



Children in Scotland **Manifesto for 2021-26**



Giving all children in Scotland an equal chance to flourish is at the heart of everything we do.

By bringing together a network of people working with and for children, alongside children and young people themselves, we offer a broad, balanced and independent voice. We create solutions, provide support and develop positive change across all areas affecting children in Scotland.

We do this by listening, gathering evidence, and applying and sharing our learning, while always working to uphold children's rights. Our range of knowledge and expertise means we can provide trusted support on issues as diverse as the people we work with and the varied lives of children and families in Scotland.

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With thanks to our staff, and all our members and partners who contributed to the development of this Manifesto.

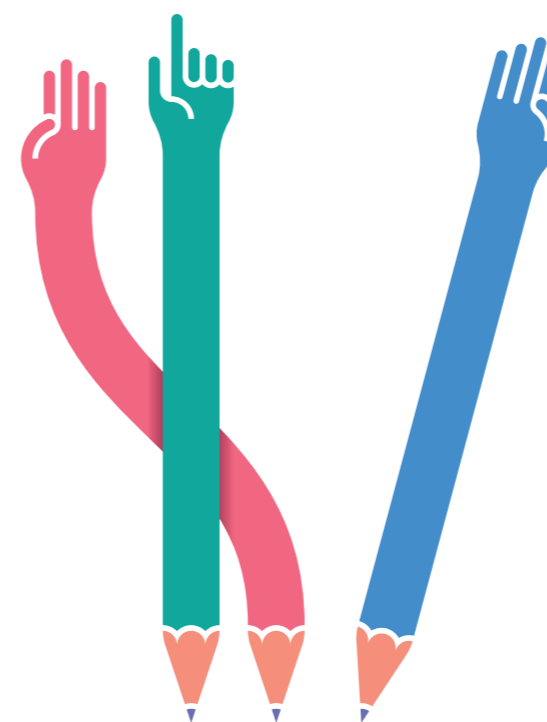
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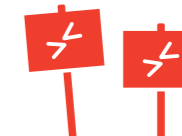
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Choosing a different path

By Jackie Brock, Children in Scotland's Chief Executive



How can we and our children's sector partners make a difference over the next five years? It's the big question we kept asking ourselves as we put together this Manifesto for the 2021-26 Scottish Parliament in the face of the gravest public health crisis of the past century. The answer lies not just in demanding action from political parties but taking the lead ourselves. It's the tail end of a punishing year, but this still feels like a moment when we can choose a different path.

In 2009, Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett's influential book *The Spirit Level* investigated the baleful consequences of anti-egalitarian thinking and policymaking. Eleven years on the pandemic has exposed this reality in the starkest terms, even to those who previously chose to look away.

As Professor Devi Sridhar, Professor of Global Health at the University of Edinburgh, said in a recent interview: "Covid-19 has revealed from all sides how unequal our society is: during lockdown, whether you could escape to country estates and enjoy it, or whether you were working class, stuck at home with children or having to go to work every day."

But out of this shared realisation have emerged new, strikingly progressive policy ideas committed to a permanent recalibration of wealth and power. Central to these is the concept of the wellbeing economy, reflected in the work of Dr Katherine Trebeck of the Wellbeing Economy Alliance. We're currently collaborating with Dr Trebeck, the Carnegie Trust UK and the Cattanach Trust to raise awareness of what a robust wellbeing approach to the Scottish budget would mean, focusing on the first 1001 days of a child's life.

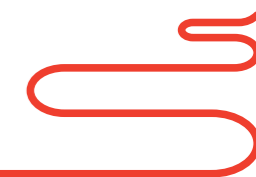
Development of the wellbeing economy, and the attention being turned to it, is an example of the radicalism that will be required over the next five years. It is deeply connected to a sense of social and environmental justice and the concerns of young people, and it will underpin how we deliver on many of the Manifesto calls expressed here.

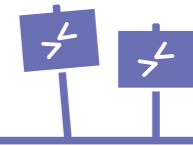
I'm also encouraged by strides in policy and legislation that predate the pandemic. The Equal Protection Act, the Scottish Government's promise of UNCRC incorporation 'to the max' and the Independent Care Review all signal the extent to which children's voices have entered the political discourse and the potency of collective campaigning.

Equal Protection finally corrects a gross imbalance in rights. Among its many virtues, UNCRC incorporation will equip young people with a legal yardstick to which they can refer government when experience of poverty renders their rights unfulfilled. And meeting the challenges made by young people in the Care Review will be an early test of how meaningful the commitment to change is across every organisation in Scotland.

These examples tell us that entrenched institutional worldviews can be shifted through public pressure – even if that pressure takes years to pay off. They tell us that, yes, campaigns, influencing work and Manifestos like this one really do matter.

But the experience of Covid makes clear that, beyond incremental progress, we now need a deeper and more wholehearted restructuring of society, based on redistributing power to children, young people and families who've never had it before. Taken together the calls in this Manifesto make that case, and we hope you'll support them.





Introduction

A Manifesto for hope in hard times

By Amy Woodhouse, Children in Scotland's Head of Policy, Projects and Participation



This Manifesto sets our Children in Scotland's policy priorities for the next five years. It is a very important document for us, outlining the policy and legislative changes we think are necessary to improve the lives of children, young people and families living in Scotland. It also establishes the direction for our own work and reflects our vision that all children in Scotland have an equal chance to flourish.

In producing these calls, we have endeavoured to be aspirational but realistic. Our asks of Scotland's political parties span a wide range of areas that affect the lives of children, young people and families, and are designed to cover both shorter-term goals and longer-term ambitions. We hope our members find here principles, evidence and calls to action that they can champion.

And in truth, members should see themselves in these calls. We've taken our time to develop the Manifesto, engaging with our members at several stages, alongside our staff team, our Board and children and young people's advisory group Changing our World. We've also sought to draw from published evidence to inform our calls, and ground them in what we know works. You will find references throughout, but these represent only a small range of the evidence that's informed the positions we've taken. Crucially, this includes evidence from children, young people and families themselves.

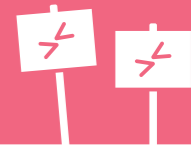
The Manifesto has been structured into 10 themes covering the priorities that emerged from our consultation process and reflecting our own strategic aims and project findings. In each section you'll also find links to all the relevant Articles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, in recognition of how embedded children's rights are across our whole Manifesto.

We are of course publishing our Manifesto at a very unusual time, in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic. As I write it is difficult to imagine what life in Scotland post-pandemic may look like, or when restrictions will be lifted. It is important that we reflect here the huge challenges and difficulties the pandemic has placed on children, young people, families and the sector as a whole.

But we are also keen to look beyond this. We want to think about what we can take from our experiences in 2020 to inform the future shape and structure of Scottish society. With incorporation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child into domestic law around the corner, we have a wonderful opportunity to forge a society built on respecting and upholding the rights of all children. That is really something to take hope and strength from.

We're very proud and encouraged by the range of organisations that have already signed up to the Manifesto. Many thanks for your input, guidance and support. It is a privilege to work in a sector where so many share a common vision for improving the lives of children, young people and families. Together we are a force to be reckoned with!





Vision *Scotland will be a welcoming, outward-looking country that realises the rights of citizens and engages internationally to be a world leader on global issues*

Introduction

In September 2020, a Bill to incorporate the **UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)**¹ was introduced in the Scottish Parliament. UNCRC incorporation will be a momentous change for Scotland and a cause for celebration. But new legislation is just the start. Realising children's rights here will require comprehensive change in culture and practice across the public sector.

The next Scottish Government has an essential role in realising children's rights following incorporation. It must work with civil society, public bodies, parents and carers and children and young people to ensure this is achieved. And there must be adequate resourcing to implement these changes. Throughout this Manifesto we highlight policy actions that will ensure children and young people's rights are met.

Unfortunately, there are still many areas in Scotland where children's rights are not being realised. Together's **State of Children's Rights 2019**² report mapped out areas of strength and weakness. The government should refer to this as it develops ongoing policy, legislation and practice. We will continue to advocate for further increases to the Minimum Age of Criminal Responsibility, and believe the next government should bring forward legislation to address this as a matter of urgency in 2021.

In our Planning, Resources and Approaches section (page 45) we outline the need to engage children and young people meaningfully in decision-making and support them to take part in politics and society. This includes discussions about UK and Holyrood elections and potential referenda.

“Let's build on the success of extending the vote to 16- and 17-year-olds. We would like to see Citizens' Assemblies include those aged under 16”

We should build on the success of extending the vote to 16- and 17-year-olds here. We would like to see Citizens' Assemblies extended to include those aged under 16. Approaches such as the First Minister's Question Time: Next Generation model produced by Children in Scotland and YouthLink Scotland, which enable children to engage directly with the First Minister, are also important.

The UK will have fully exited the European Union by the end of 2020. Our work with the **Children and Young People's Panel on Europe**³ has highlighted what children and young people want Scotland's relationship with Europe to be. The Panel has made specific policy calls relating to EU Funding; the Economy; Rights; and Opportunities to Work, Study and Travel. The government must use its powers to respond, and ensure children and young people are not detrimentally affected by Brexit.

It's vital that Scotland continues to be a world leader in human rights more broadly. Incorporation of other international human rights treaties is essential for embedding the rights of children, young people and families. We must uphold international standards as laid out by organisations like the Council of Europe. We also must continue to be an active member of leading international human rights organisations.

We believe that Scotland should be a country welcoming to people from all over the world. A diverse society is a stronger society. Immigration has a positive effect on the country as a whole. Refugees and asylum seekers should be provided with a safe, secure environment. The Scottish Government must provide adequate financial support to refugees and asylum seekers, and foreground their human rights when making decisions that affect their lives.



“Brexit will heavily alter Scotland’s future, whether it’s for the better or worse. The youngest generation, who will be the first to grow up in Scotland outside the EU, will be the first people to experience the consequences of Brexit. It is us who will grow up to be the electricians, the engineers, the entrepreneurs of tomorrow. It is our future, decided by adults – so far without the inclusion of our voice”

Quote from ‘Listen to Us’, a report by the Children and Young People’s Panel on Europe, published February 2019

Source: the **Children and Young People’s Evidence Bank**, a free online resource collecting direct quotes and views by young people from projects across Scotland



78,400

On 1 December 2018, **78,400** young people aged 16 or 17 were registered to vote at Scottish Parliament and Local Government elections.

*National Records of Scotland*⁴



Members of the Children & Young People’s Panel on Europe have made specific calls about what they think Scotland’s future relationship with Europe should be.

Picture: David Mackay

UNCRC Articles

- Article 4 Making rights real
- Article 8 Identity
- Article 12 Respect for children’s views
- Article 22 Refugee children
- Article 36 Protection from exploitation
- Article 37 Children in detention
- Article 40 Juvenile justice
- Article 42 Everyone must know children’s rights

[View the Articles](#)

¹ unicef.org.uk/what-we-do/un-convention-child-rights/

² togetherscotland.org.uk/resources-and-networks/state-of-childrens-rights-reports/

³ childreninscotland.org.uk/children-and-young-peoples-panel-on-europe/

⁴ nrscotland.gov.uk/files/statistics/electoral-stats/1-dec-2018/electoral-stats-18-pub.pdf

⁵ ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CEDAW.aspx

⁶ un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html

⁷ ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CERD.aspx

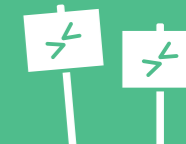


We call on political parties to commit to:

- ! Providing adequate funding to meaningfully implement the UNCRC across public services alongside a suite of policies and actions that will realise children’s rights
- ! Ensuring children and young people have a say in key Scottish Government decision-making processes, including Citizens’ Assemblies
- ! Incorporating international human rights treaties including **CEDAW**,⁵ **UNCRC**⁶ and **UNCERD**⁷ to enhance the human rights protections of children, young people and their families
- ! Bringing forward legislation by the end of 2021 to raise the Minimum Age of Criminal Responsibility to 16
- ! Working together with the UK Government to develop policies and practice which benefit all people seeking asylum and host communities. This includes sufficient financial support to meet their basic needs, adequate housing and support for mental health, physical health and opportunities to connect with others.

Calls supported by:





Vision *All children, young people and families should have enough money to live happy, healthy and fulfilling lives*

Introduction

All children, young people and families should have access to the financial resources they need to live, not just survive. However, rates of child poverty in Scotland have remained high over many years. Unless drastic action is taken, they are likely to grow further as a result of the pandemic. The Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland has called child poverty "the biggest human rights issue facing children and young people in Scotland".¹

We are fully aware of poverty's impact on the lives of children, young people and families across Scotland. Through our projects, we work with families who live in some of the most deprived areas of the country. Poverty affects the housing people can afford, the food they buy and their learning opportunities. **Research consistently shows the direct effect it has on people's health and wellbeing.**² We need action to support families now and to prevent more families falling into poverty in future.

The Child Poverty (Scotland) Act was brought into force in 2018 and contains a range of ambitious targets for reducing child poverty. It was widely welcomed by anti-poverty campaigners, and we continue to strongly support its ambition to eradicate child poverty in Scotland. While it's clear that decisions taken outwith the scope of the Scottish Parliament affect poverty here, we believe Holyrood has the necessary levers to achieve the Act's goals.



"In 2019, 59% of families in poverty had at least one adult in work. We need to ensure that work pays enough to support families to have enough to live"

The Social Security (Scotland) Act has given the government increased powers over social security, including the means to create new benefits. The Scottish Child Payment is a valuable first step in using the social security system to provide direct financial support to families. The system must be used to ensure continued financial support for families who need it and a safety net for all; a cash-first approach must always be at the heart of this support.

Low wages are preventing many working families from moving out of poverty. Reliance on zero-hours contracts must be reduced. In 2019, **59% of families in poverty had at least one adult in work.**³ We need to ensure that work pays enough to support families to have enough to live. Employers also need to provide sufficient flexibility to parents and carers to enable them to fit work around childcare responsibilities.

We know that for many, housing and childcare costs can be a particular challenge (see our Early Years section for our childcare calls – page 19 – and our Place, Space and Communities section for our housing call – page 31).

Many people who experience poverty also face a host of other challenges alongside financial insecurity. Stigmatising language and attitudes can affect how people perceive themselves and their situation. Through our 25 Calls campaign and Health Inequalities: Participative Research project, we have seen and heard about the effect stigma can have on children. We must change how society talks about and perceives individuals living in poverty. A more assets-based approach is needed.

Research has shown that experience of inequality is detrimental for everyone in society, including those who are more affluent.⁴ It is therefore important that, while we decrease poverty, we also narrow the gap experienced in income and wealth across Scotland.





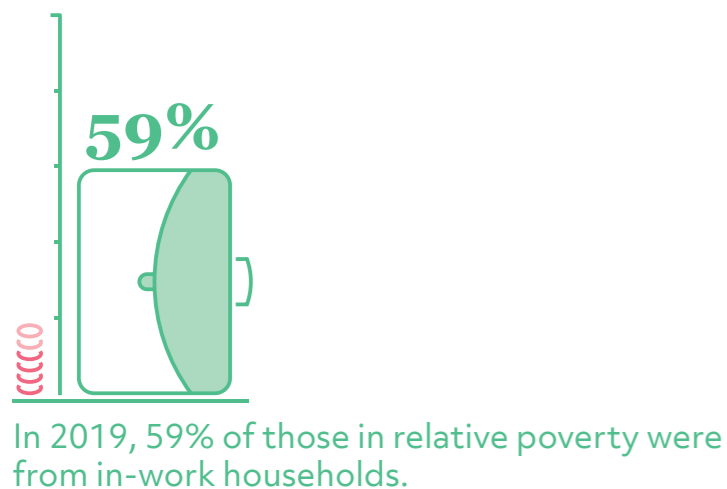
“I have to have conversations with the kids about adult stuff, they are older than they should be because of being poor”

“Being poor takes away your control of your life, and choices”

Quotes from *Child poverty in Scotland: what we know and what the public's views are* (Scottish Government, 2017)



Divine (left) and Somer contributed to the lead call of our 25 Calls campaign, about the language of poverty.
Picture: Andrew O'Brien



UNCRC Articles



- Article 6 Life, survival and development
- Article 24 Health, water, food, environment
- Article 26 Social and economic help
- Article 27 Adequate standard of living

[View the Articles](#)

¹ [cypcs.org.uk/positions/child-poverty/](https://www.cypcs.org.uk/positions/child-poverty/)
² healthscotland.scot/media/2186/child-poverty-impact-inequalities-2018.pdf
³ [gov.scot/publications/working-poverty/](https://www.gov.scot/publications/working-poverty/)
⁴ books.google.co.uk
⁵ [gov.scot/collections/poverty-and-income-inequality-statistics/](https://www.gov.scot/collections/poverty-and-income-inequality-statistics/)
⁶ [gov.scot/publications/working-poverty/](https://www.gov.scot/publications/working-poverty/)

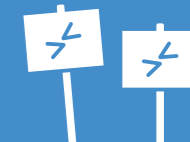


We call on political parties to commit to:

- ! Ensuring that every worker, regardless of age, is paid the real living wage by the end of the next parliament. They should also explore potential increases to the value of the living wage to ensure wages rise with inflation
- ! Applying a rights-based approach to anti-poverty policy which recognises and reflects the lived experience of those living in poverty and upholds their dignity
- ! Adopting the calls developed by the End Child Poverty coalition, including:
 - Building on the Scottish Child Payment
 - Bolstering current support provided to children in low-income households
 - Ensure crisis support is adequate and accessible
 - Guarantee holistic whole family support – including practical, emotional and financial support – is available to all families needing help
 - Support migrant children and caregivers
 - Set out a child poverty-focused labour market policy.

Calls supported by:





Vision *All children have the best start in life and families have the support they need to cope with the challenges of raising infants and young children*

Introduction

There is a **significant body of evidence**¹²³ underlining the importance of early childhood development and it is now widely acknowledged that what happens to children in their first few years of life is a key determinant of their future health, learning and employment outcomes.

Central to children's development is the importance of establishing secure relationships and building positive attachments, both within families but also in other key environments like their community and early learning and childcare settings. These relationships support healthy physical and emotional development and help children to learn positive communication skills.

The role of the adults involved in children's lives and their influence on how children grow, develop and learn cannot be overstated. Raising infants and young children is a challenge, and all parents and carers need support at some stage. The level of support needed varies from adult to adult, child to child and family to family. Some parents and carers have existing networks where they receive all the support they need, others do not. Levels of poverty and disadvantage also vary across families, with one parent families more likely to experience financial insecurity. Parents of children with disabilities are also more likely to be financially vulnerable.

 **“For all children to have the best start in life, we need accessible relationship-based family support that’s flexible to the needs of families of all shapes and sizes”**

For all children to have the best start in life, we need accessible relationship-based family support that is flexible to the needs of families of all shapes and sizes.

Since 2016, the Scottish Government has invested heavily in early years initiatives including the introduction of the Baby Box and expansion of the Early Learning and Childcare funded provision. However, while these have been welcome, many families are still not receiving the help and support they need. Indeed, the flagship expansion of early learning and childcare has now been delayed due to the impact of COVID-19. The Scottish Government must consider a coherent plan for the early years that goes further than relying on the expansion.

The Scottish Government must commit to investing in a range of universal and targeted support services which include services from across health, education and the early years. These should be evidence-based, child-focused, reflect the needs of families and represent the best use of resources.





“He was in [nursery] two days a week – Thursday and Friday – and it cost me £500 a month... there’s hardly any point finding a job”

Quote from ‘Status of Young People in Scotland’, the Young Women’s Movement, 2016
Source: *Children and Young People’s Evidence Bank*

25%



The Scottish Government must consider a plan for the early years that goes further than relying on the childcare expansion.

Picture: Anna Cervinkova



UNCRC Articles

- Article 6 Life, survival and development
- Article 23 Children with disabilities
- Article 26 Social and economic help
- Article 28 Access to education
- Article 29 Aims of education
- Article 31 Rest, play, culture, arts

[View the Articles](#)

¹ growingupinScotland.org.uk/about-gus/key-findings/
² jrf.org.uk/report/closing-attainment-gap-scottish-education
³ beta.isdscotland.org/find-publications-and-data/population-health/child-health/early-child-development/
⁴ beta.isdscotland.org/find-publications-and-data/population-health/child-health/early-child-development/

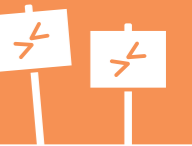


We call on political parties to commit to:

- Investing in a joined-up system of universal and targeted support services for families in the crucial first few years of life when children are aged zero to two. Relationship-based interventions must be a central point of this so that families receive the help they need early on to enable them to provide the best possible start for their children
- Delivering early learning and childcare expansion to ensure high-quality, accessible and affordable childcare for all families by August 2021. The expansion must reflect individual children’s needs and deliver high quality experiences to improve outcomes for all children
- Prioritising inclusion in the early years and ensuring that services are fully available and accessible to families of very young children with additional support needs. This should include:
 - Good transition pathways in place to all Early Learning and Childcare provision and services
 - Training available to all early years staff in all sectors on inclusive practice
 - Continued support through the Early Learning and Childcare Inclusion Fund.

Calls supported by:





Vision *All children and young people in Scotland will achieve their full learning potential*

Introduction

Children in Scotland understands that learning happens in all areas of life, not just in formal school settings. And we know that a range of factors outside of school such as poverty, presence of additional support needs or experience of care can impact on academic performance. Scotland needs an integrated and holistic approach to learning that supports all children to achieve their potential.

Wellbeing is at the centre of all learning. We welcome the existing emphasis on health and wellbeing in Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) and the Scottish Attainment Challenge, and recognise that this focus is more important than ever. We would like to see the next Scottish Government further commit to wellbeing as a key pillar of learning through more proportionate funding in the wellbeing strand of CfE and a greater emphasis on relationships within educational settings.

We know children want one-to-one tailored support. Relationships must be at the heart of learning, and based on understanding the individual needs of children. This requires a diverse workforce with the time to get to know children, appropriate skills and qualifications and the resources available to meet children's needs.



“The recent independent Review of the Implementation of Additional Support for Learning found ASL is not equally valued within Scotland’s education system. That must change”

Play could take on a much more prominent role in learning, not just in the early phase but as young people progress. The importance of play is clearly articulated in the **Play Strategy**,¹ and a greater emphasis on it, alongside support for arts, leisure and sports-based activities and hobbies could have a clear benefit to wellbeing and development.

There must also be adequate space and time for learning environments to meaningfully engage parents and carers. We know parents and carers have a vital role to play in supporting children's learning, but often need support to feel empowered in this role.

The recent independent Review of the **Implementation of Additional Support for Learning**² found that it is not visible or equally valued within Scotland's education system.

Funding to support the holistic learning needs of children and young people must be increased. Numbers of specialist and support staff in schools should return to 2010 levels. The effect lack of support and specialist staff is having, particularly on children with additional support needs, was demonstrated through our **Not Included, Not Engaged, Not Involved** research.³ If we wish to create a truly inclusive education system, specialist support must be provided in a non-stigmatising fashion. Children should not miss out on opportunities to socialise to fit the needs of the school day. The impact of COVID-19 has also shown the increasing importance of digital forms of education. We know that for some children this can make it easier to engage. However, we also know digital exclusion is an issue for many children and families.

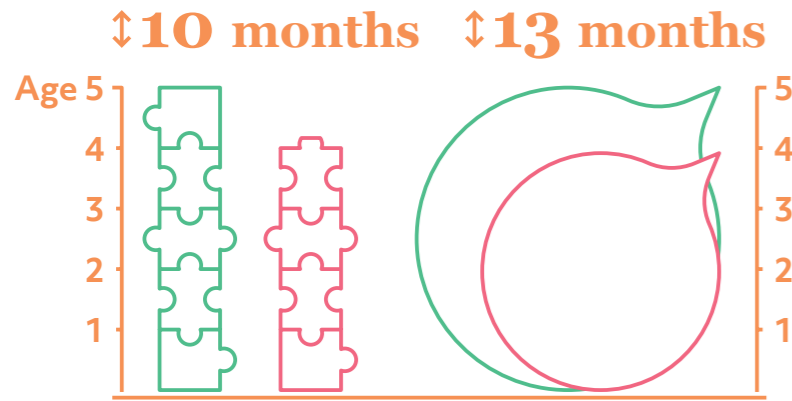
We must improve how we support transitions throughout children and young people's learning. Transitions from nursery to school and from primary to secondary and onwards can prove challenging for children, young people and families. This can be particularly difficult for children with additional support needs. These transitions should be underpinned by a focus on relationships and wellbeing to ensure all children and young people are ready to enter their new learning environments.





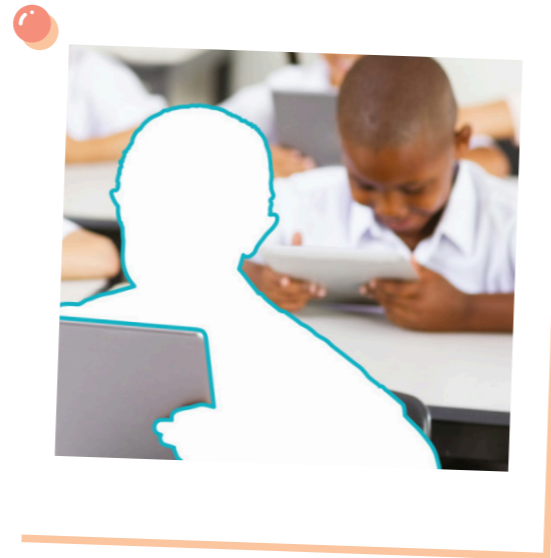
“If teachers are prepared to stick by you, believe in you, it makes a huge difference. You can turn your whole life around”

Quote from a Member of the Children’s Parliament, ‘What Kind of Scotland?’ (Scottish Borders, 2017)
Source: **Children and Young People’s Evidence Bank**



By age 5 there is a **10 month gap** in problem solving ability and a **13 month gap** in vocabulary between children from low income and high income families.

Joseph Rowntree Foundation⁴



The 2018 *Not Included, Not Engaged, Not Involved* report found that autistic children in Scotland were missing out on their fundamental right to education.

UNCRC Articles



- Article 5 Family guidance as children develop
- Article 6 Life, survival and development
- Article 13 Sharing thoughts freely
- Article 23 Children with disabilities
- Article 28 Access to education
- Article 29 Aims of education
- Article 31 Rest, play, culture, arts

[View the Articles](#)

¹ gov.scot/publications/play-strategy-scotland-action-plan/
² gov.scot/publications/review-additional-support-learning-implementation-executive-summary/
³ notengaged.com/
⁴ jrf.org.uk/report/closing-attainment-gap-scottish-education

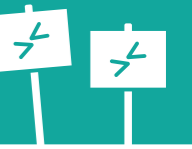


We call on political parties to commit to:

- Making wellbeing the central focus of Scottish education. A review of Curriculum for Excellence should be undertaken to explore how wellbeing, relationships and play can be fully embedded in the delivery of education. Recommendations from the review should be implemented before the end of the next parliament
- Ensuring that we have a diverse workforce supporting the learning of children and young people. Funding must be adequate to operate at a capacity to meet the needs of all children and young people. This should include:
 - Returning specialist provision for children with additional support needs to 2010 levels by 2021. This includes schools, Support for Learning teachers, Speech and Language therapists and Educational Psychologists
 - Raising the esteem and value of Pupil Support Assistants within the education system through providing clarity over their remit, and provision of appropriate training, support and supervision
 - Publishing a comprehensive Youth Work Strategy and committing adequate funding to fully integrate Youth Work, Community Learning and Development, home link workers and other forms of learning with formal education.
- Learning from the Finland experience and introduce a ‘hobby premium’ to ensure that all children and young people in Scotland have free access to a hobby or activity of their choice within or around the school day.

Calls supported by:





Vision All children and young people living in Scotland achieve optimum health and wellbeing

Introduction

Children and young people in Scotland have some of the worst health in Europe. Successive *State of Child Health* reports¹ by the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health show that rates of childhood obesity are higher in Scotland than most other European countries, and that there are strong correlations between poor child health and poverty.

The mental health of children and young people in Scotland has also been of concern for many years, with evidence that the wellbeing of young people is low and decreasing. Levels of support are not sufficient to address the need.

We know that health issues are the result of a range of complex and interconnected social and economic factors, many of which are outside the control of children, young people and their families. To support better health and wellbeing we must tackle these underlying factors as well as providing support to individuals.



“For young people to be properly supported, we need a workforce that’s knowledgeable about mental health and able to work with them collaboratively”

These challenges are well known and have been the subject of a range of policies, strategies and approaches. *A Fairer, Healthier Scotland 2017-2022*² sets out the vision for all people living in Scotland, including children, to live longer, healthier lives. In terms of physical health, the Scottish Government published *A Healthier Future: Scotland’s Diet and Healthy Weight Delivery Plan*, in 2018. Physical activity is also covered within the Scottish Government’s **Active Scotland Outcomes Framework**.³

In recent years the government has placed increased emphasis on the mental health of children and young people in national policy and strategies. The current **mental health strategy**⁴ (due to run until 2027) includes a raft of commitments relating to children and young people. Alongside this, the Children and Young People’s **Mental Health Taskforce**⁵ and subsequent programme board was set up to deliver systemic changes to mental health support across Scotland.

However, while we can point to a range of policy actions, this has yet to be matched with a significant improvement in statistical trends. And with worries that the pandemic and lockdown is placing increased stress on families and already overstretched services such as CAMHS, there is a danger of a generation becoming even more at risk. Avoiding a deterioration requires concerted, urgent effort to ensure children and young people are experiencing their right to optimum health.

We recognise that these health and wellbeing problems are interconnected with issues explored throughout this Manifesto. Increasing rates of poverty and societal inequalities are negating positive policy interventions. And we know that health and wellbeing and poverty have a knock-on effect on learning outcomes.

It is essential that there is a meaningful redistribution of funding towards early intervention and prevention. For children and young people to be properly supported, we also need a workforce that is skilled and knowledgeable about mental health, understands the issues and is able to work with young people in open, participative and collaborative ways. Children and young people have told us that they would like to learn more about health and wellbeing to better equip them to make positive choices.

Without addressing all of these issues, we cannot make progress towards improving health and wellbeing outcomes for children and young people.





“Get to know us. We need adults that are kind, sensitive and who listen to us, take us seriously, then do something to make our situation better. Don't be bystanders”

Quote from 'Mental Health in Scotland' (Children in Scotland consultation, 2016)
Source: *Children and Young People's Evidence Bank*



50%

The majority of mental health problems will develop before age 24 with **50% of mental health difficulties** established by age 14.

Public Health Scotland⁶



22%

In school year 2018/19, **22% of Primary 1 children** were at risk of being overweight or obese.

Public Health Scotland⁷



Delegates at our 2019 Annual Conference prioritised nature and the environment in their exploration of the Health and Wellbeing Manifesto theme during a Lego Serious Play workshop.

Picture: Lynn Gilmour



UNCRC Articles

| | |
|------------|----------------------------------|
| Article 6 | Life, survival and development |
| Article 23 | Children with disabilities |
| Article 24 | Health, water, food, environment |
| Article 25 | Review of treatment in care |
| Article 26 | Social and economic help |
| Article 27 | Adequate standard of living |
| Article 28 | Access to education |
| Article 31 | Rest, play, culture, arts |
| Article 33 | Protection from harmful drugs |

[View the Articles](#)

¹ stateofchildhealth.rcpch.ac.uk/
² healthscotland.scot/publications/a-fairer-healthier-scotland
³ gov.scot/publications/active-scotland-delivery-plan/
⁴ gov.scot/publications/mental-health-strategy-2017-2027/
⁵ gov.scot/publications/children-young-peoples-mental-health-task-force-recommendations/
⁶ healthscotland.scot/health-topics/mental-health-and-wellbeing/children-and-young-peoples-mental-health
⁷ beta.isdscotland.org/find-publications-and-data/population-health/child-health/primary-1-body-mass-index-bmi-statistics-scotland/

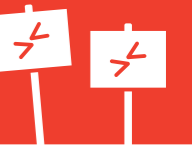


We call on political parties to commit to:

- Investing in mental health prevention and early intervention for children and young people to stop problems deteriorating to the extent they require specialist CAMHS services. This must include:
 - Targeted support for groups at risk of poorer mental health
 - Wider, year-round access to mental health-improving universal opportunities such as sport, youth work, play and the arts
 - Perinatal mental health/family support
 - Counselling, peer support and other talking therapies.
- Ensuring that PSE classes provide honest, non-judgemental opportunities to discuss health and wellbeing and are co-designed with children and young people, as called for by our children and young people's advisory group Changing our World
- Publishing a series of rights-based wellbeing outcomes and indicators for children, young people and families to give future direction to policy action to improve the health and wellbeing of children, young people and families living in Scotland.

Calls supported by:





Vision *All children and young people living in Scotland grow up in places and communities that are safe and built with their needs in mind*

Introduction

We know that where children live has a huge impact on their outcomes. If we consider life expectancy across Scotland, child health and educational attainment, poverty has a significant negative effect. This is not just a matter for individual families and the choices they are or are not able to make. It is written into the communities where they live: the quality of the buildings, levels of pollution, access to green space or play spaces, travel connectivity, feeling safe from crime, feeling connected to others. More good quality, affordable housing must be available for families and rental costs should be controlled. All of these factors impact on the lives of children and young people in real and lasting ways.

In our **Health Inequalities peer research project**,¹ children and young people explored the communities where they lived and talked to other children and young people about what made their communities positive or negative places in which to grow up. They identified safety, family and friends and littering as the most important things for them. They recognised how a high density of fast-food restaurants and a lack of cheap, healthy alternatives locally could affect their diet. They were aware of the effect of crime, substance misuse and poorly maintained public space on their communities and how it affected their own freedoms.



“Examples such as the Children’s Parliament’s co-creative process with children on the A9 development should become routine practice across Scotland”

The Planning (Scotland) Act² introduced a new duty on planning authorities to engage with children, young people and families as part of informing local development plans.

Examples of good practice in local planning do exist. Co-creative process work by the Children’s Parliament allowed children and young people (aged five to 16) to **share their views and ideas about the development of the A9**³ and how it impacts on their community.

We would like to see examples like this becoming routine practice across Scotland. Done well, this will ensure that communities are designed with the needs of children, young people and families in mind. It will include making space for childcare, play and community support. This change will require capacity building, so that professionals involved in planning decisions have the skills to engage meaningfully with children and young people, and flexibility within planning processes to ensure they have the space to include the perspectives of children, young people and families.

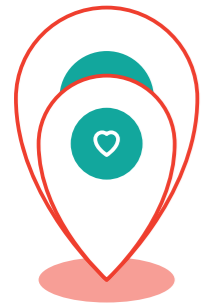
The Planning Act contains a duty on planning authorities to assess the suitability of play spaces in the area. Our Health Inequalities research found many play spaces that were unable to be fully utilised due to their neglect or misuse. It is essential that children and young people’s right to play is supported by provision of safe and appropriate play spaces. The play sufficiency duty must be fully realised and enacted to ensure this happens. The Scottish Government should use the **UNICEF Child Friendly Cities**⁴ model in their policy and legislative approach to place, space and community.





“[I worry] That I didn’t get a choice about it but it’s happening. Why didn’t you take kids’ opinions before deciding to build [the road]?”

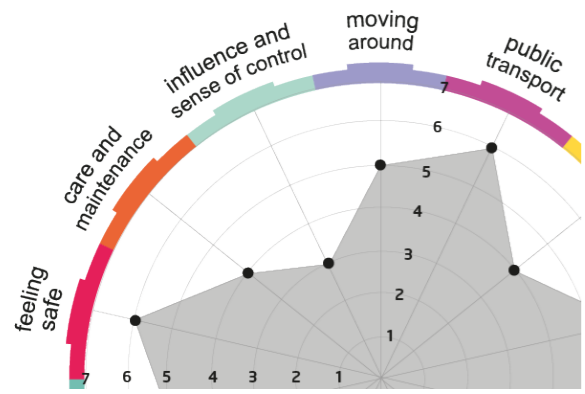
Quote from Children’s Parliament consultation on Dunkeld and Birnam Community Planning (2017-18)
Source: *Children and Young People’s Evidence Bank*



+23 years

In the most affluent areas of Scotland, people experience around **23 more years of good health** compared to the most deprived areas.

Public Health Scotland⁵



Young researchers shared what they felt about their communities in our 2019-20 Health Inequalities research project.
Picture: Chris Ross

The Place Standard tool can help structure conversations about place. It supports consideration of physical elements of a place (eg buildings and transport links) and social aspects (eg whether young people have a say in decision-making).

Place Standard⁶



UNCRC Articles

- Article 6** Life, survival and development
- Article 12** Respect for children’s views
- Article 15** Setting up or joining groups
- Article 26** Social and economic help
- Article 31** Rest, play, culture, arts

[View the Articles](#)

¹ childreninscotland.org.uk/health-inequalities-participative-research-project/
² legislation.gov.uk/asp/2019/13/contents/enacted
³ childrensparliament.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/A9-Dualling-Ideas-from-Children-and-Young-People-Updated-1.pdf
⁴ childfriendlycities.org/
⁵ healthscotland.scot/health-inequalities/what-are-health-inequalities#:~:text=Examples%20of%20health%20inequalities,shorter%20than%20the%20Scottish%20average
⁶ placestandard.scot/

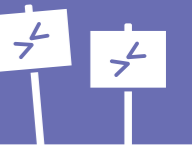


We call on political parties to commit to:

- !** Building rights-based communities around the things children and families need, using UNICEF Child Friendly Cities as a framework across small communities, towns and cities. They should ensure that local authorities have the guidance and financial resources to make this happen
- !** Ensuring that all families are able to access high quality, affordable housing by improving the quantity, quality and environmental sustainability of the social housing supply in Scotland
- !** Increasing planning restrictions on off-licences and betting shops near to schools, playgrounds and other places where children gather.

Calls supported by:





Vision *All children and young people living in Scotland achieve optimum health and wellbeing*

Introduction

The experience of growing up in poverty, or being exposed to violence, neglect or parental substance misuse can have a significant impact on children's lives. Over the past few years, there has been a noticeable change in our society's response to vulnerable children and young people including those at risk, involved in offending, or needing care and protection.

Our increasing understanding of the impact of trauma and a focus on rights-based approaches has led to a welcome shift from punishing children, young people and their families to supporting them and trying to understand their needs. Positive examples of this include the introduction of the **Equal Protection legislation**¹ in 2019 and the Independent Care Review's **root and branch examination**² of the care system in Scotland. Our emphasis on supporting the wellbeing of all children across Scotland has been underpinned by the **Getting it Right for Every Child approach**,³ which has been in place since 2006.



“The ongoing impact of societal inequality and new challenges brought by disruptions to support services as a result of the pandemic require us to re-double our efforts”

Over the past 10 years, referrals to the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration have **fallen significantly**⁴ and, prior to COVID-19, positive destination statistics for young people involved in the justice and care systems showed a **slow improvement**.⁵ However, the rate of improvement for children at risk is not fast enough. The ongoing impact of societal inequality and new challenges brought about by disruptions to support services during the pandemic now require us to re-double our efforts.

Evidence shows us that addressing poverty is absolutely crucial in this work. Early intervention, relationship-based practice, strengths-based approaches and the voices of children and young people are also central to ensuring children and young people grow up protected from harm and develop to their full potential. There is evidence of good and promising practice from across the country. We need to learn from this.

Scottish Government must commit to long-term, sustainable funding for family support. We welcome the £4m for family support provided through the Promise, but view this as only the first small step to making family support available to all those who need it. Practitioners must be able to focus on relationships not targets; funding cycles and criteria must also reflect this.





“A home should be a place of safety, hope, and no worries”

Quote from participatory youth research project 'Beyond4Walls' (Children in Scotland, 2015)
Source: *Children and Young People's Evidence Bank*

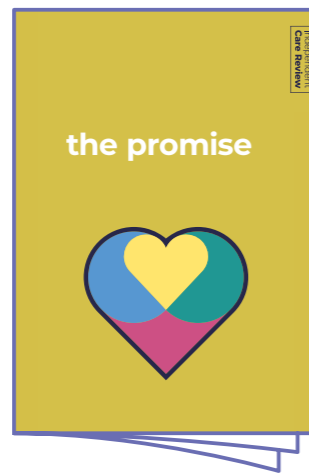
16,310

In July 2019, **16,310 children in Scotland** were looked after or on the child protection register.
*Scottish Government*⁶



Campaigners celebrate the passing of the Equal Protection Act outside Holyrood, October 2019.

Published in February 2020, the Independent Care Review emphasises the primacy of love and relationships and explains why we must 'parent, not process' children. It lays down a challenge to organisations across Scotland to support its aims and work and to #KeepThePromise.



*Independent Care Review*⁷



UNCRC Articles

| | |
|------------|---|
| Article 6 | Life, survival and development |
| Article 9 | Keeping families together |
| Article 12 | Respect for children's views |
| Article 18 | Responsibility of parents |
| Article 19 | Protection from violence, abuse and neglect |
| Article 21 | Children who are adopted |
| Article 25 | Review of treatment in care |
| Article 26 | Social and economic help |
| Article 34 | Protection from sexual abuse |
| Article 36 | Protection from exploitation |
| Article 39 | Recovery from trauma |

[View the Articles](#)

¹ legislation.gov.uk/asp/2019/16/enacted

² carereview.scot/

³ gov.scot/policies/girfec/

⁴ scra.gov.uk/resources_articles_category/official-statistics/

⁵ gov.scot/publications/education-outcomes-looked-children-2018-19/

⁶ gov.scot/publications/childrens-social-work-statistics-scotland-2018-2019/pages/7/

⁷ carereview.scot/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/The-Promise_v7.pdf

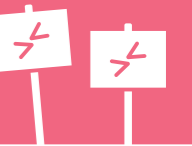


We call on political parties to commit to:

- Investing in relationship-based family support. A coherent national approach is necessary to guarantee that all families receive the support they need for as long as they need, and to ensure families do not fall through the cracks of a piecemeal network of support services
- Fully implementing the Independent Care Review findings and recommendations by 2030, in line with the timescales set out in the reports
- Learning from the findings of approaches such as the *Scottish Barnahus* pilot led by Children 1st, to support children and young people who have been victims or have witnessed violence, and committing to implementing and funding a national approach to this.

Calls supported by:





Vision *That no child or young person in Scotland experiences discrimination based on their background, beliefs, characteristics or appearance*

Introduction

Discrimination is still prevalent in Scotland in many forms. The Equality and Human Rights Commission's report *Is Scotland Fairer?*¹ presents evidence of discrimination and disadvantage in Scotland on the grounds of gender, race, faith, disability, and sexual orientation. It reports the impact this has over many aspects of life including educational attainment, bullying, employment, health, justice and civic participation.

We know that many children and young people experience bullying and harassment based on their background, race, sexuality or gender identity, and this can have a significant effect on their health, wellbeing and learning. Every year the NSPCC highlights the prevalence of bullying and discrimination of ethnic minority communities through their research into calls to **Childline**.² Evidence from partners across the sector also shows the ongoing issues faced by members of the LGBTQI+ community and children with learning disabilities. It is clear that substantial progress still has to be made before children and young people are able to grow up free of discrimination.

Children in Scotland knows that many of these issues stem from structural inequalities and are the result of ongoing inequity in society that can and should be tackled. Much of the legislative framework is now in place to support this.



“There is not enough of a recognition of the impact of intersectional inequalities on children and families-focused policy”

However, some legislation may still be necessary to address specific concerns. We were disappointed that the Scottish Government recently halted plans to reform the Gender Recognition Act to make the process of applying for a Gender Recognition Certificate easier. Children in Scotland believes this should be a priority for the new government. More broadly, we believe a faster pace of progress is required to support ongoing cultural and societal change to create an inclusive and non-discriminatory Scotland.

Children in Scotland strongly supports universal approaches to service provision. However, we also know that these can, when not supported by appropriate measures, exacerbate inequalities. We are concerned that there is not enough of a recognition of the impact of intersectional inequalities on children and families-focused policy.

It is important that all Scottish Government policy and legislation is supported by a proactive equalities impact assessment. The impact on equalities must also be clearly and positively communicated as decisions are made. Targeted engagement is essential during policy development to ensure that all groups have a chance to influence decision-making. We also must gather far more rigorous data on the outcomes for children and young people with protected characteristics to inform policy and decision-making. Where necessary, targeted interventions should be available to ensure people of all backgrounds are supported, empowered and represented.

We must develop a children's sector workforce that is representative of society as a whole and ensure visible representation of minority groups. This will provide a workforce that is more culturally responsive and ensure children are surrounded by adults that reflect the full diversity of Scotland.

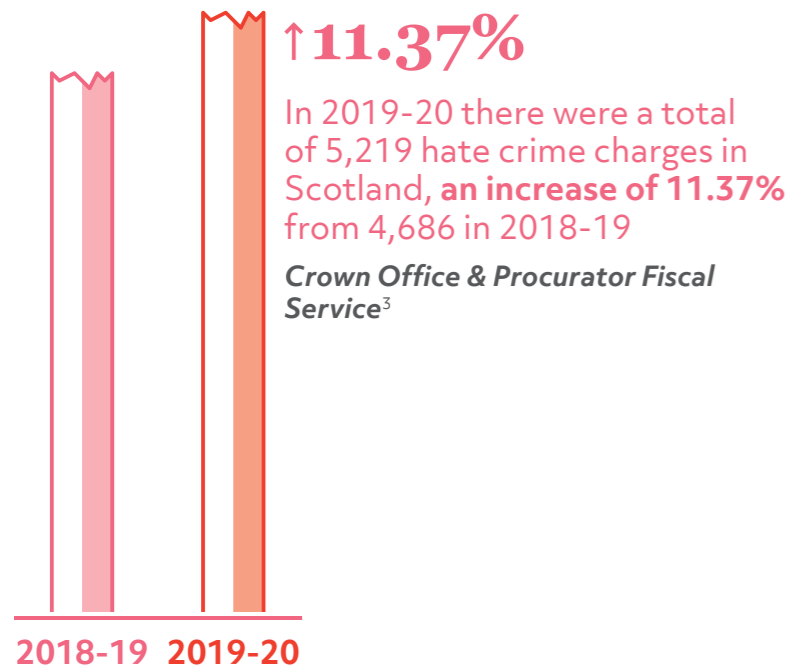




“I tried to go to a counsellor... there was no counsellor for disabled people”

“As a young and disabled woman of colour I am not represented at all in politics in Scotland”

Quotes from ‘Status of Young Women in Scotland 2018’
Source: *Children and Young People’s Evidence Bank*



We are running a project until May 2021 about children and young people’s views on diversity in Scottish education.
Image: Angus Doyle

UNCRC Articles



- Article 8** Identity
- Article 14** Freedom of thought and religion
- Article 22** Refugee children
- Article 30** Children from minority or indigenous groups

[View the Articles](#)

¹ equalityhumanrights.com/en/publication-download/scotland-fairer-2018
² learning.nspcc.org.uk/media/1898/childline-annual-review-2018-19.pdf
³ actiononprejudice.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/2020/07/Hate-Crime-in-Scotland-2019-20.pdf

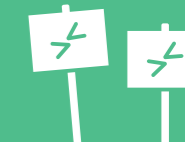


We call on political parties to commit to:

- !** Undertaking Equalities and Human Rights Impact Assessments on all policy relating to children and families, contributing to the development of Scottish Government policy that improves the lives of everyone with protected characteristics
- !** Bringing forward an action plan to diversify the children’s sector workforce and the Scottish Government workforce by the end of 2021
- !** Bringing forward legislation to reform the Gender Recognition Act to ensure a rights-based approach to obtaining a gender recognition certificate.

Calls supported by:





Vision *We avert the climate crisis and create a Scotland which has a sustainable, biodiverse, safe environment for all children, young people and their families*

Introduction

The climate crisis may be the most critical issue affecting our world today. But to date, despite emissions targets being set, progress towards tackling climate change has been alarmingly slow.

Climate change is a social justice issue. Children and young people and the most disadvantaged families in our society will be among those most adversely affected by climate change and environmental damage. Even now, these groups are already disproportionately experiencing the negative impact of pollution. We know that poor air quality is particularly prevalent in spaces used by children, and this can have a **significant impact**¹ on children’s health and growth.

Children in Scotland’s leadership and representation role within the children’s sector on this issue is an important one – the climate emergency is often not within the scope of our members to engage with in any detailed way while they are dealing with significant day-to-day challenges including housing, health and food insecurity, particularly within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. But a green recovery from the pandemic is vital to ensuring positive outcomes for all children, young people and families, and specifically those most disadvantaged.



“We stand with children and young people, including the Youth Climate Strikers, in urging the Scottish Government to ensure a fair and just transition to a greener society”

In recent years, the environment has become an issue that has galvanised children and young people nationally and internationally. It is also a key issue for Children in Scotland’s young people’s advisory group **Changing our World**.² Action is required to ensure that all children and young people are engaged in this issue.

The climate emergency requires a societal response. As such it must be embedded within the curriculum to ensure everyone learns about the scale and social justice context of the crisis and is able to take positive action.

We stand with children and young people, including the **Youth Climate Strikers**,³ in urging the Scottish Government to be more proactive in their response to the climate crisis and ensure a fair and just transition to a greener society.





Our obsession with wealth is killing our planet”

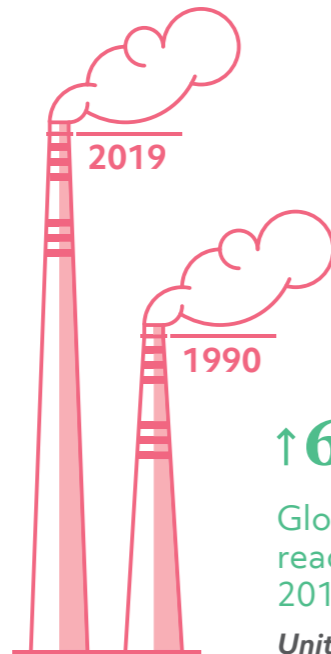
Coll McCail, member of our children and young people’s advisory group
Changing our World

Quote from *Children in Scotland Magazine, April 2020*



Protesters at the young people-led Global Climate Strike march, Edinburgh, September 2019.

Picture: Jemma Tracey



↑ 62%

Global fossil CO² emissions reached a new record high in 2019, 62% higher than in 1990

*United in Science 2020 report*⁴



1 in 3 children in the UK are growing up breathing unsafe levels of air pollution

*A Breath of Toxic Air report, UNICEF*⁵



“In responding to the Coronavirus outbreak, [global leaders] have proven that they can act in a crisis. Now, they must apply that urgency and level of action to the climate and ecological emergency”

Holly Gillibrand, young climate change campaigner

Quote from *Children in Scotland Magazine, April 2020*

UNCRC Articles

- Article 24 Health, water, food, environment
- Article 28 Access to education
- Article 29 Aims of education

[View the Articles](#)

¹ [unicef.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/A-breath-of-toxic-air_UnicefUKResearchPaper_June2018.pdf](https://www.unicef.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/A-breath-of-toxic-air_UnicefUKResearchPaper_June2018.pdf)

² [childreninscotland.org.uk/its-time-to-follow-young-peoples-lead-on-climate-change/](https://www.childreninscotland.org.uk/its-time-to-follow-young-peoples-lead-on-climate-change/)

³ [climatestrike.scot/](https://www.climatestrike.scot/)

⁴ [trello-attachments.s3.amazonaws.com/5f560af19197118edf74cf93/5f59f8b11a9063544de4bf39/cdb10977949b38128408f5322f9f676d/United_In_Science_2020_8_Sep_FINAL_LowResBetterQuality.pdf](https://s3.amazonaws.com/trello-attachments/5f560af19197118edf74cf93/5f59f8b11a9063544de4bf39/cdb10977949b38128408f5322f9f676d/United_In_Science_2020_8_Sep_FINAL_LowResBetterQuality.pdf)

⁵ [unicef.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/A-breath-of-toxic-air_UnicefUKResearchPaper_June2018.pdf](https://www.unicef.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/A-breath-of-toxic-air_UnicefUKResearchPaper_June2018.pdf)

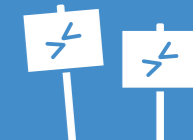


We call on political parties to commit to:

- Embedding education about climate change in the curriculum, in line with a wider review of Curriculum for Excellence. Children and young people from all backgrounds should be informed and be able to critically engage in discussions on climate change and wider environmental issues
- Publishing a revised Climate Change Plan and taking the necessary steps to ensure legally binding targets on greenhouse gas emissions in Scotland are met. This includes a 75% reduction in emissions by 2030 and a clear pathway to net zero by 2045
- Improving air quality in locations where children live, learn and play. A school air quality monitoring and education scheme should be introduced to measure air quality, educate children and families about this issue, and reduce children’s exposure to harmful pollutants.

Calls supported by:





Vision



The children's sector has enough resources and can be flexible in its approach to meet the needs of children, young people and families

Introduction

Public finances are facing unprecedented pressures – years of austerity and the impact of the coronavirus pandemic both having detrimental impacts. The extent of these over the coming years remains largely unknowable, making arguments and calls about resourcing difficult. Nevertheless, fiscal decisions will be made, and choices over where to invest public resources will still be available.

Since the publication of the **Christie Commission**¹ almost 10 years ago, Scottish Government has been shifting public sector responses towards prevention and early support. It is a shift that has widespread support within the children's sector and one which we articulate regularly in our meetings with Scottish Government officials. Prevention will be a concept and intention present in nearly all policy documents relating to the lives of children, young people and families.

However, for all this positive intent, few would argue that, given the wide inequalities that persist in Scotland, we have achieved the vision set out in the Christie Commission.

We know that getting it right for children from the earliest age can have positive impact for them as they grow into adult life. The rationale for investing in the early years and beyond continues to be well articulated internationally. We need consistent and adequate financial support to reduce child poverty, and investment in services that support families to ensure that we are giving children the best possible start in life.

This is not all about levels of investment of course. How support is provided and how services are designed are equally as important.

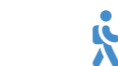
Involving children, young people and families in decision-making is absolutely vital, including national policy making, service design and evaluation. There are excellent examples of participatory decision-making across the country. However, practice still varies enormously, and the Scottish Government has an important role to play in fostering a more systematic approach to engagement both within its own policy development and across the public sector as a whole. Fundamentally, it must also ensure that after engagement takes place, the views gathered can be seen in the decisions that are taken.

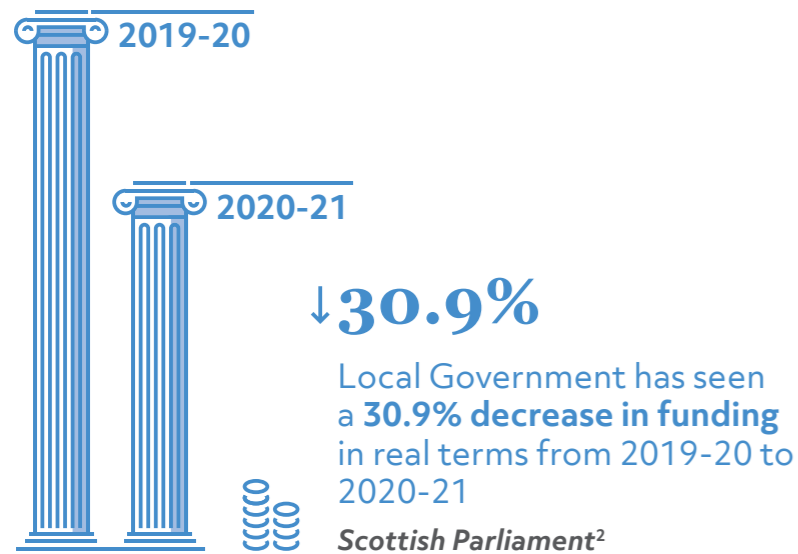
The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the increasing importance of digital access for families. Many struggled with home learning due to a lack of access to digital resources or confidence in using them. However, it provided key opportunities for people to maintain connections and allowed organisations to find innovative ways of working. We must learn from these experiences and ensure everyone has access to the digital resources that will become increasingly important.

Values must be at the heart of what we do. Organisations need the space to become truly values-led. We need to make sure that roles are attractive and the right people are recruited through values-based processes. This means fair wages, valuing staff, development opportunities and improving job security.

Increasingly it is clear that an economic model that emphasises growth over wellbeing does not work. Decisions should be made which prioritise health and wellbeing, connection and belonging. In the context of COVID-19, the priority should be on renewal and change, not a reflex recovery and return to the previous status quo.

This is of increasing importance as Scotland incorporates the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) – requiring changes to existing legislation and policy, with organisations and public bodies needing to make changes to how they operate. It provides us a unique opportunity to refocus our approaches to planning and budgeting. Call it 'wellbeing budgeting' or 'child rights budgeting', the same principle is at its heart. Make budgeting decisions based on what will improve outcomes for children, young people and families and make their human rights a reality.





UNCRC incorporation will be an opportunity to refocus our approaches to planning and budgeting.
Image: Alan Tait.

“The government doesn't have the money to get it wrong so should invest in listening to children and young people to get it right”

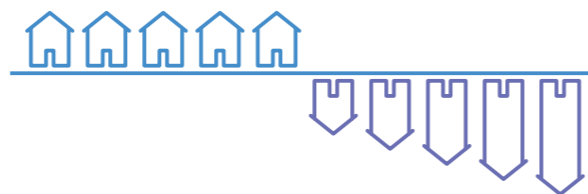
Quote from a young person at Children in Scotland's children's rights discussion day (2019)

Source: *Children and Young People's Evidence Bank*

50%

50% of people in Scotland think the standard of living has fallen a little or a lot between 2018-19

Scottish Social Attitudes 2019, Scottish Government³



UNCRC Articles

- Article 12 Respect for children's views
- Article 15 Setting up or joining groups
- Article 23 Children with disabilities
- Article 28 Access to education

[View the Articles](#)

¹ gov.scot/publications/commission-future-delivery-public-services/
² digitalpublications.parliament.scot/ResearchBriefings/Report/2020/2/14/Local-Government-Finance--Budget-2020-21-and-provisional-allocations-to-local-authorities#Headline-figures
³ gov.scot/publications/scottish-social-attitudes-2019-attitudes-government-political-engagement/
⁴ gov.scot/publications/common-core-skills-knowledge-understanding-values-childrens-workforce-scotland/
⁵ gov.scot/publications/decision-making-children-and-young-peoples-participation/pages/overview/



We call on political parties to commit to:

- ! Producing a comprehensive Wellbeing Budget by 2022. This will ensure that the annual Scottish budget is designed and implemented with the goal of improving the wellbeing of all citizens in Scotland, including children, young people and families
- ! Sustainable funding for children's services across the statutory, third and private sectors, across all five years of the next Scottish Parliament
- ! Supporting the children's sector to achieve a fully values-driven workforce through refreshing its commitment to the **Common Core of Skills, Knowledge and Understanding and Values for the Children's Workforce in Scotland**.⁴
- ! Expanding the **Strategic Participation Framework**⁵ to ensure the ongoing, meaningful engagement of children and young people in all policymaking by 2022. This must be funded appropriately and support engagement which builds upon the UN Committee's basic requirements for meaningful participation.

Calls supported by:



