

**Voice of Young People in Care [VOYPIC]**  
**100 Great Patrick Street**  
**Belfast**  
**BT1 2LU**

Company Limited by Guarantee **NI030526**  
Charity Registration Number **NIC105019**

#### **Administration Details**

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#### **Director's report 2024-2025**

#### **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.

## **2024-2025 ORGANISATIONAL OVERVIEW**

From 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025 our staff team consisted of **23** members.

During the year we supported **777** children and young people; **620** were supported directly through our services with **157** children and young people attending other events and activities.

**444** Children and young people received support through our regional independent advocacy service  
**196** Members of MyVOYPIC scheme.

**157** Children and young people attended activity days.

**132** Children and young people took part in participation forums.

**55** Young people were supported through our independent advocacy service at Beechcroft

**52** Young adults received individual advocacy support through the Leading Change programme.

**35** Children and young people received one to one support and coaching.

**26** Children and young people received advocacy support through Speak Up programme.  
**15** young people took part in a youth leadership programme.

## **STRATEGIC GOAL 1. EMPOWERING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

### **INDEPENDENT ADVOCACY SUPPORT:**

VOYPIC delivers independent advocacy services to children in care and care leavers up to the age of 30 in compliance with national advocacy standards, the Advocacy Charter, and national/international human rights obligations. The services are structurally independent from statutory organisations and service delivery. Each service is free from conflict of interests in design and operation and actively seeks to reduce conflicting interests.

#### **1. REGIONAL INDEPENDENT ADVOCACY SERVICE FOR CHILDREN IN CARE AND CARE LEAVERS**

The Regional Independent Advocacy Service, commissioned by SPPG, supports children in care and young people in receipt of statutory leaving and aftercare services.

- **444** children and young people received advocacy support
- **73%** of closed advocacy cases were fully resolved,
- **25%** of closed cases were partially resolved
- **2%** of casework closed unresolved.

### **Independent Advocacy Support and Secure Care**

VOYPIC provides individual advocacy support to young people being presented at the Regional Multi Agency Panel for Admission to secure care.

In 2024-2025 VOYPIC supported **40** young people at **59** 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. **98%** 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**

**24** advocacy workshops were delivered to **258** 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 explored a range of issues, including rights and entitlements for unaccompanied and asylum-seeking young people, transitions in education for 16+ young people, support whilst leaving care, review meetings, accommodation, personal safety and consent.

### **Impact of Regional Advocacy Service Support**

- **96%** of young people felt listened to because of the advocacy support they receive
- **98%** of young people stated they would use the advocacy service again
- **70%** of young people whose cases had been resolved reported that their rights were protected through our advocacy support
- **92%** of young people felt they were able to influence decision making with the help of their advocate.

## **2. ADVOCACY IN BEEHCROFT CHILD & ADOLESCENT MENTAL HEALTH UNIT**

Beehcroft 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 **55** individuals to share their views and take part in decision making regarding their care and discharge.

## **3. SPEAK UP PILOT ADVOCACY PROJECT**

This year we piloted independent advocacy support for young people involved in child protection Case Conferences in the northern area. The pilot assessed the effectiveness of advocacy to support young people's meaningful participation in child protection processes. During the year we supported **21** young people in case conferences.

## **4. 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 **52** 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.

## **STRATEGIC AIM 2. INNOVATING THROUGH PARTICIPATION AND CO-PRODUCTION**

### **PARTICIPATION FORUMS**

We facilitated weekly participation forums in each of the five HSCTs, involving **132** 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.

This year, young people in the forums:

- Designed an animation about 'Coming into Care' and arranged drop-in sessions to inform social workers about the animation and how to use it with children and young people they work with.
- Took part in engagement and consultation sessions on care planning
- Explored the impact of frequent changes in social workers and long-term sickness on care-experienced young people to inform research design
- Shared their experiences of having a social worker with various decision makers

### **LEADING CHANGE PROGRAMME**

The Leading Change programme, funded by the National Lottery Community Fund, supports care experienced young people 14-30 across Northern Ireland through:

- Independent advocacy for young adults aged 21-30 yrs, 52 young adults supported in year
- Coaching and mentoring support, **35** young people supported in year
- Youth leadership training and development, 15 young people engaged in leadership programme

### **YOUNG REPS**

VOYPIC's Young Reps are care-experienced young people aged 16+ who represent the views and experiences of their peers. They advocate on behalf of young people in and leaving care and advise the VOYPIC Board and leadership team on how to deliver the Strategic Plan. Membership of the group is through application, with each member appointed for a period of two years. Two members of the Young Reps Forum are selected by their peers to become ex-officio members of the Board of Directors.

### **ULSTER UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIP**

Led by Ulster University, VOYPIC assisted in the design and delivery of a short course for young people with care experience who were considering a course in social work, psychology etc in higher education. The course helped participants understand the impact of early childhood trauma. It also assisted participants to consider strategies they could utilise to manage their emotional health and wellbeing health while studying. VOYPIC complemented this learning by offering dedicated mentoring support, empowering young people to build confidence and take positive steps toward pursuing a place at university and achieving their goals.

## **DRAG – DATA RESEARCH ADVISORY GROUP**

The Data Research Advisory Group (DRAG) is a group of four young people, working in partnership with researchers from the Administrative Data Research Centre NI (ADRC NI). The Research Centre is a partnership between research specialists at Queen's University Belfast and Ulster University.

This year members of DRAG advised on research into the long-term mental health outcomes for the care experienced community. This group continues to shape the research, developing research questions, and providing context for findings from the data. One young person completed an internship at ADRC during the summer 2024, producing an academic paper on the involvement of young people in data research.

## **STRATEGIC AIM 3. CREATING CHANGE**

### **CARE DAY 25**

In February 2025 we held our tenth annual CARE DAY campaign. For a second year, the flagship event of the campaign was the Care Day Awards Ceremony. Nominations opened in October, with judging taking place in January. The awards ceremony was held on the evening of Care Day – Friday 21 February- in Belfast City Hall. To mark the tenth anniversary of Care Day, we asked local councils to plant a tree in a public park, to show their support for the campaign and the care experienced community in their local area. We attended tree-planting ceremonies in Armagh, Ballymena, Derry-Londonderry and Bangor as part of this activity.

### **Queens University Belfast & Mamelani Projects in Cape Town**

VOYPIC partnered with Queens University Belfast, and Mamelani Project, Cape Town, to organise an international exchange between care experienced young people between South Africa and Northern Ireland and to document their experiences; discussions and learning from each other in a filmmaking project which was co-produced by the young people involved. Throughout this journey, they realised that while the systems in each country might look different, many of the challenges they face are the same: stigma, lack of support after leaving care, and the importance of relationships that don't just end when they leave the system. They also discovered strengths in their stories and lessons about community, resilience, and hope.

### **Independent Review of Children's Social Care Services**

VOYPIC continues to be a member of the Reimagine Collective, working in partnership with children's organisations to inform the outworking of the Independent Review of Children's Social Care Services. Additionally, this group forms the basis of the RESET Workstream of the DoH Reform Programme. VOYPIC also maintains membership of four workstreams of the Reform Programme.

### **ENYA/ENOC**

Northern Ireland is represented on the European Network of Ombudspersons for Children (ENOC) by the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People. Each year, ENOC selects a theme related to children's rights, and in 2024 the theme chosen was 'children in alternative care'. ENOC is advised by the European Network of Young Advisors (ENYA), a group of young people from each of the member nations who consider the selected theme in their home nation, before coming together to agree key messages for the ombudspersons.

In partnership with the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People, VOYPIC worked with a 15 young people to explore the rights of young people in care. Two young people

attended the ENYA Forum in Bratislava, Slovakia, in July. The young people worked with peers from across Europe to develop a series of policy calls for decision makers in the various jurisdictions. One young person was selected to attend ENOC conference in Helsinki, Finland, alongside the NI Commissioner.

## **POLICY CONSULTATIONS /ENGAGEMENT WITH DECISION MAKERS**

VOYPIC submitted two policy consultation responses in 2024-25:

- Budget 24-25 EQIA – Department of Health
- Draft Programme for Government – The Executive Office

Additionally, oral evidence was provided to the Northern Ireland Assembly Committee for Health on two occasions. A further workshop with the Committee for Health was facilitated, involving seven young people and three members of the Committee. Meetings were also held with the Minister for Health, the Minister for Finance, the Leader of the Opposition, and the Mayors or representatives of four local councils.

## **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.

## **YOUTH & POLICING PARTNERSHIP FORUM**

VOYPIC worked alongside the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People, the PSNI, the Northern Ireland Policing Board, the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland, and a range of other children's sector organisations to establish the Youth and Policing Partnership Forum. The first Forum meeting was hosted by NIPB, on 8 March.

## **STRATEGIC AIM 4. GROWTH AND STABILITY**

### **SUSTAINABILITY AND RESILIENCE**

To improve VOYPIC's long term sustainability, resilience and capacity, support from the Dormant Accounts Fund NI helped the charity to develop the leadership team's capacity and to strengthen governance arrangements at Board level. The review of governance was completed by Trustees in year, with a review of the charity's articles of association and membership.

**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 2025 the balance of unrestricted reserves was £402,490 (2024 – £407,218) of which £57,887 (2024- £19, 296) has been designated by the Board at the year

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 £1,021,159 (2024- £1,044,751)

**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 year 2024-2025. With a projected shortfall for the year 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025 of £73,532. 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 2025, the charity had cash in bank of £424,688, with unrestricted funds of £420,490 at the year end, £57,887 of which have been designated for use in the year ending 31 March 2026.

In summary, based on the funding in place for 2025/2026 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

Mr. P Allen - Treasurer

Ms. M. McCallan

Ms. M Kennedy Vice Chair

Ms. E. Doherty

Dr. P. McCafferty

Ms. R McCooey

Mr. H. Robinson

Ms. E Ibrahim

Ms. J Dowell

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.

The Directors Report was authorised and approved by the Board of Directors.

Mr P McClenaghan

**Director**

12 August 2025