advisory Group

We supported three young people to participate in the Youth Advisory Group of a UK-wide project exploring approaches to improving young people's mental health. TRIUMPH – the Transdisciplinary Research for the Improvement of Youth Mental Public Health – brings together young people and experts in the field, working together to find new ways to improve mental health and wellbeing.

The project culminated in a conference in Edinburgh in October, which was co-designed by the Youth Advisory Group. The event was delivered by the young people, and attracted interest from academics, policy makers and practitioners from across the UK.

In addition to the YAG members, we supported five young people to travel to Edinburgh for the conference.



## Administrative Data Research Group

Six young people from VOYPIC have been working with colleagues in Queen's University and Ulster University, as part of our partnership with the Administrative Data Research Centre (ADRC). They participated in a series of workshops, working with researchers to explore high level data about the mental health outcomes for care experienced people. Together, the team are using the data to find out what risks young people face leaving care, and how they can be better supported.

## Care Leavers, Covid-19 and Transition from Care (CCTC) Conference

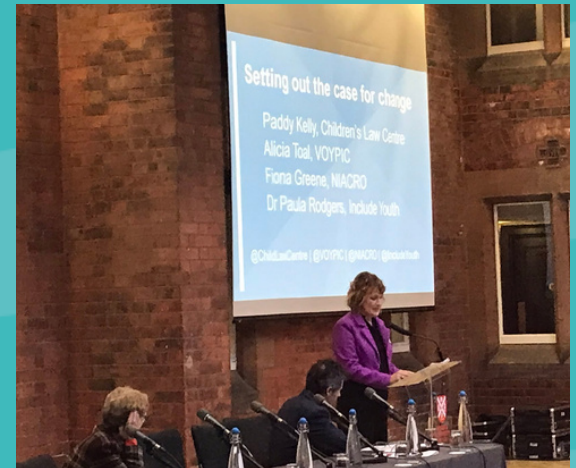
Martha and Paul attended the Care Leavers, Covid-19 and Transition from Care (CCTC) Conference in Luton in May. They spent the day talking with over 100 colleagues from across the UK and Ireland who support young people in and leaving care, exploring how we support care leavers to transition into adulthood in the post-Covid world.



## 10 Reasons Why Ten Is Too Young : Minimum Age of Criminal Responsibility Conference

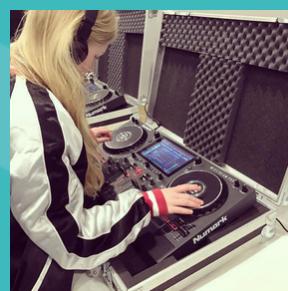
In November 2022, VOYPIC, alongside the Children's Law Centre, Queen's University Belfast, Centre for Children's Rights, Include Youth, and NIACRO jointly called on support for raising the age of criminal responsibility in Northern Ireland to 16 years of age.

At the jointly hosted event 'Stop Criminalising Our Children', in Riddle Hall, Belfast, attendees heard from a range of experts on the issues and received a briefing paper, with evidence and best practice on youth justice issues, to guide potential respondents to the Department of Justice consultation on whether the age of criminal responsibility should be raised in Northern Ireland.



## Care Day 23

Care Day 23 took place on Friday 17 February. Following two years of scaled back Care Day activities, necessary because of the Covid-19 pandemic, Care Day 23 saw a return to a large scale, regional event. Over the course of the day, we host two Fun Day events in Belfast, with participants coming from all over Northern Ireland. The Fun Day events attracted almost 300 participants.



# Creating Change



We also resumed our annual 'Care Day Breakfast with the Mayor' activities. Young people from the South Eastern, Western and Northern areas met with the Mayors of Ards and North Down (Cllr Karen Douglas), Derry City and Strabane (Cllr Sandra Duffy) and the Deputy Mayor of Mid and East Antrim (Ald Beth Adger) respectively. And Belfast City Hall was illuminated in Care Day colours!



On social media we asked people to put their 'Hands Up For Care Day'. The VOYPIC channels across Facebook, Twitter and Instagram were flooded with images of politicians, policy makers, senior civil servants, partner organisations, member of the public, and care experienced young people taking part in the activity



Our friends at the play, REMOVED, got in on the action, despite being on a European tour. They helped spread the Care Day message in Paris and The Hague!



Back in Belfast, young people were joined by Instagram stars 'Inside Number Sixteen', 'Bored of Lunch' and 'Belfast Undercover Chef' for a CARE DAY Cookery Class in 100GPS! They prepared a delicious meal to share in celebration of Care Day. And the guys even left some new cookware as a housewarming gift!



# 4

## Growth and Stability

### Our New Home - Redevelopment of 100 Great Patrick Street

Construction work on our new Head Quarters in Belfast completed in October 2022. Alongside our friends in Include Youth and Viable Corporate Services, we moved into our new home in November 2022. After many years of planning and hard work, we have transformed the former warehouse at 100 Great Patrick Street into a bespoke youth, community, and administrative hub for the three organisations.



In October we welcomed Robin Swann MLA (Minister for Health), Deirdre Hargey MLA (Minister for Communities) and Gordon Lyons MLA (Minister for the Economy) to the building.

In November we were delighted to welcome Pudsey Bear and the team from Children in Need, who used 'The Lounge' space in 100GPS as their studio for the Northern Ireland highlights programme of the annual televised appeal.



In December we hosted a special Christmas mince pie morning for over 100 of our friends and colleagues across the sector, giving them a sneak peek of our fantastic new home. We were delighted to welcome Lord Mayor of Belfast, Cllr Tina Black, to the event.

Young people from VOYPIC and Include Youth are busy preparing for the Grand Opening, scheduled for June.



## Team VOYPIC

We recognise the importance of stopping to reflect on what we have achieved, and look ahead to what we are going to achieve. In January, the whole VOYPIC team spent two days in the countryside, doing just that.

We spent time reviewing our strategic plan, sharing practice across the organisation, and planning for the year ahead, making sure we are doing what we can to work together with children and young people for a better experience of care and life after care.



## Staying Social

VOYPIC continues to use our social media channels to spread positive messages about children and young people with lived experience of care in Northern Ireland.



On Facebook, we had a reach of 41,842  
(an increase of 88.3% on last year)



On Instagram, we had a reach of 3,192  
(an increase of 64.3% on last year)



On Twitter, we made 218,000 impressions,  
and gained 288 new followers

# 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.

Strategic Planning & Performance Group (SPPG)

Belfast Health & Social Care Trust

The National Lottery Community Fund

Children in Need

Community Foundation

Department of Health

Esmee Fairbairn Foundation

Erasmus + Programme of the European Union

Belfast City Council

Northern Health & Social Care Trust

Donations received from Amazon Smile, Home Bargains, Community First Initiative, Cohen & Co, The Ancient Order of Hibernians Florida, Everun, and Belfast Boys Model School.

## Total Income: £1,146,624

# Income

£22,276  
Other  
Restricted  
Funds

£170,436  
National Lottery  
Community Fund

£3,377  
Belfast City  
Council

£20,214  
Unrestricted  
Income

£56,999  
Belfast  
HSCT

£41,179  
Department  
of Health

£12,000  
Esmee  
Fairbairn

£24,197  
Children in  
Need

£14,374  
Northern  
HSCT

£8,375  
EU  
Erasmus +

£7,832  
Community  
Foundation  
NI

£765,365  
SPPG

Total Income  
£1,146,624

# Expenditure

£78,205  
Property  
Costs

£74,618  
Office Costs

£59,704  
Corporate  
Services

£59,656  
Youth  
Activities

£863,178  
Staff  
Costs

Total  
expenditure  
£1,184,190

£48,829  
Other  
Costs



# Staff List

Alicia Toal

Angela Adair

Alex Cowan

Aine Mulholland

Aoife Clarke

Brenda Kilpatrick

Briege O'Connor

Caoimhe Coyle

Caroline Hunter

Christina Howarth

Christina Watson

Deirdre McMahon

Donna O'Kane

Eanna McKnight

Erin McKeavney

Fiona Nolan

Geraldine McGuigan

Grace Conroy

Iain Black

Jennifer Wright

Jo Irvine

Joleen Kane

Karen Stirling

Katie Taggart

Lee Kane

Margaret Guy


Nicola McCreedy

Nyree Mulholland

Paul McCafferty

Seamus Kealey

Trevor McDaid



I learnt that I could talk to anyone, my foster carers, or my social workers and many more. But I think I would prefer to talk to the VOYPIC staff.

I have been a VOYPIC member for many years and I have connected with each of the staff differently and they're all so helpful.

100 Great Patrick Street  
Belfast  
BT1 2LU

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](http://www.voypic.org)

