

Project Esperanza Care Experience Charter for Racialized Communities



Timeline of law, policy & contradictions in Scotland

In the World:

2015-2024 United Nations International Decade for People of African Descent.

In Scotland:

2013-2023 The recorded number of Black children in Scotland's 'Care System' rises to its highest.

Scots law, policy & public scrutiny:

- Children (Scotland) Act 1995
- **Scottish Black Workers Forum publishes 'Regarding Scotland's Black Children' 1998**
- Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007
- These are Our Bairns 2008
- Looked After Children (Scotland) Regulations 2009
- Children's Hearings (Scotland) Act 2011
- Children & Young People Act 2014
- Scottish Care Leavers Covenant 2015
- **'Root & Branch' review of Scotland's Care System is called by First Minister 2016**
- Scotland's Independent Care Review begins 2017
- **Scotland's Independent Care Review concludes & publishes 'The Promise' 2020**
- Children in Scotland Act 2020
- National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland 2021
- The Promise Scotland: Plan 21-24
- **January 2024: United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (Incorporation) Act 2024**
- February 2024: Passion4Fusion & Iriss publish 'Working with African diaspora Families: a supportive toolkit for the social care workforce'
- **March 2024: Project Esperanza launch 'Fostering Equality: Addressing Bias in Scottish Child Protection Practices'**

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- June 2024: The Promise Scotland: Plan 24-30
- September 2024: Human Rights Bill for Scotland 2024 is delayed indefinitely by Scot Govt
- December 2024: The Promise Scotland: Plan 24-30 Progress Framework
- **March 2025: Project Esperanza launch 'Project Esperanza: Care Experience Charter for Racialised Communities**



Project Esperanza Care Experience Charter for Racialised Communities.

Foundations for Cultural Safety in Scotland: Black Voice. Black Family. Black Care. Black People. Black Scaffolding.

In creating the March 2025: Project Esperanza we launched The Project Esperanza: Care Experience Charter for Racialised Communities (for Children & Young people; for Parents & Carers; for Black community organisations in Scotland) we state that

- i. there is a national lack of understanding of the intersections between Race, Racism and 'the Care System' in Scotland;
- ii. outdated racist attitudes of 'Colour Blindness' in Child Protection have rendered invisible the significant numbers of Black Care Experienced people in Scotland today. Our belief is evidence-based:
 - a. Race and Racism have been totally absent from the record of The Independent Care Review and The Promise Scotland;
 - b. The Promise Progress Framework for Plan 24-30 fails to highlight that the number of children & young people who are Black, Asian and have Ethnic Minority status *are at their highest for a decade*;
 - c. The data that is recorded shows there are thousands of children & young people experiencing the care system for whom there is no ethnicity data recorded whatsoever;
 - d. There has been some limited attention paid to Children & Young people with 'Dual system status' (Asylum Seeking/Refugee legal status as well as Looked After/Leaving Care legal status), some of whom are Black Care Experienced people in Scotland. *However, the UK's 'Hostile Environment' has not been identified as a systematic abuser of Black Children and Young people's rights in Scotland.*



Our Project Esperanza: Care Experience Charter for Racialised Communities seeks to redress this once & for all.

Our Project Esperanza: Care Experience Charter for Racialised Communities takes a **Rights and Reparatory Justice approach** which

- is consistent with Scotland's Child Protection and Human Rights legal & policy frameworks;
- is consistent with The Promise Scotland Plan 24-30 and national Progress Framework;
- respects the United Nations International Decade for people of African Descent;
- upholds Black Care Experienced people's Rights to Reparations, Remedy, Repair, and Restitution, as a people who have experienced Slavery, Colonialism & Ethnocide under British 3 Imperialism;
- is influenced by Cultural Safety policy developed by Black Care Experienced people in Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia:

A perspective from Black Australia:

'Cultural Safety' for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and communities.

What is Cultural Safety?

(Different from 'Cultural Competency' and goes beyond Anti-Racism)

Cultural safety is about creating an environment that is safe for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This means there is no assault, challenge or denial of their identity and experience.

Cultural safety is about:

- Shared respect, shared meaning and shared knowledge
- The experience of learning together with dignity and truly listening
- Strategic and institutional reform to remove barriers to the optimal health, wellbeing and safety of Aboriginal people. This includes addressing unconscious bias, racism and discrimination, and supporting Aboriginal self-determination
- Individuals, organisations and systems ensuring their cultural values do not negatively impact on Aboriginal peoples, including addressing the potential for unconscious bias, racism and discrimination
- Individuals, organisations and systems ensuring self-determination for Aboriginal people. This includes sharing power (decision-making and governance) and resources with Aboriginal communities. It's especially relevant for the design, delivery and evaluation of services for Aboriginal people.



The Context for Our Charter:

Situating our work during the United Nation's International Decade for People of African Descent 2015-2024 puts the significant progress with Children & Young people's Rights in Scotland into stark perspective.

The UN called for all member states to uphold the human rights of Black people (the Global African Diaspora) specifically over the last decade, with focus on these areas:

Recognition

- The right to equality and non-discrimination
- Education on equality and awareness-raising
- Information-gathering
- Participation and inclusion

Justice

- access to justice
- special measures

Development

- Right to development and measures against poverty
- Education
- Employment
- Health
- Housing

Black workers within Scotland's 'Care System' have put Race and Racism on the record since at least 1998, calling for focus in Children's Services Policy, Monitoring, Training, Consultation, and Staffing.

Black Care Experienced people and their families as well as Black workers have been highlighting Race and Racism to The Promise Scotland since its inception in 2020.



The Principles: Rights. Reparation. Remedy. Repair. Restitution

FOREWORD

This charter was co designed by care experienced young people and their peers, the workforce in health education and social work, allies and funders. It is built on the following five principles; Rights. Reparation. Remedy. Repair. Restitution. It is a commitment to do better—for the children who deserve nothing less, and for the generations that come after them.

Across Scotland, the care system holds a deep responsibility to confront and respond to its own history, one marked by exclusion, over-surveillance, and systemic injustice toward Black and multi-ethnic children and families. For too long, services have operated without the cultural sensitivity, trauma-informed approaches, or anti-racist commitments required to uphold the dignity, safety, and identity of every child.

Historically, the lived experiences of Black and minority ethnic families have been silenced, misinterpreted, or pathologised. Children were removed not only from families, but from culture, language, community, and heritage often under the guise of “neutral” care that in reality reinforced white, Eurocentric norms. The absence of understanding, coupled with institutional bias, created cycles of harm and disconnection that have echoed across generations.

Working Restoratively with Black and Multi-Ethnic Children and Families means not only acknowledging this past but actively repairing it. This must begin with the recognition of **Rights**: the right of every child to be seen, heard, and supported in their full cultural identity; the right of families to be treated with equity and respect; and the right of communities to influence the systems that affect their children. Presence of families who have navigated systems not made for them. Social work must become a space where restoration—not removal, is the starting point.



Reparation involves more than apology, it calls for structural change, investment in cultural competence, and the amplification of Black and ethnic minority voices in the design, leadership, and delivery of care. It also means holding ourselves accountable: individually and institutionally.

Remedy requires us to address the immediate and long-term impacts of systemic racism within the care system. This includes improving outcomes, closing disparities, and reimagining practice so that healing and belonging are prioritised, not incidental.

Repair is a collective effort. It is about restoring trust between communities and services, building relationships rooted in honesty, and recognising the deep resilience of families who have navigated systems not made for them. Social work must become a space where restoration—not removal, is the starting point.

Restitution speaks to justice. It calls for resources, representation, and re-balancing power. It means equipping professionals with the skills and awareness to practice safely and effectively with children from all backgrounds, and it demands that we challenge racism not only when it's explicit, but wherever it hides, in policy, language, and everyday decisions.

We are calling on allies, partner organisations, statutory services, funders, the workforce and the carers of our children and young people to be bold, unapologetic, and stand rooted in love and justice, making change happen for Black and multiethnic children and young people who have care experience or care status, or on the fringes of care in Scotland.

The Themes of Project Esperanza Care Experience Charter for Racialised Communities are as follows:

Being the child (children's rights)

Being an Ally

Being the Partner Organisation

Statutory Services

Being a funder

Being the worker/ Workforce



Being the child or young person (based on children's rights and amplifying young people's voices)

(A1) We have the right to be seen, heard, and believed.

Our voices must shape decisions about us. When we speak up about racism or unfair treatment, we must be taken seriously and provided with safe spaces to share our experiences.

(A2) We want ALL of our rights to be respected and given to us without fail.

Diversity should be normalised – no child should feel different.

(A3) We want to be supported to stay with our families and siblings as a first option.

We should never be separated from our siblings unless it's necessary for safety.

(A4) We want to be exposed to everything about our culture, heritage, and identity, and for our carers to understand these aspects before taking us in.

We should be matched with carers familiar with our culture, religion, and race.

(A5) We don't want to be moved around more than twice. Promise to ensure the right placement for us from the start.

We should be allowed to meet others in care so we don't feel isolated.

(A6) We have the right to be raised in an anti-racist environment.

We should have equal rights and opportunities, and never have to justify our identity. The care system must address racism and ensure we are not mistreated due to misunderstandings.

(A7) The people who care for us must understand racism and know how to challenge it.

Racism has no place in the care system and must be actively stopped.

(A8) We have the right to stay connected to our culture and heritage.

Our culture, history, and languages must be respected and celebrated. We must have access to mentors, carers, and social workers who understand our experiences. We should not be forced into any religion.



(A9) We should be able to practice our faith, wear our hair how we want, and eat food from our cultures without judgment.

Carers must respect our faith and culture and cannot change or stop our religious practices.

(A10) We have the right to safe and loving homes.

We deserve to feel accepted, not just tolerated. Carers must learn how to care for our hair and skin properly. We should not be placed in environments where we feel isolated or racially discriminated against.

(A11) Promise to never separate us from our siblings unless necessary for safety.

Kinship care should be prioritized, and barriers for our communities should be removed to allow us to stay connected to our culture.

(A12) We have the right to thrive in education and employment.

Schools and workplaces must support us in overcoming barriers and provide equal access to opportunities.

(A13) We have the right to good mental health and wellbeing support.

We should have access to culturally competent therapists and safe spaces to talk about our feelings and experiences without judgment.

(A14) We have the right to continued care despite immigration decisions.

Look after us beyond the borders of this country if we have to leave.

(A15) We have the right to a future full of possibilities.

Leaving care should not mean struggling alone. We deserve strong, long-term support networks and resources to achieve our ambitions.



Being an Ally

(B1) Commit to opening doors that are either closed or half opened to Black Led Organisations

(B2) Commit to calling out those sitting at tables to discuss and make decisions about Black people without us being present, and challenge them on why they are not inviting Black Led organisations into the rooms and discussions about Black people.

(B3) Commit to working in solidarity with Black women who are leading on safeguarding work.

(B4) Commit to Listening, Learning and unlearning – Acknowledge the expertise that Black women bring, not just through professional training but through lived experience. Seek to understand the ways racism, gender bias, and power imbalances shape safeguarding outcomes.

(B5) Commit to challenging and changing – Use your position to call out inequities within safeguarding systems. Advocate for policies and practices that are anti-racist, and support measures that protect Black children from harm, including the harm caused by institutional racism.

(B6) Commit to sharing power – Ensure that Black women's perspectives are not just heard but acted upon. Allyship is not about speaking for others but amplifying voices that are often ignored. Open doors for Black women and bring them into the rooms and spaces that have excluded them (or forgot to invite them)(but also do the work to make sure that those spaces are safe spaces for Black women to co exist in)

(B7) Commit to reflection and growth – Being an ally is an ongoing process. It requires self-examination, openness to feedback, having a genuine interest in the issues and the changes that need to be made, and a commitment to continuous learning. (we have a space to facilitate this so please ask us).



Being the Partner Organisation

- (C1) Commit to working with services that are Black led and culturally specific in order to meet the needs of Black children and young people.
- (C2) Commit to working with services that are Black led and culturally specific to better understand Black families and communities.
- (C3) Commit to creating safe spaces, with Black representation of staff and authentic processes for the Black child and their family to be heard.
- (C4) Commit to actively address systemic racism and bias in child protection by engaging with Project Esperanza and our learning material.
- (C5) Commit to moving from not racist to being anti racist in your organisation or agency
- (C6) Commit to trauma informed practice when working with people with racialized identities and cultural safety across statutory services and departments.

Statutory Services

- (D1) Commit to prevention and early intervention work to educate families who may not be aware of child protection legislation and policy. Signpost to Project Esperanza upon families arriving in the country.

Funders

- (E1) Having black people at the designing stage of the fund and involving black groups working in this field to design the criteria and the pots of money.
- (E2) Having the power to dictate and change how reporting is undertaken, and creating minimal reporting measures to remove barriers often associated with complex reporting expectations
- (E3) Unrestricted funding.
- (E4) Duty of care to grant holders doing this work.
- (E5) Access to free culturally appropriate counselling particularly racial trauma built into the design stage of the funding.



The Workforce

This Project Esperanza Care Experience Charter for Racialised Communities underscores the vital role of social workers in practicing restoratively with Black and multi-ethnic children who are either in care or at risk of entering care in Scotland. Rooted in Scottish legislation, national and local policy, social work education, and direct insights from Black and minority ethnic (BME) children and families, this charter serves as ***a call to action to improve outcomes, challenge systemic inequality, and reframe social work practice to be truly anti-racist, culturally competent, and inclusive.*** The charter sets a clear expectation: that social work in Scotland must be actively anti-racist, restorative, culturally competent, and accountable. Black and multi-ethnic children deserve services that value their identities, protect their rights, and support their futures. By adopting these principles, you commit to transforming care and creating a system that works with and for every child.

Project Esperanza presents six mission statements to guide transformative, justice-centered social work practice across Scotland. These principles provide a practical and ethical framework to help services meet the distinct needs of ethnic minority communities with equity and respect.

1. Practicing Cultural Competence with Integrity

Social workers must move beyond assumptions and stereotypes. Each individual and family carries unique experiences shaped by the intersection of race, ethnicity, gender, religion, sexuality, class, and more. These intersecting identities impact life chances and wellbeing.

Social workers must center the voice and lived expertise of BME service users in all assessments and decisions. Professional curiosity must be exercised confidently to ensure thorough, nuanced understanding of needs and risks.

Employers must ensure ongoing, relevant training grounded in the lived experiences of ethnic minority communities. This should include collaboration with community organisations and culturally specialist services.

Where appropriate, service users should be consulted about preferences regarding the gender and ethnicity of allocated workers, acknowledging potential religious, cultural, or trauma-informed reasons for such preferences.

Organisations must implement and uphold policies that guide culturally appropriate practice and protect staff against racism. These policies should be core elements of all staff inductions and mandatory training.



2. Building and Sustaining Accountability

Cultural competence must be embedded across training, education, and workplace practice. Workers and managers are both accountable for their knowledge and conduct when engaging with ethnic minority service users.

Restorative practice provides a powerful approach to addressing racism and fostering inclusion. Its emphasis on empathy, dialogue and collective responsibility should be extended across service user work, family involvement, and team dynamics.

Social workers must ensure accurate, comprehensive recording of a service user's ethnicity, nationality, language, immigration status, religion, and other identity markers to enable informed, non-reductive assessments.

It is the responsibility of all professionals to remain informed about global and local political contexts that may affect the lives of service users, particularly those from refugee, asylum-seeking or migrant backgrounds.

Effective referral pathways must include detailed cultural and contextual information to reduce re-traumatisation and avoid forcing service users to repeat painful disclosures. All services involved share responsibility for ensuring information is complete, current and appropriately used.

3. Engaging in Critical Self-Reflection

Anti-racist practice begins with looking inward. Supervision must be a space for honest reflection on practice, power, bias, and the impact of racism and discrimination—both personal and structural.

Organisations should routinely review outcomes for BME service users compared to their white peers to identify and act on inequalities in care and support.

Reflexive practice helps workers examine their own social identities, assumptions and privilege, which leads to more empathetic, responsive support.

Workers must be open to adapting interventions creatively and collaboratively, drawing on the expertise of multi-agency partners and culturally specialist services. Seeking out and building these partnerships is essential for effective practice.



4. Embedding Evidence-Based and Trauma-Informed Practice

A trauma-informed approach requires deep understanding of cultural context, historical injustice, and intergenerational trauma. Workers must recognise the psychological impacts of trauma on engagement and functioning, particularly among minoritised children and families.

Evidence-based approaches should be used to reduce disparities and tailor services to meet the specific needs of BME children and young people. These approaches must be continuously reviewed for cultural relevance and effectiveness.

Social workers should champion the use of culturally competent, trauma-informed interventions, ensuring that children's emotional and cultural identities are both nurtured and protected.

Collaboration with cultural advisors, interpreters, and community organisations enriches evidence-based practice and builds more holistic, informed support plans.

5. Removing Language and Cultural Barriers

Access to language-appropriate support is a basic right. All information about processes, services, and legal rights must be clearly explained and translated where needed. Understanding must be checked continuously, not assumed.

No assessment of ability or risk should be made without first ensuring that language-appropriate tools and supports are in place.

Social workers should have access to up-to-date directories of local ethnic minority community resources, enabling them to refer, signpost and build supportive networks around children and families.

Foster carers and adoptive families must receive culturally sensitive training and ongoing support to care for children from diverse backgrounds. This includes helping children stay connected to their heritage and cultural identities.



6. Representation Matters

Diverse representation across all levels of the workforce—including leadership—is essential for achieving justice, equity, and meaningful change. A diverse team brings richer perspectives, challenges groupthink, and builds stronger, more culturally responsive services.

Workplaces must commit to anti-racist recruitment, retention and progression strategies. Ethnic minority staff should be supported to thrive and advance, with fair access to leadership roles and professional development.

When service users see themselves reflected in those supporting them, it builds trust, validation, belonging and a great sense of hope. Representation fosters empowerment and helps disrupt cycles of marginalisation.

Project Esperanza Care Experience Charter for Racialised Communities

Accountability Mechanism:

We will make public a list of signatories to our charter (individuals, services, local authorities, regulatory bodies & institutions)

Thank You. Please Support Us By Committing to Our Charter

