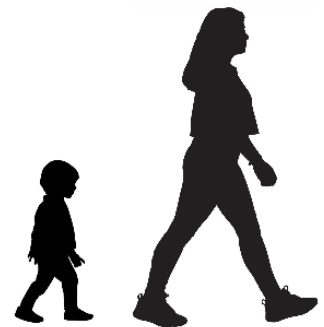


Our Seven Children in 2043

By 2043, the seven children—now all 22—have grown into adulthood within a Shetland that has changed significantly. Wetter winters, stronger winds, and a shifting population have shaped not only the environment around them, but their opportunities, choices, and wellbeing. Their lives reflect how inequality has widened over time, with early childhood circumstances continuing to influence where they each stand.

Olivia

Olivia left school at 16 and took an apprenticeship with a local engineering firm supporting the energy sector. She is now in stable employment, contributing to an industry that has adapted to harsher weather and a growing need for resilient infrastructure. She still lives with her mum, now in social housing. This has improved their situation slightly; the house is warmer and easier to keep dry compared to their previous private rental, an important shift as winters have become wetter and windier. However, low income remains a reality. Olivia's resilience has helped her sustain steady work, but her life is still characterised by careful budgeting and limited choices. Her connection to Shetland remains strong, shaped by loyalty to her mum and a sense of belonging.



George

George's life has followed a different path. Now married with a five-year-old child, he has taken on significant responsibility early. He and his family were fortunate to secure social housing, although not in Lerwick, meaning they are somewhat distanced from their original support networks. In a Shetland with fewer working-age adults, George fills vital roles, juggling multiple jobs on ferries and in social care. These sectors are under pressure due to an ageing population and reduced workforce, and George's work helps sustain essential services. His life is demanding, with long hours and ongoing financial pressure, but he carries a strong sense of duty. His childhood experience of instability has translated into determination to provide for his own family, even within a system that still offers little margin for security.



Freya

Freya achieved her ambition of becoming a primary school teacher, completing university despite the constraints of her upbringing. However, demographic change has reduced the number of children in Shetland significantly, and teaching posts are scarce. She has had to complete her probationary year on the Mainland and is likely to remain there for work. This separation from her home community is difficult. Freya had hoped to return to her rural roots, but shrinking populations have reduced opportunities. Her story reflects both success and loss: she has achieved her goal but cannot realise it in the place that shaped her.



Harry

Harry's trajectory mirrors a broader outward movement of young people. Supported through university by the Forces, he built a life on the Mainland and is unlikely to return. While he came from a family that was relatively stable, having grown up with constant financial balancing, he values a more affordable and predictable life. His departure contributes to the ongoing reduction in Shetland's working-age population, a pattern repeated across many families like his.



Carrie

Carrie's experience highlights how challenges can persist even in households that appeared stable. She struggled at school and continues to experience anxiety as an adult. She remains living with her parents in social housing, supported financially and emotionally. Her employment is limited to seasonal work at a local café. As inequalities have continued to shape life chances locally, Carrie has found it difficult to establish independence. Her world remains small, and while she is supported, her confidence and long-term prospects remain fragile, particularly in this highly automated, AI driven world.



Lewis



Lewis has entered the social care workforce through an apprenticeship, a sector now under immense pressure due to the growing elderly population. He works long, demanding hours, often covering gaps left by an ageing workforce reluctant to retire for financial reasons. Financially, he is doing relatively well due to the volume of work available, but this comes at a personal cost. There are few people his age in the sector, and the demands of his job leave little time for social life. However, Lewis has also been able, with significant help from friends, to begin building his own home on family land, avoiding a mortgage so far. This gives him a degree of long-term stability that many others do not have, though it is hard-won.

Lottie

Lottie represents a different outcome shaped by greater financial security in childhood. She left Shetland to attend university and has settled on the Mainland, supported by an inheritance that allowed her to purchase a flat. She benefits from stability, strong social networks, and a sense of independence. However, her story is not without complexity. She is aware of the growing expectation of caring for older relatives, a pressure intensified by demographic change. While she values her current life, she feels conflicted about future responsibilities, particularly as distance and climate related travel disruption make maintaining family connections more challenging.



Taken together, these seven lives show how early inequality has widened over time. Climate pressures, demographic shifts, and structural challenges in Shetland have amplified differences rather than reduced them. Some have found stability and opportunity, often by leaving. Others remain, sustaining essential services but at personal cost. And some continue to face barriers that limit independence. At 22, they are all still navigating their futures—but the paths available to them have been shaped long before adulthood began and continue to shift in uneven ways.

