



Oor Lives, Oor Ane

**The Good Ideas Group
Supported by Children 1st Moray**

Working alongside parents whose children have
been removed from their care



Summary Report

Children 1st recognise that the voices of parents who have children removed from their care are often not heard. There is a significant gap in support for parents who tell us that they can feel forgotten.

In 2022 Children 1st Moray secured funding from the CORRA Foundation, with additional funds from Moray Council Social Work and Moray Alcohol and Drugs Partnership, for a participatory action research project to explore:

What help do parents need during child protection processes and what support would benefit parents who have children who are looked after in foster care, residential care, secure care, kinship care or are adopted?

This is a summary of the findings of the research Oor Lives, Oor Ane (Our Lives, Our Own). The title of the research report comes from an interview with a parent, describing what it is like to have intensive scrutiny of every aspect of your family life.

The image of shoes on the beach was taken by parents to represent the idea of asking others to "walk a mile in the shoes of parents and children", to develop empathy for the complex circumstances that they and their families have lived through.

What we did

A small group of parents, the Good Ideas Group, worked with a peer support worker and a community research project worker to co-design the research. The knowledge, experience, and enthusiasm of the Good Ideas Group was critical to the success of the project. Parents shared that being involved in the research project had an impact on their confidence and aspirations.

As part of the research project, Children 1st offered follow up support to all participants who chose to meet with us on more than two occasions. Locating the research within an existing Children 1st service meant that we viewed the work with parents through a support lens from the start.

Using a trauma informed approach, we developed different ways in which parents could choose to participate and to what extent they wanted to be involved in the research.

Some professionals were anxious that taking part might impact parents' mental wellbeing, while participants told us taking part was a therapeutic process.

Who participated

Children 1st recognise that because we work alongside children and families, this led to us connecting more with parents who have care of a child or children than with parents who do not have any children in their care. Six out of eight parents who participated in interviews were from families with four or more children.



Oor Lives, Oor Ane Participants

What we learned

Common themes emerged from parents' experiences that link with the five foundations of the promise. Findings have been grouped thematically based on the foundations.

Family

Treat parents as parents and recognise that family is important in children's lives

Parents expressed that they do not always feel seen as or treated as parents. The message is clear, whether or not children are in their care, they will always be their parents. It's important for a child to have all the people who are significant to them fully included and involved in their life.

Have time together with babies and children

Opportunities for parents and birth families to bond with their children are valued by parents. Parents have shared examples with us of missed opportunities when bonding and connection between parents and children could have been supported.

Recognise the importance of brothers and sisters

A system that thinks about children individually, rather than locating them within their family and their community, does not give children the best chances to thrive. A rights-based approach when nurturing the relationship between brothers and sisters is essential.

Voice

Parents need to feel respected, heard and taken seriously

Parents have shared with us their need to feel respected, heard and taken seriously. All participants shared examples of not feeling acknowledged as having something to contribute. It is important to recognise that there were examples of positive experiences for parents. Both positive and negative experiences came from across a range of agencies, rather than just one single agency.

Care

Parents should not be judged for their own childhood

All care experienced participants felt their own life history was viewed negatively when decisions were being made about their children. They spoke about the use of chronologies and thinking about the purpose and relevance of sharing information, particularly parents own care records.

People

Parents should know who cares for their child and have an opportunity to build a relationship

When good communication is possible between parents, foster carers, kinship carers, adopters, or care staff, then children benefit directly. Children's needs are more likely to be better understood and consistently met. Knowing and having the opportunity to build a relationship with the person or people caring for their children mattered to parents irrespective of the age of their children or the type of care arrangements in place.

Scaffolding

Parents should have support at all stages, including if children are no longer living with them

Parents identified a need for early support when they are struggling to care for their children. They emphasised the importance of building trust, taking a strengths-based approach and having difficult conversations with kindness. Parents want workers to be curious, to understand each family and not to make assumptions about who is important to children and their families.

Parents spoke about the difficulty of having changes of worker. Participants said they needed professionals to stay connected with the family and to keep in regular contact, not just at meetings.

"If services and families can work together then it will reduce the trauma of children and for their families too."

Recommendations for Change

1. Acknowledge that parents are parents whether their children are in their care or not.
2. Recognise and respect the right to family life, for children, parents, brothers and sisters and wider family.
3. Make peer support available to parents who have lost care of their children.
4. Family Group Decision Making should be available to all families as early as possible when there is a risk that children might not be able to stay at home with their parent.
5. Improve support for young people coming home from secure care and other forms of residential care.
6. Families' views and needs must be included in reform of the Children's Hearing's System.
7. Involve parents in the design and development of services to meet their support needs.

Thank you to all the parents who gave their time and energy working alongside us and sharing their views with us.

Thank you to the CORRA Foundation, the Scottish Government, Moray Council Social Work and Moray Alcohol and Drugs Partnership for funding this work.

Thank you to the workers across a range of agencies who have helped us to link with parents who have contributed to this report.

We welcome further discussions and ideas on how to support our recommendations for change. Email us at moray@children1st.org.uk



Read the full research report.



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