

COSLA
Local Government Annual Report on The Promise
West Lothian Contribution

Promise Position Statement

Although originating from an Independent Care Review in Scotland, The Promise requires a ‘whole system’s approach’ in the clear identification of a need for early help and family support. Any Promise Plan therefore requires to ‘read across’ all existing Service Development and Improvements Plans to assess alignment rather than the creation of another separate Plan, and, before entering into Service (Re)Design. Crucially, any Service Design needs to be developed with, and upon understanding the local perspective of families, and the workforce. In addition to tangible action, The Promise makes frequent reference to cultural change, Changing culture requires an incorporation of a different way of thinking and behaving which then permeates any action. The clarity about, and integration of, values and principles are therefore viewed as foundation. This is based upon a humans rights, care, justice and recovery approach.

A Good Childhood

As part of the National Consultation in May 2021 regarding the Staying Together and Connected: Getting it right for Sisters and Brothers in preparation for the Children (Scotland) Act 2020 being implemented, we involved our children and young people.

Our children and young people told us what was significant to them and for adults to consider what they would design differently. One of our young people told us

“Can the guidance put a responsibility for people to provide a family tree for looked after kids”

One of the plans for implementation is a new information system within West Lothian’s Social Policy Service which aims to enable

When asked about sensitive issues - even if there was a shared experience when living together one of our young people told us…

“You will get people who want out (being at home) because of harm so you may not want to stay with the people who remind you of that time when you lived together. Always ask.”

This clearly highlights some of the complexities around both the aspirations within The Promise, and of the implementation of the legislation in what individual children within the same ‘sibling’ group may need or want and the skill required to navigate this with, and for children, as part of any design of services.

One of our other young person responded to the question as to what the Guidance should cover…:)

“Needs to be up to date fashionable – cover like maybe a zebra blue background with sunglasses on kind of thing - not boring”

Although the cover of the National Guidance was neither blue nor had a zebra with sunglasses – the team writing the guidance used a Zebra symbol to depict examples of creative practice…

An extract image from the Guidance:



We have a team of sessional children’s rights practitioners who are now designing therapeutic boxes for children incorporating the zebra theme…

West Lothian made, and were successful in the application for £100,000 for the Good Childhood – Promise Partnership Fund in February 2022. The basis of this proposal was in recognition of the supports required in relation to later stages of childhood in relation to Lifelong Links and housing security needs following experience of being cared for away from families of origin. This involves collaboration with two Third Sector agencies who already specialise in this form of engagement. West Lothian College have initiated a Trust Project to address structural inequalities faced by young people and care experienced parents but identified the need for wider multi-agency infrastructure to ensure the right support is given at the right time by the right people. These combined needs for infrastructure – both individually and on a service level led to the proposal. Our Youth Justice Service (who already engage with young people up to the age of 21 years) are also connected to this initiative.

West Lothian have also been invited by AFA to be one of eight local authorities considering how to improve how children and their families experience transition from the point of coming into care until children enter into their extended permanent family. The proposal to develop our evidence informed existing knowledge and resources to build a new **‘transitions toolkit’** focusing on supporting children to maintain relationships at critical transition points where these often become fractured or lost. The hope would be to co-produce this with pilot member Local Authorities and children with care experience in each area.

Whole Family Support

West Lothian had already invested in the Families Together service which aligns clearly with the 10 Principles of Family Support outlined with The Promise. Therefore, any local Promise Plan was more to understand the impacts of this for children and families, and to ensure cross reference to the existing Service Development Plan. In addition to contributing to children being able to remain within their families of origin by offering a service which is responsive to need in the hours when families need this, the team have recognised the support to relationships required in addition to the immediate parental relationships. This has included ‘siblings’ and been mirrored within the Attainment Project. Attached is an evaluation of work undertaken in November 2021 which reflects the experiences for those involved



Supporting the Workforce

There was recognition early on that there required to be clear Values and Principles to underpin the wider development of The Promise. The following were agreed to be the focus and launched at a Service Development Day for Social Policy:

1. **TRAUMA INFORMED -** In order for children to be safe – all adults supporting them need to feel safe, which includes the workforce. We will continue to grow networks and systems of support for ***everyone*** involved in children’s lives in West Lothian.
2. **STRENGTHS BASED -** Every family has its own assets and strengths but may also need support at different times.
3. **CONNECTEDNESS –** We believe children should remain within their own families and we will actively work to ensure families remain together. Where it is not possible for families to live together, we will identify and support the lifelong relationships that matter to children and young people in order to promote their sense of belonging.
4. **VALUING RELATIONSHIPS –** We will work in a relationship-based way to promote the best possible outcomes for children and young people in West Lothian.
5. **EARLY HELP –** Help for families will be offered at the earliest opportunity. It will also be clearly articulated what this help will look like
6. **WORKING TOGETHER -** Listening carefully and working with care and compassion will be an important part of any decision making. We will use everyday language without codes and acronyms. Any plans are to be made ***with*** families. We will work in partnership with all key agencies.
7. **RIGHTS CENTRED -** We strongly believe in, and wish to uphold children and young people’s rights and it is also an essential element that their experience is sought and understood to inform any plans
8. **STABILITY -** For any growth and development to happen – a sense of stability and safety are essential. Stability happens when there are as few transitions as possible – either in people or places. We strive to provide a sense of safety in all the caring experiences we provide to infants, children, young people and their families across all Services
9. **CHILD FIRST APPROACH** – actively challenge the unnecessary criminalisation of children and young people in the children’s and adult justice system and ensure they are supported in a way that is appropriate, proportionate, supports their rights and is age appropriate in line with the whole systems approach.

These are translatable across agencies as it is recognised The Promise requires a multi-agency approach. They are contained within ‘The Promise Story’ which is a description of what already exists within West Lothian and practice guidance as to how The Promise could be implemented.

Part of The Promise Story was based upon workstreams established around the Five Fundamentals – initially focused upon Children’s Rights (and Participation), Language and Listening

Work has also taken place between January and March 2022 (with planning having been undertaken between August and December 2021) relating to a model of therapeutic care which includes a clear need for caching, supervision and support to the team in order to ‘hold the hand of those holding the hands of our children’

Webpage:
<https://publicprotectionwestlothian.org.uk/article/68957/The-Promise-Resource-Page>