

# Secure care pathway and standards: Co-production process and implementation plans

**Paul Sullivan and Beth-Anne Logan**

## **Abstract**

The development of the Secure Care Pathway and Standards sets out, for the first time, national standards of what support children and young people in Scotland should expect when in, or on the edges of, secure care. Launched in October 2020, the Standards seek to ensure support is provided before, during and after a stay in secure care and that the rights of children and young people, often facing extreme vulnerabilities and risks in their lives, are respected. When implemented, the Standards will deliver a consistent, unified approach to caring for vulnerable children in all council areas, and to all children placed in secure care in Scotland. Crucially, the Standards were developed using co-production methods alongside children and young people. This article describes some of the elements of that process, as well as the impact that the new Standards will have on young people's lives in Scotland.

## **Keywords**

Secure care, care, co-production, relationships, trauma, residential childcare, social work, participation, Scotland

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## Background

The development and launch of the [Secure Care Pathway and Standards](#) comes at a time when Scotland's approach to children deprived of their liberty has arguably never had greater scrutiny and attention. The publication of [The Promise](#), after a national review, provides Scotland with a fresh impetus to deliver the best possible outcomes for the children and young people in our care.

Implementation of the Standards is also a key vehicle for supporting the achievement of, and responding to the recommendations from, the [Vision, Purpose, Values and Principles of secure care](#) agreed by the Secure Care Strategic Board. It builds on Calls for Action made during the [Secure Care National project](#), upon which the Standards are based. Also relevant is future work to support United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child ([UNCRC](#)) incorporation into Scots law, the conclusions of the recent Scottish Parliament [Justice Committee Inquiry into Secure Care Places](#) and the Care Inspectorate's [Report on the deaths of looked after children in Scotland 2012 – 2018](#).

Full implementation of all 44 Standards will help transform secure care. These Standards are what everyone in the system should expect: for children and young people, their families, staff involved in providing secure care, and professionals involved in supporting children before and after any potential stay in secure care. Each of the standards is written from the perspective of the child, and reflects the areas children and young people said were most important to them.

For children and young people who experience secure care, implementation of the Standards will form part of the journey towards transformational change to improve the experiences and outcomes for children who are experiencing extreme vulnerabilities, needs, and risks in their lives.

## **What do the Standards mean for children and young people?**

The Standards provide a framework for ensuring that the rights of children and young people are respected and are aimed at improving experiences and outcomes for children who are experiencing extreme vulnerabilities, needs, and risks in their lives.

What this means in practice, is that within secure care settings, young people will be welcomed into a space that feels safe, comfortable, and friendly. They will be given access to what they need to relax and rest. The people they care about will be encouraged and supported to stay connected with them, and they will be treated with dignity, compassion, and respect. Their rights will be upheld and respected. With everyone working together to embed these standards and create a culture change, this will further enable a child's stay in secure care to be as conducive and trauma free as possible.

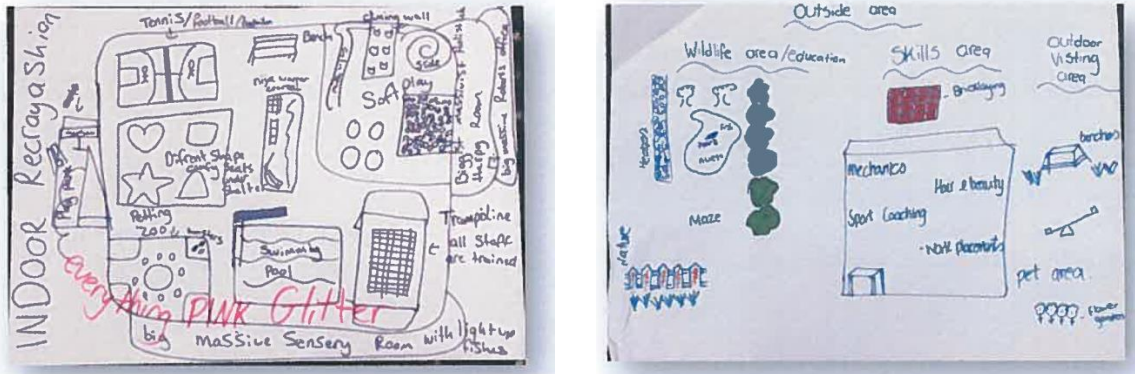
Education was one of the main issues that children discussed during the co-production process and there are a number of Standards that reflect the importance of this; including young people being given a range of high quality educational, vocational, and community-based experiences and qualifications.

The Standards do not just apply to secure care settings. Children consulted said that often it was the preparation for coming into secure care or transitioning out that was most difficult for them. Twenty of the 44 Standards are concerned with the 'before and after', ensuring that children are involved in the decision-making process about their care, are given the right information in preparing to enter secure care, and supported to leave secure care at a pace that's comfortable and safe for them.

## **Co-production process**

Just as importantly, the Pathway and Standards have been co-produced alongside children with experience of secure care. Without their involvement, the Standards could not have been developed in the way they have. The co-production process has been integral to their development and will be integral to

their success. This co-production process must now be seen as the 'new norm' for the development of any service and the development of the Pathway and Standards should be seen as a real example of co-production in motion.



Each of the five secure care centres took on the 'creative challenge' of redesigning how secure care should look and feel. Supported by Children and Young People's Centre for Justice (CYCJ), CELCIS and the [STARR Board](#), each of the centres used art, storytelling, model building, music, and other forms of creativity to design how care should look and feel. Some of the creative abilities showcased were truly amazing as children worked alongside staff to design their perfect care environment. Once this creative work had taken place, further work was carried out to create the standards, test them out with children in secure care, and then hone and develop them further.

The creative process helped staff and children think differently about how they wanted their care to be. The process gave them an opportunity to work alongside staff on an equal footing. Most importantly, the creative process gave many the opportunities to have their voice heard in ways that felt safe to them. These elements of fun, choice, and creativity were integral to the process.



None of this work could have been possible without the leadership of the STARR group, Scotland's only volunteer group of members with lived experience of secure care who help advise, influence, inform, and challenge key aspects of secure care, and ensure they are upholding children's rights with the highest regard. Developing standards for care is not a quick win. It has been a process of years in the development and one in which STARR has never wavered. Its members have been patient, focused, and always driven towards the goal of improving care for other children. During the co-production activities, STARR had a whole day session to 'sense check' the standards. Among the many questions asked on that day were: 'Are we going far enough? Do these standards uphold children's rights to the highest regard?'. STARR meticulously assessed each standard, one by one checking that the language was trauma-informed, easy to digest, and could result in real, lasting meaningful change. On the same day, STARR also analysed and identified the strategic implications of each standard. For example 'Which parts of the system need to change and adapt in order to meet the needs of our children? What do these standards mean for social workers?' This was particularly relevant when considering children's journeys before and during, secure care as throughout the co-production process children told us they would like more contact with their social workers.

Standards' 'champions' in Scotland's five secure care centres played an equally pivotal role. These champions helped lead the creative co-production process within each centre and ensure children were provided with meaningful opportunities to take part in the design.

The development of the Pathway and Standards is a clear example of multi-agency working and the value of bringing together key partners to work to a common goal. Each of the five centres worked in close partnership, and also with Scottish Government, CYCJ, CELCIS, the Scottish Throughcare and Aftercare Forum ([Staf](#)), Education Scotland, local authorities and other corporate parents. Each partner played a critical role in bringing us to this juncture. In particular, The Standards Champions found the space to come together, collaborate, and share practice from across the five centres, particularly useful. It is important that we continue to create these spaces for collaboration to ensure our children are receiving the best care possible, no matter where they are in the country.

## Hopes of the STARR Board

The way in which these standards have been co-designed and co-produced by those with lived experience is testament to the many partners involved and provides a blueprint for how service design and delivery should be done in the future. My hope is that Scotland listens, acts, and reflects on this exemplary work done with the standards and will seek to replicate it at any given opportunity.

These standards should also provide hope for our children, that they will be loved, nurtured and cherished in whatever form of care setting they are in.

Finally, it is my hope that we realise the Secure Care Strategic Board's vision, 'of a Scotland where children are treated as children and no child is deprived of their liberty'

(Beth-Anne Logan – STARR Board chair).

## Implementation

The approaches and supports provided to children in or on the edge of secure care are different in each area of Scotland, so change will happen at different

paces. What is important is that all partners and agencies are on board and are working to make things better for everyone.

In supporting the phased approach to evaluation and monitoring, the first phase of which is focused on self-evaluation, learning and improvement, the Secure Care Group have developed materials to support local reflection on what the Pathway and Standards mean for agencies within each area.

The Standards champions' group acts as a forum to support implementation of the standards, helping to share experiences and practice in respect of the standards. The group provides opportunities to collaborate, innovate, and constructively challenge practice.

The co-production of the Standards has been a journey, just as the next phase of their implementation is. Children and young people should remain at the heart of this work. The standards by themselves do not make change. That will require the effort of us all.

If you would like to find out more about the Standards please contact Paul Sullivan, [p.sullivan@strath.ac.uk](mailto:p.sullivan@strath.ac.uk)

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