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Agenda: Shining a light on Scotland's care system

By [Agenda](#)

By Dr Rachel Happer, Head of the National Confidential Forum

IN recent weeks, there have been several important developments relating to institutional care in **Scotland**.

Lady Smith, Chair of the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry, published an interim case study on the Daughters of Charity of St Vincent de Paul, concluding that emotional, physical, and sexual abuse had indeed occurred in children's homes covered in the first phase of the Inquiry's investigations. Fear, threats, and excessive discipline were characteristic of these institutions.

The inquiry has now moved into its third phase of hearing evidence.

Deputy First Minister John Swinney later announced a financial compensation scheme for survivors of childhood abuse in care, which is to be passed inside the current parliamentary term. On behalf of the Scottish **Government**, he offered "an unreserved and heartfelt apology to everyone who suffered abuse in care in Scotland".

"We believe you," stated the Deputy First Minister, "and we are sorry."

To hear those words spoken by the Deputy First Minister is simply invaluable for care leavers and, indeed, for who we are as a nation.

For those who have experienced abuse and brutality as children at the hands of the people who are meant to care. Being believed has the power to challenge the shame that many have carried for a lifetime.

This is a unique time in Scotland's history, as care leavers are beginning to have access to the justice that they have sought for so long and so very much deserve. Of course, there is still a long way to go, but it is promising to see genuine, tangible progress being made.

To celebrate these encouraging steps, we at the National Confidential Forum recently lit up various buildings across **Edinburgh** and **Glasgow** using our campaign message, "Shine a Light on Care." We wanted these light projections to help draw attention to all those in Scotland who leave care, whether it was this year or decades ago.

For members of the public who are not familiar with the institutional care system, it can be easy to inadvertently ignore or dismiss care leavers and problems they may have. As we've recently seen, this is beginning to change for the better, but we cannot become complacent.

What must Scotland do as a nation if we are to improve the experiences of those in care, and care leavers, today and in the future?

The National Confidential Forum was established by the Scottish Government to listen to the experiences of individuals who spent time in some form of care as a child in Scotland. This includes familiar institutions such as children's homes, but it also includes hospital stays, school hostels, and boarding schools.

Based on what we have heard from listening to care-experienced individuals at the Forum, we know that care leavers don't leave their care experience behind them just because they are no longer in formal care. On the contrary, their experience represents a fundamental part of their identity, shaping who they become throughout adulthood – just as anyone's childhood experiences shape who they are.

We must truly listen to the experiences and guidance of care leavers, no matter their age or background.

They know better than anyone what care in Scotland is like, and they are best equipped to guide Scotland to a better, fairer future. It is through them that we can continue to truly shine a light on care in Scotland.