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How we are leaving our childhood hell behind with Future Pathways

People who were abused in care in Scotland can now claim help and support from Future Pathways, a Government fund set up to help them towards a better life.

They were society's most vulnerable – children who were abandoned, orphaned or neglected and taken into care.

But instead of being nurtured and protected, many youngsters were subjected to horrifying abuse.

In recent years, the truth has come out about suffering inflicted on some kids in care. More than 60 institutions are being investigated.

Many victims of childhood abuse have grown up with opportunities denied, from basic education to the safety and security that others take for granted.

Survivors of abuse in care can now access support from a £13.5million Future Pathways fund set up by the Scottish Government.

Hundreds have already come forward, but there could be hundreds more eligible for support. Anyone over 18 who was abused while living in care, which includes residential or foster care, boarding school – state or private – a long-term stay in hospital or time spent in a young offenders institution, can apply.

Future Pathways help people access counselling, education and assistance with record searches.

Flora Henderson, alliance manager at **Future Pathways**, said: “We never ask for personal information or evidence that abuse took place because talking about their experience can be a barrier.

“It's important that people don't feel excluded or too embarrassed to come forward.”

Registration is easy and can be done by phone, email or online.

• Call Future Pathways on 0808 164 2005 or go online at www.future-pathways.co.uk

Here, we speak to three people who have been assisted by Future Pathways.

Richard Tracey - Foster Care



Richard Tracey

Richard was two when his mum took her own life at the age of 20.

He was separated from his brother and taken into care, then placed with a large foster family in Kilmarnock.

Richard claims that instead of being raised in a safe and loving home, he was beaten and sexually abused.

He said the abuse took place through the 70s and 80s. But its legacy has been life-long.

Richard, 48, said: "It took away my childhood and it's only recently, with the help of counselling, that I feel I'm starting to get my life back."

Let down as a child by the authorities who failed to act on his pleas for help, much of Richard's adult life has been plagued by depression and alcoholism. He has made several suicide attempts.

Broken childhood - Richard as a young boy

But contacting Future Pathways was a positive step.

Richard, who now lives in Devon, said: “Like many survivors, I’m very good at putting on a brave face. They put me in touch with a trauma counsellor who was immediately able to spot some of the issues.

“I’ve felt like a victim for a long time and it’s hard to move on from that. But the Future Pathways support worker has a very rare quality of making me feel at ease.”

As well as counselling, Future Pathways also funded swimming lessons for Richard.

He was denied the opportunity as a child, while his foster family’s own children learned to swim.

Richard added: “Future Pathways have given me back the experience I missed out on as a child.

“I’m feeling more optimistic. Knowing I have their support is very important.”

Ian Fryer - Children's Homes



Ian Fryer

Ian was 10 when he was abandoned by his mother and placed in a remand centre for older teenagers awaiting court appearances.

He was assaulted by a member of staff in the centre.

Ian said: “I should never have been put in there but it was the only place that was available.”

Over the next few years, he was moved between various temporary homes and institutions, including one where he was sexually abused.

It was years before Ian reported the abuse to the police and his attacker was jailed. It was only when Ian, who works as a housing representative with Aberdeen City Council, contacted Future Pathways that he was finally able to access practical and emotional support.

He said: “I wasn’t too sure about the idea at first. When you go through childhood being told you don’t deserve anything, then suddenly you are given something, it is difficult.” The organisation funded improvements to Ian’s life. They gave him a laptop to help with his feelings of isolation and enable him to reach out to others in his community. Ian has also had trauma counselling and been put in touch with an advocacy service.

With the help of Future Pathways, he is planning his first holiday in 25 years. A train fanatic, he’s looking forward to a rail trip from Aberdeen to Penzance.

But like many survivors of abuse, Ian found it hard at first to accept help.

“It takes time to understand that when someone gives you something, they are not going to take it back or want something in return,” he added.

Ian urged other survivors of abuse to contact Future Pathways.

He said: “Take that step. They are not judgmental, they will listen to you and everything is done at your own speed. This kind of project is about improving your quality of life, trying to move on from the events of your past.”

Sheilagh McColm - Salvation Army



Sheilagh has been given practical help with Future Pathways

Sheilagh was brought up by a Salvation Army officer and her childhood was destroyed by years of sexual abuse.

Subconsciously, Sheilagh, now 70, blocked out the traumatic events from her early years and it was only as a result of a phonecall in 1996 with an ex-Salvation army officer that her memories started to resurface.

Vulnerable, registered disabled and with no proper support Sheilagh, originally from Dumfries, was evicted from her local housing association property and spent 11 years on and off living in her car at a motorway service station in Gretna.

Getting in touch with Future Pathways changed everything. They provided practical help and she now has a roof over her head in Carlisle.

Sheilagh said: “If it hadn’t been for Future Pathways, I wouldn’t be where I am now. I didn’t have money for carpets, furniture, a fridge and other things I needed for the house.”

Future Pathways connected Sheilagh with a support coordinator who helps her access the services she deserves.

Sheilagh encouraged other victims of abuse to get in touch with the organisation.

She added: “They will help and support you. You’ll never be lonely or depressed again.”

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