

Recording 'voice' and including non-verbal communicators

Aberdeen City Council has had a dedicated children's social work Rights Service for more than 30 years, which is one of the ways the Council promotes human rights practice. The service ethos is grounded in the UNCRC. Its remit is to provide independent, relational, trauma-informed advocacy, guidance and support to Aberdeen children, young people, and young adults, aged zero to 26 years old, who are care experienced or are/have been involved in child protection processes, wherever they live.

Every infant, child, and young person has a right to their 'voice' and for this 'voice' to be heard, regardless of their capacity to express this in words or language. This includes those who are verbal, non-verbal or emergent speakers, or who have additional or neurodivergent speech, language and communication needs for reasons related to, for example, disability or trauma. 'Voice' not only refers to what infants, children and young people say, but to many other aspects of their presentation.

Those within the child or young person's network are often best placed to advocate for and promote their rights and 'voice'. Many therefore do not need or want to access the Rights Service. There are times, however, where there is a need or expressed wish for additional and independent rights advocacy and support which this service offers. This can be done through providing advocacy, support at meetings, and through the production of their expressed and observed 'voice' in written form or other formats best suited to their needs and circumstances.

A variety of inclusive communication skills are used to connect with and to reflect the views of a child or young person. This includes observing and recording body language and other forms of non-verbal communication. It can also involve taking advice and guidance from those who have established meaningful relationships with them and have learned to interpret how they communicate. Their completed 'voice' will refer to relevant UNCRC or European Convention on Human Rights articles, to help safeguard children and young people within a framework of the rights they may need adults to enact on their behalf.

Creativity beyond the use of the written word considers how a child or young person might want to receive or impart information. This includes videos, photos, emojis, audio, games, and other ways to present information to enhance their understanding. Interpreting a child's 'voice' will refer to observations, and use photographs, illustrations, art, colour, and video to bring a child's presence into meetings or discussions. As well as promoting their rights and advocating on their behalf, this helps to tell their story and becomes a snapshot of their life at that time.

Children's rights learning outcomes

Aberdeen City Council children's social work service is promoting children's rights in its practice. 'Voice' is central to this approach, and this is reflected in the advocacy and support provided by the Rights Service, alongside how the service supports workforce development through a related inclusive communication workshop. This supports children and young people to access their rights equally, with a focus on those children and young people whose rights are at risk. It takes children and young people's views into account in decisions that affect them, and ensures that work and decisions are effectively communicated as part of accountable practice.



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