



together

Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights

State of  
Children's  
Rights in  
Scotland

by Together

2026



## About Together

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Together (Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights) is an alliance of over 600 children's organisations, academics and interested professionals. Our vision is that Scotland becomes a place where every baby, child and young person grows up in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding. Working with our membership, we act to ensure that all babies, children and young people growing up in Scotland have all their human rights respected, protected, and fulfilled. We put babies, children and young people at the centre of everything we do, prioritising those whose rights are at risk.

Please do consider [donating to Together!](#) Funds raised will support our mission to ensure that all babies, children and young people growing up in Scotland have all their human rights respected, protected, and fulfilled.

Not yet a member of Together? Consider [joining us](#) to access support and benefits relating to the protection of children's human rights in Scotland.

## About this report

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The intention for this year's State of Children's Rights Report is to share practice showing examples of organisations in Scotland taking steps to implement a children's human rights approach in their work. The inclusion of case studies does not necessarily constitute endorsement of the organisations or approaches described.

This report has been designed to be used as a practical and ongoing reference tool. While it can be read from start to finish, it is hoped that the report will become a supportive tool that organisations can continually refer to.

The report begins with an overview of the domestic legal framework as it relates to children's rights, before detailing what a children's human rights approach is. Following this overview, the main content consists of case studies and learning relating to each of the five principles of a children's human rights approach. Throughout, the case studies refer to various articles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Use the link to the UNCRC in the Glossary to explore the specific articles being referred to.

Although the report has been structured using the five principles, it is essential that readers understand the importance of implementing a children's human rights approach as a whole. All five principles are interrelated and depend on each other. Focusing on just one or two means that a children's human rights approach will not be implemented successfully. With this in mind, the chapter on a children's human rights approach is essential reading for all.

## Thank you and credits

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Together would like to thank the organisations who submitted case studies for this report. This includes huge gratitude to the children, families and professionals working hard to make children's rights real in practice.

Case studies were submitted from:

A Place in Childhood, Aberdeen Council, Argyll and Bute Council, Barnardo's Scotland, Borders Additional Needs Group, Care Inspectorate, Care Opinion, Children and Young People's Centre for Justice, Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland, Children First, Children's Hearings Scotland, Children's Parliament, Circle Scotland, Clan Childlaw, Dumfries and Galloway Council,

Education Scotland, Falkirk Council, Families Outside, Flexible Childcare Services, Forces Children Scotland, Harmeny, Highland Council, Imagine, Inspiring Scotland, Intercultural Youth Scotland, Inverclyde Council, JustRight Scotland, LGBT Youth Scotland, Lochend Imagine Care, Mindroom, National Day Nurseries Association, NHS Dumfries and Galloway, NHS Grampian, NHS Lothian, Our Hearings Our Voice, Perth and Kinross Council, Play Scotland, PLUS (Forth Valley) Limited, Public Health Scotland, Scottish Children's Reporter Administration, Shetland Council, Skills Development Scotland and Starcatchers.

With thanks to the Improvement Service for gathering some of the case studies included in this report via [the children's rights in practice section of their website](#).

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The artwork used throughout this report was created by Liv Wan Illustration.

## Editors

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## Executive summary

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Realising children's rights in Scotland reached a historic moment with the commencement of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024 (the UNCRC Act). For the first time, children in Scotland have legally enforceable rights, with clear responsibilities placed on public authorities and those who carry out 'functions of a public nature' to respect, protect and fulfil children's rights. While these new legal obligations mark a significant moment for Scotland, the real 'test' of whether or not children's rights are implemented is through the day to day experience of babies, children and young people across Scotland.

It is for this reason that this year's State of Children's Rights Report is dedicated to sharing case studies exploring how organisations across Scotland are taking steps to embed a children's human rights approach in their work. Structured around the five principles of a children's human rights approach – embedding, equality and non-discrimination, empowerment, participation and accountability – this report is a practical resource to help Scotland's workforce ensure they respect, protect and fulfil children's rights.

### Key learning

The five principles of a children's human rights approach are interdependent. All five principles must be present and considered within practice for children's rights to be meaningfully implemented. With this point in mind, the following learning – broken down into each principle – must be read and interpreted as a whole.

**Embedding** children's rights in organisational practice requires committed leadership, the ability to adapt approach and tools to organisational context, and sustained commitment from everyone throughout the organisation. As is evidenced from the case studies in this chapter, organisations across Scotland are increasingly integrating children's rights into planning, policy development, budgeting, workforce development and service design or delivery. Tools like Child Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessments are actively being used and, where helpful, integrated with other impact assessments. Importantly, successful implementation of the embedding principle relies on leadership from all levels of the organisation, complemented with ongoing staff training and support. The case studies in this chapter demonstrate how embedding children's rights can improve decision-making, mitigate unintended impact and drive a culture of children's rights throughout organisations.

**Equality and non-discrimination**, as part of a children's human rights approach, requires targeted action for children whose rights are most at risk. The case studies included demonstrate how important it is to ensure organisations understand that 'equality' does not mean treating every child the same. Reducing barriers to engagement, providing accessible information and adapting support/services require a nuanced understanding of children's circumstances and experiences. The case studies also highlight how integral the equality and non-discrimination principle is to the successful realisation of the other four principles.

**Empowerment**, when delivered alongside the other four principles, can be a real driver of change and can create examples of increased power-sharing between adults and children. The case studies in this chapter share learning around what is needed to ensure children understand their rights and can advocate for them when needed – be that when their rights are at risk, in relation to new threats or opportunities like Artificial Intelligence, or in day to day embedding of a children's human rights approach within powerful systems.

**Participation** relies on the other principles to help ensure well-rounded opportunities for children to be heard and listened to. Meaningful participation requires safe, inclusive environments where children can express their views, genuinely influence decisions and understand how this has or could lead to change. It also requires that organisations understand where children have already shared views, and where requests for ‘new’ participation activity can therefore be re-directed towards existing evidence. The case studies in this chapter highlight the various creative methods that can facilitate children’s participation across all principles of a children’s human rights approach.

**Accountability** is essential for building trust, ensuring rights are upheld in everyday terms and identifying and providing solutions when they are not. The case studies in this chapter show organisations strengthening feedback mechanisms, complaint systems, child-friendly communication, advocacy and reporting on action taken to implement children’s rights. The UNCRC Act has introduced important new formal methods of accountability, like the ability for children to use the courts and the new powers afforded to the Children and Young People’s Commissioner for Scotland and the Scottish Human Rights Commission. However, just as critical are the steps organisations are taking every day to open up communication and be open to feedback on how to continually develop their children’s rights practice.

## Conclusion

The introduction of the UNCRC Act marks a transformative moment for children’s rights in Scotland. However, as the case studies across this report show, realising children’s rights is not achieved by legislation alone. It depends on the everyday decisions, practice, culture and relationships within the services and systems that support babies, children and young people – and a children’s human rights approach can help deliver this.

Across Scotland, organisations are already demonstrating aspects of what a children’s human rights approach looks like in practice. They are embedding children’s rights into planning and decision-making; addressing inequality and discrimination; empowering children with accessible information and meaningful opportunities; supporting genuine participation; and strengthening accountability.

The work ahead will require continued ambition and collective effort. But the evidence throughout this report shows that Scotland is already building a culture where children’s rights are understood, valued and acted upon. Incorporation was never the final goal – it is the beginning of a long-term transformation that will benefit generations to come.



## Glossary of terms

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**Article** – A specific section of an international treaty, such as the UNCRC. Articles can set out rights, duties, definitions and procedures. In this report, articles of the UNCRC are referenced frequently. Access the [UNCRC](#) directly to explore them further

**BPoC** – Black and People of Colour

**Care experienced** – Anyone who has been or is currently in care or from a ‘looked-after’ background at any stage in their life

**Concluding Observations** – Recommendations from a UN treaty body that sets out further steps a country should take to implement human rights

**General Comments** – Additional guidance provided by UN treaty bodies that help interpret and expand on the treaty text

**GIRFEC** – [Getting it Right for Every Child](#)

**Keeping the Promise** – [A commitment made by Scotland](#) to implement The Promise, the findings of the Independent Care Review

**LGBTQ+** – Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer & Questioning + all other related identities

**UN Committee** – The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child

**UNCRC** – [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#)

**UNCRC Act** – [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child \(Incorporation\) \(Scotland\) Act 2024](#)

**UNCRC Skills and Knowledge Framework** – [A framework for individual workers](#) who want to build or reflect on their children’s rights knowledge and take a children’s human rights approach to their practice

## Share your feedback!

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We’d love to know what you think about this report. Share your feedback here.

## Introduction

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The realisation of children’s rights in Scotland reached a historic moment with the commencement of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024 (the UNCRC Act). For the first time, children in Scotland have legally enforceable rights, with clear responsibilities placed on public authorities and those who carry out ‘functions of a public nature’ to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of every baby, child and young person. While this momentous step should be celebrated, it should also be recognised that this is not the end point. The real ‘test’ of success is in how children’s rights are understood, implemented and experienced day to day by children all across Scotland.

This year’s State of Children’s Rights Report is dedicated to supporting this successful implementation. It explores how organisations across Scotland are taking forward a children’s human rights approach in their work, demonstrating what it means to make children’s rights real in law, policy, practice, and crucially, culture. The five principles of a children’s human rights approach – embedding, equality and non-discrimination, empowerment, participation and accountability – provide a practical framework for organisations to translate these new legal obligations into meaningful change for children.

The report is designed to be used as a practical and ongoing reference tool. By using the Contents page, readers can navigate directly to areas of interest, whether exploring the principles of a children’s human rights approach, learning from case studies, or accessing reflections and top tips on implementing children’s rights. Case studies span public bodies, third sector organisations and community groups, providing insight into how a children’s human rights approach can look practically in a range of contexts – including early learning and childcare settings, child protection, youth justice, healthcare, family support, and local authority planning.

Thank you to the organisations who submitted case studies for inclusion in this year’s State of Children’s Rights Report. The case studies included are evidence of the dedication to children’s rights that exists in Scotland; a dedication that existed long before the UNCRC was incorporated into Scotland’s national legal framework.

The voices, experiences and leadership of children and young people are at the heart of this report. Their advocacy shaped Scotland’s long campaign for incorporation, and their insights continue to show what meaningful implementation looks like. As organisations adapt to their new duties under the UNCRC Act, the examples and learning shared here demonstrate that a rights-respecting Scotland is both achievable and already underway – built through everyday actions as much as legal commitments.

## The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024

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The UNCRC Act was passed by the Scottish Parliament on 7 December 2023 and entered into force on 16 July 2024. This was the result of more than a decade of sustained campaigning by children and young people, alongside civil society organisations and allies.

The UNCRC Act makes children's rights part of Scots law. It not only places clear duties on public authorities to act in line with the UNCRC, but also includes provisions that encourage them to respect, protect, and further children's rights. The definition of 'public authority' includes those who are performing functions of a public nature, whether through commission, contract, or an alternative arrangement. This can include private, third sector and voluntary organisations. The Act gives children, young people and those who represent them new ways to challenge actions and decisions by public authorities that they believe to be in breach of their rights.

Scotland is the first devolved nation in the world and currently the only country in the UK to have incorporated the UNCRC into domestic law. This development has helped to position Scotland as a leader in children's rights and started to foster a culture of children's rights across the country. The UNCRC Act places a legal duty on public authorities - including organisations delivering public services on their behalf - to make decisions and deliver services in ways that are compatible with children's rights. Alongside this, it introduces planning and reporting requirements designed to support a more consistent and transparent children's rights culture across Scottish policymaking.

### Duties under the UNCRC Act

The UNCRC Act introduces a wide range of both proactive and reactive measures that aim to uphold and further children's rights. This means that it includes both provisions that seek to prevent potential breaches of children's rights and those that address breaches that have already occurred. This creates a comprehensive framework which aims to ensure that children's rights are respected from the outset, while also enabling children to seek remedy and redress in situations where breaches do arise.

Some proactive measures outlined in the Act include:

- **A compatibility duty** – Public authorities must act in a way that is compatible with UNCRC requirements when they are performing 'relevant functions'. More information can be found in the Statutory Guidance, which helps public authorities to understand and fulfil their duties under Section 6 of the Act.<sup>1</sup>
- **Children's Rights Scheme** – Scottish Ministers must publish a Children's Rights Scheme setting out what actions they have taken, and plan to take, to further embed children's rights. They must also review the scheme and report on their findings. The first Children's Rights Scheme was published on 20 November 2025 and the first review report is expected in November 2026.<sup>2</sup>
- **Impact assessments** – Scottish Ministers must conduct Child Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessments for new Bills and certain decisions.<sup>3</sup>
- **Reporting duties** – Scottish Parliament and certain public authorities must report on actions they have taken and plan to take to ensure compliance with the UNCRC and further advance children's rights. More information can be found in the Statutory Guidance, which supports implementation of Section 18 of the Act.<sup>4</sup>

Reactive measures provided for in the Act include:

- **Proceedings for unlawful acts** – The UNCRC Act gives children and young people, their representatives, the Scottish Human Rights Commission, and the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland the power to bring a case to court if they believe a public authority has failed to comply with UNCRC requirements.

### Putting the UNCRC Act into practice

The UNCRC Act sets the standard, but it does not, on its own, guarantee change. The gap between law and practice can be bridged when organisations and individuals use the five principles of the children's human rights approach – embedding, equality and non-discrimination, empowerment, participation, and accountability – to shape culture, leadership, policies, services and relationships.

This year's State of Children's Rights Report focuses on that journey from law to lived experience. The case studies that follow show the steps organisations are taking towards embedding a children's human rights approach in their work, and how they continue to implement and respond to the UNCRC Act in real and practical ways, learning, adapting and embedding children's rights in various contexts.

In doing so, they demonstrate that incorporation is not the end point. It is the starting point for collective action to make Scotland a place where every baby, child and young person grows up in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding.

## Taking a children's human rights approach

Grounded in the UNCRC, taking a children's human rights approach ensures that children's rights are respected, protected and fulfilled at all levels of decision-making and service delivery. If implemented well, it will help foster a culture of children's rights throughout Scotland, changing how decisions are made, how power is shared and how children's rights can be proactively realised in practice.

A children's human rights approach originates from Wales, where Dr Rhian Croke and Professor Simon Hoffman of the Welsh Observatory on Human Rights of Children, commissioned by the Children's Commissioner for Wales, developed five core principles to consider when looking at children's rights in policy and practice: embedding, equality and non-discrimination, empowerment, participation, and accountability.<sup>5</sup>

The Scottish Government funded JRS Knowhow, Children's Parliament, Together, JustRight Scotland, and the Welsh Observatory on Human Rights of Children to produce a Skills and Knowledge Framework for Scotland. The project team tested the five principles in Scotland and expanded on them to develop a framework of skills and knowledge that can be used to support duty bearers and individuals within the public authority workforce to implement the principles in practice.<sup>6</sup>

A children's human rights approach ensures children are involved in decisions that affect them, embeds their rights in planning and service delivery, supports them to hold public authorities to account, and promotes equality and non-discrimination – improving services for all and helping duty bearers meet their statutory responsibilities.

The Scottish Government has demonstrated a commitment to taking children's rights seriously by incorporating the UNCRC into Scots law through the UNCRC Act. Taking a children's human rights approach can further the UNCRC Act by providing a practical framework for individuals and organisations to improve their practice and better support children to reach their full potential as rights holders.<sup>7</sup>

## The five principles of a children's human rights approach

A children's human rights approach is built upon five core principles. These are: embedding, equality and non-discrimination, empowerment, participation, and accountability. This section explains these principles in more detail and provides examples of what this can look like in practice.

### Embedding



Embedding involves placing children's rights at the core of planning, commissioning, policies, budgets and practice by acknowledging how children will be impacted during all stages of development and implementation. By consistently integrating children's rights into planning, decision-making processes, policies, reporting and actions, we can ensure that children's best interests are always a primary consideration and that all babies, children and young people can realise their rights.

#### What does this look like?

- When creating policies or reviewing budgetary decisions, undertaking a Child Rights Impact Assessment can help you evaluate how the decision or process will impact on children.
- Consider carrying out audits and evaluations of your organisation's policies and procedures to check they are supporting children's rights and make these a regular occurrence.
- Make clear reference to the UNCRC in your organisation's policies, planning or key documents such as within a strategic plan.

## Equality and non-discrimination



Equality and non-discrimination is a core principle of the UNCRC through Article 2 and is fundamental in ensuring children have the opportunity to exercise their rights. All babies, children and young people should be treated fairly and provided with an equal opportunity to reach their full potential. This includes providing children with the appropriate resources in line with their needs, ensuring any direct or indirect discrimination is prevented and discouraged and focusing on those whose rights are most at risk.

### What does this look like?

- Commit to promoting equality and to preventing direct and indirect discrimination against children in your organisation's key documents and policies.
- Prioritise training your staff on the different needs of children and the impact decisions might have, including those from specific groups and future generations.
- Gather appropriate data to help you to identify discriminatory practices or inequalities to highlight where changes need to be made.

## Empowerment



As rights holders, children should be supported to ensure they are able to fully exercise their rights. This means removing barriers for children to access information about their rights, allowing them to better understand how they can be applied in their everyday lives. Providing children and young people with access to information and resources that enhance their capabilities and increases their confidence allowing them to make informed decisions. By doing this, children and young people have more influence and power to direct their own lives and can advocate for their rights and the rights of others by engaging with and holding accountable decision-makers who affect them.

### What does this look like?

- Provide child friendly resources, created in collaboration with children to ensure their needs are being met.
- Ensure children and young people are given spaces where they can freely associate and advocate for their rights.
- Take steps to improve your understanding of children and young people's evolving capacity and support them in ways that consider their interests, level of understanding and communication preferences.

## Participation



Article 12 of the UNCRC protects children's right to have their views listened to and taken seriously. Children should be supported to freely express their opinions on matters affecting them and professionals should take these views into account when making decisions. While recognising that children have different levels of capabilities to express their views, younger children's views, thoughts and feelings should be recognised at the same level of importance as older children. Participation should be voluntary, safe and inclusive, enabling children and young people to engage with decision-makers.

### What does this look like?

- Include children directly in anything that impacts their lives including evaluating service delivery, developing policies or budgets.

- Provide children with feedback on their involvement, such as what the outcome was and any benefits or changes that have happened as a result of their participation.
- Identify and create safe environments for children to participate freely in a place and in a way that they feel comfortable with.

## Accountability



Accountability means creating a culture of responsibility and monitoring performance against children’s rights standards. Public authorities and decision-makers should be transparent about their processes and actions to allow children to scrutinise, challenge and hold them accountable when their rights are not being respected. Professionals whose roles have a direct or indirect impact on children should understand that they are accountable for actions that can affect children’s ability to realise their rights.

### What does this look like?

- Publish annual performance reports monitoring performance against children’s rights indicators.
- Make sure children have access to information about how they can provide feedback about a decision, process, organisation or individual related to your work.
- Support children and young people to access advocacy and legal advice.

### How do the principles interlink?

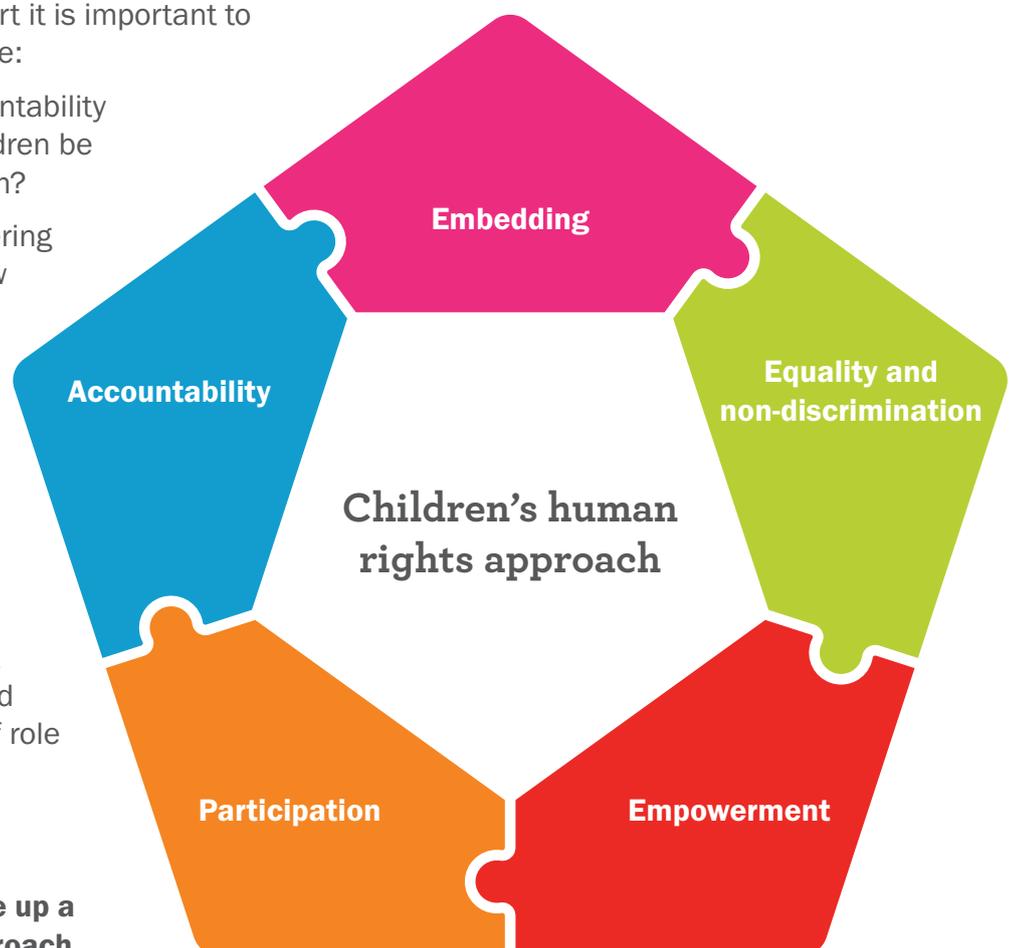
Each principle supports the realisation of children’s rights in different but interconnected ways. The principles both overlap with each other and are dependent on each other for successful implementation in practice.

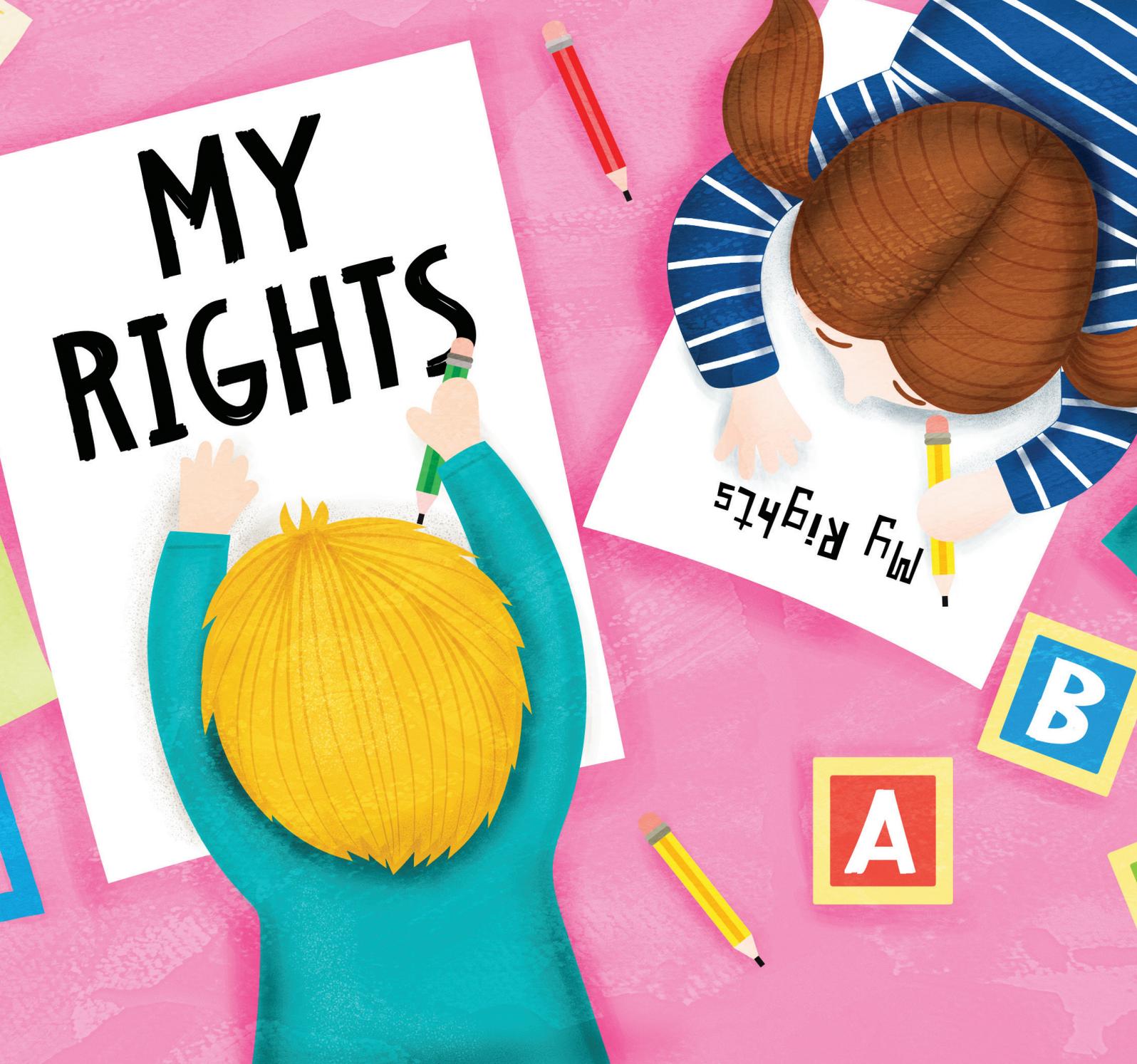
When engaging with this report it is important to keep this in mind. For example:

- When implementing accountability mechanisms, how will children be empowered to access them?
- When designing and delivering participation methods, how will equality and non-discrimination be ensured for participating children?

To deliver a children’s human rights approach effectively, all five principles should be present – not just one or two. As a result, it is essential that the five principles are engaged with collectively, regardless of role or position.

### The five principles that make up a children’s human rights approach





Chapter 1:  
**Embedding**

## 1.1 Introduction to the embedding principle

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Embedding involves placing children's rights at the core of planning, policies, budgets and practice so that they actively shape decisions, systems and outcomes.

The connections between the embedding principle and the other principles are important to reflect on when exploring how to implement this principle:

- Equality and non-discrimination: what steps should be taken to ensure all children experience all their rights?
- Empowerment: how will children be empowered to know their rights and engage with any processes implemented through the embedding principle?
- Participation: in what ways will the participation of children be supported through work on the embedding principle?
- Accountability: how is ongoing monitoring and feedback featured in any work on the embedding principle?

How the embedding principle is implemented will vary according to the practice and the needs of each organisation.

The following case studies provide a range of ideas for how the embedding principle can be applied as part of an overarching children's human rights approach. This includes examples of:

- Using Child Rights Impact Assessments to enhance decisions and processes.
- Ensuring children's rights are embedded into planning, strategies and reporting processes.
- Building relationships to support continuous learning about children's rights.
- Supporting others to embed children's rights into their work.

## 1.2 Case studies

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### Inspiring Scotland: Embedding children's rights in the Outdoor Community Play Fund

Inspiring Scotland manages the Outdoor Community Play Fund, a Scottish Government initiative designed to increase opportunities for outdoor play in communities experiencing high levels of poverty and deprivation. The fund supports charities to deliver inclusive, high quality outdoor play experiences for children and their families.

#### The issue or opportunity

In recent years, the fund has evolved to intentionally embed children's rights into its management processes, aligning with the UNCRC and Scotland's commitment to a children's rights practice. This ensures that investment decisions reflect the visions and voices of children for their own communities.

The current round of the Outdoor Community Play Fund was initially launched in 2022 and has rolled over through a non-competitive renewal process with the existing portfolio lasting until

March 2026. This provided an opportunity to test the integration of a children's human rights approach at the renewal stage with an existing group of funded charities. When the fund reopened for new applications in 2025, learnings from this initial implementation informed the design of the application process.

### **What was done**

UNCRC principles were embedded into application guidance and forms, requiring applicants to demonstrate how projects uphold Article 31, the right to play and Article 12, the right to be heard. Applicants were asked to show an understanding of Playwork principles and, where possible, provide an organisational Play Policy. Where this was not in place, support was offered to develop one during the fund duration.

Crucially, applicants were required to involve children in shaping project proposals using participatory methods, ensuring projects reflect children's views and vision for their outdoor community play experiences. Accessibility requirements were also strengthened to ensure inclusion for children with additional support needs and other common barriers like fuel and food poverty.

Monitoring and evaluation processes were adapted to capture children's voices meaningfully. Charities were supported to gather feedback through case studies, quotes, and video content, with Inspiring Scotland providing consistent guidance. Reporting occurs every six months, complemented by portfolio events where charities share learning and best practice.

Sector capacity for children's rights practice is further enhanced through knowledge exchange events and training opportunities, including Child Rights Impact Assessments and Play Policy Development.

Insights from monitoring and evaluation are collated and shared with Scottish Government. Reports place children's voices at the forefront, using quotes, observations, and case studies aligned with UNCRC linked outcomes. Outcomes are explicitly mapped to UNCRC articles, reinforcing the fund's contribution to realising children's rights.

### **Impact and outcomes**

The Outdoor Community Play Fund provides children and families with better opportunities to participate in high quality play opportunities. As a result, children and their families have improved health and wellbeing and are more aware of the benefits of outdoor play. Children and families have highlighted the value of outdoor play and its abilities to connect people and place. Children, young people and their families have told us that they support opportunities in their local outdoor spaces.

### **Key learning**

Although early in implementation, some key learning has emerged:

- Early integration of children's rights into fund design is critical to ensure investment reflects children's visions for their communities, and these visions are supported throughout the fund duration.
- Practical tools and training enable grantees to implement participatory methods and understand their role in realising children's rights.
- Continuous monitoring and evaluation ensures accountability and promotes sector-wide learning.

## Next steps

Inspiring Scotland will continue embedding a child's human rights approach into present and future rounds of the Outdoor Community Play Fund, supporting the sector to strengthen children's rights practice and uphold accountability for both funded organisations and the funder.

## Children's human rights approach principles in practice

Children's rights were placed at the core of fund management processes by integrating UNCRC principles into application, monitoring, and reporting processes. Outcomes were linked to rights, and data was collected on participation and accessibility. As a result, children's participation increasingly shapes project design and delivery within their own communities. The sector's understanding of children's rights practice has grown, and children demonstrate greater agency and empowerment, increasingly taking care of local spaces and, in some cases, engaging in activism to protect outdoor play opportunities.

## PLUS (Forth Valley) Limited: Embedding children's rights in everyday practice

PLUS (Forth Valley) Limited is a third sector organisation based in Stirling that provides social opportunities, support, and connection for disabled children and young people and their families. Our mission is to work alongside children from early childhood through to early adulthood, supporting them to build confidence, independence, and friendships within their communities.

### The issue or opportunity

Following the passing of the UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024, we wanted to make rights learning accessible and meaningful for all staff, not just through policy or training documents. We recognised a need to develop a shared understanding of what rights look like in practice, and to help staff feel confident identifying and responding to children's rights issues in real time.

### What was done

We recognised that for rights to be meaningful, they must be visible and lived out through the daily actions of staff who directly support children. To support this, we developed a team learning activity designed to make children's rights practical, relatable, and fun to explore.

We hosted a Human Rights Team Day focused on the theme 'Children's Rights in Action.' The aim was to help staff understand how children's rights, as set out in the UNCRC, connect directly to their work at PLUS sessions. We identified nine key UNCRC articles most relevant to our service and the experiences of children and young people with disabilities.

We designed short and realistic scenarios based on staff's reflections about what they regularly observe – for example, a child being excluded from a game, a young person expressing a preference about activities, or a situation where a child's independence could be supported. Scenarios were informed by children's feedback about what helps them feel included, listened to, and supported during sessions.



"I like when staff listen to my ideas for games. It feels like they really hear me."

Young person

The activity took the form of an interactive rights carousel. Each scenario was displayed on a table or wall with space for staff to record reflections, or as a matching game, where staff linked scenarios to the correct UNCRC article and discussed possible actions.

Staff were guided to consider how each right aligns with our core values: Respect, Compassion, Integrity, and Dependability.

The activity was aimed at all frontline staff and session leaders who work directly with children and young people with disabilities. The focus on disabled children ensures rights most at risk of being overlooked such as participation, inclusion, and access to play are at the forefront of staff practice. This reinforced that inclusion is not an optional add-on but a right to be upheld.

### **Impact and outcomes**

By building staff knowledge and confidence, we are creating an environment where children's choices and voices are respected. Staff are now more proactive in offering autonomy and supporting children to express preferences and ideas during sessions.



**“The session made me think about rights in every small interaction, not just the big decisions.”**

**Staff participant**

- Staff reported an improved understanding of how children's rights underpin everyday support and decision-making.
- Children's rights will be referenced more often in debriefs and reflections. For example, asking questions like “Have we listened to the child's voice?” or “Is this in their best interests?”.
- The activity strengthened inclusive practice, where staff identified simple adjustments to promote independence, choice, and equal access to play.
- The activity highlighted staff's existing good practice and helped them make the explicit connection between what they already do well and how it protects and promotes children's rights.
- The creation of a reflective culture, carried forward through regular supervision and debriefs, ensured ongoing accountability for upholding rights in every setting.

### **Key learning**

Staff engagement was highest when scenarios mirrored real experiences – situations they could picture themselves in. This made rights tangible, not abstract. We also learned that pairing rights with our organisational values helped deepen understanding and ownership across the team.

### **Next steps**

- The activity will now be incorporated into staff induction and annual refresher training so that all new team members build rights awareness from the outset.
- We will co-develop a Child Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment tool for use when planning new programmes or reviewing existing services.
- We plan to adapt the training to include children and young people's voices, inviting them to co-deliver parts of the session and share examples of when they feel their rights are respected at PLUS.

- Future sessions will invite children to share examples of when they felt their rights were supported, using creative methods like drawings or photo stories.

### **Children’s human rights approach principles in practice**

This work helped embed the UNCRC into the culture and daily practice of PLUS. Rights are now being used as a practical framework in staff supervision, reflection, and service design. We intend to use the Child Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment to further integrate rights into organisational decision-making and resource planning.



### **Flexible Childcare Services Scotland: Giving children and families greater access to health and health services**

Flexible Childcare Services Scotland (FCSS) is a national charity and social enterprise with numerous childcare settings and services for children and young people across Scotland. The charity provides flexible early learning and school age childcare allowing parents and carers to book by the hour, pay as they go and use their funded entitlement flexibly as well.

#### **The issue or opportunity**

This unique childcare model has been designed to help parents to reduce their childcare costs while supporting them back into employment or education so that they can increase their earning potential and distance themselves and their families from poverty. This supports the UNCRC Article 28 right to education and furthers Article 29, which states that education should develop a child’s personality, talents and abilities.

With services running across Scotland, from Kilmarnock to Moray, FCSS has nurtured numerous partnerships with other organisations that deliver crucial support for the whole family.

#### **What was done**

One partnership with NHS Grampian means that parents and families have access to Health Visitors within the nursery setting. This aligns directly to Article 24 the right to health and health services, further supports Article 27 to have a sufficient standard of living, and supports Article 3 the best interest of the child.

Health Visitors are registered nurses or midwives who have undertaken further study at Masters level to become registered Health Visitors. Thanks to this partnership working, Cummings Park Nursery now hosts a Health Visitor on site at their early learning and childcare setting in the Northfield area of Aberdeen ensuring that children and families have access to the advice and support they need, when they need it.



“By spending more time with each child and getting to know them individually, I can collaborate with both the nursery staff and parents. This teamwork helps us establish a strong support system where needed to support the child and their family, both at home and nursery, helping them to reach their full potential.”

**Kathryn Kerr, Health Visitor**

By being on site at the nursery Kathryn has managed to foster trusting relationships which have been nurtured through the nursery team. This has helped build and strengthen confidence and promote parents and carers' trust in their own decisions about child and family health.

 "I've noticed that it has become easier to form therapeutic relationships with families...especially those who were previously difficult to engage with. Parents now appear happier and more comfortable meeting with me in the familiar setting of the nursery... They seem to be more receptive to advice, particularly when it's given in a more informal way, which has a positive impact for the children."

**Kathryn Kerr, Health Visitor**

### **Impact and outcomes**

Having the Health Visitor on site has been a great help to the team at Cummings Park, as they can identify and provide effective early support to children much earlier, and they can get involved with Personal Plan meetings with children and families who have more complex needs.

 "Working closely with the Health Visitor has meant that we are able to support families together and refer children to other agencies sooner as the health visitor is on site to see the children more in the setting...When new children start at Cummings Park, the Health Visitor is able to provide us with a detailed background of the family's needs that can help us to provide the best possible support from their first day."

**Amy Simpson, Service Manager**

 "Having Kathryn based at the nursery makes it easier to see my child without having to try and squeeze a visit in at home. It is also nice that she can see how he is getting on at nursery and if there is anything she can also speak with yourselves."

**Parent**

### **Next steps**

The partnership between NHS Grampian and Flexible Childcare Services Scotland's Cummings Park Nursery continues and has been so successful that the charity is exploring other projects in their other nurseries. This could see the introduction of other health care professionals such as Occupational Health Therapists, Community Nurses and Speech and Language specialists.

### **Children's human rights approach principles in practice**

Flexible Childcare Services Scotland are embedding children's rights through their partnership working with other services, while also building children's rights into their nursery practice. Working with Health Visitors also factors in the equality and non-discrimination principle, ensuring children with complex needs can access early support.



## **Barnardo's Scotland: Rights Service Assessment for improving rights practice**

Barnardo's Scotland works to protect, support, and empower children, young people, and families across Scotland. Our services range from family support and fostering to advocacy and participation. In line with Scotland's commitment to incorporate the UNCRC into law, Barnardo's Scotland has undertaken a significant programme to embed children's rights into our culture and practice.

### **The issue or opportunity**

In 2022 we conducted a UNCRC awareness survey as we wanted to know the baseline confidence and understanding of our staff. Findings revealed that while 64% of staff felt confident knowing where to find more information, only 5% were very confident explaining the UNCRC to children and families, and overall awareness averaged just five out of ten.

These insights shaped the development of a voluntary Rights Service Assessment process, launched in 2023, to help teams reflect on and embed children's rights practice.

### **What was done**

We are aware that colleagues across Barnardo's Scotland express a strong desire to challenge decision-making for the young people we support. To do this effectively, staff need confidence in understanding and applying UNCRC principles.

The aim of the Rights Service assessment design was to begin to meet this need. It focuses on Articles 2,3,6,12 and 42 of the UNCRC, with statements relating to each article for staff teams to assess their knowledge and awareness.

For example, one of the statements for Article 3 is 'Service staff understand the Human Rights concepts of proportionality, sufficient reasoning, legitimate aims and the need to balance conflicting rights within decision making processes that impact Children/Young People/Parents directly or indirectly.'

The assessment uses a developmental scale rather than numeric scoring to encourage reflective discussion rather than compliance. The scale is 'Not Yet, Beginning, Growing and Fully Developed'. We hope by using this developmental scale rather than compliance metrics, teams feel more empowered to reflect honestly and identify priorities and actions.

Consultation with Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, Safeguarding, Voice and Influence, and Promise teams ensured alignment with existing reporting frameworks and avoided duplication. Some statements are specific to Barnardo's Scotland services, while others reflect broader children's rights standards across Scotland.

### **Impact and outcomes**

The service assessment has helped us take an honest look at how well children's rights are embedded in our work. It created space for teams to reflect on their responsibilities and identify practical steps for improvement.

While progress is ongoing, the process has encouraged more consistent thinking about children's rights in decision-making and highlighted areas where participation and accessibility can be strengthened.

Staff confidence has grown gradually, and services are beginning to integrate rights more visibly into everyday practice. This is not a finished journey, but the assessment has provided a clear framework for continuous learning and development.



**“The self-assessment allowed us to take a deep dive as a service into how we are fulfilling our responsibilities to adhere to children’s rights and ensure it is built into the culture of all that we do.”**

**One service involved in the assessment**

Analysing the information in the service assessment across the 50 services who completed it this year, we saw the need to develop Barnardo's Scotland-wide resources that can support staff confidence when using rights. This has included rolling out a Level One: Rights Awareness Course, a Level Two: Children's Rights and Decision-Making Course, and a Recording Skills Training which is based on The Promise and children's rights.

**Next steps / ongoing challenges**

Our ambition from the start for this assessment has been to involve children, young people and families in this process as well. The assessment is self-reporting, and we know that a participative process with the voice of people using our services would reflect the reality of children's rights progress much more accurately.

This coming year we are looking to widen the assessment out to involve more of our services as many also work with adults, meaning it will be linked more to the broader range of rights frameworks that we have in Scotland.

**Children's human rights approach principles in practice**

The Rights Service assessment allows staff to consider how well children's rights are embedded in their services, while they are supported by training materials for further learning. Other principles play – or will play – an important role. For example, the assessment will help the organisation to empower children and families by helping to invest in staff confidence around speaking to children about their rights.



**Families Outside: Embedding children's right to maintain contact with an imprisoned parent**

Families Outside is Scotland's only national charity dedicated solely to supporting children and families affected by imprisonment. The organisation is funded by the Scottish Government to provide project management, including the monitoring of performance and dissemination of good practice, to 14 Prison Visitors' Centres in Scotland.

A core function of every Visitors' Centre is to promote the rights of children under the UNCRC, like Article 9: the right of the child to maintain personal relations and direct contact with both parents, except where this is contrary to the child's best interests.

This case study highlights how one Prison Visitors' Centre team sought to highlight this right with the prison they work alongside.

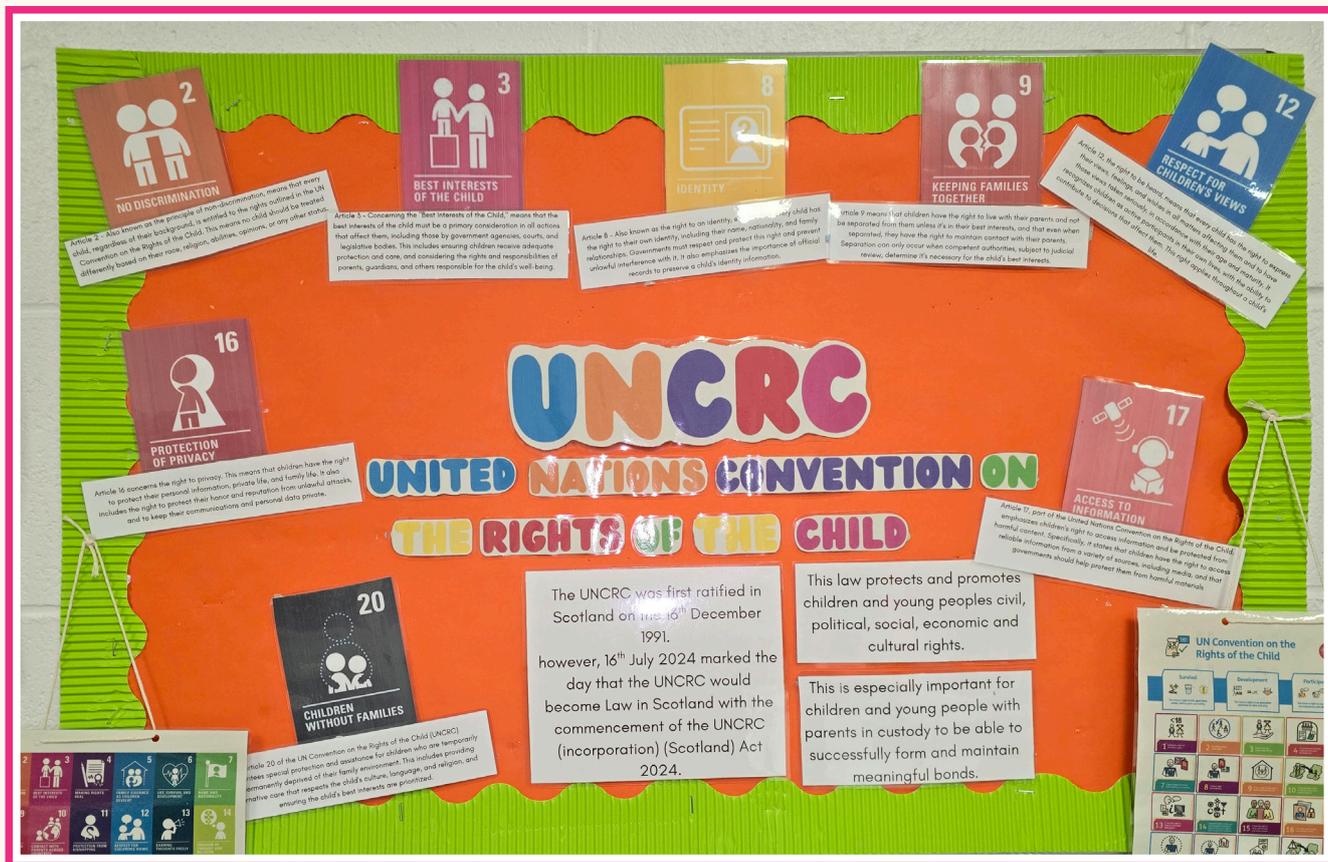
### The issue or opportunity

Staff within a Prison Visitors' Centre were made aware that a father, who attended children's visits and their 'Dads' Group', had his visits cancelled as a sanction when he tested positive for using illicit substances. While safety and security are paramount within a prison, this cancellation appeared to be applied without consideration of the impact on the child or the child's rights.

In this case, the father had spent several years carefully rebuilding his relationship with his very young daughter through regular children's visits, supported by Visitors' Centre staff and no evidence suggested the child was at risk of harm during visits; the decision appeared to be purely punitive.

The Visitors' Centre team created a UNCRC display within the centre. The display explained key UNCRC articles, including articles likely to be relevant to children impacted by a parent's imprisonment. It also highlighted that 'children have the right to see their parent in prison unless it would harm them'.

We used straightforward language and made the display colourful and engaging to encourage interaction and questions.



The Visitor Centre team's display

The team invited prison staff to view the display and facilitated open conversations about children’s rights and the consequences of blanket cancellation policies. Families commented that they “Didn’t realise this was a thing.”, said “We didn’t know this was a right – we thought the prison could just decide.” and that they had “Never heard of UNCRC.” Children and their parents now realise that they do have a voice and can influence actions or decisions that impact them or their child.

### Impact and outcomes

- Following dialogue between the Visitors’ Centre Manager and prison senior management, the father’s children’s visits were reinstated, restoring his daughter’s right to contact.
- Prison management agreed to establish a joint working group to review past and future decisions to remove fathers from children’s visits due to substance misuse, with explicit consideration of child impact and UNCRC obligations.
- Prison Staff, with the support of Centre staff, are developing their understanding of tools that can be used to support their understanding of the impact on the child, such as the use of Child Impact Assessments.
- The display remains a permanent feature in the Visitors’ Centre, prompting ongoing questions from staff, families, and children.
- 13 other visitors’ centres and services across Scotland have also created their own displays and UNCRC material, contributed to by children and young people themselves to raise awareness.

### Ongoing challenges

The father discussed in this study remains reluctant to participate in special events for fear that privileges could be withdrawn again, causing renewed trauma for his daughter and potential substance relapse for him.



“I would be heartbroken if my daughter thought she was coming to see Santa and me and this was taken away to punish me. I am worried about my release in February and if I will be able to be a good dad. I know it is wrong to use, but it helps with my anxiety sometimes.”

**Father**

This example highlights the need for consistent decision-making that considers children’s rights, rather than discretionary or punitive responses.

### Children’s human rights approach principles in practice

By using child designed tools, direct dialogue, promoting children’s rights, and persistent advocacy, Scotland’s Prison Visitors’ Centres are successfully encouraging the Scottish Prison Service to:

- Embed UNCRC considerations into policy and practice.
- Embed what is in the child’s best interest into service delivery.
- Treat the maintenance of parent and child relationships as a positive factor in rehabilitation.

Until comprehensive national training on the UNCRC is rolled out across the prison estate, the expertise and daily presence of Visitors’ Centre staff remain an invaluable bridge between prisons and the children whose rights the Scottish Government has committed to uphold.



## National Day Nurseries Association Scotland: Embedding children's rights in early years settings

### What was done

In March 2025, National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA) Scotland launched its Children's Rights Award at an event marking 20 years of supporting nurseries across the country. As the first award in Scotland recognising children's rights practice in early learning and childcare, it represents a huge step toward adapting the UNCRC across the sector.

The Children's Rights Award itself is a new mechanism for sector accountability, shining a light on settings where children's rights are meaningfully upheld. A respected judging panel with representation from the University of Glasgow, Together (Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights) and NDNA validated the strength of the sector's children's rights practice. The finalist case studies from our [good practice guide](#) share excellent examples of how nurseries implement children's rights.

The Award forms part of NDNA's wider programme of UNCRC support, developed since the UNCRC Bill entered parliament. It has enabled early years settings to confidently integrate children's rights into their culture, pedagogy and everyday life. This programme includes resources, training, toolkits and awareness raising activities. It also includes:

- Support for integrating Child Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessments into nursery planning and daily practice.
- Targeted resources for babies and infants, including ['Listen to Me'](#), which equips practitioners to include non-verbal children in conversations.
- Best-practice guidance, sharing real examples of children's rights pedagogy already happening across the sector.

The 2025 Children's Rights Award winner, Wise Owls Nursery in Moffat, shone in how children's rights practice can be embedded even through organisational challenges and how children's rights practice is driven by a confident and engaged workforce. Wise Owls Nursery's practitioners adapt particular care for each child's individual needs, ensuring all children feel seen, valued and able to express themselves. Even during a challenging period of staffing pressures, Wise Owls prioritised children's wellbeing and inclusion. Their success demonstrates that children's rights practice is a calming force supporting equity, consistency and high-quality experiences for all children regardless of circumstance.

Catherine Jackson, owner and manager of Wise Owls expressed both pride and gratitude in receiving this recognition:



"All staff have worked hard to ensure that the children's wellbeing is prioritised throughout, and winning the award is a reflection of the quality and passion of the staff... The award highlights the nursery's dedication to promoting children's rights through staff training, child-led learning, and strong relationships with families and the community."

**Catherine Jackson, Owner and Manager of Wise Owls Nursery**



### **Award winners, Wise Owls nursery, receiving their 2025 Children's Rights Award**

#### **Impact and outcomes**

NDNA Scotland's UNCRC programme empowers the early learning and childcare workforce to embed children's rights by increasing rights literacy and building confidence to act on rights in daily practice:

- Practitioners receive training on rights-respecting interactions.
- Leaders are supported to ensure rights are central to decision-making.
- The toolkit provides clarity on legal duties under the UNCRC Act.

Wise Owls Nursery demonstrated how this empowerment translates into practice. Staff feel confident supporting children to make choices about their learning, influence decisions that affect them and develop their own sense of agency and autonomy. This is particularly visible in the setting's child-led learning approaches, where children's voices help shape activities, routines and relationships with families.

Children's participation is at the heart of both the Award and Wise Owls' work. NDNA Scotland champions participatory practice by providing tools that help nurseries involve children of all ages, including babies, in decisions. Wise Owls Nursery excels in creating an environment where children can express their preferences and ideas freely, practitioners respond thoughtfully to children's cues, children's voices are visible in planning, displays and evaluations, and where families are engaged as partners in children's rights practice.

Their recent inspection highlighted that children's rights were not only understood but actively lived, demonstrating respect for the right to be heard, the right to play and the right to be cared for with dignity.

### **Children's human rights approach principles in practice**

The NDNA toolkit and Children's Rights Award helped Wise Owls Nursery to demonstrate outstanding children's rights practice. Inspection feedback highlighted the nursery's consistent use of rights-respecting language and the clear presence of children's rights throughout the setting's culture.

Through the Children's Rights Award, NDNA Scotland has created a national platform for celebrating and embedding children's rights, encouraging other nurseries to embed children's rights within their own ethos, practice and policies.



### **Scottish Children's Reporter Administration: Using integrated impact assessments in the Children's Hearings System**

The Scottish Children's Reporter Administration (SCRA) employ Children's Reporters, who work in the Children's Hearings System – Scotland's statutory approach to child protection and children at risk. If a compulsory supervision order may be required for a child, then the full circumstances for that child are considered by Children's Reporters. Reporters ask for information from professionals working with a child, or who will become involved with a child, so they can assess their situation. After receiving this information, the Reporter decides if the child's circumstances need to be considered by the panel members in a children's hearing. A children's hearing is the tribunal that responds to concerns about a child's circumstances (whether about the care or treatment of the child by adults or the behaviour of the child). The children's hearings can address these concerns using a compulsory supervision order.

#### **What was done**

As part of the firm foundations of any developmental or improvement work, SCRA are working to embed the use of integrated impact assessments. SCRA uses an integrated impact assessment – one which combines consideration of the public sector equality duty and the protected characteristics, impacts on children's rights and wellbeing, any harms to people in contact with SCRA's work (under the Consumer duty), impacts as a result of socio economic deprivation (in line with the Fairer Scotland Duty) and any impacts which are linked to remote or island communities. SCRA's impact assessment approach also asks staff to demonstrate both a clear understanding and consideration of the evidence base for the work they are planning. This impact assessment work is the cornerstone in two things:

- SCRA identifying and explaining the benefit of any change that is made – and allows effective monitoring and evaluation approaches to be put in place as well.
- SCRA recognising where there may be negative impacts from a piece of work and building in mitigation to minimise the effects of this at an early stage.

SCRA recognises that this structural approach to planning is the way in which children's rights (and the rights of everyone) can be directly surfaced and considered throughout.

Embedding children's rights is also about shared knowledge, information and training. SCRA has designed some e-learning for professionals supporting children with coming to a children's hearing, alongside partners, and this is publicly available through our '[learning leads](#)' work. A [series of questions](#) has been developed to make sure that SCRA knows what a child and family would like to happen in their children's hearing. Some questions are intended for children (as part of a conversation with a trusted adult), and some questions are for a trusted adult to pass additional useful information to SCRA in advance of the hearing. Some SCRA offices will send a copy of this checklist to social work teams or other professionals, when they are arranging the hearing. Other offices will use the questions as prompts when they are emailing or speaking to professionals about getting dates into the children's hearings diary.

Embedding children's rights is also about ensuring children can understand and engage with the adults and the situation around them. Since November 2020 advocacy services have been available for children in the Children's Hearings System. A child can be supported by an advocacy worker, if this will help them. They can also be supported by a legal representative.

SCRA staff are focusing on more consistent and regular communications with relevant persons, to provide relevant information by phone or text message and answering questions to help families before their children's hearing. These questions can include the practicalities of attending a hearing, expenses and any other changes or adaptations that can be put in place to help people engage fully in their children's hearing.

### **Next steps**

This is all in development, but in 2025 SCRA presented the impact assessment to all SCRA's operational and national managers for the first time. SCRA's External Board Members are also interested in the ways that the impact assessment is used and have had an input as part of their development. SCRA's Board are taking a proactive interest in impact assessments going forward.

SCRA are confident that this is the beginning of a variety of embedding tools being used more effectively and consistently across work in the Children's Hearings System, to ensure that there is a focus on children's rights and equity.

### **Children's human rights approach principles in practice**

SCRA are working to embed children's rights through their use of an integrated impact assessment, as well as improving training materials and creating new checklists for children's hearings. Wider principles are reflected in this case study including equality and non-discrimination in their approach to integration of impact assessments and participation of children in their children's hearings. They are also supporting accountability through the promotion of advocacy or legal representation for children.



## Dumfries and Galloway Council: Embedding children's rights through 'Peep Learning Together'

The Lifelong Learning Service delivers the Peep Learning Together Programme across Dumfries and Galloway to support parents and carers as their child's first educators. This is an evidenced based practice developed by Peep. Our delivery integrates the UNCRC into the design and facilitation of every session, making rights visible, understood and actionable at home.

### What was done

The Peep Learning Together Programme helps families strengthen attachment, communication and early learning through everyday play, songs and stories, while explicitly linking activities to children's rights such as Article 12, the right to be heard, Article 28, the right to education and Article 31, the right to play. Through the Peep Learning Together Programme we are ensuring that our practitioners, children and their families are aware of their children's rights, how to respect these rights, how these rights are protected and what we need to do to fulfil these rights.

Embedding the UNCRC is at the heart of our family learning delivery and practice. The Peep Learning Together programme is one of a suite of programmes that we offer to support children and young people and their families. Our practice is guided by our Dumfries and Galloway Council Children's Services Plan, Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC) and Keeping the Promise.

All our Lifelong Learning staff have attended training sessions on GIRFEC, UNCRC, Keeping the Promise and trauma-informed practice. Our family learning staff have had the opportunity to further their knowledge by attending information sharing and training events with our partners within the NHS. This includes areas such as Perinatal Mental Health and Infant Mental Health. This ensures that we are offering a single strategy approach in supporting our most vulnerable members of the community.

All our staff receive regular support and supervision from their line managers and regular peer support sessions, either independently or as part of full staff team meetings. During these sessions a reflective approach is encouraged to ensure that our staff base can discuss professional development and discuss practice delivery. This ensures that we are regularly reviewing and ensuring that we maintain a professional practice which includes children's rights, anti-racist practice and other aspects of diversity, equity and inclusion.

Our family learning practitioners receive the required learning and training to deliver the Peep Learning Together programme and can extend their learning to incorporate the full range of courses provided by Peep. In addition to this, practitioners can also attend monthly Peep in Practice sessions online with practitioners across the country. This ensures that there is regular sharing of best practice approaches.

Our Peep model in Dumfries and Galloway offers support from Antenatal to Primary 1 aged children and their families. Within our regular delivery we refer to the UNCRC within our session plans. We offer our children and their families friendly prompts and take-home ideas at each session. These are either in paper format or offered as digital links. Each of our topics can be linked to the UNCRC, from encouraging everyday opportunities for play and interaction (supporting Article 31), to recognising and valuing children's voice through making choices (supporting Articles 12 and 13), to sharing songs, rhymes and books together to develop literacy and numeracy skills (supporting Articles 28 and 31).

Throughout our Peep delivery we collect data, feedback and evaluations from the children and families that attend our sessions. This informs our future delivery.

Some examples of this in practice are:

- Transition Peep and Peep in Primary 1 groups. Children from these groups become very upset when the sessions were in the morning and they had to say goodbye to their grown-ups and return to their classrooms. Our children were much more settled and happier when the sessions ran at the end of the nursery and school day, and they were able to leave with their grown-ups at the end of the sessions. Now, wherever possible, we run these sessions either at the end of the school day or after school.
- Following the COVID pandemic, we had many children in our region being unable to swim and sitting on very long waiting lists for swimming lessons. In response to this local need we developed our Peep programme to incorporate sessions within a local swimming pool which were free for our families to attend. This expanded the children's social experiences, health and physical development and supported their grown-ups in developing their confidence in using local resources.
- We have used the Peep model to extend the support that we can offer our families where English is not their first language in integrating in their local communities. Through delivering these sessions in local family centres, libraries, educational settings, we have introduced our New Scots communities to local services and resources. The Peep model is flexible and has been used to support English language development for both the children and their grown-ups.

### **Next steps**

Our service understands the importance of embedding the UNCRC in our practice and ensuring that it remains at the forefront of our delivery. Our future aspiration is to ensure the development of a Child Rights Impact Assessment for the whole Lifelong Learning Service to embed this further into our practice and delivery.

### **Children's human rights approach principles in practice**

Through staff training and supervision, and links to other frameworks like GIRFEC and The Promise, children's rights are embedded through the Peep Learning Together Programme. The delivery of Peep is also varied to support equality and non-discrimination work. Accountability is encouraged through feedback and evaluations from attendees. Babies and their families are empowered through activities and resources that help them learn about children's rights.



## **NHS Grampian: Embedding the UNCRC in Scotland's right to food discussions**

### **What was done**

NHS Grampian, in collaboration with Aberdeenshire Council and local young people, has recently launched a Children and Young People's Rights Ambassador Programme. This initiative comprises two key strands:

- Youth Ambassadors: Supporting peers within schools to understand and exercise their rights.

- **Professional Ambassadors:** Building knowledge and confidence among professionals through peer support, e-learning, case discussions, and access to practical tools and resources. These ambassadors advocate for children and young people in their daily work, ensuring that every child's rights are upheld.

Professional ambassadors represent a wide range of multi-agency roles across Grampian. The programme has been actively promoted to those whose roles may feel more removed from direct engagement with children, reinforcing the principle that advancing children's rights is a shared organisational responsibility.

During a Progressing the Right to Food workshop in central Scotland, participants explored the intersection of human rights and food access. Many attendees were unaware that the UNCRC became incorporated into Scots law in July 2024. One participant asserted that UNCRC rights could not be considered because they were "Not law."

Our ambassador clarified that the UNCRC is now legally embedded in Scotland, applying to all children and young people under 18, providing a brief overview of Articles 24 and 27, which relate to food and nutrition, and shared practical resources, including an engaging poster and relevant websites.

This intervention sparked discussion on the implications for statutory and voluntary sectors—including health, justice, and legal services – which now have a duty to consider young people's rights under the new legislation. The group subsequently focused their visual diagram on the UNCRC and shared their findings with the wider workshop.

### **Impact and outcomes**

At a recent ambassadors' meeting, we asked: "What opportunities have you had to consider or discuss children's rights in your role since we last met?" One example stood out, illustrating how the programme empowered a colleague to speak confidently on behalf of children and young people – something they felt less able to do prior to joining. We hope to see many such examples, contributing to a stronger culture of rights awareness across Grampian.

### **Next steps / ongoing challenges**

Raising awareness of legislative changes is essential to embedding children's rights approaches in food access. Achieving this requires cross-sector collaboration and accessible resources for professionals working with children and young people.

### **Children's human rights approach principles in practice**

NHS Grampian are embedding children's rights in their services through the promotion of children's rights and through linking children's rights to other areas of policy and practice. Their Ambassador model drives children's rights in practice, encouraging the embedding of children's rights throughout various roles and investing in the participation and empowerment of children directly and through peer-support models.



## Highland Council: The use of Child Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessments for Highland waste management proposals

### The issue or opportunity

In 2023/24, Highland Council was proposing to make changes to its waste and recycling collection system to ensure it was aligned with the national Managing Waste Policy and the Household Recycling Charter and Code of Practice.

### What was done

To support this significant change, the project manager was asked if they would pilot the completion of an integrated impact assessment tool. This included the use of a Children's Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment. The advice supporting the Children's Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment included information on the UNCRC articles and the process of considering the views of children and young people who may be impacted by the proposed change. The project manager and the subject specialist for children's rights within the council jointly worked through the Children's Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment, discussing key aspects of the proposed change and how to mitigate any potential negative impacts on children and young people.

One of the proposals within the project was to reduce the size of the general waste bin to encourage recycling of card, paper, plastics and metals. However, it was identified that this would be an issue for families with younger children who might create more waste by using disposable nappies etc., and for larger families who naturally produce more waste. Families with disabled children may also create more waste through pads, nappies or medical waste.



“Children's rights did not feature highly in the thinking or planning of the project prior to these discussions. Being able to articulate the need for mitigation and support for specific families through a children's rights lens provided a different way of looking at some of the issues that may be experienced by some families.”

**Imogen Percy-Bell, Principal Waste Management Officer**

The identified issues were able to contribute to the council's Household Waste and Recycling Policy. The policy was reviewed to include these specific needs for families and to inform the additional bin capacity criteria. Having smaller bins delivered to all households could have disadvantaged these children and families. Mitigations were put in place to allow families to request an additional general waste bin from the outset and have their waste collected more regularly to accommodate the higher levels of waste generated.

Additionally, education materials were also made for schools to use with their pupils to support the [Sustainable Development Goals](#) within the curriculum and to encourage recycling at a young age.

### Impact and outcomes

It was hoped that the mitigations would be in the best interests of children in Highland and would have a positive impact on children's right to dignity and best possible healthcare, especially for disabled children and larger families. The aim was to also ensure that those with health care needs or disabilities would not be adversely impacted or discriminated against by this change.

The policy now states that ‘Additional capacity can be provided to a household where they can demonstrate a need...With five or more persons in permanent residence; Where a householder’s medical condition demonstrates a need for additional bin capacity or; Where there are two children in nappies’.

### **Children’s human rights approach principles in practice**

Discussing the impact of proposed changes to the waste management system using a Children’s Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment allowed Highland Council to mitigate potential children’s rights violations and allowed for them to consider children whose rights are at risk. This demonstrates a commitment to embedding children’s rights in planning and the delivery of services which impact on children. Equality and non-discrimination were also considered as part of this process, resulting in the inclusion of different family sizes, needs and medical conditions within the policy.



### **Families Outside: Child impact assessment toolkit – supporting children who have a family member in the justice system**

Families Outside is Scotland’s only national charity that works exclusively on behalf of children and families affected by imprisonment. In 2024, with funding from the Scottish Government’s UNCRC Innovation Fund (administered by Corra Foundation), Families Outside partnered with Perth and Kinross Council to deliver training on the impact of imprisonment on children and on the use of the Child Impact Assessment Toolkit.

The Child Impact Assessment Toolkit, originally developed by the Prison Reform Trust, is a practical resource designed to uphold Article 12 of the UNCRC – the child’s right to be heard and to have their views given due weight in decisions that affect them.

#### **The issue or opportunity**

An estimated 20,000 to 27,000 children in Scotland have a parent in prison at any one time. These children are often invisible, unheard, and unsupported. Having a parent in prison is recognised as one of the ten Adverse Childhood Experiences, and these children are up to five times more likely to experience additional Adverse Childhood Experiences.

This project directly responds to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child’s [2023 Concluding Observations](#) which called on Scotland to prioritise the best interests of the child in sentencing decisions, consider alternatives to incarceration for caregivers, and ensure children maintain contact with incarcerated parents, receiving appropriate support.

#### **What was done**

- 444 multi-agency professionals across Perth and Kinross were trained.
- Training came in two formats: a shorter introductory session on the toolkit and a longer ‘champions’ session that explored the wider impact of imprisonment on children and families.
- Additional bespoke sessions were delivered at in-service days and team meetings.

Participants came from social work, health, housing, education, third sector organisations, Scottish Courts, Scottish Prison Service, and Police Scotland.

A Young People's Steering Group, made up of pupils from a school within Perth and Kinross who had lived experience of family involvement in the justice system, co-designed resources (including posters) to raise awareness of the toolkit among professionals and other young people.



Example of a poster resource created by the Young People's Steering Group

### Impact and outcomes

- 444 professionals are now better informed about the impact of imprisonment on children and feel confident using the Child Impact Assessment Toolkit in their practice.
- 98% of those who completed the post-training evaluation said they could better uphold children's rights as a result of the training.
- Perth and Kinross Council has created dedicated webpages hosting all toolkit resources plus a [new 15-minute training video](#) developed by Families Outside for professionals who missed the live sessions.
- Early feedback shows the toolkit is already being embedded into everyday practice.



"This toolkit gives people the guidance: how do you open up a conversation with a young person; how do you ask them – 'How do you feel about this?'"

**Head of Family Support, Families Outside**



“You don’t necessarily know how to navigate that conversation... Having the assessment just makes it a little bit easier. It’s a useful guide.”

**Guidance Teacher and Young People’s Steering Group Lead**

### **Key learning**

The word ‘assessment’ in the original title was felt to be off-putting for some practitioners who associated it with formality and extra workload. The Prison Reform Trust is therefore renaming the resource to make it more approachable.

### **Children’s human rights approach principles in practice**

This partnership demonstrates how targeted training, co-production with young people with lived experience, and sustained local authority commitment can embed children’s rights into frontline practice, ensuring children affected by imprisonment are seen, heard, and supported.



## **Skills Development Scotland: Supporting colleagues to embed children’s rights into their work**

Skills Development Scotland (SDS) is Scotland’s national skills body that supports people and businesses in Scotland to develop and apply their skills. Respecting, protecting and fulfilling children’s rights is central to the work of SDS. A key part of this is ensuring colleagues understand the ways in which they can embed and advance children’s rights through their day-to-day work with customers, partners, and each other.

### **The issue or opportunity**

The UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act came into force in 2024. To help colleagues understand how the new legislation applies to their work, SDS partnered with Together (Scottish Alliance for Children’s Rights) to develop resources translating a children’s human rights approach into examples of practical activities that colleagues undertake every day.

### **What was done**

Together interviewed SDS colleagues from various teams to understand the detail of their job role and used this information to list the ways children’s rights were applicable to that role, highlighting areas where that team are already meeting their children’s rights obligations, and reflecting on areas that could be strengthened.

The information was then shared with colleagues to help them understand what the legislation means in practice, allowing them to have more effective and meaningful discussions as a team about how they can support children’s rights through their work.

Whilst working with SDS, Together used knowledge of the five principles of a children’s human rights approach to structure the interviews and resources, highlighting the links different areas of work had with different principles. For example, identifying that the Digital and Transformation Teams undertake a lot of co-design and participation with young people, Careers Advisers were empowering young people to make their own career decisions, and the National Training

Programmes Team demonstrate equality and non-discrimination by identifying specific actions to improve outcomes for apprentices from equality groups.

Together also provided some suggestions for other actions SDS could be taking, drawing on knowledge of professional practice across Scotland and internationally.

### Next steps

The resources will be used to support colleagues' learning, to identify actions needed to take to advance children's rights, and to help develop our children's rights report, due to be published in 2026.

 "Working with Together gave us the benefit of their expertise in children's rights and helped make rights practical and understandable for our colleagues. Having an impartial, outside perspective on our work really challenged us to think differently, highlighting areas of strength and reflecting on ways we could improve."

**Susie McKain, Equality Mainstreaming Manager**

### Children's human rights approach principles in practice

SDS are doing extensive work to embed children's rights across all their departments. They have built UNCRC into their Integrated Equalities Impact Assessment and have developed a range of training resources shaped by the needs of their teams. By exploring the roles of different teams, and considering their individual remits, the wider principles are also being practically applied e.g. through the equality and non-discrimination work of the National Training Programmes Team.



## Perth and Kinross Council: Advancing children's rights in the justice system

### The issue or opportunity

In 2023-2024, Perth and Kinross Council received funding from the Scottish Government's UNCRC Innovation Fund, administered by the Corra Foundation. The funding was utilised to purchase the specialist knowledge of Families Outside to raise awareness amongst professionals about the impact of the justice journey on children and young people. Central to the project, is the use of Prison Reform Trust's [Child Impact Assessment Toolkit](#), a UK-wide resource co-created by children and young people.

### What was done

A multi-agency steering group was formed in January 2024, and a programme of training was launched in April 2024. The training aimed to upskill staff on a multi-agency basis, enabling them to understand and mitigate the negative impacts of the justice system on children and young people.

99 people attended the Champion Training one day session and 345 attended a shorter Toolkit Session. In addition to the in-person training, a [short training video](#) was created by Families Outside and is available on our webpage to anyone unable to attend the session or wanting a refresher. This video is a legacy of the project. Further information about the toolkit can be found at [Child Impact Assessments: The Toolkit – Perth and Kinross Council](#).

A Roles and Responsibilities Guide was created to provide clarity to the multi-agency professionals regarding their expectations. In addition, an information sharing pathway was developed to provide clarity to workers regarding information sharing and General Data Protection Regulation.

A Young Person's Steering Group from Perth Academy supported, and continues to support, this project. The group consisted of seven young people. The group assisted with the development of resources and directed the activity of a local Child Impact Assessment launch event held in November 2024.

Going forward the group has evolved to a peer support group looking to arrange activities for young people impacted by someone close to them on the justice journey (like the types of activities arranged for young carers) but it is hoped that the group will still provide some guidance and feedback to the multi-agency steering group.

### **Impact and outcomes**

The project equipped staff with the necessary knowledge to link children impacted by the justice system into support. Positive feedback was received from the multi-agency training which confirmed the project's success.

The following are some examples of commitments made from training participants:

- "Talk to children – active listening."
- "Use it to begin child centred conversations."
- "Continue conversations with children, young people, adults and communities."
- "Ensuring children are heard!"
- "I will ensure to make the child impact assessment a part of my work toolkit!"
- "Do it every day, let it become the norm."
- "I will always mention the impact assessments when I deliver rights training to children, young people and professionals."
- "Keep the impact on the child at the forefront of my mind and use info/tools from training as appropriate. Share with colleagues."
- "Ensure the families I work with are provided the option to engage in assessment."
- "Include impact assessments in the support we offer and consider other ways we can promote and advocate for children's voices in the justice system."

### **Key learning**

Crucial to the success of this project was the high level of 'buy-in' from management teams across all sectors. Combining the specialist knowledge of Families Outside with the established connections of the local Community Justice Partnership Co-ordinator enabled prompt access to key multi-agency partners.

Regular feedback was sought from the steering group throughout the project which led to tweaks to the training delivery format as required. For example, it was quickly identified that engaging teachers presented a significant challenge due to staffing constraints. To address this, Families Outside provided in-service sessions and twilight sessions, maximising participation without disrupting school schedules.

An initial concern from multi-agency partners was that Child Impact Assessments would be an additional ask of their staff, many of whom already feel close to capacity. The development of the 'Roles and Responsibilities' guide was useful in providing clarity to services that their staff were not being asked to do more.

### **Next steps**

A range of webpages have been developed to support staff and the public:

- [About Child Impact Assessments](#)
- [Child Impact Assessments: The Toolkit](#)
- [Child Impact Assessment Training](#)
- [Community Justice – Your rights when someone is arrested / goes to prison](#)
- [Child Impact Assessment – Feedback from Children, Young People and Professionals.](#)

Work will take place during to gather feedback from children, young people and professionals who have utilised the toolkit.

The Steering Group established at the outset of this project will continue to meet at a reduced frequency (moving in January 2025 to bimonthly instead of monthly meetings) to continue to raise awareness and embed the toolkit. Along with keeping the topic on meeting agendas locally, learning from the project will also be shared at national events during 2025-26 and beyond.

### **Children's human rights approach principles in practice**

Children's rights are being embedded in Perth and Kinross Council through staff training, partnership working and the creation of staff resources. The steering group of young people is involved in the work contributing to their empowerment and ensuring their participation.



## **NHS Lothian: Using integrated impact assessments**

### **The issue or opportunity**

NHS Lothian have been conducting Integrated Impact Assessments that combine Equalities Impact Assessments and Children's Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment since 2023. Their Integrated Impact Assessment template allows staff to work through any proposal to think about who will be impacted, if those impacts are positive or negative, and to check if there will be legal impacts.

### **What was done**

NHS Lothian has a variety of online guidance and resources for staff that are frequently updated based on the learning from completing Integrated Impact Assessments. This guidance sits beside their published Integrated Impact Assessments.

NHS Lothian offer a three hour in-person training session which details the legal background of why an Integrated Impact Assessment should be done. It also provides an opportunity to work through the process of completing an Assessment. Staff who want additional support can also watch an Assessment being completed in person. Training is ongoing, reinforced and updated regularly with new learning.

NHS Lothian also offer guidance that details when an Integrated Impact Assessment should or shouldn't be done. NHS Lothian board papers detail if an Assessment has been done and provide an explanation if it wasn't felt necessary. Board members can read the Integrated Impact Assessment and can also request one is completed.

The work begins with the evidence gathering stage that involves as many people as possible who have relevant knowledge. The lead staff member collates the evidence in the Integrated Impact Assessment template. NHS Lothian have a public health intelligence team to gather broad national population level information, and an analytical service that has Lothian level information. They also have a Child and Maternal Health Data Strategy working group that is thinking about what data they have and where the gaps are.

The Integrated Impact Assessment template with all the evidence in place is sent out to stakeholders attending the meeting where the Assessment will be worked through. This is sent out at least a week in advance for attendees to read through. Ideally these meetings are in person, which feedback says is more successful. At times these meetings are conducted online to get input from stakeholders who cannot attend in person. Multiple stakeholders are involved to avoid bias creep that might happen if only one person conducted the Assessment. The internal or external stakeholders invited depends on the nature of the Assessment. Children and young people are involved only when appropriate as often relevant evidence has already been gathered from them through sources like the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland, Together (Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights), the Scottish Youth Parliament, or through other third sector representation. This meeting process is a learning opportunity for everyone involved to start thinking in detail about all the UNCRC articles. Everything worked through in the meeting is written up into the template and sent to attendees, so they have a chance to make edits.

Once the Integrated Impact Assessment is complete and signed off, it is published online next to the training materials. This allows staff to see how the library of Assessments has grown and changed over time. If mitigations have been agreed as part of the Assessment, they should be added into the process document for the planned changes. NHS Lothian is starting to think about the processes that need to be in place to gather evidence that all mitigations are integrated and evaluated.

### **Key learning**

NHS Lothian have found a variety of benefits from doing Integrated Impact Assessments. They have seen increased knowledge and experience from the education of their staff, better holistic decision making, good quality evidence gathering, improved transparency and accountability, and the early identification of potential issues that allowed mitigation plans to be put in place.

### **Next steps / ongoing challenges**

There are still some challenges and areas for development as NHS Lothian are in an early stage with this work. That means that occasionally Assessments can feel tokenistic, and there can be concerns about the dilution of children's rights as a focus through the Integrated Impact Assessment. There is also an increased demand on staff time for both the work, the evidence gathering and for the delivery of training. The multi-agency work of NHS Lothian means that there can be different opinions on how a Child Rights Impact Assessment should be done, which involves careful navigation and learning from different approaches. As NHS Lothian is a large organisation with a lot of operational decisions, there are times when an Integrated Impact Assessment might not be completed, but it can be hard to know when that happens. These challenges are under constant evaluation by NHS Lothian, so they can make changes to their processes as needed.

## Children’s human rights approach principles in practice

NHS Lothian’s work to embed children’s rights using Integrated Impact Assessments helps ensure that children’s rights are considered when decisions are being made. Participation is considered in a thoughtful way, respecting views shared by children in other spaces. This work is supported by varied staff training and guidance materials. As part of accountability practice, these Integrated Impact Assessments are published online, and NHS Lothian remain transparent and open to how the process can evolve and adapt to work best for the organisation and children.

### 1.3 Reflections on the embedding principle:

 The case studies featured above provide learning on how to implement the embedding principle. The importance of adapting children’s rights tools like Child Rights Impact Assessments to suit the context of each organisation was evidenced by NHS Lothian, Scottish Children’s Reporter Administration, Flexible Childcare Services Scotland, Barnardo’s Scotland, Highland Council, and Families Outside. By flexing impact assessment processes and integrating them with other policies or legal duties, these organisations were better able to implement the tools in practice, while also identifying areas for development.

The role of partnerships and the promotion of children’s rights across them came through strongly from the work of Families Outside, Flexible Childcare Services Scotland, National Day Nurseries Association, Inspiring Scotland, Perth and Kinross Council and Skills Development Scotland. In each example, ensuring children’s rights featured in the partnership led to – or has the potential to lead to – enhanced protection of children’s rights. For Inspiring Scotland, the important role of a funder in promoting children’s rights to grantees evidenced how national practice can support local implementation.

Children’s rights promotion and awareness raising featured prominently in various case studies. For NHS Grampian and Dumfries and Galloway, their approach to promotion recognised that this needed to extend beyond professionals and should include children and their families too.

Critically, adapting steps taken under the embedding principle to meet the context of the organisation and children involved is important. For PLUS (Forth Valley) Limited, this helped ensure children’s rights became ‘real’, avoiding abstract concepts.

### 1.4 Top tips on implementing the embedding principle:

 The following top tips are drawn from the [UNCRC Skills and Knowledge Framework](#) outcomes. By using these top tips, alongside real-world learning from featured case studies, individuals and organisations can be supported to effectively implement the embedding principle in practice.

- Take time to understand how to embed a children’s human rights approach in your work. This might include reflecting on and evaluating what you already do and where there is room for development across all five principles.



- Embed children's rights in your planning, strategies, and reporting activities. Keep in mind that the process of embedding children's rights is as important as the end result.
- Build children's rights into everything you do and take time to understand how they link to other policies and frameworks. This will help ensure children's rights become a core feature of planning and delivery, rather than an additional task.
- Take children's rights into account when commissioning services and developing partnerships with other organisations and services. Consider how commissioned work or partnerships impact children's rights, how will it be monitored and how can children be involved in commissioning.
- Use Child Rights Impact Assessments and Child Rights Impact Evaluations to assess the impact of decisions on children. These tools can flex and should be adapted to suit the needs of the decision being made and the children and young people involved.
- Make the collection and monitoring of appropriate information on children regular, continually helping you evolve how you support their rights. Make sure to consider how you do this for children whose rights are most at risk.
- Learn how child rights budgeting can support children's rights, particularly for children and young people whose rights are at risk.
- Develop a plan for continual learning and development on children's rights individually and across your organisation. Reflect on existing knowledge, identify gaps and embed learning into the professional development of colleagues.
- Build relationships with services working with children and young people who might be able to provide support, contacts, and expertise for your work. This might lead to new partnerships, or it might help you understand where you can refer children to for support like practical help, advocacy or legal advice.
- Get to know the role and functions of the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland and the Scottish Human Rights Commission. Both have enhanced powers to protect children's rights under the UNCRC Act but are reliant on others to help them understand what the children's rights issues are in Scotland.
- Take on the role of promoting children's rights in everything that you do. This could include explaining the power of children's rights or sharing accessible information about how to protect them. If everyone did this, a strong culture of children's rights in Scotland would be realised.



## Chapter 2: Equality and non-discrimination

## 2.1 Introduction to the equality and non-discrimination principle

The equality and non-discrimination principle means ensuring that every baby, child and young person experiences their rights in practice. This can involve targeted support for those whose rights are most at risk to ensure that everyone has an equal opportunity to exercise their rights and to reach their full potential.

Reflecting on how the equality and non-discrimination principle relates to the other principles is important to ensure that, in practice, all children and young people are supported to realise all of their rights.

- Embedding: how can equality and non-discrimination be ensured when working on decision-making, policies, planning and budgets?
- Empowerment: how will all babies, children and young people be empowered to claim their rights?
- Participation: is equality and non-discrimination considered as part of participation?
- Accountability: how are accountability mechanisms designed to be accessible to all babies, children and young people?

The following case studies provide practical examples of how the equality and non-discrimination principle can be applied. This includes examples of:

- Supporting children and young people whose rights are at risk.
- Recognising potential concerns or barriers experienced by some children and taking steps to address them.
- Understanding and considering babies, children and young people's lived experiences.

## 2.2 Case studies



### Scottish Children's Reporter Administration: 'Neurodiversity Champions' network

The Scottish Children's Reporter Administration (SCRA) employs the Children's Reporters, who work in the Children's Hearings System – Scotland's statutory approach to child protection and children at risk. There is a variety of work being undertaken to support equality and non-discrimination.

#### What was done

SCRA established a network of Neurodiversity Champions in March 2023. This Champions network currently includes over 30 members of staff, who come from different roles in the organisation and who are located across the country. Every geographical area and every grade or role in SCRA is represented in the network. Several of the staff involved are neurodivergent or are the parents/carers of neurodivergent children.

SCRA's Champions have been trained in aspects of neurodivergence including 'Train the Trainer' neurodiversity training with Salvesen Mindroom, and they are encouraged to continue their own professional development through additional training.

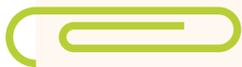
The network meets quarterly to raise awareness of neurodiversity, provide training to other members of SCRA staff, to provide advice and guidance to colleagues and to ensure that sensory tools, visual information guides and other aids are available in local areas and are actively promoted. The network also provides information on neurodiversity back to SCRA's Inclusion Steering group.

SCRA locality support administrators are following a training and development programme which covers practice, corporate parenting, neurodiversity and trauma. It also considers the ways in which our practice can and should alter as a result of increased knowledge across these areas. SCRA are considering the ways in which we can introduce the Supporting Scotland's Children – Core Knowledge and Values materials into induction training for all new staff – and into continuous professional development for existing staff members.

We have also been working with the British Deaf Association Scotland to improve the British Sign Language information on the SCRA website. We created a [standalone British Sign Language section](#) on our website, that includes a suite of films aimed at children, young people, parents and carers. One of our films is a British Sign Language walk through of a Hearings Centre, and we also have a British Sign Language video dictionary. Our next British Sign Language film is about children and young people's rights in hearings.

### **Children's human rights approach principles in practice**

The case study shows how SCRA has considered equality and non-discrimination in their work, recognising that there are children and families with multiple barriers that affect their understanding of and engagement with the work that we do. SCRA's work around neurodivergence and other protected characteristics is designed to recognise and dismantle those barriers, to ensure that all children and families receive the support they need to be able to understand and engage with decision making in the Children's Hearings System. The approach taken considers several principles including strong embedding of the work throughout the whole organisation.



### **Falkirk Council: Breathing Space – a test of change**

Breathing Space is a test of change initiative based in Grangemouth Town Centre that offers short-term, emergency, trauma-informed support for children, young people, and families during a time of crisis.

The space is funded through Scottish Government Whole Family Wellbeing funding and supported by the local community, the Children and Young People's Centre for Justice Inside Out Group, and the Falkirk CHAMPS Champions Board. There is no cost to use the space for children and young people from Falkirk Council.

### **The issue or opportunity**

From experience, we see growing difficulty in sourcing meaningful, effective support for children, young people, and their families at times of crisis. Consequently, children can end up in environments that do not meet their emotional or developmental needs. A lack of responsive provision often triggers formal legal processes such as children's hearings, which, though vital in safeguarding rights, can delay a child's return home and increase the risk of further disruption.

## What was done

The aim of Breathing Space is simple: to ensure that no child or young person is left sitting in a social work office or police station while decisions are being made about their care. Instead, they are given a calm, nice, dignified, safe, trauma-informed and supportive environment – consistent with their rights to participation, protection, and respect (supporting Articles 12, 19, and 39 of the UNCRC).

The space was co-designed with young people to provide a safe, welcoming, and therapeutic environment where young people can decompress while social work, families and partner services work together to agree the best way forward.

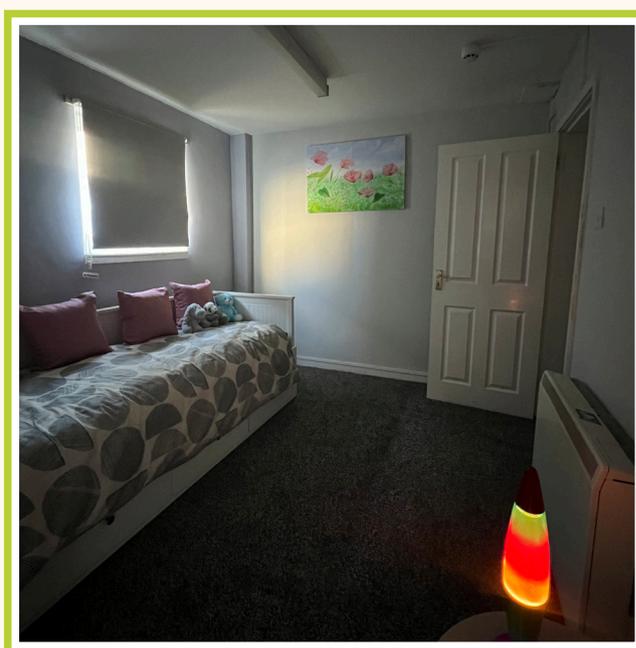
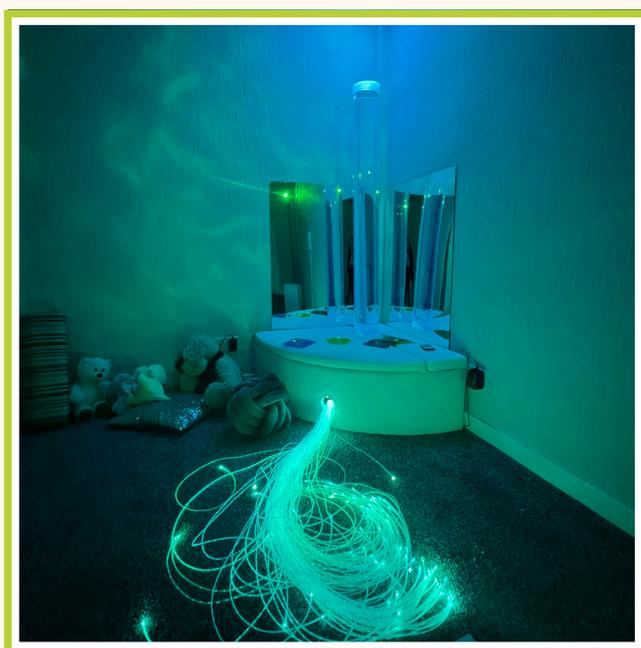
Currently, the space can be accessed by Grangemouth and Falkirk Police Stations and Falkirk Council Children’s Services Social Work Teams. It is also used as a ‘place of safety’ to prevent children and young people from being held in police stations or social work offices during crises. The space can also be used to interview children in a child-friendly setting, or for group work and family time.

## Example

A 13-year-old was increasingly coming into conflict with the law due to high-risk behaviour. They had been charged several times for assaulting police, possession of a knife, shoplifting, and vandalism. The social worker recognised that these behaviours were symptoms of deep-rooted trauma but had limited options for immediate support.

In one crisis incident, the social worker requested to use Breathing Space so the young person could have a calm environment while a support plan was agreed. Staff were present at the space, along with a member of the Intensive Family Support Service who knew the young person well. They spent approximately five hours at Breathing Space, eating, using their phone, and resting in the day bed area with the lava lamp on. The young person presented as calm and relaxed, a marked contrast to their heightened distress when in police care.

By early evening, a plan was in place, and the social worker collected the young person, who said they “liked the space – it was much nicer than the police station.”



Two examples of co-designed Breathing Space areas

## **Impact and outcomes**

A children's human rights, trauma-informed, and community-rooted approach can prevent escalation, uphold dignity, and protect children's rights in practice.

Because of the availability of Breathing Space, the young person had a safe and respectful alternative to the police station. Their behaviour and mood shifted visibly – from anger and anxiety to calmness, trust and cooperation.

Staff supporting the young person also reported that their own experience of providing crisis care felt less stressful and more purposeful. And police resources were freed to focus on other duties, knowing the young person was safe and the situation did not escalate into further police charges.

This initiative demonstrates a practical commitment to realising the UNCRC in everyday practice, ensuring that every child in crisis is treated not as a problem to be managed, but as a person with rights, and needs.

## **Example**

Breathing Space was used as a place of safety for siblings who were subject to an Interim Compulsory Supervision Order while waiting for new accommodation.

The children were required to leave their accommodation by 10am, but their next placement was not available until 3pm. The children and adults supporting them arrived at the space around 11am and stayed until just before 3pm.

Breathing Space provided a safe, calm environment where the children could spend time together as siblings. They were able to play, relax, and enjoy each other's company without being exposed to the stress of the situation happening around them.

The children used the space to explore and engage with a variety of games, which helped distract and settle them during what could otherwise have been an unsettling and anxious day. The children were noticeably more settled in the larger, child-friendly environment, which allowed them room to move, play, and simply be themselves.

All staff found the space extremely valuable as an emergency option. Staff reported that they found it easily accessible and immaculate on arrival, which immediately created a reassuring atmosphere for everyone involved.

## **Impact and outcomes**

Using the space in this way saw improved emotional wellbeing, strengthened sibling connection, and enhanced safety and stability for the children. They could remain calm during a potentially distressing transition, could support and play with each other and this ensured that they were not left without appropriate accommodation and exposed to uncertainty.

The children transitioned into their new accommodation in a calmer, more regulated state, reducing the likelihood of placement instability on arrival.

Having access to a ready, well-maintained space provided staff with a reliable emergency solution, easing logistical pressure and enabling better quality care. Staff reported increased confidence in using Breathing Space as an emergency option for future cases.

## Children's human rights approach principles in practice

When Breathing Space is offering short-term, emergency, trauma-informed support for children, young people, and families during a time of crisis, they are implementing the equality and non-discrimination principle. Their understanding of children's specific needs and experiences have allowed them to provide a space that respects and protects children's rights. Wider principles feature in this case study including ensuring the participation of children in the co-design of the space.

## Inverclyde Council: Connected 2 Care Conference 2024

Inverclyde Council believes that compassion and kindness are at the heart of our communities and partnerships across the authority, however our wonderful children and young people are at the heart of everything we do. Putting children and young people at the heart of everything the Council does means listening, engaging, and finding new creative ways to deliver services. Our young people are a source of inspiration and a positive force for good across the Council and communities.

### The issue or opportunity

An opportunity arose for some of our care experienced children and young people to get involved in a leadership academy with Columba 1400's place-based project. This was instigated by our education services through our virtual school head teacher and was implemented in partnership with our Children's Rights Officer and Your Voice Inverclyde who are a third sector organisation that we work closely with.

### What was done

Each high school in Inverclyde was asked to nominate three young people to get involved. Through working with the academy, the young people decided that a conference was the best way to share their thoughts. Therefore, they were supported to design and deliver a full day conference exploring what care experience meant to them and how our workforce and communities can better support children, young people and their families to thrive.



Conference speakers Beth-Anne McDowall, Laura Beveridge and James Docherty.

As part of the discussions the young people decided that each school should plan and facilitate their own workshop or presentation on the day. These included workshops on:

- Mental health and its impact.
- Social work and the care system, building better relationships and connections.
- Stigma around being care experienced.
- Bullying and its impact.
- The power of connections and how one nurturing adult can help us create more positive pathways.

The young people also invited some keynote speakers who they had researched and felt were the people who were aligned with their ideas and what they wanted to achieve from this conference. The Keynote speakers were Beth-Anne McDowall, Laura Beveridge and James Docherty. One of our schools was supported by Ian Corbett from the Children and Young People's Centre for Justice.

The aim was for the conference to be fully youth led, from design to delivery, and to give Inverclyde's workforce and wider community an opportunity to listen and then respond through their own practice with an enhanced understanding of our care experienced communities' needs and aspirations (#ListenAndRespond). The young people achieved that aim and so much more. 128 corporate parents from across the whole local authority turned up for the event and the feedback was outstanding. This included representatives from education, health, social work, advocacy, housing, fire, police and so many more people who play a massive part in the lives of young people whose rights are at risk.

As this was youth led from start to finish, their involvement included budgeting, planning, hosting, backstage support and all aspects of the event. Equality and non-discrimination, inclusion, and participation were crucial elements of the event, which showed throughout as no decisions were ever undertaken without the young people. However, the main reason for the success was choice. At no point was any young person asked to do anything that they didn't feel equipped to. We did encourage young people to step outside of their comfort zones but always in a safe space and never to their detriment at any point. This gave the young people the confidence to try new things at their own pace. The level of empowerment this gave the young people was not something we could have imagined at the start of this project but absolutely shone throughout this whole event.

We worked to support the young people to be confident enough to be able to facilitate a group or present on the day. This was making them feel a bit worried so we discussed what they felt would be achievable for them to manage. Every single young person within this cohort was at a different stage, so we made sure that they all felt fully included. Through some problem solving and them overseeing decisions, the young people who didn't want to present or facilitate groups came up with a great idea for an anti-bullying and kindness stall they could host on the day. The young people worked on what resources they would need for the stall, and how they would like it to run throughout the day of the conference. They looked at what costs would be for the resources and how they would order these.

The young people taking ownership of this meant that they felt fully included and equal with everyone else who had a role within the conference. It also helped increase their confidence in knowing they didn't have to step too far out of their comfort zones but far enough to be pushing themselves a bit. This example shows how we promoted inclusion, participation, equality and non-discrimination throughout to the benefit of the young people we were supporting.

We also had one pilot primary school get involved. Whilst they weren't involved in the overall planning due to age, stage and choice, they did however make their own video which was shared on the day about the importance of nurture, support and interventions at an early stage.

As this was the first time we had been involved in such a project, there were, as expected, a few barriers to be overcome. One of the first ones we encountered was how to ensure accurate communication with schools, regarding what the project entailed. When our initial cohort of young people first arrived, they were unsure what they were coming along to. This meant that we could potentially be exposing young people's stories unintentionally without their knowledge or consent. We worked closely with the young people and the schools to overcome this and although initially a barrier, it made for an interesting discussion point around stigma and privacy.

One key learning point from this conference was believing in the power of young people. With support and encouragement, they were able to not only reach their potential but smash through their own perceived limitations.



**A session from the Connected 2 Care conference**

“Throughout all of this time and being involved in championing change in Inverclyde, what we have really come to realise is that we have built the foundations of longlasting, trusting and supportive relationships. Through this conference, the connections we have made - not just with each other but with our corporate parents and other adults in our lives - have made such a difference to ensure we know we are not just heard, but responded to. These relationships are helping us to create more positive pathways for ourselves and ensure that other young people have these same opportunities.”

**Young people involved in the project**

## Children’s human rights approach principles in practice

Our work supports care experienced young people to have equal access to their rights, allowing them to share their experiences and their concerns about their rights so professionals can learn about their lived experience. This approach implements equality and non-discrimination by deeply exploring the needs of the care experienced children and young people. It facilitated the empowerment and participation principles by creating space for children to conceptualise, design and deliver the conference.



## Harmeny Education Trust: Financial inclusion for children and young people in residential care

Harmeny Education Trust provides residential childcare and education to children and young people whose lives have been impacted by trauma. Based in Balerno, on the outskirts of Edinburgh, their 35-acre woodland site offers a unique setting to work therapeutically with young people.

By providing living and learning spaces for up to 29 residential pupils and offering day education services, they support children and young people who have experienced early adversity, helping them to heal, grow, and thrive. The aim is to equip children and young people with tools for independence – including access to financial services.

### The issue or opportunity

For children in residential care, opening a bank account can be a persistent challenge. When a parent or guardian isn’t available to open an account on a child’s behalf, the process becomes complicated. Additionally, bank staff are often unable to articulate specifically what is needed which leads to significant delays in opening accounts.

For most young people placed at Harmeny, the role of legal guardian sits with the local authority, meaning a social worker is required to attend the bank with the young person to open an account. These meetings are not always possible or practical.

Some banks offer pocket money tools that help teach young people about spending, saving and budgeting from an early age. Unfortunately, these tools are not available to all young people in residential care as they must be linked to a parent or guardian’s personal account.

Without access to a bank account, young people cannot claim disability allowance or payment. Additionally, they are also forced to receive and spend pocket money in cash form. There is a known stigma for young people in residential care about receiving pocket money in brown envelopes. Plus, many vendors no longer accept cash, risking further stigma.

Financial inclusion is not a luxury – it’s a method for realising many rights including Article 27 (adequate standard of living) and Article 6 (life, survival and development) of the UNCRC. Without a bank account, young people cannot receive pocket money electronically, save for the future or learn how to manage money. These are essential life skills and a foundation for independence.

## What was done

Harmeny are working to establish a clear process with banks to support children and young people to gain access to basic financial services. Together (Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights) has been providing support with correspondence to the banks, as well as supporting Harmeny to raise this issue with The Promise and others.

The UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024 places a duty on public authorities – and those delivering functions of a public nature – to act compatibly with children's rights. While banks are not public authorities, some of these institutions hold contracts with the Scottish Government, such as the Banking Services Framework Agreement. This could create a reasonable expectation that they should operate in line with the UNCRC.

By contacting local authorities and engaging with policy makers, Harmeny aim to establish a process for setting up accounts for young people as soon as they enter the care system. They also aim to ensure that money saved is protected for those young people until they move into independent living.

## Children's human rights approach principles in practice

Harmeny demonstrate their commitment to advocating for care experienced young people by influencing change and working to ensure equal access to fundamental financial services for all young people. By recognising potential concerns about children's rights and taking action, Harmeny is working to ensure that all children and young people can experience their rights equally in practice.



## Mindroom: Neuropoint – creating rights champions

As an organisation founded upon lived experience, Mindroom champions all forms of neurodiversity and supports all kinds of minds. Our mission is to improve the quality of life for neurodivergent individuals by removing barriers, increasing opportunities, and shaping a more inclusive world. We want to see a world where every mind is valued, and no one faces barriers to opportunity or belonging.

## What was done

In January 2022 Neuropoint was created. This is our participation group for neurodivergent young people across Scotland aged 16 to 25. Neuropoint is made up of passionate young people who want to achieve societal change so that all neurodivergent babies, children and young people have equal access to their rights. The group gives them a platform to discuss concerns and issues, to raise awareness and to collectively advocate for change. The group felt that to do this, they first needed to help people understand some of the challenges they face and how easy it can be to adopt a neuro-inclusive approach that benefits everyone. The group strongly believe that a neuro-inclusive approach is essential for promoting equality and ending discrimination.

A key achievement for Neuropoint has been the design and development of a workshop which was first delivered during our international conference, It Takes All Kinds of Minds, in March 2023. Neuropoint members were invited to create a session about something important to them and were involved fully throughout the workshop development, from the initial idea through to initial delivery. They designed an experiential workshop which aims to help participants gain insight into

the experience of neurodivergent people, to reflect some of the challenges and barriers they might face. It highlights simple strategies that can make a significant difference and help neurodivergent people achieve their full potential whilst feeling included and respected. Seeing the initial idea develop and grow was an exciting time for members of the group and kept momentum going to the end stage. Supporting staff members were led by the views and feedback from the group throughout. Providing a safe space both online and in-person enabled Neuropoint members to participate in a way that met their needs.



### **A neuroaffirming space to meet and share ideas together**

The group was aware of potential challenges around advocating for their rights. Would people listen? Would they be taken seriously as a group of neurodivergent young people? They were mindful throughout their planning of the need to ensure the training and message was accessible and not designed to cause blame or guilt. They wanted to give a constructive, helpful message with real learning. They were also aware of the challenges and pressure that come with trying to achieve change.

Neuropoint members strongly believe in the value of lived experience and believe that this should inform decisions impacting their lives. They are keen to share their own experiences to help others and to raise awareness to achieve positive change across society. That said, as the people whose rights are most impacted through discrimination and a lack of inclusive practice, it was important that they weren't made solely responsible for solving a societal problem. They believed that the workshop provided an exciting opportunity to work with people who wanted to learn and hear their message and who could then take responsibility for making changes to their own practice, hopefully having a positive impact for many more neurodivergent babies, children and young people across Scotland.

### **Impact and outcomes**

One of the key outcomes of the workshop development was that the young people within the group were empowered to identify a goal, take action, and make a positive impact towards future change. The impact was society's increased awareness of neurodivergence and how everyone can support inclusion for all, ensuring no mind is left behind.

The importance of bringing together young people with a shared goal cannot be underestimated. At Mindroom we will continue to support neurodivergent young people to understand and exercise their rights. Participation in projects such as this workshop development helps to shape a confident community of neurodivergent young people.

 “The workshop allowed us to give insight not only into how our difficulties exist, but why they exist. It made them undeniable and impossible to isolate from the rest of human experience. I saw a recognition in the eyes of the participants that I thought could only have come from first-hand experience, a look that before then, I had only seen in peers.”

**Neuropoint member**

### **Next steps**

Our recently launched rights and participation project creates an opportunity for neurodivergent children and young people to share their voices, ideas and lived experience in a safe and supportive environment. The project is funded by The National Lottery Community Fund as part of its Young Start Programme. It will support a community of neurodivergent young people who want to lead the way to bring awareness and understanding. Together, they reflect on their rights, challenges and opportunities, share lived experience and create awareness-raising activities and resources that can make a meaningful change in the lives of their peers.

Neuropoint members are currently leading the Rights and Participation project, Young Start. This exciting new opportunity aims to engage neurodivergent children and young people across Scotland in developing a Manifesto for Change that reflects their views and ideas. The Manifesto will be the guide for Neuropoint and other neurodivergent youth participation groups to create and deliver meaningful, impactful activities and workshops that promote understanding and raise awareness of the neurodivergent community, working to achieve equality and end discrimination across society.

### **Children’s human rights approach principles in practice**

By encouraging people to make small, meaningful changes to their practice, neurodivergent babies, children and young people can not only exercise their rights around equality and non-discrimination but can access the support they need to exercise their rights in relation to education, health, training and employment and in accordance with the UNCRC. This case study showcases equality and non-discrimination alongside a number of other principles, especially participation and empowerment.

## **Children First: Family Group Decision Making in South Lanarkshire**

Family Group Decision Making is a structured process that brings together a child’s wider family network to make plans for their care and wellbeing. The model is flexible, culturally responsive, and supported by national standards and practice guidance. Evidence shows it can reduce the need for compulsory measures, helps reunite children with their families, and improves satisfaction for both families and professionals. It is a proven way to keep children safe and loved within their communities. Coordinators, trained and independent, facilitate meetings where families can share views, explore options, and agree on solutions. It supports children to feel

empowered and share their views, and makes sure families are supported so that children are not separated from their parents unless it's in their best interests.

### What was done

Children First deliver several Family Group Decision Making services across Scotland, based on the Scottish National Standards and Practice Guidance. For example, in South Lanarkshire, Family Group Decision Making is offered as part of a Family Support Hub initiative, which aims to provide early help and support for pregnant women with babies, children and young people up to 18 years old. Family Group Decision Making is offered alongside other support and therapeutic offers to stop challenges escalating. Recent feedback from this service highlights the difference this can make to the realisation of children's right to be heard, and their right to live safely with their family where possible.

 "Me and the weans enjoy contact more. Neither of us feel like we are being watched. I think my mum listens more and we really share things with the kids. I feel action has happened through Family Group Decision Making and having (the co-ordinator) help in the conversations with the social worker and family... I wouldn't have thought last year me and my mum would have been talking to each other, and now we are working together for the kids. Now the kids talk more openly about everyone as a caring family that like each other, I think before they were scared. I really don't think things would have changed had it not been for Family Group Decision Making."

**One Mum's feedback after Family Group Decision Making, which has resulted in one kinship placement being maintained, and one further child being able to remain safely at home**

Children First have been working to better understand the scale of provision of Family Group Decision Making in Scotland, and the connection this has with children's rights.

### Key learning

In 2025, Children First published a new report called [Family Group Decision Making in Scotland](#). This found that around two thirds of local authorities offer some form of Family Group Decision Making service, but that these offers are not being made consistently or equally to all children across Scotland.

This report included new legal analysis and research that highlighted the new impetus for investing in Family Group Decision Making services, as a way to uphold children's rights consistently and equally, in light of new duties on public bodies set out in the UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024.

The UNCRC says that adults must put the best interests of children and young people at the centre of decisions that affect them (Article 3). It also says that:

- Children must not be separated from their parents against their will unless it is in their best interests (Article 9).
- Every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously (Article 12).
- Children have a right to an adequate standard of living, and that parents and others responsible for the child should be helped to ensure this (Article 27).

The report considered the legal context for Family Group Decision Making in Scotland, including the connection with children’s rights and Scotland’s new legislation.

This new research found that ‘it recognises the imperative in Article 18 to render appropriate assistance to parents in the performance of their child-rearing responsibilities. Family Group Decision Making is an effective mechanism through which the best interests of the child are given (at least) a primary consideration under Article 3 and through which children are enabled to express views for the purposes of Article 12. While the UNCRC specifies objectives, but not the means for accomplishing those objectives, it can be said that Family Group Decision Making promotes the objectives of the UNCRC.’

It also established that in the context of the UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024, which places public bodies in Scotland under a duty to comply with children’s rights and report on their actions, Family Group Decision Making’s rights-respecting approach should help local authorities to demonstrate that they have taken steps to respect, protect and fulfil rights obligations under the European Convention on Human Rights and the UNCRC.

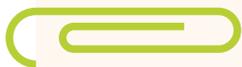
The report said that ‘the purpose of Family Group Decision Making, which is to involve and empower families while examining opportunities to look after a child within their community context, means that it is a positive demonstration that can help public bodies and practitioners to support children’s human rights and defend authorities’ actions if this is subject to challenge.’

### **Next steps**

This report has been published, shared with key leaders and stakeholders across Scotland and is now central to Children First’s campaign work looking at actions that need to be taken to help ensure more equal and consistent access to Family Group Decision Making services.

### **Children’s human rights approach principles in practice**

Children First’s work on Family Group Decision Making supports equality and non-discrimination work by recognising potential concerns about children’s rights and taking action to support babies, children and young people to have equal access to their rights. This case study evidences consideration of wider embedding throughout the organisation with ambition to influence externally too.



## **Borders Additional Needs Group: UNCRC Summer Camp**

### **What was done**

Borders Additional Needs Group designed and delivered a five-week Summer Camp in July 2025, with each week focusing on a different article of the UNCRC. The camp aimed to provide inclusive and accessible opportunities for young people who have Additional Support Needs, along with their siblings and families, with the aim of exploring their rights through play, creativity, wellbeing, and community connection.

The Summer Camp was delivered in partnership with Scottish Borders Council and Borders Disability Sport, whose guidance and collaboration shaped the programme. A wide range of supporting organisations, including NHS Borders, Live Borders, Skills Development Scotland, Borders Carers Centre, Scottish Autism, Police Scotland, The Promise Team, the Smart Play

Network, and creative practitioners enriched the camp by offering activities, resources, and specialist input. Together, this network of partners and supporters created safe and inclusive environments where children’s rights to play, development, protection, inclusion, and voice were lived in practice.

### **Week one – Article 31: The right to relax and play**

Additional Support Needs families often report limited inclusive summer opportunities in the Borders. Week one responded by providing an inclusive day filled with activities such as football, tennis, archery, inflatables, trikes and bikes, sensory spaces, and creative arts. Dedicated wellbeing spaces included a ‘Connection Wall’ where young people shared strategies for staying well. A Parent Carer tent offered peer support and links to services, while supporting organisations such as Borders Carers Centre provided information and ongoing connections. Parents highlighted the sense of belonging, with one sharing:



“This is the first event we’ve all been able to enjoy together. Usually, one of my children misses out.”

**Parent**

The day set the tone for the whole camp, creating an atmosphere of welcome, celebration, and inclusion.

### **Week two – Articles 12 and 24: The right to be listened to and the right to health**

Week two celebrated young people’s voices while promoting physical and emotional wellbeing. Families had highlighted that young people with Additional Support Needs often face barriers to accessing activities where they can share their voice and be heard. In response, Borders Additional Needs Group worked with supporting organisations including Transform Arts CIC, NHS Borders, and Live Borders, amongst many others to deliver a balance of energetic and creative opportunities. From practical oral health activities, to football, yoga, inflatables and trikes, this offered accessible physical play, while mask-making workshops encouraged expression and identity.

A youth tent provided quieter spaces for games and connection. Children proudly displayed their masks, expressing ownership over their creative voices. Parents spoke of their amazement at seeing their children try new activities such as yoga or cycling, experiences they would not normally access. The session reinforced that the rights to health and to be listened to are interconnected, and both can be promoted through playful, inclusive practice.

### **Week three – Articles 28 and 29: The right to education and the right to development**

Week three focused on informal education, encompassing creative, physical, emotional, and social development. Many families reported that their children often struggled to access inclusive education and lacked opportunities to connect learning with real-world skills, creativity, and development. The camp responded by creating a holistic day of learning supported by Skills Development Scotland, Live Borders Libraries, NHS Borders Childsmile, paediatric physiotherapy specialists, and creative practitioners. Activities included careers guidance, music workshops, Lego play, health education, cycling, physiotherapy-led sessions, and archery. Families valued the presence of Skills Development Scotland in such a relaxed space, with one parent sharing:



“It’s reassuring to see my child ask questions without pressure.”

Parent

### **Week four – Articles 19 and 23: The right to protection from harm and the right to inclusion and dignity**

The fourth week focused on safety, inclusion, and dignity for disabled young people. Families had explained that young people with Additional Support Needs often face stigma, exclusion, and limited opportunities to engage positively with protective services. The camp created a festival-style day supported by Police Scotland, Borders Carers Centre, Alchemy Film and Arts, Live Borders, Katie’s Music Sessions, and creative practitioners. Activities included adapted cycling, inflatable sports, music and art workshops, sensory tents, and Lego play. The day demonstrated how inclusion and protection are deeply linked to young people’s sense of safety and belonging.

### **Week five – Articles 6 and 31: The right to life and development and the right to play**

The final week brought together the themes of development and play, celebrating how both are essential for wellbeing. Families often reported that summer holidays lacked inclusive play opportunities where siblings could join together, and that barriers to sports and creative activities left many excluded. The programme responded with inflatable football, adapted trike cycling, arts and crafts, sensory games led by the Smart Play Network, and music and movement sessions. Supporting organisations such as Scottish Autism also provided families with tailored advice and information. Week five demonstrated that development and play are inseparable, both essential rights that flourish in inclusive spaces.

### **The Camp Finale – Obstacle Course Colour Run**

The Summer Camp concluded with a spectacular Obstacle Course Colour Run, designed as a carnival-style celebration of the rights explored across the five weeks. Young people ran through inflatables, crawled under nets, leapt into water obstacles, and threw and received bursts of colourful powder. The Colour Run symbolised the spirit of the entire Summer Camp: vibrant, inclusive, resilient, and joyful.

### **Children’s human rights approach principles in practice**

The Borders Additional Needs Group UNCRC Summer Camp demonstrated the power of making children’s rights real in practice and working on tackling equality and non-discrimination issues by creating safe, inclusive spaces where young people with additional needs could play, develop, connect, and thrive together. The principle of empowerment also features strongly with many opportunities to support children to understand their rights and to freely associate.

## **LGBT Youth Scotland: Healthy Relationships Guide**

### **The issue or opportunity**

The LGBTQ+ community experiences domestic and familial abuse at equivalent rates to women, with research showing that often they do not recognise behaviours as being abusive.

## What was done

The Voices Unheard Youth Commission at LGBT Youth Scotland wanted to support young queer people to have their rights upheld – including protection from violence, a safe home, and access to information.



“I hope that other young people are able to be better educated about serious topics and better able to get support for themselves and their loved ones.”

**Youth Commission member**

They developed a [Healthy Relationships Guide](#), offering tips and advice on things to think about when starting out in new relationships; maintaining healthy and positive relationships; ending relationships in a healthy way; and where to find support if your relationship is unhealthy or abusive. Instagram users commented that this was “such an important resource to have been created” and the resource has been downloaded nearly 500 times since publishing so far.

They complemented this with a [film](#) for young people with social media shorts, a [Q&A with Police Scotland](#), a [Support Services Guide](#), and a [training film for professionals](#).



“I’ve now shared this with my team who work with 16 to 24 year olds and I’m sure they’ll find it as insightful as I did.”

**Comment on Professional Training Film**

## Children’s human rights approach principles in practice

Creating the Healthy Relationships Guide supports young people to have equal access to their right to protection from violence. It was a result of recognising potential concerns about children’s rights and taking action to improve the situation. The film also allows professionals to learn about an aspect of LGBTQ+ lived experience. In addition to equality and non-discrimination, participation is a core principle in this case study, with the resources created having the potential to lead to greater empowerment of LGBTQ+ children and young people.

## Children First: Family Wellbeing Service – supporting families with children experiencing emotional distress

### The issue or opportunity

[Children First research](#) found that around 100 children are being referred to CAMHS every day. The scale of demand for children’s mental health services now far outstretches capacity for support. For example, in 2017 there were 657 referrals to CAMHS in East Renfrewshire, of which 216 did not meet the referral criteria at that time. Statistics only hint at the scale of the challenge, and for many children the lack of mental health support has serious knock-on consequences for their access to health, education, family relations and participation in their communities, creating inequalities that can be lifelong. Children First have, for some time, been seriously concerned that this lack of support and the consequences of it amount to a serious breach of children’s rights.

## What was done

The Family Wellbeing Service was launched in 2017 as a pilot to address gaps in mental health support for children presenting with emotional distress at GP practices. With Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services under severe pressure and long waiting times, Children First and East Renfrewshire Health and Social Care Partnership developed a social support model offering early intervention. Initially funded through The Robertson Trust, the service expanded to all GP practices and later integrated into the multi-agency Healthier Minds Hub.

The service was developed in recognition of the well-established barriers children looking for support with their mental health are facing, with demand for support far outstretching services available. Many are looking for help but struggling to find it. For too many children, their experience of mental health support is a waiting list.

This service works to address this gap in support through a child-centred but family minded support offer, for children aged 8 to 18 experiencing emotional distress, including anxiety, low mood, school refusal, and trauma-related challenges. A dedicated Project Worker works alongside the whole family, offering:

- Individual sessions for children and parents/carers.
- Joint family sessions to strengthen relationships.
- Groups and activities for young people and parents, such as emotional literacy groups and Coffee and Connect.
- Access to resources on mental health and coping strategies.
- Signposting to other services and practical supports.

Workers adopt a trauma-informed, relational approach tailored to family needs, meeting families at home, school, or community spaces. This model prioritises speed of response, with families historically contacted within two weeks of referral, which is a feature parents described as pivotal to their experience of being heard and taken seriously.

## Key learning

An evaluation of this service was published in summer 2025 and led to one young person who was supported by the service sharing her experience at an event at the Scottish Parliament. She shared that “I am able to do anything I want to do and while I still have anxiety, it doesn’t stop me from living my life anymore.”

Feedback from children and parents illustrates how these rights are realised in practice.

Right to be heard (Article 12): Young people described feeling listened to and understood. This relational approach affirms the child’s right to express views and have them taken seriously. One said that “I was a bit nervous at the start... Then I noticed she’d remembered things I said and I started feeling like I could open up to her. She listened really well.”

Right to health and development (Article 24): The service helped children manage emotions and build resilience. A young person shared that “She spoke to me about how to be more calm... coping techniques like going for a walk, listening to music... I started feeling like I could open up.”

Right to family life (Article 16): By working systemically, the service strengthens family relationships. One parent reflected that “My son had all these feelings but nowhere to put

them... Now we laugh together, we do things together. I feel respected and loved. I've got hope for his future."

Right to education (Article 28): The service supported re-engagement with learning, respecting children's choices. The evaluation found "Stakeholders reported that a key impact from their perspective, was the service's success in supporting children and young people to engage with school. Referrals from education tended to be concerns regarding school attendance, behaviour and engagement in lessons and subsequent improvements helped demonstrate the service's value."

### **Children's human rights approach principles in practice**

The Family Wellbeing Service is supporting children to have equal access to their right to education, healthcare and opportunity by offering effective support when it is needed and when rights are potentially most at risk. The accountability principle also features through evaluation, reflection and an openness to hear feedback.



### **Intercultural Youth Scotland: Supporting the rights of Black and People of Colour (BPoC) young people in Scotland**

Intercultural Youth Scotland (IYS) is committed to promoting the rights and wellbeing of all babies, children and young people, particularly those from intercultural backgrounds. We recognise a critical gap: the experiences of intercultural young people regarding equality, non-discrimination, and access to their rights. The unfortunate reality is that, due to being widely marginalised, some BPoC young people do not recognise that the UNCRC also applies to them. We chose to tackle this through our interactions with children and young people in an educational setting.

#### **What was done**

Our aim was to ensure that intercultural children and young people could access the same opportunities, protections, and support as their peers. Specifically, we sought to:

- Support children and young people in understanding and exercising their rights.
- Identify potential barriers to equal access.
- Recognise and respond to diverse lived experiences.
- Provide children and young people with a space to advocate for their rights.

Between August and November 2025, IYS ran lunchtime workshops and school-based sessions with young people from intercultural backgrounds. These focused on:

- Education about children's rights.
- Sharing experiences of discrimination or exclusion.
- Empowering participants to understand their rights and take action when their rights were not upheld.

A key component was the anti-racist lunch club provision in schools, facilitated by IYS Educators with lived experience of racism. These lunch clubs are safe, pupil-led spaces where young people can:

- Discuss experiences of racism and discrimination.
- Learn about their rights and strategies for advocacy.
- Build peer support networks and leadership skills in anti-racism.

IYS activities, particularly the anti-racist lunch clubs, have been used as a framework to influence school policies on anti-discrimination and inclusive practice. Children's input directly informed school anti-racism policies, curricular recommendations, and broader advocacy initiatives within IYS. IYS also supported schools in considering children's rights through a holistic approach to the curriculum, taking advantage of learning opportunities outwith the classroom. IYS embeds continual learning by reflecting on feedback from participants and educators. Regular feedback mechanisms within clubs allow children and young people to report concerns or suggestions, which are then addressed through changes and updates to IYS programmes. This cycle of listening and responding reinforces accountability to children's voices.

### **Impact and outcomes**

Children and young people involved shared the impact of the project:

- "We get to learn new stuff and interact with other people."
- "My mental health needs this[!]"
- "There's more awareness of things. Like cultural awareness."
- "I feel like I know these things but that's because I do the reading and my dad helps me. But it's not the same in school. It's good that we have this class, and more people can learn about things that are important."
- "I feel like I could talk to you about these things. There isn't really anyone else in the school. Some of the teachers are nice but I don't think they "get it."

### **Key learning**

Children's rights cannot be realised equally without recognising diverse lived experiences.

Safe, inclusive spaces, such as anti-racist lunch clubs, enable children and young people to voice concerns they might otherwise suppress.

Collaboration between children, young people, families, and service providers is essential to addressing systemic inequality.

### **Next steps**

IYS will continue to:

- Expand workshops and lunch club provision to more schools and community groups.
- Advocate for BPoC young people's rights in local and national policy.
- Develop resources to help educators, caregivers, and peers recognise and combat discrimination effectively.

### **Children’s human rights approach principles in practice**

The activities directly targeted intercultural, BPoC young people whose rights are at higher risk. By providing safe spaces, culturally responsive workshops, and advocacy tools, the programme ensured these children could exercise their rights on an equal footing. Resources, including accessible guidance on the UNCRC and practical tools for reporting discrimination, were made available to participants. Being able to quote articles of the UNCRC increases their awareness of rights and strengthened their ability to use their rights to influence decisions impacting their school and community.

By actively engaging intercultural and BPoC young people and listening to their experiences, IYS is taking steps to ensure equality and non-discrimination in children’s rights. Initiatives like anti-racist lunch clubs demonstrate how safe, inclusive spaces can empower young people to realise their rights fully, share experiences, and take action against discrimination.



### **Borders Additional Needs Group: Neurodivergent Adventure Arcade**

#### **What was done**

Borders Additional Needs Group co-designed ‘The Arcade Machine’, an interactive gaming project, in partnership with Alchemy Film and Arts.

‘To the City: A Neurodivergent Adventure’ is a game which engages young people in conversations about the everyday experiences of neurodivergent young people. It demonstrates how our environments, public spaces and societal attitudes can either support or hinder the realisation of children’s human rights.

The Arcade Machine is a portable gaming unit that takes inspiration from vintage arcade machines. It features a video game where players must make decisions across five levels about everyday scenarios - for example, going to the cinema, catching a bus or going to the shops. Through the game, players can experience what everyday life can feel like for someone who is neurodivergent.

Created in collaboration with Borders Additional Needs Group’s Branching Out Programme for 16 to 24 year olds with Additional Support Needs, the project showcases community filmmaking and creative learning. Throughout regular workshops, participants from the Branching Out programme built the game, incorporating and drawing on their own lived experiences to design the characters, environments, audio, character loops, dialogue and backdrop design.

#### **Next steps**

In May 2025, the game premiered at the Alchemy Film and Moving Image Festival. The project will continue to tour schools and community events, offering more young people the opportunity to explore and interact with the game.

### **Children’s human rights approach principles in practice**

The game highlights the challenges faced by neurodivergent individuals, bringing visibility to their daily experiences to help talking about inequality and discrimination. It also promotes awareness of the rights of neurodivergent young people in an engaging and creative way.



## Children and Young People's Centre for Justice (CYCJ): Challenging justice inequalities

The Children and Young People's Centre for Justice (CYCJ) works towards ensuring that Scotland's approach to children and young people in conflict with the law is rights-respecting, contributing to better outcomes for our children, young people and communities. We produce robust internationally ground-breaking work, bringing together children and young people's contributions, research evidence, practice wisdom and system know-how to operate as a leader for child and youth justice thinking in Scotland and beyond.

CYCJ's Participation workstream works alongside our Practice and Research workstream to ensure that children and young people, many of whom have direct experience of conflict with the law, can meaningfully influence youth justice practice and policy. In 2024 CYCJ received funding from Nuffield to carry out a participatory research study exploring inequalities in the justice system. Alongside researchers from across University of Strathclyde and CELCIS, the project – Challenging Justice Inequalities – focuses on under 18-year-olds who encounter justice systems as a result of suspected, alleged, or confirmed involvement in offending behaviour. In Scotland, the youth justice system spans police contact, the Children's Hearings System, the criminal court, and other justice institutions. The Challenging Justice Inequalities project has set out to coproduce unique child led research which explores the interactions between identity (including protected characteristics) and experiences of justice.

In 2025 we brought together a Youth Advisory Group of 10 justice-experienced children aged 14 to 17 who are helping to shape and carry out this research. Throughout the past year we have come together to learn about research methodologies and define a clear aim for the project. The Youth Advisory Group have developed stage two of this project, with the title *Doing intersectionality 'in justice': exploring intersectional experiences of policing with children and front-line police officers in Scotland*. This unique project will explore how intersectional identities have shaped, and continue to shape, children's interactions with police in Scotland over the last decade. It will also explore how police officers understand, respond to, integrate and embody intersectionality within their own policing practices and professional lives.

Throughout the Challenging Justice Inequalities project, the Youth Advisory Group have been supported to develop their own interests and skills and incorporate these throughout our work. In line with CYCJ's Participation and Engagement Strategy we continue to strive to create a safe and inclusive space for the children involved in the project and support them where needed to meet their personal aims as well as the aims of the research they will conduct.

### Next steps

The Challenging Justice Inequalities project will continue throughout 2026, with the Youth Advisory Group carrying out fieldwork, analysing data, and co-producing research outputs.

The Youth Advisory Group will go on to conduct a range of interviews and focus groups with children aged 14 to 17, to find out more about children and young people's experiences and perceptions of the police and what they think shapes their interactions with officers. Building on the group's range of skills and experiences, and to create more accessible research opportunities, the group will host zine making workshops with participants. These zines (small, multi-media magazines) will be used to support deeper discussion about experiences. Following this, the Youth Advisory Group will interview police officers, sharing the other participants' zines with them to

help drive discussion of how they recognise and respond to children's experiences. This unique approach will bring together knowledge from children in conflict with the law and police officers, to create rich and reflective information on the relationships and interactions between children and the officers who may have contact with them.

### **Children's human rights approach principles in practice**

Challenging Justice Inequalities supports children with a range of lived experiences and identities, many of which are marginalised, to access their right to express their views freely, and have those views influence the systems around them. By exploring protected characteristics and intersectionality, the project offers an opportunity to learn from child-led insight to inequity and disparities within the justice system.

## **2.3 Reflections on the equality and non-discrimination principle:**



The case studies featured in this chapter highlight how the equality and non-discrimination principle can be applied in practice. As a general principle of the UNCRC, Article 2 ensures that rights within the UNCRC apply to all babies, children and young people regardless of their differences and without discrimination.

By engaging with the equality and non-discrimination principle alongside the other four principles, organisations can help ensure that the needs and rights of all children are considered throughout organisations and processes.

Ensuring that all children and young people have equal access to their rights can involve taking a focus on those whose rights are most at risk, as each of these case studies shows. Taking this learning and embedding it throughout organisations or practice ensures this is not limited to one or two projects or teams, as evidenced by Children First and Scottish Children's Reporter Administration.

Given the risk that some communities of children face in terms of their rights, ensuring that empowerment features alongside equality and non-discrimination work can help children understand their rights and how to overcome potential barriers. It also helps to ensure groups whose rights are most at risk can come together, share common experiences and freely associate as showcased by Intercultural Youth Scotland, LGBT Youth Scotland, Borders Additional Needs Group, and others.

Several case studies also show the importance of facilitating or creating space for children whose rights are most at risk to participate in decision-making, often with the aim of reducing barriers they might face in practice and policy – as shown by Falkirk Council, Inverclyde Council, Mindroom and the Children and Young People's Centre for Justice.

Focusing on the equality and non-discrimination principle is never a one-off activity as many of the case studies show. It is a practice that should be continual and should sit alongside accountability methods such as securing feedback from children and adapting practice accordingly as shown in Children First's case study. This also includes ensuring that mechanisms for addressing threats to children's rights are used, as shown by Harmeny Education Trust.

## 2.4 Top tips on implementing the equality and non-discrimination principle:

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The following top tips are drawn from the UNCRC Skills and Knowledge Framework outcomes. By using these top tips, alongside real-world learning from featured case studies, individuals and organisations can be supported to effectively implement the equality and non-discrimination principle in practice.

- The principle of equality and non-discrimination will only lead to the implementation of children's rights when it is interwoven with the other four principles. By doing this we can avoid our equality and non-discrimination work from becoming tokenistic or viewed as an additional task.
- Support all babies, children and young people to have equal access to their rights, including by focusing on those whose rights are at risk. Children, young people and their families can be impacted by discriminatory practices. They may have Additional Support Needs or different communication preferences. It is important to recognise those at risk to ensure that they get an appropriate level of support.
- Understand the importance of cultural sensitivity and intercultural communication for the children you work with. Taking an inclusive approach in your work should sit alongside ensuring that children and young people can enjoy and participate in their own cultures.
- Acknowledge and work to address the fact that babies, children and young people can have experiences, circumstances, identities and beliefs that mean their rights are more likely to be at risk within wider systems, such as care, justice and immigration.
- Children and young people can face direct or indirect discrimination which leads to unequal opportunities and unfair outcomes. Recognise and challenge potential concerns or risks to children's rights and ensure that concerns are prevented and appropriately responded to. This could include ensuring adults know what to do if a child or young person raises a concern or by implementing a child-friendly complaints process.
- Understand and learn from babies, children and young people's lived experiences. This could include undergoing specialist training on working with children whose rights are at risk. All children are different and their needs, strengths and opinions can be influenced by their background and environment.
- Monitor and address situations when babies, children and young people's rights are at risk, evaluating how to improve policy or practice and investing in change when needed.



Chapter 3:  
**Empowerment**

## 3.1 Introduction to the empowerment principle

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The empowerment principle is about supporting babies, children and young people to enhance their capacity and agency to claim their rights and engage with individuals, organisations and institutions that impact their lives. By supporting children and young people to advocate for their rights, power imbalances can be shifted, allowing children and young people to make informed decisions and take control over their own lives.

In practice, empowerment can relate to the other principles in various ways:

- **Embedding:** how can babies, children and young people be empowered by the embedding of children's rights into processes like Child Rights Impact Assessments or child rights budgeting?
- **Equality and non-discrimination:** how can all babies, children and young people have access to information that suits their needs and evolving capacities?
- **Participation:** how are babies, children and young people empowered to access participation opportunities?
- **Accountability:** what steps can be taken to empower babies, children and young people to provide feedback every day, as well as when something goes wrong?

Children may need different forms of support to learn about and exercise their rights, depending on their experience, background, and capabilities.

The following case studies show how empowerment in practice can support babies, children and young people to engage with decisions, services and systems that affect them. This includes examples of:

- The co-production of child-friendly and accessible resources.
- Ensuring all babies, children and young people are supported to engage with and learn about their rights.
- Allowing children and young people to make their own informed decisions about matters affecting their lives.
- Producing resources and opportunities for children, young people and families to engage with decision-makers and services.

## 3.2 Case studies

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### **Circle Scotland and Scottish Families Affected by Drugs and Alcohol: Grow Your Own Routes**

Circle Scotland believe all children, no matter what their circumstances, should be enabled to lead healthy and happy lives. We offer support to whole families facing multiple disadvantages because of structural inequality, poverty, drug and alcohol use, imprisonment, physical or mental health, trauma, abuse, and loss.

Scottish Families Affected by Drugs and Alcohol supports anyone affected by someone else's alcohol or drug use in Scotland, whether they are still actively using substances, are in recovery, or bereaved. They provide information and support to family members, and link them to local support services, recognising and understanding the importance of looking after themselves.

## What was done

Since 2006, we have been delivering Family Outreach Services with projects in Edinburgh, East Lothian, West Lothian, North Lanarkshire, South Lanarkshire and Clackmannanshire.

We deliver emotional, practical, relational, and social community-based support to families on a one-to-one, groupwork and family work basis. In 2024-25, we provided outreach-based whole family support to 601 families, including 849 children and young people.

At the heart of what we do is listening and building on children and families' rights and strengths, often in communities that have unequal access to resources and who face health and social inequalities. We support families to understand they intrinsically have a right to support, valuing their opinions, reflecting their worth back to them and helping families make decisions in the children's best interest. We advocate alongside them and facilitate lots of groups having open discussions about their rights, while cocreating fun, safe spaces and opportunities to learn and grow.

Stigma and discrimination are experienced by many of the children and families we work with which means that this is the first time they have felt heard. Our job is to ensure that the young people understand their rights and genuinely feel listened to, taking time to build trust in the context of trauma and poverty and experiences of exclusion.

We have continued to build on and develop training for all staff. As we work in an ecological way, we meet in environments that children and families feel comfortable in, actively removing barriers so our service is accessible to them. They have the choice to decide on what support looks and feels like. This considers histories of trauma (including intergenerational trauma) which can influence fixed thinking and hypervigilance, along with health inequalities which impact on access to resources and support as a result of stigma, along with physical or mental ill health.



**"It makes me feel happy. It makes me feel great. It makes me feel confident."**

**Child participant**

**"It's very important being able to talk to someone, it makes you brighter on the inside and on the outside"**

**Child participant**

We also seek to keep families together by scaffolding and developing families' skills and capacities wherever possible. Particularly where the emotional availability of the parent is less accessible in some way, for example using Parents under Pressure.

Where there is substance use, we seek to minimise harm by working collaboratively with families, especially through times of crisis. We have brought the right to support in recovery to children, young people and any family member with dedicated workers and whole family teams. We recently facilitated our first whole family advisory group to cocreate meaningful and lasting, focused on upholding and supporting rights.

In partnership with Scottish Families Affected by Alcohol and Drugs, we have become an early adopted site for Grow Your Own Routes.

The initiative offers a co-produced and evidence-based youth work model focused on solutions and assets to empower young people to claim their rights and shape their own lives.

The young people (aged 12 to 26) involved are all affected by family and substance use. Our young people's workers consult with them in everything we do. For example, we ask what food they want, where they would like to go, we have staff profiles so they can often choose whom they wish to work with. We offer a multitude of activities – obstacle courses, escape rooms, splat art, nails and beauty, football, making sushi, baking cakes, cinema trips, festivals and Pride, Halloween, Easter parties – to help develop their social relationships and identities.



**“T really enjoys smaller groups so this was the perfect mix of people for them. It was great to see T so energetic and having so much fun instead of being one of the more quieter ones for a change.”**

**Routes worker**

Young people were involved in decorating the Routes room, planning our launch event, baking, producing art, creating a short film and some incredibly brave and inspiring young people spoke amazingly about their experiences.

Developed with direct input from young people, Routes supports young people to recognise the importance of their roots whilst acknowledging their families' actions need not define their future paths.

### **Impact and outcomes**

As a result of this work, we have made some changes to our working practice:

- Our case notes are streamlined, and we use encrypted WhatsApp and voice notes reducing use of emails and reports.
- We travel around the local authority picking up and dropping off young people to overcome barriers to access.
- We help young people prepare for professional meetings so that their views are articulated and heard. We also support young people to prepare for and hold difficult conversations with adults and help build their self-esteem.
- If it is the right choice for them, we help young people to get back into school or access other support that they may benefit from.
- We ensure that the young people always have someone to talk to, including about big decisions such as where to live, who offers a safe relationship, what to do with their leisure time and what makes a good friend.
- We always co-design our activities and adapt our practice using their feedback.

### **Children's human rights approach principles in practice**

We work to build the agency and capacity of children and young people to claim their rights, ensuring that babies, children and young people get information in ways they can understand, supporting them to express their views, which we then take into account. In addition to empowerment, equality and non-discrimination features in our case study through a focus on children whose rights are most at risk.

## Education Scotland: Youth Voice Toolkit

### What was done

In August 2025, Education Scotland launched the Youth Voice Toolkit which aims to support a genuine approach to youth voice and consultation activities across schools and communities, organisations and local authorities.

The Youth Voice Toolkit builds on the original Social Justice Ambassadors Toolkit created by Stirling Youth Participation Team and young people involved in the Stirling Youth Forum. This work was developed and co-designed over time by practitioners and young people, alongside a whole council approach that was crucial to its success.

The Stirling Youth Participation Team supported us to develop the materials and scale up the approach into a regional model across Forth Valley and West Lothian. The regional Forth Valley and West Lothian Youth Voice Development Group continued to support the development of the toolkit through the creation of a regional Youth Voice Charter and a range of pilot projects.

This work ultimately resulted in the Toolkit as it is today, presenting a practical way to realise participation rights, underpinned by the Lundy Model of Participation and the Children's Commissioner Seven Golden Rules of Participation. It is a tool for schools and Community Learning and Development settings, community organisations and local authorities to help make rights real for children and young people.



### Youth Voice Toolkit

The Youth Voice toolkit contains implementation guidance, the Empowering Youth Voice Resource Pack and support materials to support practitioners and leaders to deliver a meaningful and non-tokenistic approach to youth voice. The Toolkit can be used with existing youth voice structures such as pupil councils, youth forums and ambassador groups, or can be used to support the development of new youth voice groups.

The toolkit responds to concerns raised by [Together's 2023 report](#) which highlighted:



**“Children continue to express frustration that their views are not listened to or taken seriously by decision makers. Key issues for children include tokenistic approaches, a lack of feedback loop, failure to include seldom heard groups – especially younger children, difficulties in accessing independent advocacy, and a sense that participation can sometimes feel forced/pressured rather than voluntary.”**

It aims to address these challenges by providing practitioners with the methodology and tools to empower children and young people to lead on the ways in which their voices are heard and actioned.

To support a broader culture change around youth voice practice, encouraging a more representative, empowering and non-tokenistic approach, the Toolkit encourages all settings to do two central things.

The first is to create and embed a Youth Voice Charter. A Youth Voice Charter builds a mechanism to fully appreciate the ways in which children and young people wish to be consulted. The Toolkit gives guidance for practitioners on how to work with children and young people to create a charter of principles for effective youth participation. This forms a consistent, agreed and widely understood approach to consultation with children and young people – created by children and young people. This outlines the principles that all adults should follow when consulting with them.

The charter should consist of several statements and descriptive sentences that allow adults to understand the expectations on them when they seek to find out the views of children and young people. Forth Valley and West Lothian provide an [example of a regional youth voice charter](#).

The second action is to facilitate peer research with the Empowering Youth Voices Resource Pack. The toolkit includes a downloadable Empowering Youth Voices resource to support children and young people within a youth voice structure to undertake peer-research on any theme or topic, supporting a more democratic and diverse process of consultation.

The pack upskills practitioners on how to empower children and young people to lead on peer research and represent the wider views on issues that affect their lives, across both school and community settings. The Toolkit has six sections that begin with learning about the importance of youth voice, children's rights and UNCRC, before moving on to cover:

- Learning to work together as a group to represent their peers.
- Developing questions, undertake research and capture the views of their peers.
- Understanding key elements of research such as consultation, data and analysis.
- Creating an action plan following the results of the research.
- Presenting findings to leaders and decision makers.

The resource is a complete programme but does not need to be used prescriptively, it relies on practitioners using professional judgement and can be adapted to suit different settings.

This approach supports a consistent, genuine and non-tokenistic approach to youth voice, across a range of settings – facilitating a real way of implementing UNCRC participation rights. In addition, the toolkit approach provides a mechanism for peer-research to increase engagement

and greater representation of diverse and collective views. There will be a Gaelic version of the resource launching online soon.



**Youth Voice Toolkit**

### **Impact and outcomes**

Previous work in Forth Valley and West Lothian shaped how four local authorities initiated consistent youth voice processes, allowing a far greater representative group of children and young people to shape direction and influence decision makers.

Over 290 leaders and practitioners attended the launch event for the toolkit in August, with a further 60 attending two professional learning sessions in September. [The Youth Voice Toolkit launch](#) has had over 300 views on YouTube.

Regular professional learning sessions will continue to be facilitated by Education Scotland, offering practitioners space to learn about and discuss the Youth Voice Toolkit. A [dedicated email address](#) has been created for practitioners to feedback on the Toolkit and support impact measurement and future improvements.

### **Children's human rights approach principles in practice**

The overall aim for the Youth Voice Toolkit is to provide a mechanism for supporting a culture change in how children and young people are listened to, and taken seriously, across school and community settings. Further, the Toolkit supports a move away from tokenistic approaches to youth voice, going beyond day-to-day interactions, to create a more formal participation process of listening to children and young people and taking their views seriously.



## Highland Council: Children and young people's journey to empowerment through co-production of the 'Armed Forces Covenant'

### The issue or opportunity

The Armed Forces Covenant supports children, young people and families from the Armed Forces community. However, the formal language in official documents was not accessible to all children.

Recognising this gap, the children agreed there was a need for a clear, inclusive resource that would drive advocacy, rights awareness, and positive change. While not a direct response to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's Concluding Observations, the project reflects key recommendations on participation, accessibility, and inclusion. It also responds to feedback from Armed Forces families seeking more child-friendly communication.

### What was done

Highland Council worked with children and young people in Highland co-producing a digital resource about the Armed Forces Covenant that celebrates their voiced experiences, identities, and rights and promotes advocacy.

The resource was developed as part of Highland Council's commitment to increasing awareness and understanding of the Armed Forces Covenant and to embedding the UNCRC. It was guided by The Highland Children's Rights and Participation Strategy.

The resource titled 'The Armed Forces Covenant – Education' was co-created by children and young people from Armed Forces families, with support from Highland Council's Military Liaison Group and the Educational Psychology Service.

The project had a strong focus on meaningful participation and a children's rights approach. Six children from Primary 4 to Primary 7 at Raigmore Primary School, Inverness, explored the Armed Forces Covenant and its relevance to their lives, supported by Highland Council's Military Liaison Group partners and trainee Educational Psychologists.

Recognising the need for a child-friendly version, they co-created a resource using storytelling, artwork, and personal reflections. Their voices shaped both the content and design, ensuring it was accessible and empowering for children and families. This work highlights the unique experiences of Armed Forces children – promoting inclusion, understanding, and support. Their stories of pride, resilience, and transition offer valuable insights for all. The resource is designed with options for audio, text, and visuals promoting accessibility.

Children involved have presented the resource to key groups including The Highland Council Covenant Group, Children's Rights and Participation Group and their own school community – showcasing child-led advocacy and the value of embedding children's voices in policy. These experiences also boosted their confidence and presentation skills.

### Impact and outcomes

The children involved reflected on their pride and ownership in producing this resource.



“We want everyone to know about it”

“Everybody needs to see this!”

“It’s better than the official guide”

**Child participants**

The resource is readily available and accessed across Highland by Armed Forces families, schools, and services to inform practice and staff training. It supports local authority planning around transitions and wellbeing and has gained national recognition.



“Hearing first-hand what their own journey and story is like is so helpful for us as professionals.”

**Health and Social Care**

### **Key learning**

Key learning from this project was recognising Armed Forces children as a potentially overlooked group facing unique challenges like frequent moves, family separation, and school transitions. The project emphasised the importance of hearing their voices and understanding their lived experiences. It also highlighted the value of co-production. Involving children in creating the resource led to a more effective tool, empowerment, and promoted rights education and advocacy.

### **Next steps / ongoing challenges**

Next steps involve the continuous embedding and promotion of the resource across the Armed Forces community, education settings and Highland communities to promote further understanding of the Armed Forces Covenant, including ongoing awareness-raising and integration into training programmes.

More resources are available on the [Highland Armed Forces Families](#) website, including [further co-created resources](#) developed by children and young people for children and young people.

Feedback was built into the project, allowing children to reflect and suggest improvements. The cohort included children and young people with varied abilities, and facilitators ensured full participation by using appropriate language and tailoring tasks to individual capabilities for clear understanding.

Pupils received direct feedback after their presentations, with additional comments shared via the Head Teacher following the launch. Facilitators held a celebration session with the children and young people to review feedback and reiterated their wish for the resource to be shared widely.

When reviewing feedback, facilitators discussed adding direct links to resources on children’s rights to strengthen connections for educators. The children and young people agreed this would enhance the resource and this change was made.

The feedback strongly endorsed the Highland Children’s Rights and Participation Strategy followed during the whole project. It also shaped wider distribution, ensuring national organisations were informed and encouraged to share the resource across Armed Forces networks. The resource has been accessed globally and is promoted by a wide range of Armed Forces organisations, including nationally by the Families Federation and the Army Welfare Service.

Highland Council's Military Liaison Group continues to monitor its impact.

### **Children's human rights approach principles in practice**

The 'Armed Forces Covenant – Education' project was rooted in empowering children and young people. It started because of their idea, and the co-created resource informed children about their rights in a child-friendly format, while the process-built skills in advocacy, communication, and leadership. The project also featured several principles including accountability through feedback and the participation of children.



### **Lochend Imagine Care: Supporting children with Additional Support Needs**

Lochend Imagine Care is a residential children's home dedicated to providing a safe, nurturing, and rights-respecting environment for young people with Additional Support Needs. As an organisation, Children's Rights and Wellbeing Assessments are used for any changes and developments within the house to ensure that children's rights are at the centre of all we do. However, we wanted more participation from our young people. We support young people with a range of experiences, abilities, and communication styles, and we work to ensure that each child's rights are understood, embedded, and upheld in everyday practice.

This case study outlines our creative, individualised work to embed the UNCRC into the care planning and lived experience of two young people who have Autism Spectrum Disorder, with one also having a Learning Disability and being non-speaking. Through creative tools, advocacy, and personalised resources, we sought to make rights meaningful, accessible, and empowering.

#### **What was done**

When a young person with Autism Spectrum Disorder joined us from England, we immediately ensured they had access to an independent advocacy worker, recognising that their transition required support with a strong focus on children's rights. While staff initially tried to engage the young person in discussions about their rights verbally, it became clear that this approach did not connect. Through reflective conversations, the team recognised the need for a more creative, visual method.

Working closely with their key worker, the young person developed a personalised picture collage using personalised photographs. Each image was linked to a specific UNCRC right. This process enabled the young person to explore and understand their rights in a way that felt meaningful, relatable, and safe. The end product became a proud achievement for both the young person and staff.

Our second young person, who has Autism Spectrum Disorder, a Learning Disability, and is non-speaking, required an approach that enabled meaningful participation despite communication barriers. Knowing the young person loved jigsaws, staff created a personalised puzzle based on the Care Plan. The young person engaged exceptionally well, recognising their name in the centre and identifying significant people in their life. This demonstrated that the young person could meaningfully participate when information was presented in an accessible, interest-based format.

Building on this success, and reflecting our commitment to UNCRC implementation, we designed and made a bespoke UNCRC jigsaw. Unable to source an accessible version elsewhere, we

created one tailored to young people with similar needs. The young person completed it with enthusiasm and skill, demonstrating both understanding and strong engagement.



The UNCRC jigsaw created by Lochend Imagine Care

Staff continually reflected on the effectiveness of their approaches and adapted the activities based on feedback, observation, and engagement from the young people. Embedding these resources into Care Plans and Service Improvement Plans ensures ongoing accountability and sustained commitment to rights-respecting practice.

Actions were guided by the UNCRC, Scotland's incorporation journey, and our commitment to ensuring access to rights for young people with communication differences. The work also arose from reflective practice and learning; staff recognised the limitations of traditional verbal or written approaches and sought to remove barriers to participation and empowerment. Both activities were designed to address barriers faced by young people with Autism Spectrum Disorder, Learning Disabilities, and communication differences. By tailoring resources to their interests and abilities, we ensured equitable access to understanding and exercising their rights, particularly the right to participate, be heard, and receive information in accessible formats.

At Lochend Imagine Care, we strive to be a safe, loving, brave, and rights-respecting home. This work demonstrates our ongoing journey to make children's rights accessible, meaningful, and embedded in everyday life. Through creativity, collaboration, and unwavering commitment, we have taken significant steps toward ensuring that every young person we support can understand, experience, and exercise their rights in ways that truly meet their needs.

### Impact and outcomes

The impact has been significant:

- Both young people now engage meaningfully in conversations about their rights using personalised, accessible tools.
- The first young person's collage has strengthened their understanding of how their rights are reflected in their care.

- The second young person's puzzles have enabled them to participate actively in care planning for the first time in a fully accessible way.
- Staff confidence, creativity, and commitment to accessible rights education have grown.
- All work has now been embedded into the young people's care plans, ensuring the approaches remain central to practice.
- The UNCRC now directly underpins our Service Improvement Plan and aligns with the Health and Social Care Standards, strengthening accountability and consistency across the home.

### **Key learning**

Key learning included the importance of adapting resources to each young person's interests, communication style, and sensory profile. We learned that visual, tactile, and creative approaches can significantly enhance understanding and participation for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder or communication differences.

### **Next steps**

Next steps include:

- Developing more bespoke resources for other young people who may benefit from similar approaches.
- Sharing learning with colleagues across the organisation and wider sector.

### **Children's human rights approach principles in practice**

The picture collage and jigsaw resources enabled both young people to gain awareness of their rights in empowering formats. By giving them tools they could understand and enjoy, we increased their ability to influence their care and strengthened their confidence in expressing preferences, views, and choices.

- The first young person had ownership over the images used in his collage, making the activity personal and self-led.
- The second young person engaged actively in care planning through the puzzle format.

Both activities provided accessible mechanisms for expressing views, contributing to planning, and being active participants.



## **Our Hearings Our Voice: Creating a scrapbook to empower children and young people during children's hearings**

Established in 2015, Our Hearings Our Voice (OHOV) is an independent board for young people across Scotland who have lived experience of the Children's Hearings System. Our aim is to ensure children and young people have a decision-making role in the improvement and reform of the Children's Hearings System.

### **The issue or opportunity**

Children require support before, during and after their hearings to understand how they can participate fully, comfortably, and safely. OHOV board members frequently stated that they felt underprepared for their children's hearings and that their voices were often not heard.

Commonly cited issues included:

- Feeling unsure of their rights.
- Having to sit next to, or close to, somebody they didn't feel comfortable with.
- Adults making decisions about young people's lives without asking for their input.
- Difficulty understanding the decisions that were implemented within a hearing, and what this would look like in their lives.
- Adults being unaware of children and young people's needs and preferences. For example, an aversion to bright lighting or difficulty making eye contact.
- Communication barriers preventing children from giving their input. This could be due to neurodivergence, differing communication styles, or reticence to speak out in an adult-dominated setting.

These are just some of the barriers that prevent children and young people from fully participating in the children's hearing, in accordance with their rights.

### What was done

In response to these issues, children's hearings experienced board members Ciara and Achilles developed a prototype for a 'scrapbook'; an open-ended resource that empowers children and young people to take control over the design and facilitation of their children's hearing.

It includes pages for children to express how they are feeling, to customise their hearing beforehand, and to record hearing decisions. It also contains information about their rights in the Children's Hearings System and signposts where to get help and more information, written in a way that children can understand.

Ciara and Achilles envisaged the scrapbook being used by children and young people independently, or with a "trusted professional that the young person feels comfortable talking to... someone to sit down and go through the booklet with them."



**"My hope for the future is that it's something young people feel connected to and it really helps them feel comfortable and safe in hearings."**

**Achilles, Board Member**

Children and young people have reported that they often do not feel comfortable and safe in their hearings. Work is being done around Scotland to make hearings more trauma informed, and the scrapbook is one means by which children and young people can have a say in what 'trauma informed' means to them. Examples of this could include asking to sit separately from a certain person or letting adults know that they have a fear of lifts and should not be expected to use one to get to their hearing room,

Ciara and Achilles worked with communications staff from the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration, along with a speech and language specialist who was able to advise on child-friendly fonts and wording. The scrapbook was designed with simplistic, uncluttered information and visual aids presented in a neutral colour palette. Ciara and Achilles wanted children and young people to feel ownership of their scrapbook, so they designed it as an A5 ring binder, which allows pages to be added or removed. This design element affords "control from the young person about what they share."

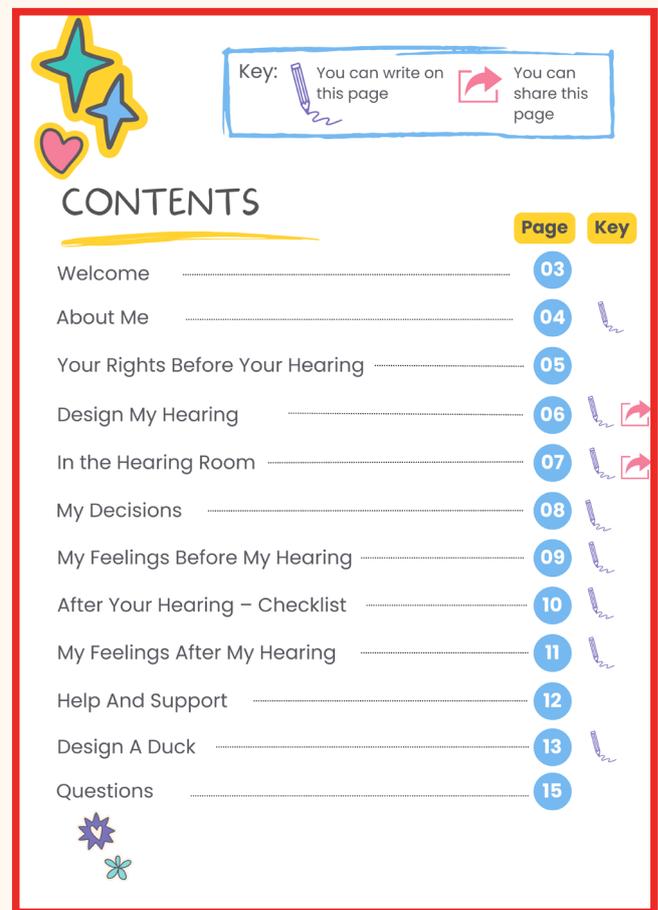


“It was a fun and interesting process, and I feel so proud to have co-created it!”

Ciara, Board Member

The scrapbook was initially launched in November 2023 on a trial basis. It was sent to all children over the age of six who were attending their first hearing.

OHOV received some encouraging feedback; a child was excused from attending their Grounds Hearing following a Pre-Hearing Panel. The child’s father brought in the scrapbook to the hearing, and it was almost completely filled in. He advised that she wanted the panel to read the ‘My decisions’ page and a blank page on which she had written more of her thoughts. The panel members reported that this aided them in their decision making, and they were pleased to have information that had come directly from her. In addition, the father said the child loved the scrapbook and intended to use it for future hearings, just as Ciara and Achilles had envisioned.



### The front cover and contents of the Scrapbook

OHOV learned through impact assessments that the scrapbook was mostly being used by children rather than young people. Ciara and Achilles designed an alternative scrapbook aimed at adolescents. It had slightly more mature design elements but maintained clear, child-friendly language and the same clean, uncluttered aesthetic of the initial scrapbook.



**The front cover and contents page of the alternative scrapbook**

Following a successful trial in Fife, and four other areas in Scotland, both scrapbooks have now been rolled out across Scotland. All children and young people will now be sent a scrapbook in advance of their hearing.

**Children’s human rights approach principles in practice**

This work, driven and designed by young people with care and hearings experience, supports the agency and capacity of children and young people to claim their right to be heard. The different levels of resources support children and young people’s evolving capacity. These initiatives empower children, including younger children, disabled children, and children in care, to express their views and to have them considered in all decisions affecting them, including in courts and relevant judicial proceedings and placement in alternative care.



**Scottish Children’s Reporter Administration: Empowering children to give their views on Children’s Reporter decisions**

The Scottish Children’s Reporter Administration (SCRA) employs the Children’s Reporters, who work in the Children’s Hearings System – Scotland’s statutory approach to child protection and children at risk.

## The issue or opportunity

Referral to the Children's Reporter is the first contact a child and family will have with the Children's Hearings System. Most referrals come from Police Scotland or from a social work department in a local authority, but they can be made by anyone. The Reporter will decide if a children's hearing is required, after gathering information about the referred child and their circumstances. The decision about whether to call a children's hearing, or not, is an important one for a child – and one they should be able to give their view on.

Children and young people have shared that better preparation for hearings enables better participation and empowers them to take control of their hearing.

## What was done

Children and families have always been able to give information to the Reporter about a referral, but SRCA now provide a more thorough explanation about the child's right to give their view on what decision the Reporter should make and how they can do this.

Children can give their views about what decision the Reporter should make by online form, by hard copy form (which is included with their letter) or directly to the Reporter – in writing or through a conversation. Children can be supported by others to give their views, for example by parents, carers, social workers or advocacy workers – who can help them understand the referral, the decisions that the Reporter might make and help children with explaining what they want to happen. SCRA's letters to parents, carers, social workers and others explain the child's right to give their views and how this can be done.

There are several new ways that SCRA staff will approach hearing arrangements going forward. SRCA have improved written communications to children telling them about the referral and have developed online information [for children](#) and [for young people](#), a '[giving your views](#)' resource and '[grounds for arranging a children's hearing](#)' resource.

SRCA developed a 'Hearing About Me' form with children and young people prior to UNCRC incorporation. This form continues to be used for children's hearings and is available online [for children](#) and [for older children](#). Additionally, 'Hearing About Me' is explained more fully as a [sound bite](#).

SCRA have embraced child and family friendly scheduling. This is explained [online in a short animation](#) and is also explained in [a leaflet designed for professionals](#) to use with children and with family members. This approach provides family members with ways to have an influence in the process.

Pre-hearing visits to a hearing centre can happen at any point for a child or family. A child can come on their own or with a trusted adult. Pre-hearing visits should be proactively offered to all children and, if they choose to attend, this should be fully supported. These visits should be used to enhance children's understanding of what can happen at hearings, ensure they have the information they need and familiarise them with the hearing centre. This may help them feel safer and can provide another opportunity for them to state their participation preferences.

SRCA are now pro-actively inviting children over the age of eight to who have never been to a hearing before or not been to their hearing for some time. If they choose to attend, these visits are used to enhance children's understanding of what can happen at hearings, ensure they have all of the information they need, and familiarise them with the hearing centre.

There are a series of [sound bites, films and animations on SCRA's website](#) – all of these are designed to help children understand what will happen in their children's hearing. There are also a wide variety of books, toys and sensory items available for all children coming to a children's hearing in the waiting rooms and hearing rooms.

### **Children's human rights approach principles in practice**

The children's hearing can be a difficult experience for a child and their family. SCRA continue to work hard to ensure that the child feels empowered in their journey through the Children's Hearings System, that they understand what is happening and why, and they can share their views. When children do feel lost, SCRA are putting in place things that will enable them to share that feeling, so they can ask questions and have some influence and control of their experience.



### **Play Scotland: Scotland's Play Vision Statement and Action Plan**

At Play Scotland, our work is grounded in every child's right to play as set out in Article 31 of the UNCRRC. Our aim is to promote, protect and fulfil this right for all children across Scotland. As part of this commitment, we were pleased to collaborate with the Scottish Government to develop [Scotland's Play Vision Statement and Action Plan](#), which sets out the vision for the future of play in Scotland, and the actions Scottish Government will take with public and third sector partners.

#### **What was done**

From the outset, the content for the document was shaped through consultation with children and young people, supported by an internal and external working group. In parallel, Play Scotland designed a child-friendly version of the materials to uphold Article 17 – the right to access appropriate information.

Taking a children's human rights approach, we focused on Articles 12 and 13 by ensuring that children's voices, perspectives and creative expression meaningfully influenced the process. Children and young people were involved at each stage from contributing ideas for the Vision Statement and Action Plan, to guiding how the final resources should be presented so they could be easily understood by their peers.

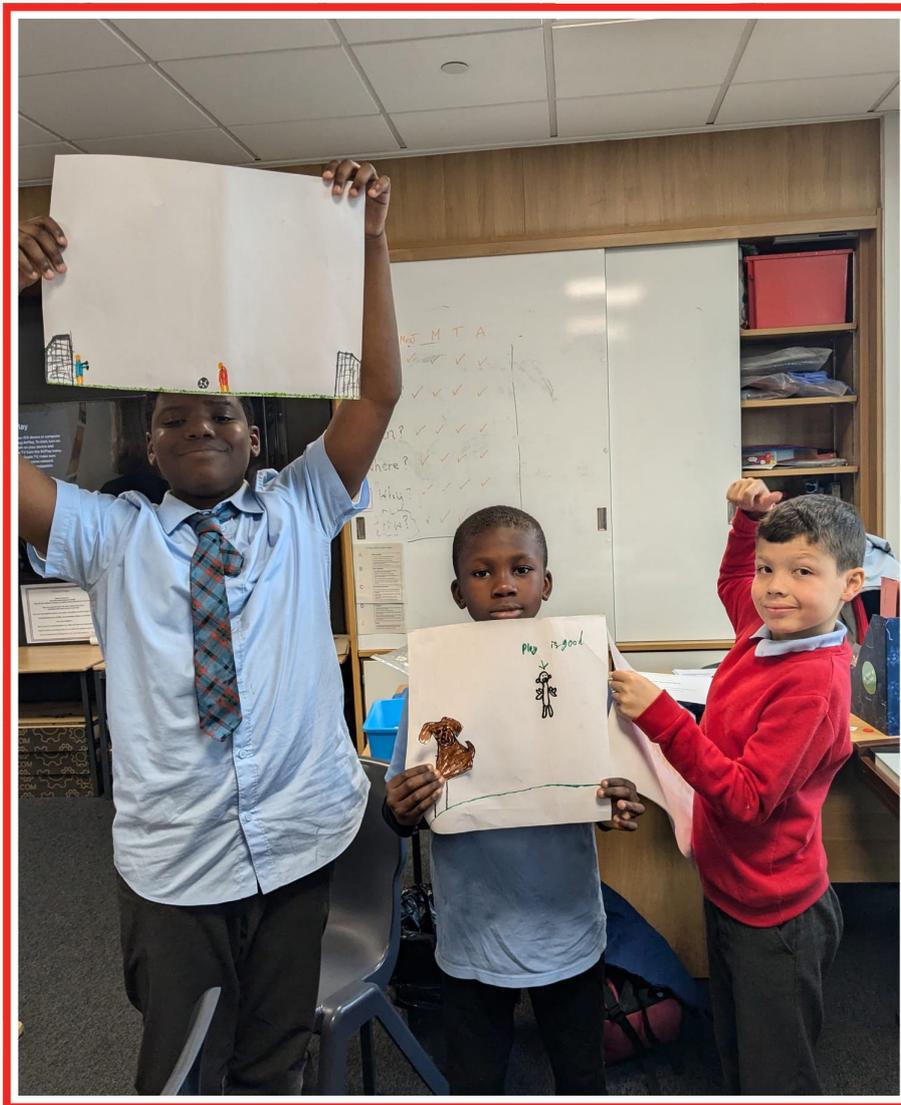
[The Children's Versions of the Vision Statement and Action Plan](#) were developed using children's rights as a framework. As such we set a good example for future government strategies and resources to be translated into child-friendly and accessible language and formats. We know from our work that child-friendly versions mean identifying with children what is important to them, and that different versions are useful for different purposes.

To support this engagement, we created two short workshops for different age groups. These sessions introduced the Vision and Action Plan and invited children to help design an accessible children's version. Our goal was to gather feedback on clarity, relevance and visual style, while learning which elements children considered most important. Activities were deliberately creative and interest-led, ranging from poetry and poster making to video creation. Facilitators supported children's curiosity in finding out more about their rights (Article 42).

Workshops were delivered in three schools:

- Drummond High School, Edinburgh, with nine students with Additional Support Needs and English as an Additional Language.
- Falkirk High School, working with the Eco Group, seven students from S3 to S6.
- St Martin's Primary School, Glasgow, with seven students from P5 to P7.

Additionally, Eyemouth Primary School conducted its own workshop using our guide, engaging with twelve pupils.



**Children from the workshops showcasing their designs**

In line with equality and non-discrimination practice, and informed by [General Comment 17](#), we made sure to engage groups whose rights are most at risk, and who often don't get the chance to have their say, like children with English as an additional language. This included working directly with children who have Additional Support Needs to uphold Article 23 – every child with a disability has the right to participate fully in their community, including in play. Their perspectives were treated as essential, not optional, ensuring equitable participation and representation.

Throughout the workshops, we collected extensive feedback, editing suggestions and direct quotes from the children. Respecting Article 16 (right to privacy), children were asked how they wished to be referenced; some chose initials or nicknames, and all notes were anonymised after the sessions. A professional poet then used children's poems and collected quotes to co-create a hybrid poem that reflected their voices.

The workshops created structured, meaningful opportunities for children to share their views on policy content and presentation. Their input directly shaped the text, illustrations and messaging of the final resources. Children's ideas were not only heard, they were also embedded into planning, drafting and design.

Children's drawings, layouts and symbols also informed the visual design of the final poster. Their imagery guided decisions about representation, ensuring that the final resources reflected diverse ages, identities and experiences.



**A child from one of the workshops showcasing their designs**

Feedback from children and young people has been thoroughly incorporated, and their suggestions continue to inform how we approach engagement in future projects. Children were able to see what we had done with the information they had given us to start with, closing the feedback loop.

### **Impact and outcomes**

The response to the children's versions has been overwhelmingly positive. The children and young people involved are rightly proud of their engagement and their role in shaping the Vision Statement and Action Plan. We see play as a right that enables children's other rights to be upheld as it engages, supports curiosity and sparks imagination. Children are already helping to shape Scotland's policy landscape in a way that places children's rights, especially the right to play, at the centre.

### **Children's human rights approach principles in practice**

By making information accessible and through playful and creative activities, we supported children's understanding of their rights, and children helped us to understand what was important to them. The child friendly version of the Vision and Action Plan acts as a resource that empowers children and young people to recognise, discuss and advocate for their right to play.



## Dumfries and Galloway Council: Using ‘Peep Learning Together’ to empower children and young people

The Lifelong Learning Service delivers the Peep Learning Together Programme across Dumfries and Galloway to support parents and carers as their child’s first educators. The Peep Learning Together model adopts a strengths-based approach which upholds children’s rights as well as their and their family’s dignity and agency.

### What was done

All Peep practitioners are required to undertake training on UNCRC, Getting It Right For Every Child, Keeping the Promise, trauma-informed practice, and infant mental health. This ensures that there is a staff base which is knowledgeable and understands the different family situations and issues within their community.

Each Peep programme follows a curriculum which outlines aims and objectives from the outset. Peep positions the parents and carers as the expert in their children, and the session plans reflect this.

At the beginning of each block, the practitioner will explain the themes and topics that are available, and the parents and carers will discuss what is relevant to them. One of the key components of a Peep session is the ‘Talk Time’ with the parents and carers where the aim of the session will be discussed and the activities available during that session will be explained and linked to the learning outcomes. It is during this element of the session that the children’s rights message is imparted in an accessible manner.



“I’ve learned that giving my child choices helps her feel heard and respected – that’s her right.”

**Parent**

Within every session there are family friendly prompts and ‘things to try at home’ handouts which can be either in a paper or digital format to extend the learning outcomes into the home learning environment. The sessions are built upon reflective discussions between the practitioners and the families and build on their confidence and self-belief, skills and experience.

Whilst each session has a plan with aims and outcomes, the activities during the sessions are led by the children. There are activities on offer which are relevant to the theme of the session, but the children are allowed to choose and interpret the outcomes of these activities.



“I love playing with my mum and my friends at Peep. I will miss Peep, but I am a big girl now and will be going to school.”

**Child**

As these programmes are delivered to an age group from Antenatal to Primary 1, there are adaptations that can be made to account for the differences in ages and stages of development. For example, a Development of Baby Unit will follow the development of an infant over the course of approximately 12 weeks, during which their developmental abilities will change and will require adaptations during the sessions to accommodate this.

Feedback is gathered after each session and at the end of a block families are asked to complete an evaluation form. This evaluation form has been developed by Peeple. The data from these methods supports delivery going forward and is used to adapt sessions if required.

### **Impact and outcomes**

In 2024-25, 2292 adults and 3,540 children participated in Peep Learning Together groups and other family learning events across Dumfries and Galloway.

100% of parents reported increased confidence supporting learning and development following attendance at a Peep Learning Together group.

 “Peep has helped me to see that I am all my baby needs. I now have the confidence to support my baby.”

**Parent**

Qualitative outcomes include stronger attachment, richer home learning environments, and increased community connection.

 “It can be lonely sometimes; the Peep group has helped me meet other families and find people to talk to.”

**Kinship Carer**

### **Children’s human rights approach principles in practice**

In addition to the approach shown through the previous Peep chapter in the embedding chapter, the Peep Learning sessions work to empower children and families to claim their rights and have a say in how sessions are run. As part of accountability to babies, children, and families, feedback is gathered and acted on to improve Peep sessions.



## **Argyll and Bute Council: Celebration, empowerment and participation**

### **What was done**

In October 2023, the Argyll and Bute UNCRC Implementation Group applied for a grant from the Scottish Government and CORRA Foundation UNCRC Innovation Fund. The bid was successful, giving us the resources to engage with children and young people across Argyll and Bute in celebrations of their rights that would empower, engage and inform them in fun ways that were memorable and meaningful. From the very beginning and during the development of the bid, co-production took place and was a theme throughout. We worked with schools, youth and community organisations, our Refugee and Resettlement team and others to shape a programme of events that ultimately engaged 2475 children and young people across our towns and remote, rural and island places.

This model was highly successful and in 2024-25, children and young people showed us how they wanted to be empowered and included, and what rights and causes they wanted to celebrate. Examples include a group of six primary schools who held a sports day to mark their right to play. Another primary school was concerned about cleaner seas and held a ‘Jobby-Free Sea’ event

for their community and reached out to decision makers in the Scottish Government to make themselves heard. Our Refugee and Resettlement team ran an activity week for children and young people at an outdoor centre.

Engagements that brought children and young people in contact with organisations that supported safety and families took place. A Child Safety Day was organised for multiple schools in Helensburgh and Lomond by Argyll and Bute Fire and Rescue Service, Police Scotland, British Transport Police, Scottish ambulance service, first responders and Loch Lomond rangers. Helensburgh and Lomond Carer's Centre ran Children's Right's Awareness Raising sessions and a day trip for the young people supported through our Young Carers Service across Helensburgh and Lomond.

Argyll and Bute Citizens Advice Bureau ran events for young people in high schools in each of the four localities. In their events, key issues such as employability, cost of living and social benefits were highlighted. The events allowed young people and their families to learn about their social rights and local resources in a workshop environment and connected them to the Bureau for advice.

Inclusion and being heard were important in these activities and many of these events had the added advantage of creating materials that could support children's human rights going forward and be shared even more widely. Our LGBTQ+ (including allies) children and young people ran a day that included children's rights workshops in the morning and social activities in the afternoon. Part of this was a competition to design an Argyll and Bute LGBTQ+ flag. This has been created and shared and was recently used at Oban Pride.



### **The Argyll and Bute LGBTQ+ flag**

Our young carers wanted to make an Argyll and Bute Young Carers: 'Children's Rights' film about why rights were important to them and Media Coop were commissioned to create this with them. This has been shown widely to great acclaim. An animator who worked with Aardman Studios ran an animation workshop for our young carers and a launch event for the film was held and attended by some Council leaders.

Groups of young people worked with graphic designers to produce graphic rights plans that could be placed in schools and other settings across Argyll and Bute. One of these, for early years families, also involved staff and parents.

Importantly we wanted to work with children and young people to create things that could carry them forward in their rights journey. These have included an awards scheme for Council and partner staff celebrating how well they embed children's rights into their work and engage with them. Children and young people will help to decide the categories of awards, decide the winners and award them in conjunction with Council leaders.

Material created for future work have included small libraries of children's rights, and inclusive and LGBTQ+ books being placed in Oban, Tobermory, Rothesay and Hermitage Academy to support their inclusion development work. E-pens provided with the books will read aloud, allowing children and young people to share them with parents where English may not be a first language etc. We strove to ensure that activities took place for children living in our remote, rural and island places, for example on Mull, Bute and Jura.

### **Next steps**

In all of this we worked to make children and young people aware of their rights in a joyous way that would leave them keen to know more and stay involved. We wanted to connect them with decision makers and ensure that they were a part of planning going forward. A Youth Conference to build on this work was the next step, which took place in November 2025.

This conference, alongside the Planet Youth 2025 Reports will inform the next iteration of the Children and Young People's Service Plan. The conference continued the positive work that was supported by the Innovation Fund. It continued to empower youth voice and engagement as young people were able to see where their views and actions are making a difference.

### **Children's human rights approach principles in practice**

Through empowering children and young people across Argyll and Bute to participate by co-designing activities and resources celebrating and promoting children's rights, Argyll and Bute Council made sure that their engagement and information work was fun, memorable and meaningful. The work also sought to embed children's rights learning across various sectors and professions in the community.



## **Children First: Bairns Hoose work**

### **The issue or opportunity**

For decades, Children First have worked alongside children and their families across Scotland who are survivors of abuse, trauma and other adversities, to support them through their justice, care and protection journeys and to recover from their experience. Scotland's first Bairns Hoose opened in August 2023, based on the Barnahus model advocated for by the Committee on the Rights of the Child. Since then, it has transformed the experience of children navigating the complex and challenging child protection and justice systems by putting children's rights and wellbeing at the heart.

Now, with Bairns Hoose approach rolling out across Scotland, our work in North Strathclyde and beyond is demonstrating the power and impact a children's rights approach to supporting children through justice, care and protection system can have, when children's rights are put at the centre of decision making, planning and delivery of services.

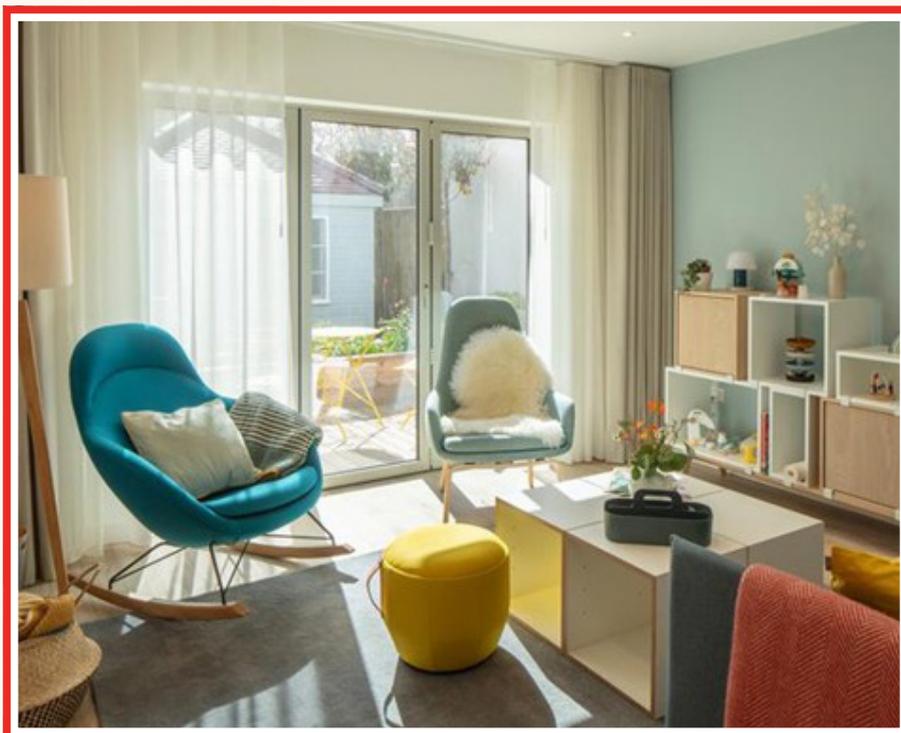
The work to develop the Bairns Hoose was based on experiences shared by children and young people that showed children’s rights to recovery, protection and child-friendly justice following abuse or harm were not being upheld. Children are asked to repeat their stories, to different professionals for different reasons. Exhausting delays in cases mean that fear and anticipation surrounding going to court lasts years, and repeated adjournments mean that anxiety and stress build repeatedly up to a court date. Children and families tell us that court buildings feel unsafe and untrustworthy. Giving evidence in court can be brutal. We see the long-term impact on children’s lives, which can lead to a lack of sleep, anxiety, fear, flashbacks, and missing school. Children’s right to access information (Article 17), their right to be heard and have their views taken seriously (Article 12), their right to be protected from harm (Article 19) and right to recover (Article 39) are repeatedly not met.

Our work on the Bairns Hoose aims to change this. It is based on the Barnahus model which brings together justice, child protection services, health professionals, and the judiciary under one roof to minimise trauma and ensure a coordinated response. Key principles of the UNCRC, particularly the right to protection from harm (Article 19), the right to be heard in judicial and administrative proceedings (Article 12), and the right to access appropriate support and recovery services (Article 39) are foundational to the approach, and asks police, courts, social work and prosecution services to re-orient their processes so that children’s right to recover from harm is at the centre.

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child included support for this work in their Concluding Observations for the UK in 2023. This said that the Committee urges Scotland “To ensure a child rights and trauma care-based approach in the provision of support services for victims, including the Bairns’ Hoose standards in Scotland, and that such services and support are also available for and address the specific needs of all victims of violence.”

### **What was done**

To build a Bairns Hoose that respects, protects and fulfils children’s rights while supporting child victims and witnesses to recover and thrive, it is fundamental to involve children, young people and families in its design and development and to inform and influence system change.



**Example Bairns Hoose environment**

We have established a ‘network’ of Changemakers across Scotland, made up of children and young people who have experience of child protection and/or interviews by the Joint Interview Team or are a witness or victim of a crime with experience of the justice system. The first Changemakers group was established in North Strathclyde, February 2022. These voices have been at the centre of our work, and include [Lydia’s Poem](#), alongside [a message from Lydia’s mum](#) and [Sophie’s Song](#).

One young person shared her story with us and explained how different the experience of justice was when she was supported by Bairns Hoose. She also shared a message for other people working in the justice system, calling for a more child-centred way of working that respects and upholds children’s rights.



“About a year ago, my life changed in a way I never expected. I had been abused by my boyfriend and made the brave decision to report it to the police. I went through the justice process for months, but my case was eventually closed due to lack of evidence. My mental health was badly affected by it all.

“My school was trying to help but my mental health was getting worse, and I knew I needed more support- especially since I was planning to leave soon...That’s when the school told me about Bairns Hoose. After a few meetings, I was introduced to a lovely support worker there, and that’s when things started to change.

“The Children First Bairns Hoose team... gave me a safe space to be myself. They listened to me, helped me find my voice, and encouraged me to express my feelings. I even wrote a song and started a book about my story and my experience with the justice system. They made me feel like I was talking to a friend, not just a professional. I’ve been through a lot of mental health services, but none have helped me like Bairns Hoose has.

“A year ago, I had no confidence and no hope. Now, I feel proud of myself. I’ve found purpose, and I’m doing amazing things with Bairns Hoose by my side.

“If I could speak to the people in charge of the justice system, I’d ask them to really think about the victims. The system can be scary and damaging, especially for young people. We need to be heard, supported, and treated with care. We’re not adults yet, and the process needs to reflect that. Please listen to our voices – we matter.

“Bairns Hoose... gives young people a voice and a safe space. It’s more than just support- it’s someone walking beside you through the hardest times. It’s a second home, a safety blanket, and a reminder that you’re never alone.”

**Evangeline**

### **Children’s human rights approach principles in practice**

Empowering children, young people and families to participate in the design and development of Bairns Hoose ensured that the service would be designed in a way that met their needs, uses trauma informed practice, and supports children’s rights.



**Example Bairns Hoose environment**

## **Children's Parliament: Exploring children's rights and artificial intelligence**

Through our child rights practice, Children's Parliament provides children up to 14 years of age with opportunities to share their views, experiences, and ideas so that they can influence positive change in their lives at home, in school and in the community. We demonstrate children's rights in action, support children to influence policy, practice and legislation, build capacity and win the hearts and minds of adults to realise children's rights.

### **What was done**

Since 2022, our [Exploring Children's Rights and AI Project](#) partnership with the Scottish AI Alliance and The Alan Turing Institute has been working with 140 children ranging from nine to 11 years old in primary schools in Glasgow, Stirling, Edinburgh, Shetland and Dundee to understand what they think and feel about AI and its impact on children's human rights.

In the first stage of the project the children established a solid foundation of knowledge about AI and children's rights. They shared their views on various real-world applications of AI technologies. This phase was important as children needed to understand AI before they could share their thoughts and feelings.

Through a series of in person and online sessions based around creative and exploratory activities, four themes emerged as consistent areas of interest for the children:

- AI and Education
- Fairness and Bias
- Safety and Security
- The Future of AI.

For the second stage each school was paired up with an ‘AI partner’ and a local artist to explore a thematic area and creatively share their key learnings. Our AI partners were NHS Greater Glasgow, Digital Skills Education, the Centre for Research in Digital Education, and Mesomorphic. From these workshops the children developed twelve ‘Calls to Action’ which focused on what needs to be done for children’s rights to be upheld in the development and use of AI in Scotland. The children explained their calls to action in a [video](#) and a [leaflet](#) is available to download.

The children shared their key themes and calls to action with decision makers, and AI thinkers and developers at the annual Scottish AI summit and at a bespoke sharing event with key academics and policy leads engaging hundreds of adults with their calls to action.

The third stage of the project was led by children’s urgent call for change and focused on taking forward action on the AI policy and development workforce to learn about children’s rights, and for educators in primary schools to learn about and teach children about AI.

To this end, two learning resources were co-produced with children. An [eLearning resource](#) aimed at adults who work with AI technologies in their professional lives, and an [AI teaching pack resource](#) aimed at primary schools.



“AI should be in the curriculum. AI will be in all our lives, so we need to learn and understand what it means before we grow up.”

**Member of Children’s Parliament**



“There should be rules about how much and what data companies are allowed to gather about children. Companies should not collect or share data from children unless it’s absolutely necessary.”

**Member of Children’s Parliament**

All the adults around the project had the opportunity to experience the power of children’s rights practice. We ensured duty bearers had a clear understanding of children’s views on AI in relation to their rights through direct engagement of children with decision makers at the AI Summits and sharing events, and by the dissemination of calls to action and resources through strategic and mainstreamed routes. Children were also kept informed of change or, where change was slow or yet to emerge, why they have not yet seen change.

### **Impact and outcomes**

- 140 children took part in the project.
- 2,500 adults signed up to learning about the project and to access resources through 28 different events to date.
- 76 professionals and academics from other organisations took part in the project, learning about the children’s views and our approach.
- 4,772 downloads (to date) of the ‘Exploring Children’s Rights and AI Teaching Pack’ resources.
- Children’s rights now a central strand to the AI Curriculum Framework.

- Children’s views informed the Scottish Government draft AI Guidance and Guardrails for Teachers.
- Examples of replication of approach underway in other countries.

 “The ideas for interactive games are great. I don’t think I have ever seen lesson plans with such detailed explanatory and background notes!”

**Lucy, Primary School Teacher, Edinburgh**



**Photograph from Children’s Parliament in person session. Photographer: Roberto Ricciuti**

### **Next steps / ongoing challenges**

The outcome of the ‘Exploring Children’s Rights and AI’ project has made a positive impact on children’s lives and their knowledge and understanding of AI and their rights so they can act as human rights defenders. We know that the project has reached many adults working in education, technology, and policy development and that our work has helped them to reflect on their policy and practice. However, there is still much to be done to deliver the children’s calls to action, especially in relation to securing children’s data and protecting them from being used to train AI systems.

### **Children’s human rights approach principles in practice**

We demonstrated in practice how it feels for children to feel empowered and meaningfully participate, by disrupting adult-child hierarchies, and creating an environment where children feel able to share their thoughts and ideas openly. We collaborated with artists throughout the process which provided children with new and hands-on experiences and offered them different ways to express their thoughts and ideas.



**Photograph from Children's Parliament in person session. Photographer: Roberto Ricciuti**

We also demonstrated the values of kindness, trust and respect for human dignity, encouraging participating children and adults to do the same. The project planning and delivery was done in an inclusive and child-friendly way, with fun and creative activities which were easy to follow and helped children to explore the topic and share their thoughts confidently. This helped them feel that their rights being respected, listened to, and taken seriously.

## **NHS Dumfries and Galloway: Youth Health Advisory Forum**

### **The issue or opportunity**

The NHS Dumfries and Galloway Rights Reporting Action Plan outlines that NHS Dumfries and Galloway health services will consistently enable children and young people to have a voice and meaningfully participate in decisions that affect their lives (now and in the future), directly and indirectly, including in policy making, budgetary decision-making, and in reviewing processes and practices.

## What was done

In 2025, we created our NHS Dumfries and Galloway Youth Health Advisory Forum, led by our Child Health Commissioner and our Participation Lead who are based within our Family and Support Services Directorate. The Youth Health Advisory Forum members are a group of 12 passionate young people aged between 13 and 17 years old who are either living with varying health conditions or who have experience of accessing hospital and or health care services.

This group offers an opportunity for the young people to come together to talk about health issues that matter to them and others, where they can get involved in helping to shape and influence healthcare services. We want children and young people to help us identify good practice within health and what improvements are needed.

 **“My experience within the Youth Health Advisory Forum is learning to use my voice more and it has given me more confidence than I ever had. The meetings I love because I got to learn something else from other people and their experiences and get to do fun things. Now that we have a Youth Health Advisory Forum, we will make sure children and young people’s voices get listened to and heard.”**

**Young person**

 **“I have suffered with juvenile idiopathic arthritis since the age of 5. I have used the NHS service countless times... most of my experiences have been good although there has been a handful of bad ones. I want to make a difference for young people in Dumfries and Galloway and for them to be able to feel like they can rely on their healthcare and to be able to feel safe within them.”**

**Young person**

This group has met nine times throughout this year, five times online for an hour-long meeting and four times in person for a three-hour session. At the beginning the young people created their own working together group agreement for when they meet online and in person. This included trying to speak slowly and clearly as one of our group members is deaf and she lip reads. We also focused on team building and for the young people and staff to get to know one another better as this is a brand-new group. We always start our meetings with a fun ice breaker. We used different creative interactive youth work methods and approaches for this. For example: question shields, codebreaker, Jenga rights questions, newspaper towers, people bingo, participation cakes, and newspaper articles and headlines.

The Youth Forum members had the opportunity to take part in themed meetings. One of these meetings focused on explaining more about the NHS Dumfries and Galloway Board role and included a visit from Gareth Marr, the Chief Officer of Dumfries and Galloway Health and Social Care Partnership, who explained more about his role and the role of Dumfries and Galloway Integration Joint Board. This also gave the young people the opportunity to ask questions. The Youth Forum link in with our staff UNCRC steering group who are all working together to implement Children’s Rights within NHS Dumfries and Galloway.

Another meeting was themed around communication and patient experience. The young people were learning more about Patient Services role within NHS Dumfries and Galloway. They were introduced to Care Opinion, where they can leave anonymous feedback about their health experiences. None of the group members had heard of Care Opinion before. The young people felt that it would be helpful to have more young person friendly promotion, whether this is a

poster or an animation, to help inform children and young people about the different methods for leaving feedback, including Care Opinion.

Through these discussions, the group members then began to think about child friendly information, as some of the young people have experience of accessing Children’s Outpatients. Group members have been working alongside staff to create an animation about Children’s Outpatients, including what it looks like, what happens when you come for an appointment and to hear from some of the doctors you might meet. It was felt this would be helpful, especially if a child or young person was feeling nervous about their visit. Once this animation has been produced, other children and young people will be asked to share their feedback. After it has been approved by our communication team, we will create a QR code and link which will be added to every appointment letter.

### Key learning

Involving young people can bring new energy and ideas to projects and services. We know that when care and services are designed and delivered in collaboration with children, young people, adults and families who use them, there will be better outcomes for all. There are huge benefits to young people and organisations when meaningful engagement occurs, as collaboration often improves the quality of decision making when the people affected by those decisions are involved in making them.



“I wanted to get involved within the Youth Health Advisory Forum as my little sister was in hospital a lot and at one point in for about two years... [I] now want to have a say and help other children like my sister have a positive experience in the hospital... I feel it is important for young people’s voices to be heard within health, and NHS boards benefit as this gives them an insight from young people about what things matters to them that the board may not have even thought about.”

Young person



The Youth Health Advisory Forum members



“I think it is important for young people’s voices to be heard as they will know how and what they would like changed and spoken about, but adults who are not living it won’t. That’s why I think young people should be listened to more.”

**Young person**

### **Children’s human rights approach principles in practice**

Our work to empower children and young people through participation has led to the creation of a variety of child friendly resources and to changes in our services. The empowerment and participation principles feature heavily in this work – both for the children involved and wider children and young people in the community as these changes and resources will help others claim their rights when they are using our services.



### **Argyll and Bute Council: Illustrated UNCRC Action Plan**

#### **What was done**

Argyll and Bute Council worked with Listen Think Draw to create an illustrated UNCRC Action Plan that is more accessible to everyone. Having worked with this company previously to create an illustrated Child Poverty Action Plan, we found that this is a useful tool in engaging children and young people in discussion. Adults also appreciated seeing information in a summarised format.

We wanted to ensure that we engaged with groups of pupils who were well informed on their rights through the Rights Respecting Schools Awards. This mainly involved working with primary schools. We also worked with Argyll and Bute’s Youth Voice Group who had more varied knowledge of rights and helped to provide a secondary school age perspective. Through both pieces of engagement work, we ensured that we had mainland and island representation.

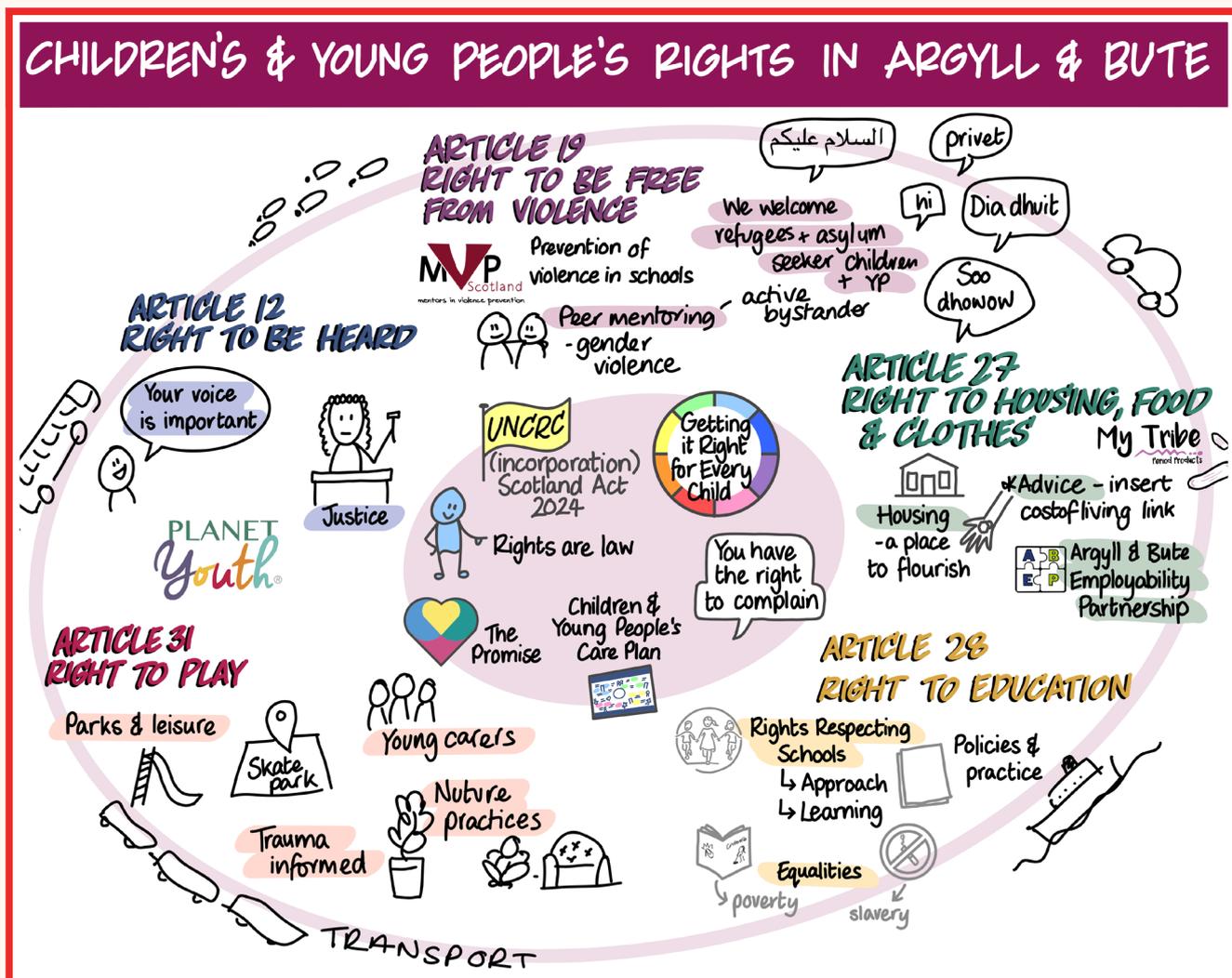
The timing of this work was challenging as it was towards the end of exam leave. We initially worked with Primary Pupils to receive initial responses before then seeking the views of secondary pupils. This was mainly undertaken via virtual meets to ensure that we could have a spread of opinions from across the local authority.

The other challenge we faced was co-ordinating availability. In the end, separate sessions were arranged and fed back to Clare, the illustrator. Whilst this was not ideal, having previously worked together we knew the level of detail the illustrator would require to formalise ideas. This also helped children and young people to be open about how they felt things could improve without offending anyone.

The final illustration was shared first with those involved in creating it to ensure that they felt their views had been considered. We were also keen to ensure that we close that ‘you said...we did’ loop. This was done through online meetings with those involved and the Youth Voice Group.

A4 laminated prints and A5 postcards have also been produced and shared across schools and partner agencies within Argyll and Bute. The postcards have allowed children and young people to share their rights with others. It is important to note that children and young people’s views informed the work that was contained within the full UNCRC plan and report.

We have also shared the approach at in person events, such as the Youth Voice Conference, which has been positively received. In November 2025, we recorded a Youth Voice Conference by using an illustrator. This allows us to capture the day and share it with all stakeholders. This will also be used to help inform other plans and strategies such as our Planet Youth work and the Children and Young People's Service Plan.



Draft version of Argyll and Bute's Illustrated UNCRC Action Plan, created by Clare of Listen, Think, Draw

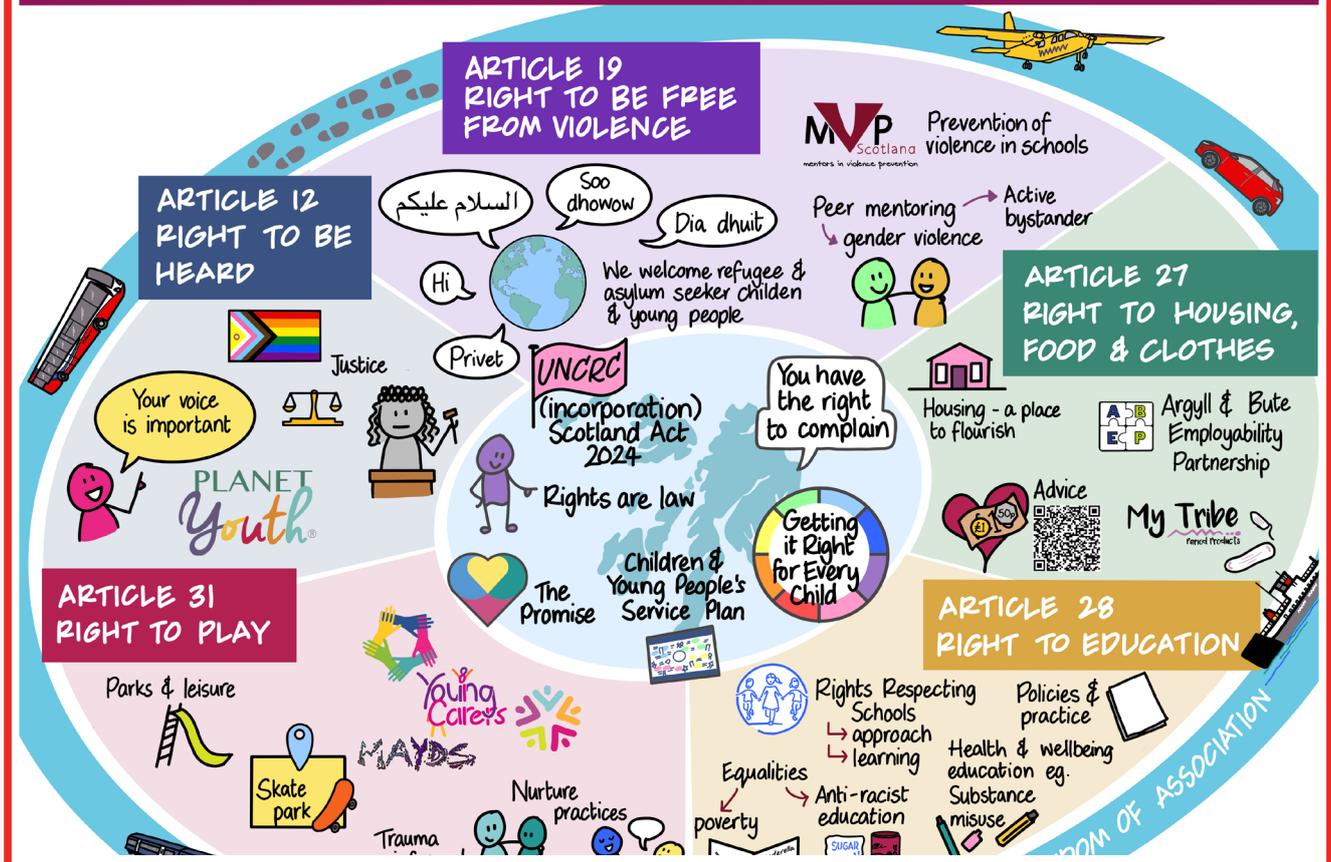
### Impact and outcomes

Throughout the process, the pupils made suggestions such as making the design more colourful, altering the icons to align more closely with their representation of topics, adding in missing elements such as a rainbow flag, and making definitions clearer.

The pupils also suggested the inclusion of organisations who provide young carers support, which was challenging for the artist to include because of the limited space available. Although we explained to the pupils that it may be difficult, the artist worked hard to meet the expectations of our children and young people.

Pupils fed back to us that they could see their suggestions within the final design. For example, in the final illustration, justice is represented by a judge and gavel as well as scales. This is because older and younger pupils identified with this in different ways. Furthermore, a member of the Education team noted that the plane was missing from the initial illustration; the children and young people agreed that this was an important inclusion.

# CHILDREN'S & YOUNG PEOPLE'S RIGHTS IN ARGYLL & BUTE



Final version of Argyll and Bute's UNCRSC Action Plan, created by Clare of Listen, Think, Draw

## Key learning

Creating an open atmosphere for children and young people to be critical was important. They provided suggestions about what areas of the plan had been overlooked that were important to them, as well as how to illustrate key priorities better so that they understood what it meant. They were not afraid to challenge, which was great to see and hear.

The process highlighted to us priorities that are important to children and young people that had been previously overlooked or not made prominent enough. Children and young people were also very clear about what they can relate to. It is important to remember that often we are creating documents that are not only more accessible to children and young people but to our communities as a whole. However, one size never fits all!

## Ongoing challenges

This approach does have financial implications, and we do not currently have the skill set within the council to capture documents and reports in this way. We do need to consider our budget accordingly.

## Children's human rights approach principles in practice

We wanted to ensure that our UNCRSC Action Plan was information that children and young people could understand, and we felt that participation with children and young people was the best way to ensure this. We worked to empower the children and young people we worked with to express their views at every stage of the process and took their inputs into account to create the final resource.

### 3.3 Reflections on the empowerment principle:



The case studies within this chapter outline various examples of how empowerment can be implemented in practice to support babies, children and young people to claim their rights and to engage with individuals and institutions that can have an impact on their lives. They also help demonstrate how steps can be taken to support children to freely associate, express their views and create space for children to genuinely influence and inform. The role of empowerment in shifting the balance of power between adults and children is essential throughout a children's human rights approach.

The importance of creating accessible and child-friendly resources to provide key information to children, young people and their families was highlighted by Dumfries and Galloway, Highland Council, Our Hearings Our Voice, Play Scotland and Scottish Children's Reporter Administration. Providing children, young people and their families with information in ways that suit their age and capabilities allows them to make informed decisions. Resources created to embed an understanding of empowerment and build a skills base throughout organisations and systems can also be hugely impactful, as outlined by Education Scotland.

When applied into practice, understanding the evolving capacity of babies, children and young people is crucial to effectively supporting them without restricting their autonomy and self-expression. This was highlighted by Lochend Imagine Care's and Our Hearings Our Voice's adaptation of resources or activity to suit varied interests, levels of understanding and communication preferences. This ensures activities encourage engagement. By respecting different preferences, this also allows all babies, children and young people the opportunity to express their views and to learn about their rights in ways that suit them, emphasising the link between the empowerment principle and the equality and non-discrimination principle.

Effectively implementing the empowerment principle in practice can shift power imbalances by allowing children and young people to make their own decisions and to shape their own lives. Argyll and Bute Council, NHS Dumfries and Galloway, Circle, Scottish Families Affected by Drugs and Alcohol and Children First illustrate how this can be achieved through participatory work with children and young people to learn about what matters to them and what they need to be able to exercise their rights. By supporting children and young people to stand up for their own rights and to act as human rights defenders for others, organisations can support calls to action about matters that are important to them, as highlighted by Children's Parliament.

Throughout all the case studies, the wider children's human rights principles feature and play an important role in their success. Understandably, participation features alongside empowerment in the majority of case studies and some have taken careful steps to consider equality and non-discrimination. Likewise, various case studies show how empowerment approaches can be embedded throughout systems and communities, and how accountability can be ensured by creating meaningful feedback opportunities and implementing change as a result.

### 3.4 Top tips on implementing the empowerment principle:



The following top tips are drawn from the UNCRC Skills and Knowledge Framework outcomes. By using these top tips, alongside real-world learning from featured case studies, individuals and organisations can be supported to effectively implement the empowerment principle in practice.

- While empowerment naturally exists close to the participation principle, it is important that you consider how your work features all principles together. When creating robust feedback or complaints processes under the accountability principle, children and young people need to feel empowered to use them.
- Understand the evolving capacities of babies, children and young people to take a supportive role that respects dignity, autonomy and self-expression. Regardless of a child's ability to understand an issue, babies, children and young people have the capacity and right to form and share their own views and to have them taken seriously.
- Babies, children and young people can have different preferences in how they express their views. Ensure all children are supported to express themselves and to voice what is important to them. This could include using fun and creative activities to encourage engagement and ensuring that non-verbal forms of communication are recognised and respected, such as play, body language or facial expressions.
- Access to understandable information is essential for children and young people to make well-informed decisions. Ensure you communicate in ways that suit the children and young people's age and capacity. This could involve using clear and easy to understand language, free of jargon, and ensuring communication is transparent, accessible and engaging.
- Always take the views of babies, children and young people into account in decisions that affect them. Babies, children and young people's views, feedback and ideas can help to improve their communities and services. Speak directly to children and young people, not just to adults, and consider what children and young people have already said about a topic when seeking further views.
- Support children and young people as human rights defenders, to advocate for their rights and for the rights of others. This can include identifying and creating opportunities for children and young people to progressively exercise their rights. Additionally, this could include ensuring that they have a safe environment to advocate for their rights and freely associate, both online and in-person.
- Sometimes building a strong, empowering and interpersonal relationship is necessary for children and young people to share their views. Building a close relationship can take time so this step should be built into processes as early as possible. Any relationship should be based on kindness, trust, empathy and a commitment to respecting the dignity of the child or young person.
- Ensure your work supports children and young people who have experienced or are experiencing trauma by being sufficiently trauma-informed. This could include accessing training to support on recovery, rehabilitation and reintegration and understanding what services are available to help children and young people experiencing trauma.

We have a voice



Chapter 4:  
**Participation**

## 4.1 Introduction to the participation principle

The participation principle means actively listening to children and young people and taking their views into consideration in ways that are meaningful.

Participation can look different depending on those involved and the context of the work being carried out. In any setting, it is important to consider the preferences and needs of the babies, children and young people who are participating to ensure they can fully engage with the process. Additionally, take time to explore what evidence already exists from wider participation – this can respect views already shared by helping to avoid repeatedly asking children the same questions. It can also help protect against over-consultation, which can often be experienced by groups of children whose rights are most at risk.

When designing and delivering the participation principle in practice, consider how this relates to the other principles of a children’s human rights approach:

- **Embedding:** how can participation be built into an organisation’s policies and processes to ensure children’s views are integrated into the organisation’s work, rather than as an add on?
- **Equality and non-discrimination:** how are barriers removed to ensure all babies, children and young people can participate?
- **Empowerment:** how will children and young people be empowered throughout participation to act as advocates for their rights and the rights of others?
- **Accountability:** how can accountability be built into the process to ensure children and young people are aware of the outcome of their participation and can provide feedback on how the process felt?

The following case studies provide examples of participation in practice, including:

- Creating safe and welcoming environments for children and young people to express their views and voluntarily participate in discussions.
- Ensuring participation is child-friendly and engaging.
- Providing children and young people with accessible information about their right to express their views.
- Ensuring children and young people are given feedback about the outcomes of their participation.

## 4.2 Case studies



### Shetland Council: Youth Voice – refreshing youth participation in Shetland

#### The issue or opportunity

With a declining youth and working age population it is vital to understand young people’s needs more effectively in Shetland, ensure Shetland Council is supporting young people to be heard, and that local public bodies actively engage with young people in the work they do.

#### What was done

Shetland Youth Voice is dedicated to empowering young people across the Shetland Islands. The ongoing programme aims to engage young people in meaningful participation within their

communities, fostering leadership, advocacy, and positive change. By creating a platform where young individuals can express their ideas, opinions, and concerns, the project ensures that their voices are heard and valued in all aspects of community life. The work is promoted and facilitated by Shetland Islands Council's Youth and Employability Service, who support the recruitment and organise the logistics of the meetings and activities of the group.

Shetland Youth Voice is a voluntary group comprising of young people between 12 and 26 working in different roles:

- General Members who have a commitment to meet four times a year.
- Executive Members who meet more regularly and take the actions discussed from the general meetings.
- Leadership are office-bearing roles within the Executive such as Chair, Secretary, Communications.

All secondary schools and voluntary organisations across Shetland are represented with members meeting quarterly to discuss key issues and participate in themed activities. This inclusive structure ensures that a diverse range of young voices are heard and that leadership opportunities are available at multiple levels, fostering a culture of empowerment and engagement within the youth community.

Shetland Youth Voice provides a mechanism for participation and voice for young people in Shetland. It also supports services and organisations to be able to engage and listen to their views, take them seriously and be accountable for the engagement, providing a feedback loop and updates on how the work has shaped future plans, policies and actions in the community.

Shetland Youth Voice activities range from workshops and events involving over 100 young people (based around their chosen annual themes), wider surveying of the youth and school age population needs in Shetland, promotional activities and campaigning. The issues and themes they will work on are decided each year by young people. Examples from last year include Transport, Mental Health, Fair Work and Youth Spaces.

For a young person in Shetland, engagement can differ depending on commitment and interest. Quarterly summits involve more members, but Executive members hold more regular meetings. The summits involve focusing on one of their chosen issues so that young people can opt in or out depending on their passions and interests in the subject.

Partnership with other services and community organisations is vital so at each summit there will be input from various organisations depending on the theme. They are then asked to feedback to the Youth Voice members on what action they have taken at the end of the year.

Transport was voted as the Shetland Youth Voice's number one priority in October 2024. Members identified it as essential to education, employment, and social life, as well as influencing whether young people stay in Shetland long-term. The Summit aimed to explore the challenges and co-design solutions with transport leaders, from local councillors to the Chief Executive of Transport Scotland.

The event featured four themed workshops:

- Transport Connectivity in Shetland with Council Transport Officers – mapping journeys, identifying gaps in timetables, and discussing integration of bus and ferry services.

- Public Transport Issues in Shetland with SIC Elected Member – exploring accessibility, affordability, reliability, and safety.
- School Bus Transport with Shetland Islands Council’s Executive Manager and Schools – sharing positives and tackling negatives such as overcrowding, behaviour, and vehicle condition.
- Air Travel with Loganair airline – discussing costs, reliability, and proposals for better youth discounts.

### Impact and outcomes

Three headline recommendations emerged:

- Extend bus schedules (especially Sundays).
- Improve young person discounts for off-island travel.
- Enhance safety on late night buses.

Shetland Youth Voice members presented their findings to SIC’s Environment and Transport Committee, as well as to the Scottish Government Minister for Transport and Connectivity. This secured praise from councillors and a commitment to explore potential changes.

Feedback from members at the summit showed high enjoyment (average rating 8.1 out of 10) and strong perceived learning (average rating 7.9 out of 10), with participants reporting greater confidence to speak up (average rating 8.0 out of 10).



**“Young people in Shetland face real challenges with transport. Limited services, high costs, and safety concerns all make it harder for us to get to school, work, and social activities. The Transport Summit gave us the chance to share our views, and we hope to see real action taken.”**

**Shetland Youth Voice member**

Following this event, Shetland Islands Council amended their bus timetables to include an extra bus leaving Lerwick in the evening and are looking at introducing extra lighting in bus stops.

Transport Scotland have stated this event influenced their decision to incorporate inter-island ferries in their Free Bus Travel for Under 22s.

These updates were provided directly to young people at Shetland Youth Voice’s ‘Year in Action’ event in November 2025 so they can hear what impact they made and what actions organisations have taken by listening to their views and needs.

Other examples of organisations being more accountable to Shetland Youth Voice are:

- Children Services signing a Pledge on Positive Relationships in Schools.
- Leading Inservice training for all Children Services Staff in October 2025.
- Pilot on social and recreational space for young people in Shetland to be introduced in January 2026.

### Next steps

Priorities for next year have included Education and Learning, Culture, Creativity and Arts, Environment and Nature. The Youth Voice members have also been provided with funding from

Shetland's Community Local Led Development fund to distribute to youth groups small grants of up to £1,000 if they meet their current priorities in Shetland's community.



**Young people sharing their views during a workshop**

### **Children's human rights approach principles in practice**

The work of Shetland Youth Voice demonstrates the power of participation in action. While ensuring participation is voluntary and child friendly, children and young people are given the chance to influence their communities, and the participation process gives feedback on the results of their inputs.

### **A Place in Childhood: Audit Scotland's Youth Advisory Panel (2023-2025)**

A Place in Childhood (APiC) is a leading children's rights co-design organisation, specialising in meaningful participation, place-based engagement, and youth-led research. APiC work nationally with local and national government, public bodies, schools, and communities to ensure children and young people's lived experiences shape policy, services, and the built environment.

#### **The issue or opportunity**

In 2023, Audit Scotland commissioned APiC to create and facilitate a national Youth Advisory Panel. The aim was to embed young people's lived experiences across audits and briefings, strengthen organisational practice under the UNCRC, and ensure young people could influence decision-making across Scotland's public services. Between 2023 and 2025 the Panel contributed to audits on Alcohol and Drug Services, Sustainable Transport, Additional Support for Learning, and early-stage work on Child Poverty, Education Outcomes, Skills, and Public Health and Prevention.

## What was done

APiC recruited 30 Youth Advisers aged 10 to 18 in late 2023 from Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Glasgow, rural Stirlingshire and rural Falkirk, grounding the project in place-based lived experience. The panel met 20 times, online, in person, and via hybrid hubs (e.g. Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Glasgow connected through Teams) over the course of the next two years.

Each meeting combined:

- Audit Scotland updates.
- Youth-led discussion in place groups or breakout groups based on experiences and interest.
- Co-analysis of evidence and development of insight.

Annual in person meetings led to co-created creative outputs such as a film and a podcast (currently being edited). Young people influenced all stages of the audit cycle, from scoping to evidence interpretation and communication of findings.

Audit Scotland recognised the need to:

- Meaningfully involve young people in public audit processes.
- Strengthen their organisational readiness for UNCRC Incorporation.
- Centre lived experience in understanding public services.
- Ensure future audits are relevant to, and informed by, young people.

It also responded to young people's calls for more meaningful influence over national decision-making.

Participation was youth-led, with APiC following its established principles: service, youth-led discussion, non-interpretation, youth verification, and collaborative adaptation. The project explicitly used UNCRC articles as a framework for discussion and evaluation, after finding that Youth Advisers responded well to this approach. Young people examined how their rights show up (or fail to show up) in public services, created children's rights analysis tools, and explored how audits could better assess rights fulfilment. Audit Scotland began integrating youth-led rights analysis into ongoing audit processes.

Young people:

- Set priorities for future audits (e.g. mental health, child poverty, education).
- Mapped lived experiences (e.g. poverty in their communities, education, experiences, impacts of transport systems).
- Co-directed films and podcasts.
- Shaped scripts used in public communications (e.g., Additional Support for Learning video).
- Gave feedback on policy proposals, reform programmes, and government responses.



**"We get to help create a change in issues that matter to us."**

**Young advisor**

Recruitment across urban, rural and mixed socioeconomic areas ensured a diverse range of lived experiences. Young people identified systemic inequalities, for example:

- Disability rights in education.
- Stigma around poverty.
- Uneven access to transport.
- Discriminatory disciplinary practices in schools.

Youth Advisers emphasised that poverty's visibility in schools (food, uniform, attendance) makes education an essential site for addressing inequality.

 **“Poverty makes children feel inferior... but we can help shape the solutions.”**

**Young advisor**

The project built the Youth Advisers' skills in:

- Critical thinking.
- Empathy for the experiences of others in Scotland.
- Understanding public policy.
- Film and media production.
- Facilitating discussion.
- Systems analysis.

Young people also developed a children's rights evaluation framework for future audits, empowering them to shape how youth participation should work in Scotland.

### **Impact and outcomes**

On Audit Scotland:

- Young people's wording and insights appeared directly in national reports and communications.
- Their critique improved audit design, timing, and accessibility.
- Youth verification processes strengthened Audit Scotland's internal understanding of children's rights in practice.
- Audit Scotland shifted to more transparent feedback loops and clearer communication about what had been done with young people's input.

 **“It feels great to know what we do here has real value.”**

**Young advisor**

On policy and systems:

- Young people's influence contributed to high-profile public discussions, including Scottish Parliamentary scrutiny of sustainable transport and ASL reform.
- Government responded to findings that included young people's insights.
- Their input added an additional focus on prevention to the Alcohol and Drug Services Audit, which was going to focus only on treatment services.

- Their experiences of poverty informed the framing of Audit Scotland’s Child Poverty Audit (due 2026) and highlighted major gaps in young people’s awareness of the Scottish Child Payment.

In ongoing evaluation, young people reported:

- Increased confidence.
- Enhanced communication and teamwork skills.
- Deeper understanding of government systems.
- Improved ability to advocate for their rights.
- Feeling that their contributions “actually mattered”.

 “It’s amazing to see how us young people’s opinions are so beneficial in reports and audits, and how we can boost facts and opinions.”

**Young advisor**

### **Next steps**

The project concluded in late 2025 with a youth-produced podcast, which will be available in due course. Audit Scotland is exploring how to embed a Youth Panel model into future audit work.

### **Children’s human rights approach principles in practice**

Participation was deep, structured, and continuous over two years. Young people shaped agendas, set priorities, co-designed outputs, and were involved at every stage of real national audits. Online breakout groups, collaborative tasks using the collaboration platform Mural, hybrid hubs, and asynchronous options ensured accessibility. Audit Scotland provided updates on how young people’s ideas influenced reports and policy responses to ensure that there was a feedback loop.

## **Aberdeen City Council: Empowering Youth Voices – Aberdeen’s Participatory Budget Consultation**

### **What was done**

Through a strategic partnership with Aberdeen Youth Movement, Aberdeen City Council launched an innovative participatory budget consultation for the 2025-26 financial year. This initiative reflects the principles enshrined in Article 12 of the UNCRC, which guarantees every child the right to express their views freely in all matters affecting them.

The consultation aimed to bridge the gap between policy making and youth perspectives, creating a platform where young voices could influence decisions on resource allocation, service priorities, and community development. By embedding youth participation into the budgetary process, Aberdeen City Council is setting a precedent for inclusive governance that values the insights and lived experiences of its younger citizens.

Budget decisions have far reaching implications for young people, impacting education, mental health services, recreational facilities, and community safety. Yet, historically, these decisions have often been made without meaningful youth input. Recognising this gap, Aberdeen

City Council sought to transform the narrative by empowering young people to contribute to discussions about proposed savings and service priorities.

Aberdeen Youth Movement's involvement was pivotal. As a youth led organisation committed to amplifying young voices, Aberdeen Youth Movement brought authenticity, trust, and creativity to the engagement process. Their approach ensured that consultations were not tokenistic but genuinely reflective of young people's concerns, aspirations, and ideas for the future.

The consultation unfolded between 4-8 November 2024, with Aberdeen Youth Movement spearheading engagement sessions across five secondary schools in Aberdeen. Central to their strategy was the 'Lunch Time Takeover' model – a dynamic, peer led approach designed to make participation accessible and enjoyable.



The consultation process in action

Aberdeen Youth Movement members set up interactive stalls in school lunch halls, transforming these spaces into vibrant hubs of dialogue. Each stall featured engagement boards with key questions about proposed budget changes, sticky notes for pupils to share their thoughts under themed headings, and small incentives such as treats to encourage participation and create a buzz.

This informal yet structured format fostered trust and openness. Peer-led facilitation was crucial; young people felt more comfortable sharing their views with fellow students rather than adults in formal settings. Discussions covered a range of topics, including mental health support services, sports and recreational facilities, community safety and lighting, school meals and nutrition, and music provision in schools.

 **“It is crucial that young people have an equal opportunity to let the council know how these proposals impact them. Young people engage better with other young people – there is more trust.”**

**Aberdeen Youth Movement Member**

To complement in-person sessions, Aberdeen Youth Movement leveraged social media platforms, posting personal reflections on proposed changes and inviting online feedback. This hybrid approach extended the reach of the consultation, ensuring that voices beyond the physical sessions were heard.

### **Impact and outcomes**

The results were impressive. Over the course of five days, 390 pupils actively participated in the sessions. Hundreds of comments were collected, highlighting diverse perspectives and priorities.

Key concerns included the quality and affordability of school meals, closure of public toilets in the city, cuts to local sports village funding, reduced street lighting and its impact on safety, and changes to music education provision.

Aberdeen Youth Movement compiled these insights into a 16-page report, which was submitted to Aberdeen City Council. Importantly, participants were assured that their contributions would inform final budget decisions – a commitment that reinforced trust and accountability.

The consultation achieved more than just gathering opinions – it cultivated a culture of civic participation among Aberdeen’s young people. By engaging in meaningful dialogue about public spending, young people developed a deeper understanding of governance and resource allocation, felt valued and respected as stakeholders in their community, and gained confidence to voice their concerns and advocate for change.

 **“I think it’s important because it affects all of us. We’re the people that the budget decisions could impact, so I think it is important to be involved in something that might change what the future looks like for you.”**

**Pupil, Aberdeen Grammar School**

This was the second consecutive year that Aberdeen Youth Movement delivered these sessions, and the continuity has strengthened trust and participation. Young people reported feeling more confident and informed compared to the previous year, signalling the long-term benefits of sustained engagement.

### **Key learning**

While the initiative was successful, it also highlighted areas for improvement: efforts must be intensified to reach marginalised groups, including those not in mainstream education; providing clear, accessible updates on how youth input influenced decisions is essential to maintain trust.

### **Next steps**

Looking ahead, Aberdeen City Council and Aberdeen Youth Movement are committed to building on this momentum. Aberdeen Youth Movement will continue to play a central role, ensuring that youth voices remain at the heart of decision-making. By institutionalising these practices, Aberdeen City Council is not only shaping better policies but nurturing a generation of informed, engaged citizens.

Plans for Year Three of the consultation include formalising youth consultation frameworks within council processes, expanding outreach to diverse and underrepresented groups, publishing transparent feedback reports to demonstrate impact, and innovating engagement methods through digital tools and creative formats.

As Aberdeen City Council moves forward, the challenge – and opportunity – lies in sustaining and scaling these efforts. By embedding youth participation into the fabric of governance, Aberdeen is paving the way for a future where decisions are truly reflective of all voices, including those of its youngest citizens.

### **Children’s human rights approach principles in practice**

Aberdeen City Council’s participatory budget consultation stands as a powerful example of how local authorities can operationalise youth rights and foster democratic engagement. The approach taken empowers children to participate in budgeting discussions which is often reserved for adults and therefore helps to address adult/child power imbalances. Through collaboration with Aberdeen Youth Movement, the council has demonstrated that young people are not passive recipients of policy but active contributors to shaping their communities.



### **Children First: “My Opinions Felt Worthy” – supporting the sport sector to involve children and young people in decision making**

Child Wellbeing and Protection in Sport is a partnership between Children First and sportscotland. We work with 48 Scottish governing bodies of sport providing advice, assessment, training and consultancy. Our aim is to ensure sport is a safer place for children and young people, where their rights are respected, protected and fulfilled at all levels in their chosen sport.

### **The issue or opportunity**

With the incorporation of the UNCRC in 2024, we wanted to organise an event, combined with a series of webinars, to support understanding of the legislative obligations and to advance thinking and practice around children’s rights.

### **What was done**

The event, ‘A Conversation about Children’s Human Rights in Sport’, brought together governing bodies of sport from across Scotland to hear from several experts. This included Children First, Together, Children and Young People’s Commissioner Scotland, Kyniska Advocacy and sportscotland, but most importantly, young people.



### **Promotional material for Children First’s conference**

Working with Scottish Rugby Limited and Scottish Disability Sport, we recruited seven young people to support with the development and delivery of the event. Their input, without question, made the day the success it was.

Before the event, our Participation Lead and Child Wellbeing and Protection in Sport staff met several times online with the young people and their governing body support staff. Following initial relationship building, child-friendly information was provided to allow the young people to reflect and decide which roles felt most comfortable. Information packs with all the details they would need for their involvement on the day were shared in advance to ensure clarity and minimise any worries.

Roles included meeting and greeting delegates, updating the attendance register, providing the opening address for the day and introducing speakers to the audience. The young people continued their involvement throughout the day in various ways such as being involved in group discussions, supporting the management of a Q&A session, delivering their own presentations and posing follow up questions for the audience.

On the day, a space for the young people was provided. This was an important quiet and relaxing space to ensure they could take regular breaks and time out whenever required. Drinks and snacks were provided, and they had familiar support from governing body staff throughout the day.

The support from the young people during the event and their five presentations, delivered with passion and flair, had a significant impact on the audience. Many of the participants noted the aspect they enjoyed most about the day was “hearing directly from young people”. Their presentations centred around their experiences as young people in sport and their involvement on youth panels with their governing bodies, Scottish Rugby Limited and Scottish Disability Sport. They talked about the positive impact this had on them and the actions they have seen taken as a direct result of their views being truly listened to.

Two young people also shared the challenges and negative experiences they had faced in sport from having a disability. This encouraged a call to action by explaining what could have been done to make their experience better, and what a positive experience looks like.

 “[Our] presentation was met with a lot of positive feedback. Our openness and honesty about our experiences, allowed for people to truly understand the need for children’s rights to be recognised in sport.”

**Young person**

 “Having the opportunity to listen in on these courageous and truthful talks, and to get involved in discussions on how we can progress into the future, was an invaluable experience.”

**Young person**

Their ability to share very personal experiences in such an articulate way connected with the audience and powerfully delivered the message from firsthand understanding about the importance of listening to young people.

 “I found it helpful to remember that we are the experts in our own lived experience.”

**Young person**

Following the event, we met with some of the young people to allow them time to reflect and share feedback about their experience of the day and the response they received from delegates. It was overwhelmingly positive:

 “Being part of the discussion this week provided me a place to have a voice, speak about my experience, and most importantly feel listened to. My opinions felt worthy.”

**Young person**



“The audience participation and discussions within this Children First event were so incredibly valuable. Not only did I learn, but I was encouraged to share my ideas.”

**Young person**



“Children First... provided us with a lot of information beforehand to calm our nerves, a small breakout room for us to relax in on the day, and they were all-round accepting of our diverse needs.”

**Young person**

Two of the young people embarked on some further remarkable work by following up with written blogs and publishing it themselves through Scottish Disability Sport, as well contributing to blogs written for the Children First website. Following the event, we sent handwritten cards with gift vouchers to thank and acknowledge the young people’s hard work and significant contributions.

To support the embedding of a children’s human rights approach, we organised and facilitated a series of webinars to continue the conversation. One of these, delivered by Dr Melanie Lang, specifically focused on participation.

### **Next steps**

We continue to run regular learning sets with governing bodies and ensure that the progression of children’s human rights is at the heart of our conversations, reflective questioning and delivery.

Because of our work, in addition to the connection and support created between governing bodies, we have seen a continuation of the involvement of young people in a variety of ways, from short consultations to youth panels, youth ambassador programmes and involvement in research. Sport must continue to build this work, to meaningfully listen to young people, and take their views into account. We believe the impact of doing so could be transformative.

In the voice of one young person who presented at our event: “It is my right to play sports. Sport has the power to make change. Continue the conversation.” We look forward to doing so!

### **Children’s human rights approach principles in practice**

We wanted to ensure children and young people were empowered to participate at all stages of planning and organising our conference. We made sure all participants felt prepared and included, developing child friendly materials for them. We evaluated our work through feedback gathered from children and young people and shared with them the feedback gathered from event attendees. The involvement of children and young people was crucial to our successful event highlighting children’s rights in sport.



## Forces Children Scotland: Turning listening into action for forces children and young people

At Forces Children Scotland, our values are clear: babies, children and young people must be at the centre of everything we do. The best solutions are found with them, not for them. Their experiences, perspectives, and ideas guide our work, because we know that when they lead, the outcomes are stronger, more relevant, and genuinely transformative.

### The issue or opportunity

For babies, children, and young people from armed forces families, so much of their lives is shaped by decisions made about their parent's military career; yet too often their voices are unheard in those decisions. When children's perspectives are overlooked, the risk is not only that their needs go unmet, but that they lose the sense of agency which is central to their wellbeing and development.

### What was done

One of the biggest changes experienced by forces children happens when their parent transitions out of the armed forces into civilian life. No two transitions are the same but in school-based participation sessions, children and young people shared what this shift meant for them. Some described the deep loss of the armed forces community. One young person recalled the shock of moving into a civilian street where no one knocked on their door; the silence spoke volumes.



“Being a forces child was all I ever knew.”

Young person

Transition brought uncertainty – overheard conversations about jobs, housing, and money – without anyone checking how those uncertainties affected them. While their serving parent felt supported, children told us their voices were invisible. Families had to renegotiate daily life, and some children admitted it was hard, while feeling guilty for saying so. Others missed the rhythm of moving, describing ‘itchy feet’ when realising they would not move again. The children and young people were clear that it was not enough to be heard – they wanted things to change.

Partnering with the creative agency Effervescent, we co-designed a campaign with children and young people. In creative workshops, over a seven-day residential, they developed the Tornado of Change campaign.

The workshops were designed to be creative, fun, and centred on each child and young person's strengths. Some activities included:

- Making characters of themselves out of pipe cleaners and playdough to describe who they are and what strengths they bring.
- Storyboards to explore change.
- Drama activities to explore what it feels like to be welcomed into a new community.
- Young people were also involved in creating some activities, especially those exploring belonging and identity.

All activities were adapted for each child and young person's needs. The children and young people were encouraged to use the ways of working that suited them best. Their individual skills – such as drawing, production skills, or storytelling – were used to shape the sessions so everyone could take part comfortably.

The workshops offered multiple ways to express ideas. For example, art and crafts, drawing and storyboarding, drama, model-making and talking in pairs or small groups. The variety also helped ensure their voices were captured in ways that felt natural and accessible.

The children and young people were involved throughout the whole process. They took part in a week-long residential, where they helped create the outline of the campaign. They also previewed videos and provided feedback that was reflected in the final edits.

### **Impact and outcomes**

Children and young people also developed the campaign's action points, ensuring that their input shaped real outcomes. This created a strong feedback loop, where the children and young people could clearly see how their contributions influenced the final campaign.

The campaign raised awareness across Scotland, equipping professionals with practical tips and making children's perspectives visible where they had long been overlooked.

It also helped children's voices reach and influence national policy. Following its release, the children and young people involved met with the Scottish Veterans Commissioner, influencing the landmark [Community and Relationships: Anything But Uniform](#) report, which called for more support for the 'invisible' members of the veteran community and highlighted children's experiences of transition.

There is now increased recognition in the sector that the impact of children's experience of the transition is not understood, shaping [new research](#) commissioned by the Forces in Mind Trust. As part of a consortium led by the Department of Education at Brunel University and including Portsmouth University and Academic Consulting and Education Services, Forces Children Scotland will support a Youth Advisory Board who will co-design recruitment materials, shape interview questions, analyse data, and help report findings. This is not research about them; it is research with them.

### **Next steps**

Throughout Tornado of Change, the children and young people kept highlighting their desire for a service allowing them to share experiences, combat isolation, and support one another through transition.

Responding to their requests, we developed Ruby Boots, a peer-support service designed and named by the children and young people.

Ruby Boots pairs children with trained 'buddies', slightly older peers with lived experience, building confidence, problem-solving skills, and resilience for everyone involved. Sessions are flexible, creative, and shaped by each group to ensure they meet their unique needs.

Complementing the Ruby Boots sessions will be 'Max's Big Move', a picture book co-produced with the Ruby Boots children and young people. This book will help children in nursery and early primary school with their own transition experience and provide the necessary learning resources

for the teachers and other adults in their lives to support them. From start to finish, the children and young people shaped the words, pictures, and messages.

### **Children’s human rights approach principles in practice**

Children and young people from armed forces families have told us they want to be heard. More importantly, they want their words to matter. From Tornado of Change to Ruby Boots, and influencing national research, one truth has been clear: when children and young people are not just consulted but empowered, real change happens. Their voices transform services, shift policy, and ensure resources reflect lived reality. At Forces Children Scotland, we remain committed to ensuring their voices shape every step of the journey, because no forces child should be disadvantaged, and no forces child should be invisible.



### **PLUS (Forth Valley) Limited: Listening to children’s voices in recruitment and service design**

PLUS (Forth Valley) Limited is a third sector organisation based in Stirling that provides social opportunities, support, and connection for children and young people with disabilities and their families. Our services aim to promote inclusion, friendship, confidence, and independence for children and young people aged five to 35.

We invited a young person with lived experience of disability to participate in the recruitment of a Family Support Coordinator and to help reflect on the UNCRC articles used in our Child Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment.

#### **What was done**

When recruiting for the Family Support Coordinator post, we invited a young person with Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy, who has long-standing involvement with the organisation, to take part in the interview process. Our intention was to strengthen our commitment to Article 12 by ensuring that young people’s perspectives directly influence how we select staff who will support them.

During the young person’s visit, we also revisited the UNCRC articles we had identified as being particularly relevant in our Child Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment. We asked the young person to share their thoughts on how these rights are reflected in his experiences with PLUS. This activity was aimed at embedding rights in decision-making and participation structures across PLUS, ensuring young people’s voices are represented in both recruitment and service design processes. The young person took part as a valued contributor. They have received support from PLUS over several years through after-school activities, home-based support, and time at school. The young person’s lived experience of inclusion, accessibility, and independence made their input particularly relevant.

By engaging a young person with Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy, we demonstrated our commitment to removing barriers for children whose rights may be at greater risk due to disability. The young person’s feedback directly informed our ongoing accessibility planning and ensured that inclusion remains central to our development work.



“Sometimes we get asked but not always listened to. This time I was listened to.”

**Young person**

This activity followed our increasing focus on embedding the UNCRC within our everyday practice. It also built on feedback from previous self-evaluations, where we identified the need to create more authentic and practical opportunities for participation beyond consultations and surveys.

### **Impact and outcomes**

The young person’s reflections provided valuable insight into how rights are experienced from their perspective:

- Article 2 (Non-discrimination): “No one is disrespected.”
- Article 3 (Best interests): Highlighted the need for age-appropriate resources: “For older children, don’t have some stuff for them, younger children tend to pull apart stuff for us. Keep them separate.”
- Article 5 (Parental guidance): Recognised ongoing tailored support: “Rebecca came to my primary school but don’t need her at high school, she still comes to the house.”
- Article 12 (Right to be heard): “That’s quite good, sometimes but not at other times.”
- Article 13 (Freedom of expression): “Yes, we do, but it’s about being heard.”
- Article 15 (Freedom of association): Identified a lack of opportunities for older children to connect socially: “Didn’t know about [Dungeons and Dragons] group, might be interested in that.”
- Article 19 (Protection from harm): “That’s quite good but the sensory room isn’t always used as it should be.”
- Article 23 (Children with disabilities): Pointed out physical access barriers: “Bump at the front door. Next building door needs to be wider.”
- Article 31 (Leisure, play and culture): “This is what PLUS is.”

The young person’s light-hearted reaction “Oh no, not this again!” when shown the UNCRC poster highlighted the strong level of awareness already being built through schools.

Involving the young person in recruitment gave them real decision-making power and reinforced that their voice matters. Discussing the UNCRC in a familiar, light-hearted way strengthened their awareness of their own rights and built their confidence to share honest opinions about their experiences. The session gave us direct feedback that will inform building design, programme planning, and accessibility discussions in our move to new premises.

Staff involved in the interview reported that the young person’s contribution grounded decision making in lived experience, reinforcing the importance of relational practice and empathy in recruitment.



“[They] helped us see our rights work through a young person’s eyes; it turned theory into something immediate and practical.”

**Staff member**

This activity strengthens our use of the UNCRC as a framework for policy and service delivery. The Children's Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment has become an active tool for reflection rather than a static policy document, influencing our recruitment, environment design, and staff training.

### **Key learning**

We learned that involving young people in formal processes can be both meaningful and fun when approached creatively. However, it also highlighted challenges in ensuring participation from young people who are less verbal or confident.

### **Next steps**

This process embeds ongoing reflection on children's rights within our organisational culture. Staff were reminded of the importance of acting on feedback rather than simply collecting it. The next step will be to share how this young person's feedback has influenced change, closing the loop and modelling accountability in action.

We will continue to involve young people in recruitment where appropriate, particularly for roles that directly support them and introduce a feedback loop to show young people how their participation influenced decisions.

### **Children's human rights approach principles in practice**

The activity provided a direct mechanism for children to express their views on service delivery and decision-making. We captured insights and will embed them into service planning and staff reflection sessions. This experience will shape a template for future participation opportunities, ensuring that more children can contribute meaningfully to our decisions.



## **Our Hearings Our Voice: Seeing Beyond the Surface**

Established in 2015, Our Hearings Our Voice is an independent board for young people across Scotland who have lived experience of the Children's Hearings System. Our aim is to ensure children and young people have a decision-making role in the improvement and reform of the Children's Hearings System.

### **What was done**

Facilitating participation opportunities for children and young people is a key part of our practice. We work from [Laura Lundy's model of participation](#), giving careful consideration to space, voice, audience, and influence. Along with responding to local and national priorities within the Children's Hearings System, we encourage the young board members at Our Hearings Our Voice to have a key role in shaping the direction and focus of our work.

Early this year the young people at Our Hearings Our Voice expressed a desire to engage with professionals out with our usual scope of partner agencies. Many of the themes explored in our work permeate children's lives beyond the Children's Hearings System. For example, children have raised the issue of their right to privacy not being upheld in the hearings room, but also in school, social work meetings, and healthcare. They spoke about feeling judged and stigmatised by the paper trail of sensitive historical information that is shared between professionals in multiagency reports.

Six broad themes were identified from the main issues children spoke about in relation to the care system:

- The importance of consistent, reliable relationships with key adults.
- Access to effective, personalised support when needed.
- The use of rights respecting, child-centred language in all communications with and about children.
- A request for adults to see children’s potential, free from judgement.
- Children’s right to privacy being upheld when handling their personal information.
- Children’s voice and influence being central to decision making in their lives, and in improvement work relating to their lived experience.

The young people at Our Hearings Our Voice shared their experiences, insights, and ideas for practice improvement under these six themes with the intention of creating a guide for any professional who supports children and young people within the care system.

To reflect a broad range of perspectives and experiences, they arranged to meet with diverse groups of children and young people across Scotland to invite them to contribute to our research, from Ayrshire to the Northeast, Shetland, the Highlands and Central Lowlands.

The groups we worked with focus on voice, care, justice, hearings, and lots more. We worked with young people with experience of foster, residential, kinship and secure care, of living at home with family, of supported living or homeless accommodation, and of being in custody.



**“It was interesting to learn that there were key areas that kept popping up, like support, privacy, and relationships. There are things that are going well but there are definitely things that need to change.”**

**Abbie, Board Member**

To minimise the risk and ensure children were protected to participate, the Our Hearings Our Voice board members undertook training in trauma informed research facilitation. They used this learning to create their own trauma informed guide to working with young people.

As the board members were learning and developing new skills, many of them requested for this to be recognised in formal accreditation. As a result, the work the board members have undertaken and the skills they have demonstrated have provided assessment evidence for a Participation and Democracy certification by Youth Link Scotland.

Participants were given the opportunity to share their thoughts in a manner that suited their communication style. We gathered artwork, voice recordings, videos, poetry, and written information; all of which were added to our guide for professionals. Although the subject matter was serious, and at times, very emotive, we used simplistic resources, fun ice breaker activities, and made time for more lighthearted chat during the research to help ensure participation was child friendly.

The young people decided on a name for the guide: Seeing Beyond the Surface: What Children and Young People Wish All Adults Knew. Due to the size of the guide and the creative content within, it was published as an interactive online resource.



# Seeing beyond the surface: What children and young people wish all adults knew



## Seeing Beyond the Surface: What Children and Young People Wish All Adults Knew.

On 22nd October the young people at Our Hearings Our Voice officially launched the guide at a celebratory learning event in Glasgow. Partners and stakeholders from across the care sector and beyond were invited to ‘Rise Up’ to listen and learn from the board members and celebrate their hard work.

Children and young people from the groups who participated in our research were also invited to the event and had the opportunity to see some of their work brought to life through readings and interactive sessions, as part of our feedback process. We also followed up with them after the event to thank them once again for their input and feedback to them on how the guide is currently being used by various organisations, to improve practice.

“A lot of hard work has been put into the guide. I think adults should take everything we’ve said in this guide fully to heart. Care experience is never an easy subject, and you’ll never fully understand it unless you’ve been through it. But we can help you as much we can to understand.”

**Jamie, Board Member**

“Young people want to work with adults. We want to make the system better together. If we work together and there are healthier conversations, then things can only improve.”

**Achilles, Board Member**



**The Our Hearings Our Voice members at the Rise Up event**

### **Next steps**

Following 'Rise Up', we plan to share the guide as widely as possible in the hope that it is embedded in practice by organisations who take a role in supporting children and young people with care experience.

### **Children's human rights approach principles in practice**

Seeing Beyond the Surface is the culmination of years of participation activity to gather young people's views, and a reflection of long-term work to change legislation. Change cannot happen overnight, but child-designed resources such as this guide ensure that young people's voices and important messages continue to be relentlessly amplified and embedded throughout practice.

## **Starcatchers: Voice of the Baby – a holistic, children's rights approach to participation with pre- and non-verbal children**

Starcatchers is Scotland's Arts and Early Years organisation. Their work is driven by the belief that babies, toddlers and young children realise their rights under the UNCRC through engagement with and participation in high-quality arts from birth. Grounded in Article 31 of the UNCRC – children's right to participate in arts and cultural life – Starcatchers advocates for the inclusion of our youngest children in decision-making.

### **The issue or opportunity**

Babies are born communicating. However, due to their lack of verbal language, their rights, particularly their participation rights, are overlooked, meaning they are the least heard in policy and practice. Starcatchers challenges this through creative exploration, demonstrating the innate capacity of babies to express agency long before they have language to support it, and that the arts are a powerful vehicle through which their voices can be heard and valued.

## What was done

Starcatchers commissioned the Voice of the Baby research project to explore how arts settings can meaningfully listen to, respond to and uphold the rights of the youngest children. Starcatchers' aim was to demonstrate how babies' voices are recognised in arts environments. Through close observation of Starcatchers' artists and families in community settings the research team – Dr Rachel Drury (Royal Conservatoire of Scotland), Dr Caralyn Blaisdell (Queen Margaret University) and Claire Ruckert-Fagan (Royal Conservatoire of Scotland) – explored artistic provocation, slow and consistent relationship building and nurture of the family unit, to show how rights become lived experiences through creative engagement.

The research occurred in two phases: Mapping Existing Practice and Developing the Methodology. The findings from phase one – which included conversations with Early Years Artists, a literature review, and development of a shared understanding that babies' voices emerge through non-verbal cues – were presented at an event in September 2022 with high cross-sector engagement, signalling appetite for change.

The final methodology – a research report, observations from community sessions and [A Reflective Guide](#) – embeds:

- Holistic observation.
- Relational practice.
- Rights-informed decision-making.
- Practitioner reflection.
- Evidence of impact on children's experience and participation.

Starcatchers has conducted consultations in early years settings, delivered community sessions with families with babies from birth to 18 months old, produced theatre productions for babies under 12 months old and delivered Voice of the Baby training in nurseries aiming to embed a child-rights approach to practice.

Observations utilised [Starcatchers' Engagement Signals](#) and a [What they said, how we know, what we did Framework](#). The five areas of the Reflective Guide acted as a touchstone for planning and developing sessions with pre- and non-verbal children.



“[She] has thrived at Starcatchers' sessions as she has a choice – there is sensory play available, an opportunity for drawing and also getting messy. She loved the session with the paints!”

**Parent**



“She immediately ran to the boxes with a pen and was giggling with delight as she coloured in. She spent ages independently drawing and showing people what she'd created. Needs a 'yes' space.”

**Parent**

The methodology validates babies' non-verbal communication as intentional, expressive and rights-holding. For babies from birth to three years old, the methodology supports:

- Enhanced agency – influencing artistic decisions, shaping the experience.
- Emotional wellbeing – observed increases in calmness, engagement and secure exploration.
- Access to rights – babies exercised their rights through lived, embodied creative expression.

### **Impact and outcomes**

Outcomes for practitioners:

- Increased confidence in interpreting infant cues as legitimate forms of communication.
- Deeper understanding of how to create inclusive, responsive creative spaces.
- Recognition that arts settings can act as early platforms for rights-realisation.



“The learning from the sessions has impacted the learning and planning in our setting in terms of the terminology used within professional dialogue with colleagues and parents. There is greater recognition of the non-verbal voice and as a result planning and reflections consider the engagement levels of the non-verbal children in greater depth than previously.”

**Jennifer Hall, Summerston Manager**

Outcomes for the sector:

- A replicable framework for children's rights participation with 0 to 3-year-olds.
- Richer cross-sector collaboration between arts, health and early years services.
- Broader awareness of babies as active cultural participants, not passive recipients.

### **Children's human rights approach principles in practice**

Starcatchers Voice of the Baby Guide highlights the participation rights of babies and supports the understanding of babies' methods of communicating and how best to engage with them to understand their views. By focusing on the very distinct needs of babies, Starcatchers have ensured the equality and non-discrimination principle informs their work and that of others.

## **Forces Children Scotland: “It felt like our space” – children's right to participate in the creation and launch of the Forces Children's Rights Charter**

### **The issue or opportunity**

Children and young people have the right to be heard, taken seriously, and involved in decisions that shape their lives. For those from Armed Forces and veteran families, these rights are often disrupted by frequent moves, separation, and environments where adults routinely make decisions on their behalf.

## What was done

The development of the Forces Children's Rights Charter, and the national Roundtable event that launched it, aimed to reverse this by placing young people's leadership and lived experiences at the heart of the process.

This case study brings together reflections from several young people involved in co-producing the Charter and taking part in the launch. Their insights show what meaningful participation looks and feels like when done well – and why it matters.

Participation begins with creating a space where young people feel they belong. A few intentional choices helped them feel confident, valued and part of something important.

 "We all had lanyards and that made us feel special and professional."

**Young person**

 "We designed our own hoodies and that connected us as a group."

**Young person**

These small but meaningful elements created unity and pride, particularly important for forces children who often have to rebuild their sense of belonging in new environments. Before any discussions began, the message was clear: your identity, presence and voice matter here.

Young people were invited to take leadership roles in the Roundtable launch, informed by earlier co-design activities such as an 'event jigsaw' and 'hot air balloon' exercise that helped them identify who needed to be in the room. But participation went further than assigned tasks.

 "Some of us started welcoming guests as they arrived. It made the event feel like ours from the start – we ticked people off the register and showed them to their tables."

**Young person**

 "It was so welcoming, friendly and child led. That set the tone for the table conversations."

**Roundtable attendee**

By choosing to take on these additional responsibilities themselves, the young people set the tone for the entire event. They were not participants in an adult-designed space; they were co-hosts shaping the atmosphere. This is the core of meaningful participation: young people exercising agency, supported rather than directed by adults.

The format of the Roundtable was intentionally designed to support young people to contribute confidently.

 "There were just a few young people at each table. It meant we could get our point across and felt the adults were really listening."

**Young person**

This balance ensured that young people were partners in discussion, not overshadowed or placed apart. Adults heard directly about the realities of forces life – frequent moves, deployment, the challenges of rebuilding identity – and how these experiences shaped the Charter’s priorities.

The project team knew that young people participate best when they feel physically and emotionally safe. To support this, the event included sensory tools, fidgets and child-friendly activities.



**“The fidgets were so helpful. Some of us used them to stay focused in discussions, and others used them when doing their speeches.”**

**Young person**



**“The same thing happened when we were playing rights snakes and ladders which was also on the tables. We were all playing along, but the adults were really involved and asking loads of questions, writing things down, and genuinely listening to what we were saying and taking us seriously. It made it almost seem like we were at home playing a game and asking ‘how was your day?’”**

**Roundtable attendee**

These supports normalised diverse needs and ensured no young person felt disadvantaged or overwhelmed. This reflects a children’s rights approach: participation must be accessible, inclusive and adaptable.

The set up of the room co-created with the young people resulted in a calmer, more regulated space where young people felt able to contribute confidently, particularly during high-pressure moments like speeches.

The Charter itself was co-produced with young people, who shaped the issues, language, design and key messages. It reflects their lived experiences and their hopes for change.



**“This is more than a document. It represents our ideas, our stories and our vision.”**

**Young person**

The Roundtable launch was therefore not just a presentation of a finished product; it was a celebration of young people’s leadership and ownership of a solution that embedded children’s rights.

### **Impact and outcomes**

Across all reflections, one theme appeared consistently: young people felt genuinely listened to.

The environment, roles, format and supports all contributed to that feeling. But equally important was the response of the adults in the room. They listened with intention. They asked questions that showed respect for lived experience. They treated young people as experts in their own lives.



**“Listen to what young people say – not just what we want to hear.”**

**Adult attendee**

The results speak for themselves:

- 100% of young people reported increased confidence and feeling valued and respected.
- 95.5% of attendees said the event improved their understanding of forces children's rights.

### **Children's human rights approach principles in practice**

The creation and launch of the Forces Children's Rights Charter shows what is possible when young people are empowered, supported and respected. They were not symbolic representatives or token voices. They were co-creators, facilitators, ambassadors for their community and leaders of change.

The Roundtable enabled decision-makers to hear forces children's lived realities: identity shifts, separation, rebuilding connections, resilience and hope. Their voices shaped the conversation and will continue to shape future action.

The reflections from young people make one thing clear: when participation is done well, it is empowering, transformative and deeply meaningful.



**"It made the event feel like our space."**

**Young person**

And that is what children's rights in practice should always strive for.

## **Children and Young People's Centre for Justice: Restorative Justice**

The Children and Young People's Centre for Justice (CYCJ) works towards ensuring that Scotland's approach to children and young people in conflict with the law is rights-respecting, contributing to better outcomes for our children, young people and communities. We produce robust, internationally ground-breaking work, bringing together children and young people's contributions, research evidence, practice wisdom and system know-how to operate as a leader for child and youth justice thinking in Scotland and beyond.

### **The issue or opportunity**

Part of our work strives to support the Scottish Government's delivery of their 'Restorative Justice Action Plan' (2019), ensuring that children's needs and rights are considered and promoted throughout this work. The plan's vision is of restorative justice being available across Scotland to all those who wish to access it, and at a time that is appropriate to the people and case involved. The vision also calls for high quality restorative justice services to be delivered by trained facilitators, and that there is a strong public awareness and understanding of restorative justice in Scotland.

Restorative justice offers an important tool in healing and developing transformative insight in the wake of harm. Whilst formal care and justice systems will offer some access to support, and retribution in the case of the latter, restorative justice focuses on the unique and subjective impact of what has happened to each party involved, and offers a voluntary and supported means of bringing people together to communicate their feelings, needs or wishes and to find a means to

move forward beyond the harm. At its core lies a means to redressing power imbalances and the traumatic loss of power that is often expressed by those who have experienced harm.

Whilst restorative justice does not form the basis of a specified UNCRC article, it continues to feature in UN Committee on the Rights of the Child General Comments. In 2024's draft [General Comment 27](#) on Children's Rights to Access to Justice and Effective Remedies, the need for access to effective remedies was highlighted as an essential means of the protection, promotion and fulfilment of all human rights.

At CYCJ we support Scotland's vision for restorative justice being available to all and believe the best way to ensure that children's needs and rights are embedded in delivering this, is to ensure that the voices and views of children and young people are heard and incorporated throughout.

### **What was done**

We have supported the participation of children and young people to share their views on issues relating to harm, justice and access to restorative justice over the past few years. Multiple events and approaches have been trialled to explore and gather the views of children under the age of twelve (the current age of criminal responsibility in Scotland), secondary school children aged 13 to 18 years old, and young people within His Majesty's Prisons and Young Offender's Institution Polmont. Some of the work has been direct with children and some work, particularly during COVID restrictions, was supported by class teachers. Children and young people have been encouraged to engage with ideas of justice and to explore concepts relating to restoration of relationships and addressing the subjective impact of harm.

In addition to children attending mainstream education, groups of children whose needs and rights may be vulnerable to marginalisation were sought out and creative means of working were deployed to support their engagement. For example, we engaged with children who are part of an alternative curriculum, designed to offer learning opportunities beyond the traditional classroom setting. Sessions were also planned with children with a range of Additional Support Needs who attend a specialist learning unit.

Practice wisdom was applied in designing bespoke content with carefully selected language, and a flexible approach allowed for the team to be responsive to individual needs. Some sessions demanded a fast pace and high energy, incorporating practical application of concepts, whereas others required a quieter, gentler approach, that allowed for periods of silence and accounted for individual processing needs. Being flexible in how messages and concepts were articulated was critical and required adaptability to developmental needs. For example, the fair dissemination of chicken nuggets worked well for eight-year-olds but perhaps would not have had the same effect with 18-year-olds. To support opportunities to exercise their rights to voice and participation, a community-based group for children aged 15 to 18 years old who no longer attend school were also included in the work.

For each group, creative approaches, like making emotion masks, were utilised to build rapport and allow for mapping out children's views and perceptions of crime and harm. Exercises were designed to reduce risk of making assumptions about the children's knowledge and perceptions of their own communities. Sessions invited children and young people to share thoughts on concepts of justice, healing and fairness associated with restorative justice.

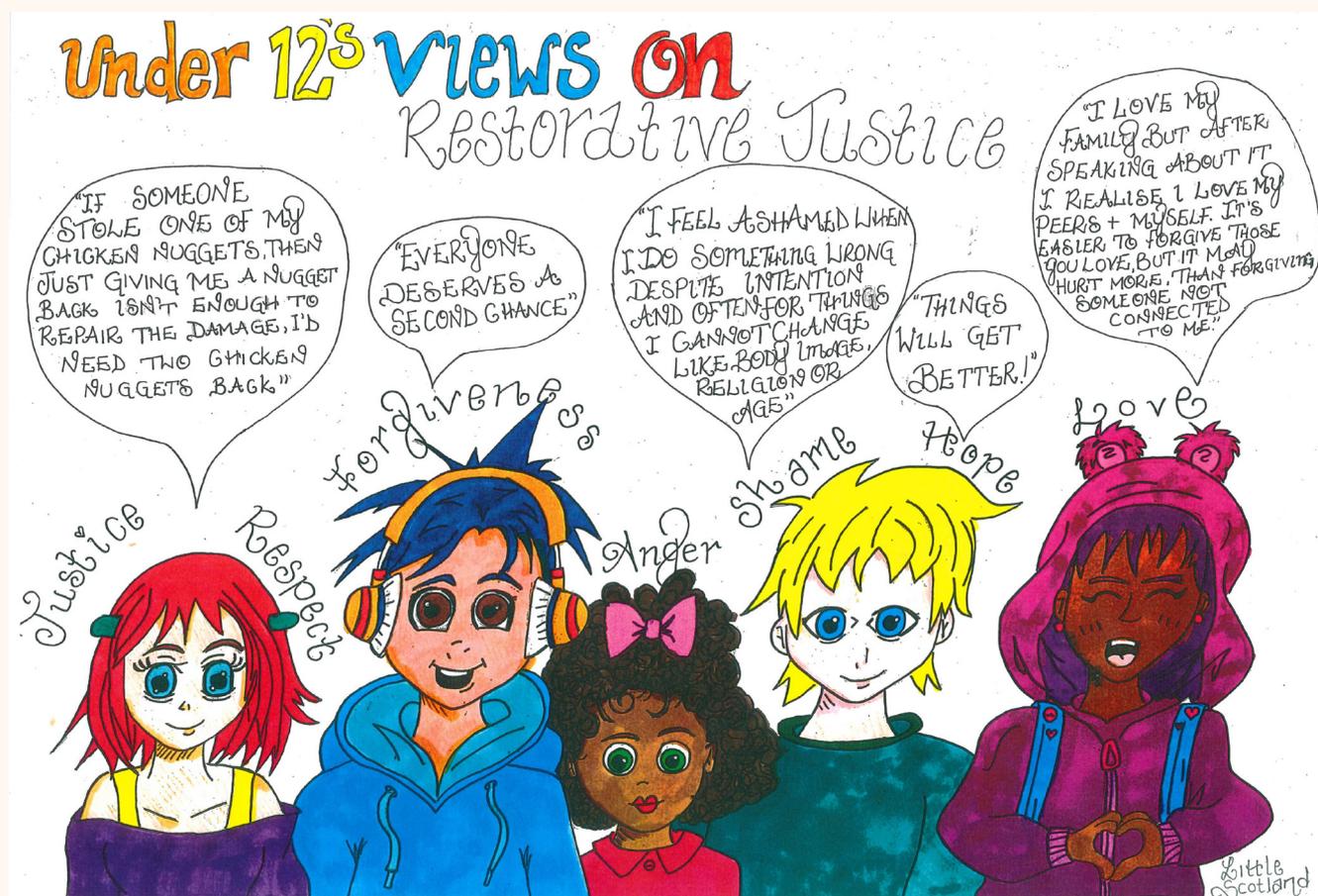
### **Impact and outcomes**

The main aim was to gather data from children and young people to support development of policy, whilst also forming the basis for information sheets and resources for practitioners working

to support children who have caused harm and those who have experienced harm. Furthermore, the work was designed to raise awareness and support reflective thinking with children about restorative justice and children’s rights, whilst highlighting the importance of redress in the face of harm outwith formal systems. A good example of how this work has shaped policy and practice is the inclusion of key messages in Scottish Government’s forthcoming Restorative Justice Policy and Practice Framework.

### Children’s human rights approach principles in practice

The core set of five principles for restorative justice in Scotland are choice, safe, individual, participation, and together. This provides a framework that supports the consideration of children’s rights and meaningful participation, as well as the need to balance the rights of both those who cause harm and those who have experienced harm. Ongoing practice of participation with children and young people informs policy and practice development, upholds children’s rights and supports wider opportunities to embed children’s rights in meeting the aims of the Restorative Justice Action Plan.



Artwork depicting views from young people’s participation. Artwork credit: Little Scotland

### 4.3 Reflections on the participation principle:

- All babies, children and young people should have the opportunity to be involved in participation to ensure their views and lived experiences are being considered in matters affecting them. The Children and Young People’s Centre for Justice and Starcatchers demonstrate how a focus on those whose rights are at risk can improve processes and support learning by ensuring the voices of those who are often overlooked are taken into account. This highlights the link to the equality and non-discrimination principle.

Creating safe and welcoming environments ensures that children and young people feel comfortable sharing their views and concerns. Forces Children Scotland, Our Hearings Our Voice, Aberdeen Council, Children and Young People's Centre for Justice and Children First demonstrate what this can look like in practice. For example, this can look like undergoing safeguarding training, recognising various communication needs and preferences and being flexible to suit the needs of the children and young people involved.

Ensuring children and young people have access to age-appropriate and accessible resources is essential for informing them about their right to express their views and about how their views will be considered. Children First illustrates how providing accessible information to children and young people can ensure that all participation is voluntary as they can make well-informed decisions about the extent of their participation. It should also be made clear that consent can be withdrawn at any stage of the process.

The link between the participation and accountability principles is strong as accountability mechanisms should be integrated into all participation with babies, children and young people. The featured case studies by PLUS (Forth Valley) Limited, Forces Children Scotland, A Place in Childhood and Shetland Council illustrate how feedback loops can be built into participation processes to ensure children and young people are informed of the outcome of their participation. Participation should always be built on honesty, by being open with those involved about why decisions were or were not made.

#### 4.4 Top tips for implementing the participation principle:



The following top tips are drawn from the [UNCRC Skills and Knowledge Framework](#) outcomes. By using these top tips, alongside real-world learning from featured case studies, individuals and organisations can be supported to effectively implement the participation principle in practice.

- When facilitating or supporting participation opportunities, considering all other principles will help ensure children's rights are at the centre. Likewise, even if the project, service or work you lead on is not initially participatory in nature, considering how you include the views of children in it will help to embed a children's human rights approach.
- Ensure that children and young people are protected from harm and that they are not put at risk during their participation. Child protection and safeguarding training will help ensure that staff are well informed about child protection issues, including the risks faced by different groups and what to do if an issue arises.
- Children and young people should be provided with accessible and age-appropriate information about their right to be listened to, the participatory process and how their views will be taken into account. Information and discussions should be clear and built on honesty. Be sure to also follow up participatory work to outline what decisions were made as a result of the work and explain why a decision was or was not made.
- Ensure all participation is voluntary. Children and young people should be well informed that they can withdraw consent to participate at any time, and it should be clear how they can do this.

- Babies, children and young people can express their views in different ways. Ensure participatory work recognises and respects different methods of communication and allows for various methods to express their views, such as non-verbal methods. This could include grounding any work on existing methods, theories, or models of what works in children and young people's participation.
- Ensure participation is child-friendly and provides enough time, space and resources for all children and young people to take part. This could involve working with children and young people in the planning process to ensure their needs are met and to create a safe and encouraging environment. By holding regular reviews of the outcomes of participation and receiving feedback, future work can be enhanced.
- Work collaboratively with colleagues and other organisations. This can support workers to develop their skills and become more knowledgeable about how to apply a children's human rights approach to participation.
- Promote inclusive participation by ensuring that children and young people whose rights are at risk can play a meaningful role in decisions that affect them. Be aware of different cultural, social and economic barriers and take a flexible approach to participation that allows all children and young people to fully participate. For example, consider using translators, communication aids and different communication methods to support the needs of participants.
- Participation is a process and as such feedback loops should be built into the process. Ensure children and young people are given feedback on the outcomes of their participation as well as during the process. This includes ensuring that they agree with the interpretation of their views. If the work has informed decisions, provide an update to those involved. Alternatively, if no action has been taken, explain why and what the next steps are.



Chapter 5:  
**Accountability**

## 5.1 Introduction to the accountability principle

The accountability principle is about creating a culture of responsibility for children's rights across all services and decision-making processes. This principle centres around transparency and providing children and young people with the opportunity to influence, challenge and scrutinise decisions that can affect them.

When applied in practice, the accountability principle can relate to the other principles of a children's human rights approach in various ways. It is important to keep this in mind when reading the examples within this chapter.

- **Embedding:** how are you ensuring accountability to babies, children, young people and their families when using embedding processes like budgeting, data collection, and Child Rights Impact Assessments?
- **Equality and non-discrimination:** are accountability measures available for all babies, children and young people? This includes everyday accountability as well as methods they can use when things go wrong.
- **Empowerment:** how will creating accountability mechanisms help children and young people to engage with institutions and services that affect their lives?
- **Participation:** how will accountability practices consider and act upon the views of children and young people, and were they shaped by participation?

The following case studies provide examples of how the accountability principle can be applied in practice. This includes examples of:

- Reflecting and acting upon feedback from children and young people.
- Increasing access to feedback mechanisms and independent complaints procedures for children and young people.
- Ensuring children and young people have access to advocacy and advice, including legal advice and representation.

## 5.2 Case studies



### Children's Hearings Scotland: Supporting child friendly feedback mechanisms and access to independent complaints procedures

#### The issue or opportunity

We know that children and young people can often be reluctant to say what they think when making a complaint or providing feedback as they can be concerned there could be adverse consequences for them if they are critical about their experience. We also know that when a young person wants to provide their views, they often prefer to do that by speaking with someone, or via a trusted adult rather than to have to fill out a form or write something down.

The Children's Hearings Scotland (CHS) Children's Participation and Rights Strategy brings together two key UNCRC articles; Article 12, the right to be listened to and taken seriously and Article 13, children should be able to say what they think. The strategy clearly outlines the need for connections between the CHS Participation Team and Feedback and Complaints team.

## **What was done**

We have employed an additional member of staff to the Feedback and Complaints Team with a dedicated focus on creating child friendly mechanisms to gather feedback from children and young people. Alongside this has been the establishment of a CHS Participation and Feedback Delivery Group. This group will be accountable for the upscaling of existing national and regional participation workstreams to develop a framework that works for children and young people to tell us what they think about hearings. The Delivery Group will work closely with the CHS national Experts by Experience Group to codesign ways for us to receive feedback from young people, including a redesign of our current engagement methods.

## **Next steps**

This work is in early development and will take place in three phases, working with older children in year one, younger children in year two and adult advocacy workers in year three. Each phase has four distinct stages: research and consultation, collaborative design, implementation and review. The golden thread through each phase will be consideration of inclusion, transparency, accessibility, and trauma-informed principles.

Starting with older children, which aligns with work already underway with our Experts by Experience Group, regional participation outreach workstream and the implementation of the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act 2024, a key strategy will be the development of an intentional approach to feedback and the creation of a Voicebank to capture the views of children and young people in a planned and focused way. Building on this, the creation of new regional participation forums will support the collaborative practice needed to make this change.

Phase two will focus on the development of accessible and inclusive feedback channels for younger children. Whilst the principles will be the same there may need to be a greater focus on face-to-face feedback and the creation or adoption of tools for use by known and trusted adults. However, this will only be determined after local consultation in the regions. Collaborative working with CHS Partnership Coordinators to develop appropriate connections will facilitate the research and co-design stages of this phase.

Phase three is about aligning any changes made during phase one and two to the channels used by adults when making a complaint or providing feedback on behalf of a child. Some of this will be about the review of the complaints handling procedure and associated processes, which is already underway by the Feedback and Complaints Team, but also about reviewing existing mechanisms used by adults through the lens of inclusion and accessibility.

## **Children's human rights approach principles in practice**

It is important to us that the feedback we receive is used by those with the influence to change practice. An active feedback tracker will be used to monitor how we are using feedback. We are committed to improving internal communication between teams as part of this project. We will redirect feedback to relevant teams so that appropriate learning and development can be prepared or practice guidance updated. Close monitoring of the tracker will increase internal accountability and enable us to better tell children and young people what impact their feedback has had on practice in the community through our website, annual reporting and social media.



## Highland Community Planning Partnership: Participation ROCCS!

Highland Community Planning Partnership includes organisations working in Highland across every sector. Strategic governance of services for children is provided by an Integrated Children's Service Board, which commissioned a Children's Rights and Participation Improvement Group to create and oversee the implementation of a shared Participation Strategy. Over 800 children and young people of all ages and from each of the nine Community Partnership areas were involved in co-producing the strategy, including the choice of its guiding model.

### The issue or opportunity

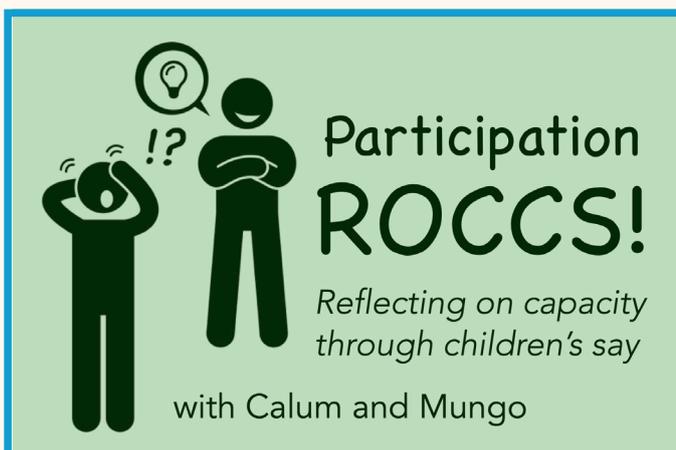
Two years on, we find ourselves reflecting that we are doing well with the easy bits. There is a lot of 'voice' but less 'influence', and still a relatively narrow 'audience' confined to those who were already interested. The voices gathered are also often limited to particular groups, whether this be 'youth', or over-consulted existing panels or quasi-panels. Further, methods remain adult-focussed, often in the form of surveys where the adults set the terms of the problem and the questions being asked.

What we want is to implement the transformative potential of the UNCRC. We want to create a system and services that do not just listen to children but are responsive to them, and that go beyond this to become accountable. Why doesn't this happen? And why are we stuck in the easy first steps?

There are lots of reasons, but we realised that we keep coming up against explicit or implicit attitudes about children and their capacity to meaningfully participate, such as the myths about the age of 12. Others are more subtle, such as that children do not really have ideas to contribute better than what the adults already know, that they are too young or inexperienced, that parents or others can speak better for them, or that children are too vulnerable or innocent to take part in discussions of difficult issues that affect them. Even more implicit are the underlying assumptions about which issues do or do not affect children – assumptions that the initial stage of the Children's Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment is especially vulnerable to.

### What was done

We wanted to start to address, and change, these attitudes. We wanted to find a way to challenge without creating controversy, to prompt reflection without triggering shame, and to bring a little of the joy and laughter of childhood into adult ways of thinking. After some false starts, we realised the way to do this was to co-produce with children, resulting in the Participation ROCCS!



**The introduction of Callum and Mungo helps adults to reflect on their attitudes towards children's capacity.**

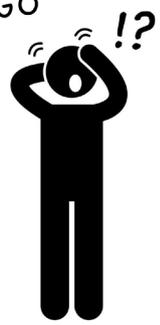
We first worked with a wide range of professionals involved in promoting children’s rights to create a list of common blocking attitudes and assumptions that they encounter. Next, we worked with focus groups of children and young people to explore what they made of these attitudes, whether they agreed with them, and how it affected their lives if adults believed these things. The data was rich, with themes including a need to take children and their ways of thinking seriously, a nuanced understanding of the balances and trade-offs between protection and participation, and the positive impact of children’s participation in decision making on any topic that affects them.

Data analysis was done in partnership with the children and young people, including creating recommendations. They were particularly keen that all adults understand the limiting impact of the attitudes and assumptions and for us to create tools that could challenge this.

That is harder than it sounds. We could have created a myth buster or shown PowerPoint slides for people to nod in agreement to. But we wanted to change attitudes and practice, which involves meeting people where they are, and enabling positive and blame free reflection.

So, we created two ridiculous characters. Mythical Mungo is utterly hopeless. If you can think of a way of implementing the UNCRC, he does the opposite. His colleague, Capacity Callum, makes us sick. He is just so completely perfect in his participatory practice. The point, playful but serious, is that none of us are totally Callum, nor are we as bad as Mungo. We are all a bit in-between, and this makes it safer to reflect on where in that range we really want to be.

In the Participation ROCCS, Callum and Mungo take us through a dismayingly large list of blocking attitudes. Individuals and groups can pick the ones that they find most useful to reflect on. For each, they find the children’s thoughts about the ‘myths’ and what is good or less good practice. Which leaves the open question: Are you more Mungo or Callum, and what do you want to be?

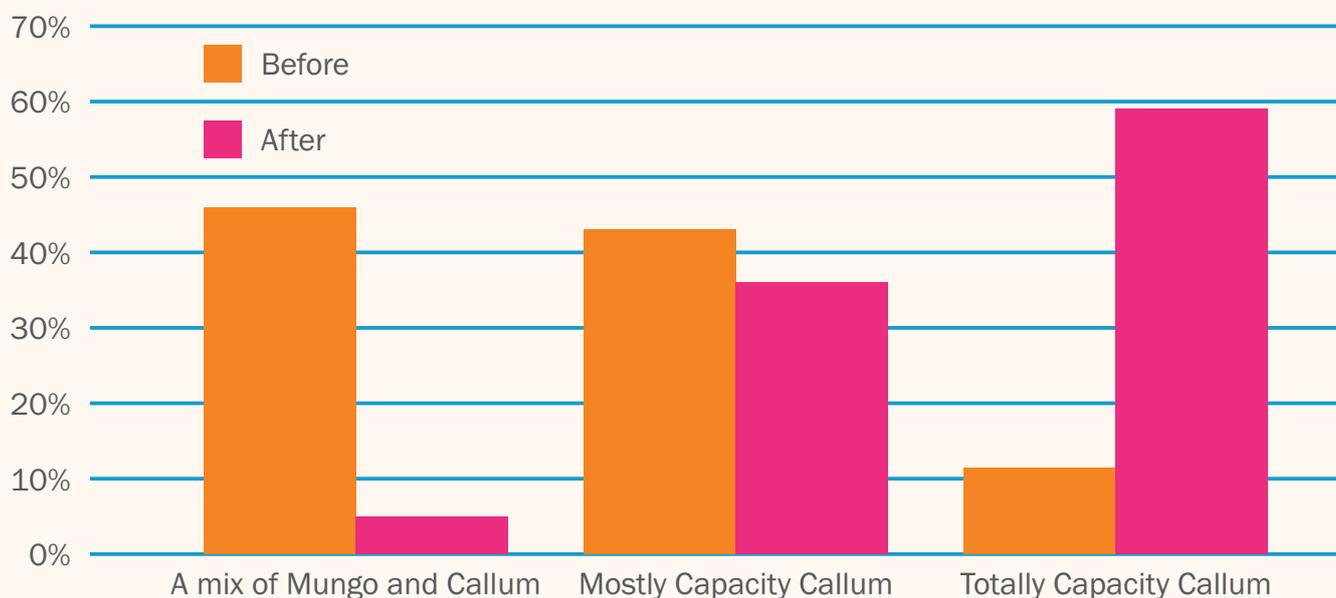
<p><b>MYTH!</b> Adults know better than children what is best for them</p>	<p><b>NOPE</b> Sometimes true, but in any decision or situation there are elements that affect the child that they will have views about. Taking account of these leads to better outcomes.</p>
<p><b>MYTHICAL MUNGO</b></p>  <p>Mungo thought it was obvious what to do so just went ahead; when it all went wrong, he realised the child had important information that would have made a difference</p>	<p><b>CAPACITY CALLUM</b></p>  <p>Callum checked his plan with the child, and learned important information that led to new ideas. These helped change things for the better</p>

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**An example of Mythical Mungo and Capacity Callum in action.**

## Impact and outcomes

Participation ROCCS is now incorporated in a range of multi-agency trainings, such as the refreshed Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC) training and is used by different professional groups for in-house development activities. We have been gathering data on impact which shows that nearly everyone using the resource finds it a comfortable experience that brings reflection and insight. Most participants show a change in attitude and intentions for practice after using the Participation ROCCS, and evaluation is on-going.



**Difference in attitudes before and after using Participation ROCCS**

## Children's human rights approach principles in practice

Qualitative feedback shows impacts relating to the children's human rights approach principles:

- "It helped me to reflect on how the systems around us are very 'mungo-fied' and how we can become more Callum as practitioners in a Mungo system." (Embedding)
- "The children I work with are very learning disabled but there are many ways to capture views and it doesn't have to be something you do as a 'one off'." (Equalities)
- "Provided a lot of insight about how to interact with children and to prioritise their agency." (Empowerment)
- "Challenge myself to keep coming up with ways to provide children with capacity to share views." (Participation)
- "Consider whose interests I'm serving when thinking about whether to share information." (Accountability)

Our hope is that these reflections and changes in thinking infuse through all our organisations and begin to remove some of the barriers to the realisation of children's rights and the creation of services and systems that are truly accountable to them.

## Care Opinion: Care Opinion Bear supporting children's feedback

### What was done

Care Opinion is a non-profit organisation that has been sharing people's experiences of health and care services online since 2005. The Care Opinion Bear is a calm, compassionate, gentle bear who is prepared to help children share their experiences to make them feel supported and empowered. For children, this is how Bear introduces themselves and encourages them to share their experience – 'Hi there, I'm the Care Opinion Bear with a heart as big as the mountains. I love listening to stories, because it brings us closer together. I am here to listen to what you have to say and lend you a helping paw!'

The Care Opinion Bear is available to support children to tell their stories. Children under 12 need parental consent to share feedback. The child's story is read by Care Opinion staff who follow safeguarding procedures to decide if it can be shared on the website. Care Opinion asks for contact details to inform children when their story is published, but don't share that information with anyone else. It also highlights support services that might be available to children in immediate need. Care Opinion then email health or care staff who need to see the feedback and encourage them to leave a reply on the website, which the child is alerted to.

The website form asks:

- What is your story about?
- What happened? How did you feel?
- When did your story happen?

A selection of images is available to help children tell their story. Children can select aspects of their experiences and rate them to say if they were happy or not happy about them.

What happened? How did you feel? ?

Happy ← ————— → Not happy

|  
x

Waiting time

Appointments

**Help:** Pictures  
You can tell your story with words, pictures, or a mix of both. You can add words between the pictures.  
[Learn more about picture stories](#) (this will open in a new tab)

**Help:** Add a picture  
You can add just one picture, or as many as you like. Add a picture by clicking or dragging it.

**Help:** How you felt  
After you add a picture, move it to show how you felt. Use the arrows to move the picture towards the happy end or the not happy end.

### The Care Opinion Bear feedback form

Subscribing organisations working with Care Opinion develop different resources like stickers, greeting cards, certificates and colouring in sheets for young children with a QR code that leads to the Care Opinion Bear story workflow. They are also working with older children to design Care Opinion Bear imagery that appeals to them and are piloting a Care Opinion Bear paper freepost feedback leaflet for children to draw and write in.

Care Opinion hosted an [online session](#) for staff and services who deliver health and care to children in Scotland. The session focussed on the passing of the UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024 in Scotland and how the Care Opinion Bear can support children to share their views.

The Royal Hospital for Children in Glasgow launched their Care Opinion Bear initiative with an eye-catching window display in the atrium, supported by colourful, child-friendly posters and postcards. On launch day they had an interactive stall in the atrium where patients and their families received postcards, stickers and Bear-themed colouring materials. Two Senior Charge Nurses were on hand to welcome families, answer questions and help distribute materials – creating a warm and inviting atmosphere. These resources are designed to make it easier for children and young people to share their feedback through Care Opinion – ensuring their voices are heard, valued, and acted upon, supporting their Article 12 rights to express their views, feelings and wishes in matters affecting them, and to have their views taken seriously.



“Patient feedback is at the heart of how we shape services in the Women and Children’s Directorate. Championing Care Opinion has given us a powerful strand of insight, and I am especially proud of the innovative use of Care Opinion Bear to ensure that even our youngest patients and their families have a voice. The early signs are encouraging, showing that age appropriate, patient centred approaches can truly make a difference. We are committed to building on this success and embedding feedback as a cornerstone of paediatric care in NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde.”

**Jamie Redfern, Director of Women and Children’s Directorate**

### **Impact and outcomes**

Following the launch, they recorded the highest number of Care Opinion stories for the Royal Hospital for Children to date. This achievement demonstrates the positive impact of the Care Opinion Bear.

### **Children’s human rights approach principles in practice**

The Care Opinion Bear is an example of a child friendly feedback mechanism that supports NHS and care services to be accountable to babies, children, young people and their families.

## **JustRight Scotland: Support for Showpeople family facing eviction**

[JustRight Scotland](#) are lawyers, working with people and communities to change broken systems and improve lives.

### **The issue or opportunity**

When the UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024 came into force, we were representing a family in Govan who were facing eviction from their home. During the course of that work,

we became aware that a child was a member of the family. The UNCRC sets out the rights that all children are entitled to, including the right to have their best interests treated as a primary consideration in decisions that affect them, and the right to adequate housing. Following the commencement of the Act, we sought to rely on these newly incorporated children's rights on behalf of the child to defend against eviction. We understand this to be the first use of the UNCRC Act in a civil case.

The Stringfellow family are travelling Showpeople. Showpeople run travelling funfairs and other entertainments. Traditionally, Showpeople would travel in the summer and return to a base over winter, but increasingly have a permanent base, as do the Stringfellow family. They use 'yards' to site their chalets, caravans, rides, vehicles, equipment and an area for repairs. The Stringfellows have lived on a yard in Govan for approximately 40 years.

Glasgow City Council, the landlord, is developing the area where the yard sits and sought to evict the Stringfellow family using a clause in the Stringfellow's lease allowing eviction for no cause, on 28 days' notice. This would be severe even for commercial tenants, but the Stringfellows are not commercial tenants. They reside on their yard in accordance with their cultural heritage and Glasgow City Council is seeking to evict them from their home.

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 gives security of tenure protection against eviction to residential tenants of local authorities and social landlords. Similar protections apply to those who live in mobile homes, under the Mobile Homes Act (1983). However, Glasgow City Council argues neither Act applies to the Stringfellows, leaving them with no protections at all.

### **What was done**

Eviction had been defended prior to our involvement, but not on human rights grounds. We sought time from the court to add a human rights defence based on the right to respect for the home, private and family life under Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights. Glasgow City Council argued that human rights were not relevant and the case was only about property law. However, the court allowed us limited time to raise the Article 8 defence. When we learned the family included a child, we asked to be allowed to introduce a UNCRC Act defence, which was also opposed, but allowed.

In addition to the European Convention on Human Rights defence, the child benefits from rights contained in the UNCRC Act. This includes the right to:

- An adequate standard of living, including adequate housing (Article 27)
- Preserve their identity (Article 8)
- Enjoy their own culture in community with other members of an ethnic minority (Article 30)
- Have their best interests be a primary consideration in all actions concerning them (Article 3)
- Be heard in relation to all matters affecting them (Article 12)
- Non-discrimination in the fulfilment of these rights (Article 2)

When asked to apply these rights, courts can consider international sources, including General Comments, Concluding Observations, and other international law sources (UNCRC Act, Section 4).

For the UNCRC Act to have a meaningful impact for children, it is essential that our courts draw on these sources and apply these rights within the Scottish context. For example, following these international sources, the right to adequate housing is interpreted as including the right to security of tenure and cultural adequacy. The yard provides cultural adequacy and a space in which the

child can enjoy the Showpeople culture, which will be lost if the family are evicted. If the housing legislation protections do not apply, the child is denied security of tenure, severely undermining their standard of living.

We argue that eviction would breach the child's rights and that, if the housing legislation protections do not apply, this is incompatible with the UNCRC Act and therefore not law in the case of Scottish legislation. These arguments run in parallel with the arguments based on Article 8.

Glasgow City Council asked the court to find that the UNCRC Act does not apply, contending that the functions being challenged fall under UK legislation rather than Scottish Parliament legislation and therefore are out of scope.

We argue that it is Glasgow City Council's decision to evict the family and its failure to treat the lease as including the tenure protections provided to all its other residential tenants that is at issue. If the housing legislation does not apply, Glasgow City Council served a notice to quit as landlord under the Scots common law of property, which is covered by the UNCRC Act.

The UNCRC Act is also relied upon in relation to the court itself, as any order for removal would breach Section 6, being incompatible with the Act.

Glasgow City Council argues that in seeking to evict and by raising the court action for removal, it was acting under powers created by UK Local Government legislation, and therefore UNCRC does not apply. It also argues that Scottish Courts' powers derive from the UK Parliament's College of Justice Act 1532, and therefore our courts are not covered by the UNCRC Act. If these arguments are to succeed, it would have serious implications for the applicability of the UNCRC Act. A decision in the Stringfellow case is expected early in 2026.

### **Children's human rights approach principles in practice**

The UNCRC Act incorporates several economic, social and cultural rights into Scots law for the first time. There is a need for case law applying children's rights in the Scottish context, with reference to the international sources listed in the interpretive clause. Many countries have successfully incorporated and applied these rights in their courts, and Scotland can too. However, application of the UNCRC Act by our courts continues to be stymied by public authorities using technical arguments to deny that it is relevant at all. We will continue to work to support children's rights through legal means.<sup>8</sup>



### **Highland Children's Rights and Participation Group: Library of Voices**

Highland Community Planning Partnership includes organisations working in Highland across every sector. Strategic governance of services for children is provided by an Integrated Children's Service Board (ICSB). One of the delivery groups that sits under the ICSB is the Children's Rights and Participation Group, chaired by Highland Council's Principal Educational Psychologist.

#### **The issue or opportunity**

Our Children and Young People's Participation Strategy was launched in August 2024 and is based on thematic analysis of consultation with over 800 children and young people aged three to 26 from across Highland. This yielded six key themes:



**Themes produced following consultation with over 800 children and young people**

One of the main asks of the children and young people was that adults stop asking the same questions over and over and start doing something about the answers they already have. The [Library of Voices](#) is one element of Highland’s plan to address this.

Across Highland, there are numerous organisations, teams and individuals who place participation at the heart of what they do. Children and young people regularly take part in surveys about matters that affect them, in consultations, in research, and in day-to-day participatory activity. What was missing, was a central place to share, celebrate, learn from and act upon these pieces of work.

Our implementation plan identified the need for a ‘repository’ that could be used to collate children’s voices. Just as important as collecting it, though, is sharing it more widely so that all organisations across the partnership could become part of their audience, and so that their voice could be utilised to influence decision making.

**What was done**

The Library of Voices was established to address children’s concerns that they are asked the same questions, but they do not see any change. Given our commitment within the Strategy to use the [Lundy Model of Participation](#), it is our duty to ensure that Space, Voice, Audience and Influence are evident if we are to embed meaningful participation across our services.

In the consultation for the strategy, children were asked ‘how adults can make sure everyone’s voice is heard’. Children talked in depth about the role of adults to let them know they are listening.



“Adults who really listen and who are listened to by the people who make the decisions.”

“It can cost millions for an organisation to change a system, but it costs them nothing to change a culture and actively listen.”

**Child participants**

We developed a [Microsoft Form](#) that requests that practitioners reflect on how each of Lundy’s four concepts have been fully addressed. The form provides branching scenarios, based on the type of participatory work the practitioner is reporting.

Practitioners are asked to share how many children were involved in the work, their age bracket, which area of Highland the participation took place in and what change has occurred as a result,

amongst other questions. The form seeks to coach practitioners through the expectations set out in the strategy, in line with the Lundy Model as well as to capture detail about the good practice happening across Highland.

The form is accessed via our [Children's Rights and Participation website](#). On the same page, summaries of the entries to the Library of Voices are shared back out, with contact details for the practitioners who have shared their work. This supports collaboration across Highland, as practitioners reach out to hear more about one another's work.

The Library of Voices is embedded in our [Voice Process](#), and our [Involving Children and Young People in Decisions that Affect Them](#) resource. Within these resources it is cited as a place to review whether children and young people have already answered questions, and as a place to ensure Audience and Influence, particularly when paired with the Integrated Children's Services Board Voice Process.

### **Next steps**

Work continues to encourage people to see the Library as 'just part of the day job' and not an added extra in already stretched workloads. The introduction of the comprehensive suite of resources provides the wider context and has already been successful in demonstrating to practitioners across Highland how the library fits into the bigger picture. We will continue working to embed it, alongside other implementation work. The investment will have proved worthwhile when children tell us that they feel that they have been listened to and that their voices have influenced decisions that they can see and feel the impact of.

### **Children's human rights approach principles in practice**

The Library of Voices is part of a wider suite of resources that support accountability to children. Children can access the Library and see that their work has been shared, and how it has been taken forward to influence the decisions that affect them. Gathering data in this way allows us to identify gaps in coverage by age or locality and to consider next steps to address this. By analysing the topics covered over time, we have a way of monitoring across the community partnership where there are gaps in the implementation of children's rights and the remedies put in place.

The process deepens approaches to participation since, for example it supports practitioners to stop asking children the same questions in repeated consultations where the results of previous work have led to change. Further, work is only shared in the Library if it has demonstrated that it involved all aspects of the Lundy model, setting a standard for quality and reach of participation.



## **Public Health Scotland: Children's rights as part of a national approach to the prevention of substance use harm among children and young people**

Public Health Scotland is Scotland's lead national body for improving and protecting the health and wellbeing of Scotland's population and is committed to improving outcomes for all children and young people.

### **The issue or opportunity**

In 2025 Public Health Scotland published its consensus statement – 'prevention of substance use harm among children and young people'. The statement describes the process undertaken

and findings as part of work to develop an agreed whole-systems approach to substance use harm prevention among children and young people in Scotland.

Scotland has existing public health commitments to reduce substance use harms from alcohol, drugs, tobacco, nicotine products, e-cigarettes and vapes. However, currently there is no overarching national approach to address the complex area of substance use harm prevention for children and young people. Public Health Scotland were consequently commissioned to deliver this development work on behalf of the Scottish Government.

### **What was done**

To establish consensus, Public Health Scotland used the Delphi method. This is a multi-stage stakeholder-led process that supports the development of consensus on a particular topic. It does this by bringing together and engaging with a panel of people with relevant experience and expertise. The approach involves multiple rounds of engagement; the first is an open discussion on a range of key questions, from which main themes or statements are extracted. The second, and subsequent rounds, consists of presenting outputs from findings of the previous round to the expert panel and asking them to consider areas of agreement.

Children and young people's participation was key in the development of the consensus, and they were included as panel members with equal weight to professional stakeholders. Specialist youth partners including Young Scot, Fast Forward and YouthLink Scotland facilitated work with young people to identify how they would like to be engaged with in the consensus approach. Children and young people's participation in the development of the consensus allows their voices to shape national policy and direction at the earliest stage in contrast to at a consultation stage.

Through the Delphi process it was unanimously agreed that Scotland should have a national substance use harm prevention strategy for children and young people and that the strategy should align to Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC), UNCRC and the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014. It also recognised the need to involve children and young people in the development and implementation of prevention strategies and approaches from the outset. This ensures that Children's Rights are at the forefront of a national prevention strategy and provides a foundation for children and young people to be involved in the planning and delivery of national and local prevention strategies.

### **Next steps**

Public Health Scotland is continuing to build on work started by development of the consensus statement. Public Health Scotland are linking with colleagues in health and local authorities to include prevention of substance use harm for children and young people within service and commissioning plans. The aim is that the consensus statement can be used by children and young people as a lever for their inclusion in the development of local prevention activity. Furthermore, the consensus statement can also be used to reflect where prevention planning and activity does not use a children's human rights-based approach to the fullest.

### **Children's human rights approach principles in practice**

Public Health Scotland's work to develop consensus with children and young people supports accountability by being transparent about decision making and sharing information so children and young people can influence and challenge decisions.



## Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland: Using legal powers to advance children's rights

The Children and Young People Commissioner Scotland (CYPCS) has a unique role as the statutory guardian of children's rights in Scotland and has legal powers to enable it to fulfil that task. The office's work on restraint illustrates how the Commissioner can use the full range of their legal powers, as well as more traditional approaches to policy and influencing that complement the work of partners and human rights defenders.

### What was done

Restraint in education settings was the subject of the first formal investigation undertaken by the Commissioner's office in 2018. It was prompted by powerful work undertaken by parent advocates, who for years had been fighting for justice for children. Workshops were held with children and young people to gather their views and experiences. The investigation findings confirmed that restraint was happening inappropriately, it was happening too often and disproportionately to disabled children, and it was not properly governed by guidance or consistently recorded.

The human rights tests are clear. Restraint must only be used as a last resort to prevent harm. It must use the minimum force possible, and last for the minimum time necessary. Restraint must never be used for the purposes of discipline or punishment. The Concluding Observations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child make specific recommendations on restraint and the matter is also covered in several General Comments.<sup>9</sup>

Human rights abuses around restraint and seclusion represent a failure of government to do its job and make sure children's human rights are respected, protected and fulfilled. In particular, the office's investigation highlighted a failure by Scottish Government to put in place a robust legal and policy framework to govern the use and recording of restraint and seclusion. At the time, Scottish Government had produced just two pages of guidance on restraint and seclusion, inappropriately framed in terms of behaviour management and exclusions. Nobody knew how many children in Scotland were being injured as a result of restraint or seclusion.

The investigation report called on Scottish Government to put in place guidance based on human rights, and to ensure all incidents of restraint and seclusion were properly recorded. Initially they declined to do so. At that point, the office had no power to enforce the investigation recommendations by bringing a case itself, so the office worked with the Equality and Human Rights Commission, using their powers to bring judicial review proceedings against Scottish Ministers for breach of multiple obligations under the European Convention on Human Rights and various provisions of the Equality Act 2010.

This legal action prompted the Deputy First Minister to agree to produce national human rights-based guidance on reducing restraint and seclusion in education and to take steps to improve recording. Ultimately however, that non-statutory guidance took five years to produce and its effectiveness is only now being reviewed.

The Commissioner's office had long argued for statutory provision but had no other legal power we could invoke. Daniel Johnson MSP consulted in 2023 on the introduction of a member's Bill on restraint in education, citing the Commissioner's investigation and policy work alongside that of parent advocates. This offered a better solution to the issues around restraint in education and

the office's engagement shifted into a more traditional influencing space, seeking to support and shape the legislative provision. The Bill was introduced in March 2025.

The Commissioner along with the Equality and Human Rights Commission, Scottish Human Rights Commission, the Promise, and the Mental Welfare Commission had written twice to the Scottish Government calling for an end to the siloed approach to policy and law-making. They had called for the replacement of patchwork legislative provisions on restraint with a coherent and consistent legal framework across all settings including education, care and mental health. The matter was raised repeatedly in Scottish Parliament and in meetings with Ministers.

Incorporation of the UNCRC into Scots law in 2024 meant that the Commissioner's office acquired new powers to undertake strategic litigation on UNCRC issues. This created another avenue to progress human rights protections on restraint.

The Children (Care, Care Experience and Services Planning) (Scotland) Bill provided a potential vehicle for addressing restraint in care settings, but mental health remained the obvious gap, with no prospect of a legislative vehicle to achieve change. The urgency of the issue was highlighted in February 2025 when a BBC documentary exposed a "culture of cruelty" at a mental health unit, and revealed, among other issues, excessive use of restraint.

Over the next few months of 2025, the office liaised closely with the Mental Welfare Commission in relation to their visits to child and adolescent mental health units. The office also carried out a freedom of information request to health boards and found that there was inconsistency in the existence and content of policies governing restraint and seclusion of children in mental health units at health board level. Those policies that did exist did not mention the UNCRC, and the office found that there had been a concerning trend of increasing use of restraint over the last three to four years.

The office sent a 'letter before action' in October 2025 to the Scottish Government seeking specific commitments to strengthen the legal protections in this area and warned that the Commissioner would use her 2024 Act powers to raise legal proceedings should those commitments not be made. The office identified breaches of UNCRC Articles 3, 4, 16, 19 and 37. In response, the Scottish Government confirmed that it will revise the statutory code of practice issued under the Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003, to include human rights-based guidance and put in place mandatory recording and reporting of restraint and seclusion in mental health settings. The office was also given assurances that it will designate and resource the Mental Welfare Commission as the appropriate monitoring body.

### **Children's human rights approach principles in practice**

The promptness of the response to the letter before action, and the marked shift in both tone and content compared to previous correspondence, demonstrates the extent to which legal powers can assist in holding duty bearers accountable to their human rights obligations.



**Working with the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland – reflections from Beth Morrison, campaigner and founder/CEO of Positive and Active Behaviour (PABSS) and Kate Sanger, campaigner and co-creator of Mycompass**

As unpaid carers and campaigners against the misuse of restraint and seclusion in schools, we have seen first hand how systems meant to protect children's rights often fail. The one

consistent and vital exception has been the Children and Young People’s Commissioner for Scotland (CYPCS).

The professionalism, empathy, and steadfastness of the Commissioner’s office have made a profound difference. Without their support, many children would still be suffering harmful practices that damage both physical and mental health. Families who have faced intimidation from Local Authorities have found courage knowing the CYPCS stands with them, giving them the strength to fight for their children’s rights.

Since our parliamentary petition in 2015, the CYPCS has been an invaluable ally. Through the ‘No Safe Place’ investigation in 2018, the judicial review in 2019, the eventual publication of human rights based Physical Intervention Guidance in 2024 and now for their unwavering support for Calum’s Law aka Restraint and Seclusion in Schools (Scotland) Bill 2025, their long-term commitment across successive Commissioners demonstrates their ability to see change through.

The CYPCS has not only transformed practice in Scotland but has influenced other UK Commissioners, setting a leading example. Scotland should be proud of this office, and it is vital that its scope and powers are never diluted.



### Care Inspectorate: Improving access to feedback and advocacy

The Care Inspectorate is a scrutiny body which supports improvement. That means we look at the quality of care in Scotland to ensure it meets high standards. Where we find that improvement is needed, we support services to make positive changes.

#### The issue or opportunity

As a public body listed in the UNCRC Act, we have a responsibility to promote, uphold, and support children’s rights and wellbeing across policy and practice, particularly for those for whom we have corporate parenting duties.

Article 20 of the UNCRC highlights the importance of: “If a child cannot be looked after by their immediate family, the government must give them special protection and assistance. This includes making sure the child is provided with alternative care that is continuous and respects the child’s culture, language and religion.”

Our plan involves looking to improve the ways children and young people who are connected by our work, can offer and receive feedback and access independent advocacy.

#### What was done

We have enhanced the way children and young people receive feedback following inspections in their own homes, with key learnings now being shared and spread across the organisation. The project has engaged 26 services and 87 children and young people and is being tested in Early Learning Centre school-aged childcare settings.

Advocacy remains essential in ensuring that babies, infants, children and young people have a voice in decision making processes. Our revised inspection framework, Key Question 7, published in 2024, sets the expectation that services rated as 'very good' must demonstrate that 'children and young people have access to responsible adults outside the service who always act in their best interests, including advocacy.' We collaborated with WhoCares? Scotland on national advocacy campaign in April 2025 and we further strengthened advocacy across all organisational work by raising awareness of the key issues.

### **Children's human rights approach principles in practice**

Our work to enhance accountability mechanisms like feedback systems, our inspection and improvement frameworks, and access to advocacy will support the realisation of children's rights as children and young people are supported to claim their rights for themselves.



### **Imagine: Creative Encounters**

Imagine develops, celebrates and presents theatre and dance for children and young people so they can experience performance that is engaging, innovative and inspiring.

#### **What was done**

To strengthen the embedding of children's rights across our work, Imagine developed and delivered 'Creative Encounters' in partnership with North Edinburgh Arts. The project placed children's voices at the heart of creative, organisational and decision-making processes. It marked a shift from children participating in our work, to children acting as collaborators, decision-makers and influencers.

Creative Encounters was created as a result of a company focus on the UNCRC, with children's rights now informing policy, procedures, budgeting and organisational culture.

Creative Encounters was a response to UNCRC incorporation in Scotland and interest in how children can meaningfully influence cultural production and policy. Imagine used the project to explore an alternative to traditional youth advisory groups, focusing instead on long-term, year-round relationships with children and embedding accountability into everyday practice.

Over three and a half years, Imagine worked with school and community groups in North Edinburgh (Forthview Primary School, Pilton Youth and Children's Project, Spartans Community Foundation, North Edinburgh Youth Arts Collective). Imagine collaborated with children aged eight to twelve on a commissioning process, where they shortlisted and selected artists to create a performance for Edinburgh International Children's Festival Family Day and North Edinburgh Community Festival. The commissioned performances were co-created with children, who influenced design, writing, movement and narrative.

Imagine fundraised for a dedicated Creative Projects Facilitator which provided continuity, built trust with children and partners, and helped to embed children's feedback in the organisation. The Facilitator undertook training from Together and researched methods of participation, providing an environment where children could express themselves and feel confident that adults would explain decisions and respond to their views.

Creative Encounters began as an artistic experiment, with children directly influencing programming and production. Imagine staff approached this process with curiosity, and the project evolved, inspiring them to consider how children can influence policy and decision making beyond individual projects.

Children's views and feedback shaped every element of Creative Encounters, including workshop content, project structure and working groups. Children met with all of the Imagine team, attended festival performances, and consulted on other performance projects.

Imagine held regular evaluation sessions where children could reflect, identify barriers and suggest improvements. Importantly, children could see how their feedback led to action. For example, when children found it difficult to shortlist artists based on written applications, Imagine redesigned the process to prioritise video submissions and visual presentations. This demonstrated that children's views were not only heard but also acted upon.



**“I think the adults do listen to you because one – it’s their job and two – they’re interested in your opinion.”**

**Child participant**

When a child commented on the lack of visibility of children at the Edinburgh International Children's Festival, Imagine responded by creating visible roles for children at industry events. Children hosted the Children's Festival Launch, where the programme is presented to industry delegates. During the Festival, children carried out evaluation surveys, attended performances as 'VIPs', and wore staff T-shirts and lanyards. This was the first time children had formal roles at the Launch and directly influenced festival practice. In 2025, Imagine programmed 'The Show for Young Men' by Guesthouse Projects, an inter-generational performance duet between a professional dancer and child (Alfie who attended Forthview Primary School, the Creative Encounters partner school). By commenting on children not being visible at our festival, they have encouraged Imagine to rethink their approach.



**“Increasing pupil voice is at the heart of our school improvement plan, and this project is constantly feeding into that because the children know they can voice their opinions. Now we’re thinking about how we can embed that approach into other parts of the school, like the equalities group and other working groups.”**

**Deputy Head Teacher**

Imagine use children's rights budgeting throughout the project, ensuring the provision of meals, transport, and chaperones to remove as many barriers to participation as possible. When working with community partners, Imagine offer fees for staff time (e.g. youth workers) to ensure partners are also sufficiently resourced.

This approach has been introduced across the organisation, spearheaded by Imagine's Chief Executive. All budgets are now designed to ensure projects have the resources to support children's rights, equity and inclusion. Where Imagine have found gaps or challenges in ensuring this provision, they are actively working to address this through resource prioritisation. The whole organisation has received anti-racism training, anti-ableism training, and dedicated consultation with EDJI Arts.

One of the final elements of the project was Imagine's Children's Summit, held on World Children's Day at North Edinburgh Arts. The event was co-programmed and co-hosted by children from Forthview Primary School, who invited approximately 50 children from neighbouring primary schools to take part in creative workshops and discussions about children's cultural activity in Scotland.

These discussions were observed by 'VIP adults' including the Children's Commissioner, Imagine's Festival Director, and representatives from Scottish Government and Creative Scotland. This created a clear moment of accountability, where children could speak directly to influential adults and see their perspectives taken seriously.

To capture learning and support future accountability, children from the North Edinburgh Youth Arts Collective are creating a 'manifestation': a mash up of a manifesto and invitations for artists and adults who want to collaborate with children. These invitations encourage reflection, listening and follow-up, such as: 'Consider why you want to work with us' and 'Come back and visit us – we want to know what impact we've had.' This document will be shared with the wider sector in 2026.

### **Impact and outcomes**

As a result of Creative Encounters, Imagine's organisational culture has shifted. Children's rights and accountability now inform strategic decisions, budgeting, staff training and advocacy. This learning continues through [Thérèse Kearns' PhD](#) and an additional [research/consultation project](#) for Scottish Government on how children can shape a new Arts Strategy for Scotland.

At the outset of the project, Imagine developed two Theories of Change: one focused on children's participative experience, and one focused on organisational change. These were developed collaboratively with staff and used to guide transparent decision-making and reflection. Although Imagine is not a statutory duty-bearer, they recognise their responsibility and influence in advocating for children's rights within cultural practice and policy.

Creative Encounters started this children's rights focus on creative engagement work, but it now drives the company as a whole.

### **Children's human rights approach principles in practice**

Accountability was embedded by ensuring children could understand, influence, scrutinise and challenge decisions that affected them, and by creating clear mechanisms for feedback, learning and change.



"I like giving my opinion in Imagine because I know I'll be listened to."

**Child participant**

## **Clan Childlaw: Rights Empowered Project**

Clan Childlaw is an award-winning, independent children's charity that actively supports children and young people to take ownership of their rights. We are the only charity in Scotland that provides free, independent legal representation exclusively for children and young people, which is child-centred by design.

## **The issue or opportunity**

One of our central aims is to increase access to justice for children and young people to enable them to hold duty bearers to account. One of the ways in which we do this is through the Rights Empowered: Children's Access to Justice Project – a three-year project funded by the Independent Human Rights Fund for Scotland (delivered by Corra on behalf of a partnership of eight funders). This project is delivered in partnership with Together.

Incorporation of the UNCRC alone will not guarantee that all children's rights in Scotland will be respected, protected and fulfilled. Many children and young people continue to experience their rights being disregarded, with little recourse to justice. The Rights Empowered Project aims to maximise the incorporation of the UNCRC in the lives of all children in Scotland by supporting Together's membership to use community action and strategic litigation to challenge decision making and address systemic rights breaches.

## **What was done**

In the first year of the project, we successfully established the administrative and analytical framework for how strategic litigation and community action will progress through the project. This included creating models for multi-organisation information sharing, stakeholder engagement and the creation of the Strategic Litigation Group with the Scottish Human Rights Commission and the Commissioner for Children and Young People Scotland.

We received and responded to 29 project related enquiries and provided legal information and signposting to participating children's charities to build capacity and understanding of UNCRC related issues. All project enquiries which concerned an individual child or young person were referred to our legal team for legal analysis. We have provided legal information and signposting to support 12 individual children or young people to challenge rights issues.

## **Next steps**

We are beginning year two by progressing one strategic litigation issue and one community action issue. The absence of a 'victim test' in the UNCRC Act has theoretically broadened access to justice for children and young people in Scotland. Organisations in Scotland, with sufficient interest, can raise UNCRC related legal actions even where the organisation is itself not the direct 'victim'. However, there are still significant financial barriers to bringing these types of cases.

As such, we will undertake strategic litigation which focuses both on a substantive strategic rights issue for children, along with exploring how organisations can raise these issues on behalf of the children impacted. This will mean looking at pathways for non-governmental organisations and community organisations to instigate and fund strategic litigation on UNCRC related issues on behalf of children and young people.

The first issue we will focus on relates to the use of restraint and seclusion in secure care settings.

Secure care centres are overseen by the Care Inspectorate and run by care professionals who provide therapeutic support targeted to each child's specific needs. Removing children from the prison estate is an important step forward in ensuring that children in the justice system access child centred support. However, through Clan's representation of children housed in secure care, we have also identified an issue relating to the lack of statutory oversight regarding the protections and limitations that should be applied to the restraint and seclusion of children in secure care. The lack of statutory oversight contrasts with the protections in place for adults in the prison system, and individuals subject to deprivation of liberty under the Mental Health (Scotland) Act 2003.

We are of the view that there should be a UNCRC Act compliant framework for all children who are housed in secure care. We are currently preparing an evidence base to inform the next steps we take on this issue. We have issued Freedom of Information Requests to the four secure care centres requesting data on the prevalence of restraint and seclusion practices, and any policies and guidance followed.

Article 12 of the UNCRC says that every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously. Children's voices are particularly important in court proceedings, to ensure that decisions made that impact children are in line with their best interests. As such, the project is looking at various ways we can support the realisation of children's voices in court proceedings through community action.

Our first focus area will be the commencement of Sections 1(4), 2 and 3 of the Children (Scotland) Act 2020. These are amendments that will introduce the requirement for children's views to be considered when the court makes orders about parental rights and responsibilities, in adoption proceedings and in children's hearings. We have been liaising with Scottish Government regarding the timeline and look forward to working with Together's members to ensure the implementation of these amendments in the most robust, UNCRC compliant and child-centred way. We hope to consider other aspects of the children's voices issue as the implementation point progresses.

Our engagement with Together members has identified common knowledge gaps and frequently asked questions from participating children's charities.

To build capacity, knowledge and confidence, we are creating a UNCRC Community Action Toolkit. Part one of this resource will focus on the fundamentals of the UNCRC, including 'what is the UNCRC' and 'what is the UNCRC Act'. We hope to release this in early 2026.

### **Children's human rights approach principles in practice**

By increasing understanding of legal and human rights frameworks, the overall aim of the toolkit is to create a more legally empowered children's sector, and to encourage Together members to act on potential UNCRC rights issues on behalf of the babies, children and young people they work with.

## **5.3 Reflections on the accountability principle:**

 The above case studies provide insight into how the accountability principle can be applied in practice. It is important to note that the development and implementation of accountability measures will vary depending on your role, organisation and setting, as well as the needs of the children and young people who are involved.

Incorporation of the UNCRC into Scots law may have led to changes in the role or legal duty of your organisation. This can be seen in case studies from Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland, JustRight Scotland and Clan Childlaw, where the UNCRC Act introduced additional legal powers that could be used to seek changes to guidance and legislation, and to strengthen a court case.

Building accountability into your organisation also helps encourage continuous development and improvement, as highlighted by Highland Community Planning Partnership. By regularly reflecting on performance against children’s rights indicators, organisations can identify areas for improvement and ensure they are meeting their legal duties.

Having access to accessible and independent feedback mechanisms allows children and young people to exercise their right to express their views and to be involved in decisions that affect them. Care Opinion highlights what a child-friendly feedback mechanism can look like in practice and illustrates one way that children and young people can be connected to support and advice services where needed.

Considering and taking seriously children and young people’s feedback can allow for services and processes to be improved, as emphasised by Children’s Hearings Scotland, Imagine and Public Health Scotland. The Care Inspectorate’s case study shows the role of advocacy and external support in enhancing this.

## 5.4 Top tips for implementing the accountability principle:



The following top tips are drawn from the [UNCRC Skills and Knowledge Framework](#) outcomes. By using these top tips, alongside real-world learning from featured case studies, individuals and organisations can be supported to effectively implement the accountability principle in practice.

- Ensure that accountability is built into your children’s human rights approach. Decisions and actions can affect children and young people in various ways; it is important to take accountability for this and consider how children’s rights can be and will be affected. This could include regularly reflecting on feedback from children and young people or introducing data collection, monitoring and evaluation processes.
- Communication about decisions and actions should be grounded on transparency and should be provided in a way that children and young people can understand. This can include ensuring that up-to-date information is available for children and their families about matters affecting them. Any commitments made should also be followed up by reporting on progress made or providing reasons for why an action has not happened.
- Children and young people should have the opportunity to provide feedback and have access to independent complaints procedures if they have concerns about their rights. The process should be clear and accessible to allow children and young people to challenge or scrutinise decisions made and to hold organisations to account.
- Ensure that all children, young people and their families have access to advice and advocacy. This can involve providing children and young people with information on available advocacy or advice services, in a way that they understand, and continuing to support them as needed.

## Endnotes

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- <sup>1</sup> Scottish Government (2024). UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024 – part 2: statutory guidance, [UNCRC \(Incorporation\) \(Scotland\) Act 2024 – part 2: statutory guidance - gov.scot](#) [Date accessed 21.01.26]
- <sup>2</sup> Scottish Government (2025). Proposal for First Children’s Rights Scheme, [Proposal for First Children’s Rights Scheme – gov.scot](#) [Date accessed 21.01.26]
- <sup>3</sup> Scottish Government (2024). Child rights and wellbeing impact assessment external guidance and templates, [Child rights and wellbeing impact assessment external guidance and templates – gov.scot](#) [Date accessed 21.01.26]
- <sup>4</sup> Scottish Government (2024). UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024 – part 3: statutory guidance, 4. Reporting duties of listed authorities – detailed requirements – UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024 – part 3: statutory guidance – gov.scot [Date accessed 21.01.26]
- <sup>5</sup> Children’s Commissioner for Wales (2017). The Right Way: A Children’s Rights Approach in Wales. <https://www.childcomwales.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/202402-Childrens-Commissioner-for-Wales-Right-Way-English.pdf> [Accessed 14.10.25]
- <sup>6</sup> Together (Scottish Alliance for Children’s Rights) (2025). Children’s Rights Skills and Knowledge Framework. <https://www.togetherscotland.org.uk/media/4070/framework.pdf> [Accessed 14.10.25]
- <sup>7</sup> Scottish Government (2024). Taking a children’s human rights approach: guidance. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/guidance-taking-childrens-human-rights-approach/documents/> [Accessed 14.10.25]
- <sup>8</sup> The UNCRC Act is an important step in strengthening children’s rights in Scotland. After a UK Supreme Court judgment on the original Bill, the final Act had to be narrowed. The duties in the UNCRC Act only apply to decisions made under Acts of the Scottish Parliament, but not to Acts of the UK Parliament - even when they are in areas within the competence of the Scottish Parliament, such as education and social work. This includes Acts passed before 1999, before the Scottish Parliament was established, and parts of UK Acts that have later been changed by the Scottish Parliament. This means children’s rights duties and legal challenges under the UNCRC Act cannot be used where public bodies are carrying out duties set by those Acts. As a result, some pre-1999 Acts that have major impacts on children’s rights remain outside the Act, including the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 and the Children (Scotland) Act 1995. Together will continue to campaign for the scope of the UNCRC Act to be expanded, in line with the Scottish Government’s commitment to a “maximalist approach” to incorporation.
- <sup>9</sup> For more information and links to relevant General Comments, you can read Together’s consultation response to the proposed Restraint and Seclusion (Prevention in Schools) (Scotland) Bill. [https://www.togetherscotland.org.uk/media/3471/restraintresponse\\_final.pdf](https://www.togetherscotland.org.uk/media/3471/restraintresponse_final.pdf)

## Appendix: Case study navigation

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The following links will help you navigate to specific case studies. Before doing so, please make sure to read the explanatory chapters which help explain a children's human rights approach and how it should be engaged with.

### Embedding case studies:

• Inspiring Scotland: Embedding Children's Rights in the Outdoor Community Play Fund	15
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### Equality and non-discrimination case studies:

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## Empowerment case studies:

- Circle Scotland and Scottish Families Affected by Drugs and Alcohol: Grow Your Own Routes 67
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