

Voice of Young People in Care [VOYPIC]
100 Great Patrick Street
Belfast
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Company Limited by Guarantee **NI030526**
Charity Registration Number **NIC105019**

Administration Details

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Director's report 2023-2024

Objectives and activities

Voice of Young People in Care (VOYPIC) was established for exclusively charitable purposes; namely to ensure that the general welfare and interests of care experienced children and young people are advanced. The Directors have paid due regard to guidance issued by the Charity Commission in deciding what activities the company should undertake.

Mission, Vision, and Values

Created in 1993 by a group of young people in care and professionals, VOYPIC is the charity for children and young people with a lived-in experience of care in Northern Ireland. We promote the rights and voice of children in care and care leavers.

The current strategic plan focusses on four key strategic aims:

1. Empowering children and young people
2. Innovating practice through participation and co-production
3. Creating change through policy advocacy
4. Organisational growth and stability

Our Mission: Working together with children and young adults for a better care experience and life after care.

Our Vision: Every child in care in Northern Ireland feels safe, valued and loved. Every young person leaving care does so with dignity and respect, and thrives into adulthood.

OUR WORK:

Advocacy and Awareness-raising: We raise awareness of the rights of children and young people, their views and experiences living in and leaving care, and their priorities for change.

Making Connections and Capacity Building: We connect young people with a lived experience of care with their peers. We host regular groups, participation forums and activities that build self-confidence, personal, social and life skills, whilst making new connections and friends.

Independent Advocacy and Advice Service: We support young people to exercise their rights by assisting them to; participate in decision making processes, express their views and concerns, access information, resolve issues or to identify available support options.

Youth Participation and Coproduction: We help children and young people to find their voice and set their own agenda for change. We create a culture of listening that enables children and

young people to influence the world around them. Our programmes equip and prepare young people to take part in co-production activities.

Influencing Change through Policy Advocacy: We use our specialist knowledge and insight into the views and experiences of children and young people. We work in partnership with them to influence the development of legislation, policy and practice.

OUR VALUES:

VOYPIC's work is underpinned by five core values which not only inform what we do but also how we do it.

Relationship Based. We are driven by the needs and aspirations of children and young people. We listen, learn, and work in partnership with them to ensure their voice is heard. We are dedicated to empowering young people so that they reach their potential in whatever they choose to do.

Commitment. We are committed, passionate and enthusiastic champions for change. We are persistent and determined in promoting the voice and defending the rights of children and young people in leaving care and into adulthood.

Social Justice. We work to a strong moral code rooted in ideals of social justice. We challenge the oppression and discrimination faced by children and young people in care and seek to reduce the stigma they face in their daily lives.

Respect for Rights. We respect the rights of children and young people and are prepared to challenge other to do the same.

Solution Focused. We are positive about the future. We are proud of what we do and what we have achieved. We face problems with a solution-oriented mentality, and we encourage our staff, stakeholders and young people themselves to be problem solvers.

2023-2024 Organisational Overview

From 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 our staff team consisted of **23** members.

During the year we supported **621** children and young people; **554** were supported directly through our services with **67** children and young people attending VOYPIC events and activities.

416 Children and young people received support through our regional independent advocacy service for children in care and care leavers.

14 Children and young people received advocacy support through Speak Up programme.

19 Young adults received individual advocacy support through the See Me Hear Me programme.
21 Children and young people received one to one support and coaching.
88 Children and young people took part in social action programmes.
120 Children and young people took part in participation forums.
63 Children and young people participated in policy consultations.
17 Young people undertook a leadership role.
58 Young people were supported through our independent advocacy service at Beechcroft.
159 Children and young people attended activity days.
139 Members of MyVOYPIC scheme.

STRATEGIC GOAL 1. EMPOWERING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

INDEPENDENT ADVOCACY SUPPORT:

Regional independent advocacy service for children in care and care leavers

- **416** children and young people received advocacy support
- **335** advocacy cases were closed during the year
- **82%** of closed advocacy cases were fully resolved, an increase of **4%** from previous year
- **13.5%** of closed cases were partially resolved
- **2.5%** of casework closed unresolved, a decrease of **3.5%** from previous year.

Impact of Advocacy Support

- **94%** of young people felt listened to because of the advocacy support they receive
- **91%** of young people stated they would use the advocacy service again
- **68%** of young people whose cases had been resolved reported that their rights were protected through our advocacy support
- **60%** of young people felt they were able to influence decision making with the help of their advocate.

Advocacy in Secure Care

In 2023-2024 VOYPIC supported **46** young people at **65** presentations to the Regional Multi Agency Panel for Admission to Secure Care. Advocates support young people to share their wishes and feelings to the panel about any safety concerns, and how they can keep themselves safe. **90%** of all young people offered advocacy support for panel accepted help. Young people continued to avail of advocacy support for care and exit planning whilst placed in secure care.

Advocacy Workshops

26 advocacy workshops were delivered to 284 young people living in foster families and young people leaving care across Northern Ireland. These workshops are designed to educate children and young people about their rights and entitlements whilst in care. The workshops explore a range of issues; support for leaving care, review meetings, accommodation, play, and identity.

Advocacy in Beechcroft Child & Adolescent Mental Health Unit

Beechcroft Child & Adolescent Mental Health Unit provides specialist care to young people from across Northern Ireland. VOYPIC provides a dedicated advocate located in the hospital on behalf of the BHSCT.

We supported 58 individuals through 62 pieces of advocacy case work. We helped young people share their views, participate in Patient Forums, and take part in consultations on issues such as administering IV nutrition and mealtimes.

Speak up Pilot

This year we piloted advocacy support for young people in Northern Health & Social Care Trust area to participate in child protection case conferences. The pilot is assessing the effectiveness of advocacy to support young people's meaningful involvement in child protection processes. During the year we supported 14 young people in case conferences.

Advocacy for Young Adults

Often, the need for help and support does not end when a young person moves on from leaving and aftercare services. With support from The National Lottery Community Fund, we have been able to support 19 young adults, aged 21+, who no longer have access to statutory support services, to resolve 30 different issues.

PARTICIPATION SERVICES:

SEE ME HEAR ME programme

Through this programme VOYPIC facilitated the development of three peer support groups for young care leavers. Thirty-three young people took part in the groups throughout the year. Peer support groups provide a space and environment for care leavers to meet with their peers and create and sustain social networks within their communities.

88 young people took part in social action projects. These projects give young people an opportunity to use their lived experience to affect change in their community. Examples of social action projects undertaken this year include:

- Guerilla chalk street art and urban gardening, in partnership with Ulster University, Belfast
- Production and distribution of health and hygiene packs
- Creation and publication of a storybook about coming into care
- Development of a 'Pizza Advice'- a pizza box advice centre
- Delivery of second 'Care 2 Swap' – a social clothes swap event
- Organising and running a Halloween Haunted House for young people in care.

Participation Forums

We facilitated weekly participation forums in each of the five HSCTs, involving **120** children and young people. Our participation forums help young people to find their voice and set their own agenda for change. They provide a safe space for young people to have their say and engage directly with decision makers on matters important to them.

STRATEGIC AIM 2. INNOVATING THROUGH PARTICIPATION AND CO-PRODUCTION

Young Reps

Young Reps are the youth leaders of VOYPIC. They represent and advocate on behalf of young people in and leaving care and advise the VOYPIC Board of Directors and the VOYPIC Leadership Team on how to deliver the Strategic Plan. There are currently 17 VOYPIC Young Reps, including two *ex-officio* members of the VOYPIC Board of Directors.

During the year the Young Reps took part in a team-building residential and undertook training for their new role. For example, they received Media Training with Bespoke Communications, to develop their skills and confidence to use traditional and social media to communicate their key messages on life in care.

Young Reps coordinated and helped deliver VOYPIC's 30 birthday activities in October 2023 and contributed to the annual Care Day working group and the Care Day Awards Ceremony in February 2024.

Ulster University Partnership

We worked with young leaders to co-design a series of workshops for students in Ulster University, focused on improving student's understanding of care and issues impacting children and young people. Workshops were delivered in both the Belfast and Magee campus.

UNICEF Partnership

We continued to work in partnership with the Derry & Strabane District Council, the Western Health and Social Care Trust, and other voluntary and community organisations to promote Derry as a 'Child Friendly City'. We supported young people to take part in several workshops

and online training sessions throughout the year, to promote young people's rights across the DSDC area.

STRATEGIC AIM 3. CREATING CHANGE

Care Day 24 'Celebrating and Connecting the Care Experienced Community'

Care Day 24 was held on Friday 16 February. In the lead up to the big day the Young Reps hosted a coffee morning for 'VOYPIC Alumni', that is young people who participated in VOYPIC's programmes in the past. This reunion was attended by over 30 former service users, who took the opportunity to reconnect and have a tour of the new building at 100 Great Patrick Street.

During Care Day 24, everyone was encouraged to put their 'Hands Up for Care Day'. Once again, many individuals and organisations across Northern Ireland, around the UK and Ireland, and further afield, got involved in the activity, by writing #CareDay24 on their hand and sharing a selfie on social media. This provided a great opportunity to 'celebrate and connect the care experienced community' globally on Care Day.

On the morning of Care Day, VOYPIC hosted a 'Family Fun Day' in New Life City Church, Belfast. This event was attended by more than 50 care experienced families, all enjoying games, craft activities, a petting farm, and giant inflatables.

The flagship event for Care Day 24 was the first annual Care Day Awards. Between Christmas and the start of February, anyone could nominate a care experienced young person for a Care Day Award, in a range of categories. Sixty-five nominations were received across the categories, and the judges met in early February to select the winners.

The awards were presented at a special ceremony on the event of Care Day, in the Great Hall of Queen's University, Belfast. The event was hosted by BBC reporter, Mark Simpson. The event was a resounding success, with many commenting on the celebratory, positive nature of the ceremony, and praising the stories of those recognised with an award.

Independent Review of Children's Social Care Services

The Independent Review of Children's Social Care Services was published on Wednesday 21 June 2023.

Throughout the period of the review, VOYPIC supported a group of young people with experience of the services covered by the review to act as the Experts by Experience (EBE) Reference Group to the Review. Young people were involved in the launch event, including speaking about the experiences of the EBE Reference Group, and taking part in media interviews.

VOYPIC supported young people to participate in the public consultation on the recommendations of the Review, and the Department of Health's proposals for delivery on the recommendations. In March, a group of young people from the EBE Reference Group and VOYPIC Young Reps attended a meeting of the Health Committee at Stormont where the Review was being considered.

PSNI-NICCY Project

VOYPIC supported three young people to take part in a programme of activities coordinated by NICCY and the PSNI. This included young people being part of the launch of the PSNI Youth Engagement Strategy, as well as participating in a steering group to develop a new structure for youth engagement with policing in Northern Ireland.

UNCRC Reporting

In spring 2023, VOYPIC supported four young people to travel to Geneva, to present to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, as part of the UK delegation to the Committee. On return, the young people worked with peers from partner organisations to plan and host a briefing session for a larger group of young people, informing them of the engagement. They also helped deliver a session for professionals, including duty bearers, in the autumn.

All-Party Group on Youth Participation

VOYPIC has taken up membership of the All-Party Working Group on Youth Participation, chaired by Colin McGrath MLA and facilitated by the Northern Ireland Youth Forum (NIYF). A member of the VOYPIC staff team, alongside at least one young person from the organisation, has attended each meeting since the APG was established in October 2023.

Five Nations, One Voice network: (5N1V)

The Network continues to meet to develop relationships and shared learning across the five charities. During the year staff from across the network came together for Knowledge Exchange session based on shared interests and priority areas of work.

STRATEGIC AIM 4. GROWTH AND STABILITY

Grand Opening of 100GPS

Following years of planning and development VOYPIC was delighted to move into their new premises at 100 Great Patrick Street in November 2022, alongside Include Youth and Viable Corporate Services.

To mark this achievement a planning group, made up of young people and staff from VOYPIC and Include Youth, came together to develop plans for a grand opening. Young people took a

leading role in coordinating the activities, including agreeing the theme for the day, decorations, catering, and the activities on offer.

The Grand Opening took place on Thursday 22 June. The building was officially opened by six young people- three from each charity - representing the themes of HISTORY, TOGETHERNESS, HOME and FUTURE.

The event was attended by over 150 children and young people, sector professionals, decision makers, and supporters.

VOYPIC30 – 30th Birthday Celebrations

In October 2023, VOYPIC celebrated its 30th birthday. An online campaign shared stories from those currently involved with the organisation, alongside those who have been involved over the past 30 years.

On 20 October we hosted the VOYPIC30 Conference at Ulster University, showcasing some of the key milestones for the organisation over the past 30 years, telling the story of care experience in Northern Ireland from the early 90s to the present day. The conference was co-designed with a group of VOYPIC Young Reps, and all presentations and activities were co-delivered by them.

SUSTAINABILITY AND RESILIENCE

To improve VOYPIC's long term sustainability, resilience and capacity we secured funding through the Dormant Accounts Fund NI to develop the leadership team's capacity, increase and diversify our income, and strengthen governance arrangements.

A governance health check was completed with Board members in May and June 2023, using the Code of Good Governance self-assessment framework. Following the self-assessment an action plan was developed highlighting key actions for the year.

The leadership team undertook development training to ensure team effectiveness. The training focused communication, efficient utilisation of resources, building long term relationships, social and psychological safety to ensure space for crucial conversations, roles and responsibilities, accountability, and change awareness and readiness.

During the year we implemented a new management information system and developed impact data measurements and collection processes. This will improve our reporting to funders, potential supporters and donors, and generate better public awareness of our work with children and young people with a lived experience of care.

Financial Review: VOYPIC strives to meet all targets and objectives agreed with its funders, with all expenditure monitored and benchmarked against budgets.

The Board of Directors consider that the unrestricted funds of the charity have sufficient resources and assets available which are adequate to fulfil their obligations.

At 31 March 2024 the balance of unrestricted reserves was £407,218 (2023 – £415,494) of which £19,296 (2023- £113,853) has been designated by the Board at the year end.

Restricted funds are restricted for the purpose as specified in letters of offer provided by the funding bodies. At 31 March 2024 the balances of restricted funds totalled £1,044,751 (2023-£1,082,200).

Reserves policy: The Board aims to maintain free reserves in unrestricted funds at a level which equates to approximately three months of unrestricted charitable expenditure. Currently we hold the equivalent of 3.5 months expenditure. The Board of Directors monitor and review the reserves policy on an annual basis.

The Board considers that reserves at this level will ensure that, in the event of a significant drop in funding, VOYPIC will be able to continue its activities while consideration is given to ways in which additional funds may be raised. This level of reserves has been maintained throughout the year.

The VOYPIC Board of Directors has decided that VOYPIC should hold financial reserves because:

1. VOYPIC has no long-term funding sources and is entirely dependent for income from year to year on short term grants and donor funding, which is inevitably subject to fluctuation.
2. VOYPIC requires protection against, and the ability to continue operating, despite fluctuation in income or events threatening to the organisation.
3. VOYPIC requires the ability to continue to employ workers and continue our projects in between periods of grant funding.

The VOYPIC Board of Directors considers it prudent that unrestricted reserves should be sufficient to “avoid the necessity of realising fixed assets held for the charity’s use” and to “cover three months of direct and indirect expenses”.

Going Concern: The charity’s funding streams have remained constant during the years 2023-2023. With a projected shortfall for the year 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025 of £56,036. The Board recognises the low level of risk. However, they take an active approach in seeking to mitigate any risk to the charity’s future. A fundraising plan is in place to address any potential shortfalls, and scenario planning continues.

The Board has considered the secured funding in place for the next few years, which enables the board to forward plan and be proactive about their funding in the future.

The Directors are satisfied that the charity's financial sustainability of services to care experienced children and young people in the financial year 2024 – 2025.

The Directors aim to increase fundraising activities and to generate additional income by ways of increased training and consultancy work.

After making enquiries, the directors have a reasonable expectation that the Company has adequate resources to continue to operate for the foreseeable future.

Accordingly, they continue to adopt the going concern basis in preparing the annual report and accounts.

At 31 March 2024, the charity had cash in bank of £417,484, with unrestricted funds of £407,218 at the year end, £19,296 of which have been designated for use in the year ending 31 March 2025.

In summary, based on the funding in place for 2024/2025 the directors have a reasonable expectation that the organisation has adequate resources to continue its operational activity. Along with written representations from the Board and the reserves of the charity. We do not believe there to be a concern over the operation of VOYPIC Limited in the foreseeable future.

The VOYPIC Board of Directors considers it prudent that unrestricted reserves should be sufficient to "avoid the necessity of realising fixed assets held for the charity's use" and to "cover three months of direct and indirect expenses."

Risk Review: The Board has a risk management strategy which comprises:

- An annual review of principle risks
- The establishment of policies, systems & procedures to mitigate those risks identified in the annual review, and.
- The implementation of procedures designed to minimise or manage potential impact on charity should those risks materialise.

The key element in the management of financial risk is a regular review of available funds and cash flow.

Structure, Governance & Management

The Board of Directors and the Chief Executive comprise the key management personnel of the charity in charge of directing and controlling the charity and running and operating the charity on a day-to-day basis.

The company is a company limited by guarantee and a registered charity for taxation purposes. It is run by a Board of Directors, no more than twelve and no less than five in total.

None of the directors have any beneficial interest in the company.

The Directors who served during the year and up to the date of signature of the financial statements were:

Mr. P McClenaghan – Chairperson

Ms. F Nicol – (Resigned 31 December 2023)

Mr. C Nicol - Treasurer

Ms. M. McCallan

Ms. M Kennedy Vice Chair

Ms. E. Doherty

Dr. P. McCafferty

Ms. R McCooey – (Appointed 3 January 2024)

Ms. E Ibrahim – Young People's Representative (Appointed 16 May 2024)

Ms. J Dowell – Young People's Representative (Appointed 1 June 2024)

The Board of Directors has the power at any time to fill any vacancy on the board by co-option. At the Annual General Meeting directors are appointed by election. The Board of Directors meet on a monthly basis. New Board members may be sought through open advertising. The interview panel is made up of young people and current Board members. When appointed, Board members complete a full induction into the charity and receive a welcome pack which includes a brief history of the charity, a copy of the last three years annual accounts, annual reports and a copy of the Charity Commission's guidance 'The Essential Trustee; 'What you need to know and Public Benefit running of a charity.

None of the directors has any beneficial interest in the company. All of the directors are members of the company and guarantee to contribute £1 in the event of winding up.

Key Management Personnel Remuneration

The Board of Directors and the Chief Executive comprise the key management personnel of the charity in charge of directing and controlling the charity and operating the charity on a day-to-day basis. All Board members give of their time freely and no remuneration was paid in the year. Board members are required to disclose all relevant conflict of interests and register them at each monthly board meeting and in accordance with the Trust's policy withdraw from decisions where a conflict of interest arises.

Employee involvement

The charity's policy is to consult and discuss with employees any matters likely to affect their interests. Information on matters of concern is given through staff briefings which

seek to achieve a common awareness on the part of all employees of the financial and economic factors affecting the charity's performance.

Disabled persons

Applications for employment are fully considered, bearing in mind the aptitudes of the applicant concerned. In the event of members of staff becoming disabled, every effort is made to ensure that their employment within the company continues and that the appropriate training is arranged. It is the policy of the company that the training, career development and promotion of disabled persons should as far as possible, be identical to that of other employees.

Statement of Directors Responsibilities

The Directors are responsible for preparing the Directors Report and the financial statements in accordance with applicable law and the United Kingdom Accounting Standards [United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice].

Company Law requires the Directors to prepare financial statements for each financial year which give a true and fair account of the affairs of the company, the incoming resources, and the application of resources.

In preparing these financial statements the directors are required to:

- Select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently.
- Observe the methods and principles in the charities SORP 2015 [FRS 102]
- Make judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent.
- State whether applicable UK Accounting Standards have been followed subject to any material departures disclosed and explained in the financial statements and.
- Prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the company will continue in operation.

The Directors are responsible for keeping adequate accounting records that disclose, with reasonable accuracy, the financial position of the company and enable them to ensure that the financial statements comply with the Companies Act 2006. They are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the company and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

AUDITOR

In accordance with the company's article, a resolution proposing the GMcG Lisburn be reappointed as auditor of the company will be put at a General Meeting.

This report has been prepared in accordance with the provisions applicable to companies entitled to the small companies' exemption.

Disclosure of information to the auditor

Each of the Directors has confirmed that there is no information of which they are aware that is relevant to the audit, but of which the auditor is unaware. They have further confirmed that they have taken appropriate steps to identify such relevant information and to establish that the auditor is aware of such information.

Signed: P. McClenaghan

Date: 10/12/25

[Peter McClenaghan - Chair]