

Essential reading for Scotland's children's sector

August - September 2020 Issue 198

# Children in Scotland magazine

## THE ROAD TO RENEWAL

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Professor Sonia Livingstone on  
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We'd like to say thank you to all our members and readers for continuing to engage with us and support our work during this challenging time.



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# Welcome...



Jennifer Drummond
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At the time of publishing, Scotland continues to make progress towards easing out of lockdown and returning to some form of normality — albeit one that might look quite different from the start of the year.

In this edition, we reflect on some of the observations made and lessons that have emerged in the 'new normal' and how they can help us shape our society post-COVID.

Heeding warnings issued around the long-term social, emotional and mental impact of spending months in lockdown, and some in total isolation, we explore how we can offer support and help for those who are likely to have felt the impact the most — be that through financial instability, emotional distress, mental health issues or physical endangerment.

But we also consider the potential positives to come out of the adaptations made during this period. It's led to an embracing of working from home and a more flexible work culture, more use of digital

technology for working and learning, and services adapting away from the run-of-the-mill to find new and innovative ways to continue to serve the most vulnerable families during these difficult times.

The last few months have been unprecedented. Very few events in history have caused a global shutdown of such extremes. It's been new and uncharted waters for everyone, but the overarching message has been one of community and solidarity. As we start to find our way out of the dark and make our way to shore, we need to focus on how to find a way forward, together.

Happy reading, and stay safe.

Drummond

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Catch up on key news from the sector (page 4), find out more about our event with trauma expert, Bruce Perry (page 7) and meet Mhairi McCann, a member of Children in Scotland's youth advisory group and founder of Youth STEM 2030 (Introducing, page 26).

# Welcome outdoors!

Outdoor play has long been a part of ELC in Scotland and there is increasing focus on how the outdoors can benefit children (and the adults that work with them!). The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted how important it is to spend time outdoors in nature. Being active and playing outdoors helps children develop physically, socially and emotionally. In nature, children can relax, explore the world around them and connect with their environment.

To increase access to outdoor play for all during the pandemic, Scottish Government funded the Virtual Nature School from Living Classrooms. The programme is training and supporting ELC practitioners in the delivery of nature-focused play sessions for children while they were unable to attend settings as normal. This is helping to maintain access to high quality learning provision throughout the lockdown period, with known practitioners, whilst also supporting families more widely to recognise the value of learning through play outdoors.

Find more information and register for a place at www.virtualnatureschool.scot



Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
gov.scot



Lead news story

# Rights of children have been overlooked during pandemic, says Children's Commissioner

A new report has suggested children's human rights have been overlooked, undermined and jeopardised in the government's response to COVID-19.

The *Independent Children's Rights Impact Assessment on the Response to Covid-19 in Scotland*, published in July, analyses how emergency laws and policies around the pandemic impacted the human rights of children and young people in Scotland. It suggests the global pandemic, and both the Scottish and UK Government's response, demonstrates how easily children are left with no voice, and warns the legislative approach has had a significant impact on human rights.

Bruce Adamson, Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland, said: "The pandemic revealed we've not made as much progress on children's rights as we would like to think in Scotland.

"Under pressure, too many of our systems and structures reverted to treating children as passive recipients of charity and welfare rather than as active agents in their own lives and valued members of our community."

He referenced the lack of direct input from children and young people into decisions around exams, or new methods of assessment and highlighted there is no representation of children or young people on the Scottish Government's Education Recovery Group.



Image: iStockphoto @hidesy

The Commissioner also noted that the Scottish Government failed to routinely assess the impact of emergency law and policy responses to COVID-19 on children. The report states that the emergency legislation passed by both UK and Scottish Governments, intended to act in the interest of public health, had a significant impact on children's rights with some even temporarily overturning human rights protections for children.

The report makes a series of recommendations covering nine themes, including mental health, education, poverty and children in detention to ensure children and young people's rights are better respected, protected and fulfilled moving forward.

Recommendations focus on law reform, specifically the incorporation of the UNCRC into Scots law, monitoring and scrutiny of emergency powers and improved data gathering and resource allocation.

Kay Tisdall, Professor of Childhood Policy at the University of Edinburgh, speaking on behalf of the Observatory of Children's Human Rights Scotland, said:

"We need to commit the resources — and take the time now in preparation for the next lockdown or next crisis — to know about the diversity of children and particularly those children who are most at risk of human rights violations. We need to plan ahead and ensure all children under 18 have their rights respected."

The Commissioner has also called for a commitment to carry out a Child Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA) on all future decision-making and legislation affecting children and young people.

The study was conducted by the Observatory for Children's Human Rights in Scotland, based at the University of Edinburgh, at the Commissioner's request after the office raised significant concerns around how children and young people were being supported during the global pandemic.

> Read the report in full [here](#)

## Delaying funded childcare "devastating for parents"

The delay in expansion of free childcare across Scotland will be a devastating blow for parents, impacting on their employment and putting more stress on household finances, campaigners have warned.

The Scottish Government's transformational childcare plan, which promised to double the number of funded childcare hours for three and four-year-olds as well as eligible two-year-olds from 600 hours to 1140 hours, was announced in 2017 and has become one of the flagship policies of Nicola Sturgeon's leadership.

However, in July, the First Minister announced the increased hours will no longer be offered during the 2020-21 school year as a result of delays to expansion caused by the coronavirus outbreak.

Eileen Prior, executive director of parent-teacher organisation, Connect, warned the delay will hit parents hard and only add to the pressures they face.

She said: "It seems to be a repeat of last year's 'transition year', where some families lose out as much as £3000 because they have to pay for additional childcare. At this time of economic crisis, this will be particularly difficult."

The First Minister expressed disappointment on announcing the delay, recognising it would be devastating for parents but said it was inevitable as a result of the global pandemic.

A revised date for implementation is yet to be agreed but Early Years Minister, Maree Todd, said an "initial assessment of readiness" would be conducted in December.



Image: iStockphoto @FamVid

## Hey Girls reaches 10 million product milestone

Scottish social enterprise, Hey Girls, has provided over 10 million free period products to help women and girls in need across the UK.

Through their Buy One Give One model, for every product sold the same is match-donated to the community. Donation partners vary from local foodbanks, community centres and initiatives to women's crisis shelters.

The organisation has also been working with local authorities, schools and colleges across Scotland to deliver free products to students, constituents and service users throughout the pandemic, supplying products to provide protection for up to three months.

Celia Hodson, founder of Hey Girls, said:

"We're amazed to have reached this milestone of 10 million donated products. Sadly there is still a long way to go until we can say that nobody in the UK finds themselves unable to afford period products, especially once the ramifications of COVID-19 become clear."

"Working with our partners to provide period protection during the coronavirus pandemic hopefully means that students have one less thing to worry about."



Hey Girls was launched in 2018 after a Plan UK survey found 1 in 10 women and girls find themselves unable to afford period products from month to month.

> Find out more at [heygirls.co.uk](https://heygirls.co.uk)

## Charity calls for personalised support for autistic pupils

A leading autism charity has called for more support for autistic pupils upon their return to school.

The National Autistic Society Scotland says parents of children with autism are concerned about how the lockdown has affected their children's routines and how many will cope with the return to full-time schooling. The charity has called for every autistic child to have a personalised support plan to help with the transition back to school life.

Nick Ward, Director of NAS Scotland, said:

"Many autistic children will have been out of school for over four months. Some have coped very well. Others, however, have struggled under the strict restrictions and huge change to routine and we've heard from families under severe pressure with the profound impacts on mental health and wellbeing."

"Change can be incredibly challenging for autistic people. It is important that transition back into school is handled sensitively and in a personalised way. We're calling on schools to make sure that each and every autistic child has a personalised plan, with input from parents, to make the transition as smooth as possible."

According to Scottish Government statistics, there are 6,500 autistic children across Scotland.

The call comes after Angela Morgan published her report into the implementation of Scottish Government ASL guidance across Scotland which revealed the need for a better, more consistent approach to offering support.

> Too many promises and a failure to act - Sally Cavers reflects on the recently published Review and where we go next  
Lead Comment, Page 16

> Read Angela Morgan's review into the implementation of ASL Guidance [here](#)



# The impact of lockdown on our mental health cannot be ignored

News reports continue to highlight the effects of lockdown on mental health. Acknowledging this impact will help us plan and support children, and adults, in the years ahead writes **Amy Woodhouse**

The mental health of children and young people in Scotland was already cause for concern before COVID-19. We were aware that rates of wellbeing were dropping, especially amongst teenage girls, and that levels of support were not sufficient to meet need.

Evidence from children and young people about the impact of the pandemic and associated lockdown on their mental health has added to these concerns.

Almost two fifths (39%) of young people who took part in the Lockdown Lowdown study by Young Scot, Scottish Youth Parliament and YouthLink Scotland stated that they felt 'moderately or extremely concerned' about their own mental wellbeing. When asked about the mental wellbeing of others, 46% stated that they felt 'moderately or extremely concerned' about the wellbeing of others.

Young journalists contributing to the Children's Parliament's *Corona Times* reported that the restrictions left them feeling a range of emotions including sadness, loneliness, boredom, anger and frustration.

In addition, Carers Trust Scotland published a report in July warning about the steep decline in the mental health of young carers as a result of the additional responsibilities and decreased support they have experienced during lockdown.

These concerns have been reflected in increased calls to national helplines. For example, NSPCC has revealed that their calls have gone up by almost a third (32%) since lockdown, with an increased number related to concerns about children's mental health and wellbeing.

These statistics are deeply worrying. Not least because, although lockdown restrictions are lifting, we are by no means out of the woods yet.

Providing adequate and accessible support to children and young people navigating these uncertain and worrying times is key. Our attention must also now turn to supporting children and young people returning to school.

John Swinney has indicated that schools must prioritise child wellbeing over the coming months, and Children in Scotland supports this focus. But it has to be more than rhetoric. It needs to focus on how schools can feel like safe,



supportive places for children, within the context of very real and ongoing public health concerns. We should also consider how some of the flexibility provided by remote learning, which has worked for some children, can be incorporated after schools return, and how schools can hold onto their important role within communities, reaching out to families and bringing in community support.

It's an incredibly tough ask, particularly as schools need to feel safe for school staff too. Recognising the mental health impact of coronavirus on us all, adults and children alike, recognising how difficult and challenging this all is, and treating ourselves and others with compassion and kindness is not the whole answer, but it will help.

**Amy Woodhouse is Children in Scotland's Head of Policy, Projects & Participation**

> [Read the Lockdown Lowdown report here](#)

> [Find out more about the Corona Times, published by the Children's Parliament here](#)

> [Read more results from the Carers Trust Scotland survey here](#)

> [Supporting children and young people at home Find out how Place2Be have maintained their mental health support service during the pandemic](#) **Voices, Page 24**

Our **2020 More Than My Trauma conference** has been reconfigured to take the format of a webinar series on 16-18 September 2020, and a conference on 7-8 September 2021.

This year's **webinar series** will see international trauma expert **Dr Bruce Perry** contribute to webinars exploring trauma theory and practice. Ahead of these, we asked our project partners to tell us what they're most looking forward to about the 2020 webinars and 2021 conference.



"We are very much looking forward to the More Than My Trauma Conference. So many children and young people that we work with at Aberlour have experienced traumatic events in their lives. Sadly, we see many children who have been exposed to multiple traumatic experiences. As an organisation we want to increase our awareness and knowledge about preventing and aiding recovery from trauma. We want to improve how we respond to and address the distress children experience, ultimately helping them towards healthy and fulfilling lives."

**SallyAnn Kelly, Chief Executive, Aberlour**



"We have worked for years with our friend and colleague, Dr Bruce Perry. We were disappointed that the September 2020 international conference had to be rescheduled to 2021 but the webinar series is the next best thing. It is excellent timing to share the insights and learning of the children's workforce experience of responding to trauma as a result of COVID-19. People have worked so hard. The webinar series will present opportunities to reflect and take stock, together with Bruce on these past months and what it means for our practice."

**Jackie Brock, Chief Executive, Children in Scotland**



"This is a fantastic opportunity to hear from some of the field's leading experts about how we can better care for those that need it most.

We're particularly looking forward to having such a committed and diverse group of attendees who can discuss, debate and importantly deliver the next phase of trauma care and services. Much has been achieved in the last few years and this conference has a big part to play in making sure this continues for the years ahead."

**Dan Johnson, Clinical Director, Kibble**



"It is exciting to be part of this webinar series. The opportunity to have input from experts in their field is valuable and the webinars will allow us to still work together, sharing our ideas and our enthusiasm so that we can collectively be a part of affecting positive change for those impacted by trauma. We will benefit through our participation as individual practitioners and this will support us to be better informed as organisations as the learning in this area is a continuous process. 2021 will bring an exciting opportunity to work together exploring further how we can best support the recovery process for those affected by trauma."

**Stuart Provan, Chief Executive, Seamab**



"At Staf we're excited to hear from Dr Bruce Perry at these webinars, particularly as the pandemic has brought into sharp focus the need to address unresolved trauma amongst children and young people with experience of care. We're looking forward to hearing more on how we can put the theory on relationships into practice and how we can better support the wellbeing of the workforce so that they can provide the love and care our children need."

**Jo Derrick, Chief Executive, Staf (Scottish Throughcare and Aftercare Forum)**



"We are so looking forward to having the opportunity to share the work we have undertaken over the past four years to implement Dr Perry's Neurosequential Model as part of our Readiness for Learning approach to closing the poverty-related attainment gap.

Our webinar event in September 2020 will give a brief taster of the overall R4L approach and how this has informed our COVID-19 response. When we meet in person in 2021, we'll be exploring in more depth how we have used this work on our journey from trauma awareness to trauma transformation – not only for the children and young people we work with, but also in the way we deliver our service as a whole, as well as sharing data that demonstrates the impact of our approach."

**Clackmannanshire Council**



To book your place for this September's webinar series, visit **BIZZABO**



Like many other organisations, Children in Scotland has been impacted by the effects of the global COVID-19 pandemic, but we continue to work to support the sector.

Usually a member benefit, our magazine is currently free on our digital platform as part of our offering to the sector at this time. Our events have moved online — read more about our upcoming webinars on page 30.

Help support our work to improve children's lives: donate with Give as You Live [here](#)



# "We have to overcome our fear of young people's collective power"



## Interview

Professor Sonia Livingstone, international expert and advisor on children, young people and the digital age, reflects on the effects of a move towards a more digital society, children's rights in a digital age and the opportunities we need to embrace to move forward safely. *Interview by Jennifer Drummond*

Embracing and making best use of digital technology is recognised as vital in our fast-moving society. From developments in healthcare to privately funded space missions, online learning and remote working, and smartphones to home entertainment systems, technology is developing at a phenomenal rate.

In the last few months, globally we have seen an almost immediate reliance on digital for working, learning and leisure time. For some, digital has proven a literal lifeline during lockdown. For others, moving life online has been simply unfeasible due to a lack of resources, knowledge or skills.

Throughout it all there has been concern for how the growing reliance on digital will impact on our youngest generation. Issues causing concern include exposure to risk, an increasing lack of physical contact and social interaction, exclusion from online activity, including online learning, and the long-term social, emotional and developmental effects. But there is also a recognition of the opportunities of a more accessible online world in terms of connectivity and opportunity.

### Digital exclusion

**The emergence of COVID-19 quickened the use and focus on digital in all aspect of life. What do you think will be the short and longer term impacts of the expedited 'digital-by-default' approach?**

**Sonia Livingstone:** What lots of research and policy interventions have told us over the years is that the digital world exacerbates and amplifies and intensifies all the processes in society. So, for those who are productive and creative, the internet is a wonderful opportunity. For those who are miserable and depressed, the internet can be an amplifier of misery.

Under COVID, we have moved to an extraordinary reliance on digital technology. Not quite by default, but that's where it's going. The idea began as a policy of government to put all public or government services online and get rid of all the offline expenses and onerous ways in which people engaged with government. But there are many reasons to do with connectivity and affluence and various forms of accessibility that make this world harder not easier.

It is good for those with the skills, education and connectivity, and not much time, who can navigate their way through what is rather poorly designed or not very human-friendly services. But the effects of digital by default fall unequally.

The other lesson that we learned when the government went digital, which has really been exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic, is that although things can be done efficiently online, there is no human exchange. And for some, the exchange might be the only human exchange that the people have in their day. The informal, social fabric of our lives is just not recognised and not possible in a 'digital by default' world. That whole layer of an ethic of care is

eliminated. And all social structures of power, inclusion and inequality are stripped out. We become much more crude players, or interactors, than we would ever really want to be. It's a crueler world, even though it is of course very efficient.

### What do we need to truly offer digital experiences to all?

**SL:** We need to recognise that going digital by default, or to engage with the digital world, is not just hardware and the software, but it is also about the sociotechnical practices that connect us and we engage with. Digital skills and digital understanding is crucial.

Experience shows that well-meaning government policies that only provide the technology, only provide the hardware, fail over and over again. They fail for not understanding skills, lifestyles, norms, power relations in families or communities or gender issues. For any government to say we will solve the problem of social justice and social inequality or inclusion by spending some money on laptops is unconscionable. It's a whole learning shift. People don't learn instantaneously when the technology arrives in the home, it's a process, and a process that has a pedagogy. We need to keep all of those complexities in mind.

### Children's rights, wellbeing and digital

As the digital world has expanded, companies such as Google, Facebook and Amazon have become global powerhouses. But they have come under fire for their failure to protect consumers' private data, and the monitoring of our online behaviour. Professor Livingstone has written in the past about the dangers of 'surveillance capitalism', and the notion that we as consumers become commodities, with our interests and our time able to be bought and sold, often without our knowledge or consent. As adults, we have a responsibility and the capacity to consider how our data may be used and our online behaviour tracked by platforms we are accessing. But how does this impact on children and young people who may not be able to make that connection or understand the long-term implications?

A related issue is the tension between rights and wellbeing in the digital landscape, an issue explored at the webinar *Children's wellbeing in a digital world*, chaired by Professor Livingstone, in June this year.

### What are your key concerns regarding the powers and actions of so-called 'digital giants' and how it impacts on the rights of children and young people?

**SL:** All users look the same online, so it is very difficult, even if one wanted to, to address the needs and rights of children differently from those of adults. I, and others, such as the 5Rights Foundation, have complained that we cannot design a digital world to be good for children if you don't know if it's a child using your service. But if you ask children, yes in many ways they are frustrated that they are invisible, but they have also played with its possibilities — entering into adult



spaces where they would never be able to see what was happening in the offline world. They are also treated as equal, because people don't know they are a child.

Hypervisibility is the idea of “surveillance capitalism”, that the platforms and services know everything about you, as does whoever they report to. And there is distressingly little barrier between the platform that collects where you go on its service and commercial enterprises who pay for that knowledge.

We [as users] want to be visible or invisible in ways in which we can manage, from people we know and from the state, for example schools, doctors, community services, etc, and then from commercial players. Breaches of privacy that happen in those places are different. When you are hypervisible to your friends in ways in which you didn't realise and the potential for embarrassment or shame or bullying is high. The way in which the state increasingly know everything, presents a different risk. Not shame and embarrassment but control, punishment or intervention; that everything we do is visible and can be commodified; that my attention and interests become a resource that is sold over my head.

**How does this privacy issue sit within the context of rights and wellbeing for children and young people going online?**

**SL:** It's the responsibility of adults to think about both the short-term and long-term consequences. Children often only think about the short-term and that is perhaps one of the things that makes children's needs distinct, in terms of protections that need to be put around them.

So, the child says, I don't care who has my data today, but the platform and definitely the State have to think what consequences might that have tomorrow, and have to take that responsibility. But they don't.

Children can't be responsible for what happens in the future. The whole way in which we understand childhood is as a time to make mistakes, fall over and get back up. Resilience is about learning from mistakes and gaining inner resources. You need to develop those inner resources to cope with what is going to be the unknown, with what the world throws at you, and you need that chance to learn without everything being held against you. That's another dimension of online hypervisibility, that everything you do at any point can be used against you, or for you, or combined with other data to get further things about you in ways that we are only just beginning to understand.”

**What measures do individuals, corporations and government need to take to protect children's rights whilst keeping children safe in an increasingly digital world?**

**SL:** The fact the debate about duty of care has caught on both speaks to a need and it being recognised as being practical to people. If the Online Harms Bill and the Age Appropriate Design Code goes forward, if various measures to formally legislate and make sure these platforms and services have that duty of care to their users, there will likely be lots of trouble down the road with the duty of care applied too crudely, or challenged in the courts. There are always unintended consequences. But I am in favour of moving to that point. We have been shilly-shallying for too long, not knowing

where to go, and in that time these platforms have become so important.

But my understanding is that the duty of care is designed to be simply a minimum threshold. It doesn't mean that tech giants will in any way care for us, they will simply apply a minimum threshold. Just like McDonald's makes no commitment to produce food that's good for us, it does commit to eradicating the poisons. So, duty of care might sound too kind and too generous in its ethics and social responsibility. It really is that minimum level of not facilitating paedophile access to our children, not providing pornography to our children or anyone who wanders by or dealing with hashtags on Instagram that promote or draw in those who are inclined to self-harm or have suicidal thoughts. These are extreme; these are the equivalent of poisons in our food. It's going to be a very interesting challenge to deal with them.

**Professor Laura Lundy [Co-Director of the Centre for Children's Rights, Belfast] said during the June webinar discussion that upholding children's rights is about “politically negotiated compromises”. That companies don't care, but they have agreed to make certain compromises in order to continue trading. Would you agree?**

**SL:** Yes, and what makes people fearful is that this is not a negotiation amongst equals. The technological complexity is not understood by the politicians doing the negotiations with the companies. The tech sector is the biggest spender on lobbying within Brussels. When people who are watching the patents of these companies, they are patenting technologies that one cannot imagine the use of or see the connection to the service currently offered by that company – why is Facebook investing in drones, or why is Microsoft patenting medical knowledge? Where they are going is so far ahead of our ability to negotiate on behalf of presently living children. It is a very unequal negotiation.

The duty of care is the beginning but it is not enough. Dealing with the worst doesn't, in any way, make for a good society for children to grow up in.

#### Participation and digital citizenship

**What do you think are the key pillars of effective, and safe, digital participation?**

**SL:** There is one fundamental requirement of any kind of digital participation or otherwise, and that is consequential. When young people participate and express their views, somebody with the power to make change is listening, and ready to act upon those views. That could mean young people themselves in various forms of political activism, knowing that when they participate with their peers, they themselves can bring about action, and action that is meaningful and will change lives. But very often, we adults, in positions of power, consult young people then fail to act on what they've said, or fail to even tell them whether we have acted or not.

Participation is both about speaking and being heard. I think that idea is recognised, but it remains difficult, how to weigh what young people say with the views of those who think they might know better or who have other interests.



I also think it is very hard to participate as a lone individual. We have to think about ways in which participation can be collective and collaborative. Society is a bit worried when it sees groups of young people getting together to debate the system of power. We fear them. We regard them as a bit like the unruly crowd. We adults have to somehow overcome our fear of young people's collective power.

**As part of our 25 Calls campaign, Jess McBeath said we need to work as a society to agree 'a common set of values in the digital world so that young people are safe and encouraged to be active digital citizens'. Do you think that's possible, and what do you think needs to happen for it to be achieved?**

**SL:** “What I learned in interviewing families for my book is that there are many things that link families and help them share their experiences, but there are also a very many things that differentiate people without dividing them. But we are not very good at thinking of diversity and values without turning that into a problem that result in exclusion and inequality.

I interviewed 70 families and ended up with 70 stories and 70 world views and 70 sets of values. What's often foremost in people's minds is the particular type of identity and values they are trying to take forward for them and their families. That's what lots of parents find so damaging about the digital world; it always seems to force one mainstream, probably commercial, probably white, lower-middle class vision on everybody.

On the other hand, everyone would agree that we want young people to be safe and encouraged and active digital citizens. I can't imagine a family who would not agree with that. But it's paradoxical. There are very powerful values that we could all agree on, and there are lots of ways in which people want to live very different lives. The practical question is which of those is most operational. Which one is easiest for us to turn into action?

I always used to advocate for a one-stop shop, and a Minister for children's rights in a digital world. I still think we need a lot more co-ordination. We are increasingly seeing it is an incredibly diverse world. Take NGOs, for example. They all have their particular, and often common, values. But they also want to be their own identity. They have their own motivations, and that's what makes for change.”

**Sonia Livingstone is a Professor of Social Psychology at the London School of Economics.**

> Professor Livingstone has advised the UK government, European Commission, European Parliament, UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, OECD, ITU and UNICEF, among others, on children's internet safety and rights in the digital environment.

> Her forthcoming book *Parenting for a Digital Future: How hopes and fears about technology shape children's lives* (Oxford University Press, with Alicia Blum-Ross) is due to be published in September.

> Find out more at [sonialivingstone.net](https://sonialivingstone.net), and follow discussion on Twitter [@Livingstone\\_S](https://twitter.com/Livingstone_S)



# Caring in a crisis

Oxfam Scotland's Make Care Count campaign shines a light on what's been learned about the link between care, poverty and gender injustice during the pandemic – and calls for politicians to act. *Jamie Livingstone* explains more



Image: iStockphoto @Onfokus

Right now, our news is dominated by death and disease, but gradually a more familiar yet destructive crisis is re-emerging from COVID-19's unwanted shadow: poverty.

Ironically, some of the people most vulnerable to it are the very people that politicians and the public have been enthusiastically applauding; the nation's carers.

We've joined forces with over 100 anti-poverty, carers' and women's rights groups, as well as thinktanks and unions, to sound the alarm. We have one straightforward ask of our political leaders, both at Holyrood and at Westminster: to act now to end carers' poverty.

The coronavirus pandemic has truly brought into sharp focus the importance of care. Each of us depends on someone to care for us at some point in our life. Carers – both paid and unpaid – are the glue that hold our society together, perhaps now more than ever before.

We know, from our work internationally and here in Scotland, that there's a direct link between caring and poverty. Even before the coronavirus, too many carers were barely keeping their heads above water. But the pandemic is making a bad situation intolerable.

Whether you're caring for a child, an older person, or someone with an illness or additional needs, the last thing you need is the added worry of poverty.

We need to fix this injustice now, and for good.

## Care needs have increased

People are spending more time looking after others, including parents giving up paid work to look after children, and others looking after those who are ill or self-isolating during the coronavirus crisis.

Many paid care workers, where they have been able to stay in work, including nursery staff and care home staff, are facing unprecedented pressures in the workplace – including a significant health risk to them and their loved ones.

**"We know there is a direct link between caring and poverty"**

As ever, the caring impacts of this crisis are falling on women hardest. Here and across the world, paid and underpaid care work is disproportionately done by women and girls, especially those from groups who, as well as gender discrimination, experience discrimination based on ethnicity, nationality, and age.

In Scotland, there are approximately 759,000 people aged over 16 providing some form of unpaid care to elderly or disabled people. Carers are also significantly more likely to be women – for example, they make up 96% of the paid childcare workforce. And, even before this coronavirus, many were living in poverty.

There are many key groups of carers, but one that's attracting less coverage is those who are responsible

for looking after children, either at work or at home. Parents – especially lone parents – and guardians caring for children were already more likely to be living in poverty prior to the pandemic. One reason is the lack of access to affordable, flexible childcare, which locks people out of the job market. As some of the participants in Oxfam's research told us, if childcare is too expensive and paid work does not allow parents to afford childcare, then parents, very often mothers, have to make the decision to leave work or wait until their children are older and more independent before entering, or re-entering, the job market. As one woman told us: "I'm skipping lots of opportunities, because I need to take care of [my children]."

But it's not just parents who face financial hardship. Many paid childcare workers are themselves facing poverty, in an industry characterised by persistent low pay. In a UK-wide survey by Nursery World last year, nearly half of respondents said they were unable, or sometimes struggle, to save £20 a month, leaving them vulnerable to income shocks.

Both parents and childcare workers often have no option but to turn to social security for help; a system which all too often fails to protect people from poverty.

## It's time to care

Governments across Britain have taken some welcome steps to cushion the impact of the pandemic on people's incomes, but there is clearly much, much more that needs to be done to ensure that everyone is protected from poverty, including carers.

As we tentatively emerge from the pandemic's dark shadow, thoughts are turning to recovery. Our political leaders should ensure social security acts as a safety net to protect all carers from poverty, and that social and childcare workers are given the conditions and protection they need.

Of course, it's true that many of the broader solutions to alleviating poverty – like fixing Universal Credit and lifting the benefit cap – rest at Westminster. But that doesn't mean the Scottish Government is powerless; encouraging signs of policy commitment must now be built upon.

The upcoming Scottish Child Payment, which will give low income households £10 per week extra for every child, is a welcome step forward, but its implementation has been delayed. Until it is delivered, the Scottish Government should plug the gap for families who need help now.

And while the focus is, understandably, on mitigating the immediate income crisis, continued investment is required to boost access to, and the affordability of, childcare, to make it easier for parents who wish to work to do so, and stay out of poverty. News that the expansion of funded Early Learning and Childcare hours has also been delayed, is a significant blow for low-income families.

Meanwhile, the Scottish Government's move to fast-track payment of the Real Living Wage of £9.30 per hour for all hours worked for social care workers is also a welcome step. Ensuring it reaches all of them quickly is the key test. Yet, as it stands, others will miss out on similar protection. Despite the Scottish Government's commitment that childcare workers delivering the expanded quota of government-funded free entitlement will be paid at least the Real Living Wage, too many other childcare workers will be left to

survive on wages below this.

Ultimately, while signs of progress are welcome, it's painfully apparent that there still needs to be a step-change in how care, and those who provide it, are valued.

Those unpaid carers in Scotland who are eligible for Carer's Allowance may be better financially protected than those in other parts of the UK, but the upcoming shift to Scottish Carer's Allowance creates a golden opportunity to properly value their vital contribution while ensuring this protection reaches all those who need it.

**"There needs to be a step-change in how care, and those who provide it, are valued"**

Carers are playing a key role in helping the country through this pandemic. So, as our political leaders seek to build back better, it's clear they should be given the same level of support and respect they give to others; both now and for good.

Investing in care and carers is not just the right thing to do, it would both create a significant number of new, valuable, low-carbon jobs and help to deliver a Just, Caring and Green Recovery in Scotland.

Recent YouGov polling commissioned by Oxfam Scotland shows that 66% of people here said care workers are paid too little and nearly two-thirds believe that those on low incomes who look after sick or disabled people should receive more financial support through increased social security payments. More than half believe governments should spend more on parents who work on very low incomes, with a further third of respondents saying that existing financial support should be protected.

Now is the moment for our political leaders to listen to the public, and help build the fairer, more equal Scotland we all want to live in. They have the chance to show they genuinely care and want to work together to make care really count in Scotland.

**Jamie Livingstone is Head of Oxfam in Scotland**

[> Download the Make Care Count campaign report here](#)

[> The supplementary report, Care, Poverty and Coronavirus across Britain, identifies the impact of COVID-19 on the care sector and those with caring responsibilities. Download the full report](#)

Image: iStockphoto ©FatCamera







# Superheroes, assemble!

**F**ife residents have been superhero spotting over the last few months as a team of caped crusaders have taken to the streets.

Dave Roper, AKA Duloch Spiderman, initially started the craze in March, running daily in a Spiderman suit and using the interest and support from the local community to raise money for Calaiswood School, Dunfermline, which his son attends.

Since then, he has been joined by Batman, Buzz Lightyear, Mrs Incredible, Superman, Captain America, Wonder Woman, Thor, Supergirl and Batgirl, amongst others, representing Dunfermline as well as surrounding areas.

Speaking to the local press, Dave Roper said: "The response has been fantastic. I wasn't planning to fundraise, I was just doing my daily exercise, but it's been incredible."

He and his fellow caped crusaders have now raised more than £12,000 for Calaiswood School which provides specialist education for children aged 3-18 with complex and additional support needs.

As well as running locally, the group has recently completed a 22-mile run from Pittencrieff Park, Dunfermline, to Edinburgh's Sick Kids Hospital as part of the Lap the World Challenge - a fundraising race between Edinburgh and Glasgow Children's Hospital Charities to cover the distance around the world's Equator (50,087km) during the month of July. They ran as part of Team Edinburgh, joining more than 2000 other runners who signed up for the month-long fundraiser.

The group has been nominated for a prestigious Pride of Britain award in recognition of their service to the community.

> Find out more or donate to Spiderman's fundraising efforts at [uk.gofundme.com/f/duloch-spiderman](https://uk.gofundme.com/f/duloch-spiderman)

> The Edinburgh and Glasgow Children's Hospital Charities exist to transform the lives of children and young people in hospital and healthcare so they can be children first, and patients second.

Find out more at: [echcharity.org](https://echcharity.org) (Edinburgh) [glasgowchildrenshospitalcharity.org](https://glasgowchildrenshospitalcharity.org)

*Image courtesy of Gillian Naysmith*



## Comment, policy & analysis

Leader Comment

# "There have been too many promises of change, followed by a failure to act"



Sally Cavers  
@sallycavers

We need to respond swiftly, effectively and listen to the many testimonies provided during the Additional Support for Learning implementation review, writes *Sally Cavers*

In June, the report of the review of the implementation of Additional Support for Learning was published. The recommendations, to me, seem well considered and an achievable response to the information gathered by the Review team, alongside the plethora of previous related reports and research.

The introduction of the report notes 'Scotland has groundbreaking, rights-widening legislation for children who face additional barriers to learning and to fulfilling their potential.' Our additional support for learning legislation is more or less universally agreed as sound and outlines what we want for our children and young people. Internationally, we are applauded for our approach.

However, like many others who have been following this legislation and its impact for a long time, I have also seen the increased dissatisfaction about resourcing and inconsistency in its application. In my view, there are four key areas where we can almost immediately change our approach and practice to vastly improve delivery, engagement and outcome.

### Children and young people must be listened to in all decision-making

During the review process Angela Morgan talked to children and young people, including some of the network of Inclusion Ambassadors. The young people identified what they consider to be important, and there were two stand-out points for me: school needs to be a safe place, and children and young people with additional support needs continually feel underestimated in their ability and capability.

The overarching recommendation is that children and young people must be listened to and involved in all decision-making relating to additional support for learning. Co-creation and collaboration with children, young people and their families will support more coherent, inclusive, and all-encompassing policymaking, which improves implementation, impact, and experience. As one of the organisations that makes up the My Rights, My Say support service Children in Scotland is ready to fully support this recommendation for children who wish to exercise their rights in relation to additional support and also in our work to independently seek children's views.

### Improve access to online learning

The past few months have created major challenges for families and highlighted the impact and importance of good communication and support. It has also shown what can be provided for children at home that might be of benefit to some children in the longer term.

One of the calls we made with Scottish Autism and the National Autistic Society in our 2018 report *Not Included, Not Engaged, Not Involved*, was to improve access to online learning. Our report acknowledged that while it will not be appropriate for every situation, online learning opportunities could be utilised to ensure that those who are missing school, for whatever reason, are still given the opportunity to learn.

We recommended that Education Scotland commit to improve current digital educational resources to support the remote teaching of the

Curriculum for Excellence, including identifying any specific gaps in the current offer. This is particularly important, and will benefit from the learning gained from our collective experience in recent months.

### Re-evaluate how we identify, and celebrate, successful learning

There is a fundamental issue with how we measure success. The ASL Implementation Review report observes the hierarchy in our education system, with some qualifications "valued significantly more highly than others". The Scottish Government's own summary statistics on attainment describe passes at SCQF level numbers 'or better', for example.

### "The status awarded to PSAs says all the wrong things about our education system"

I would love to witness a real shift in recognition of achievements, with the successes of children and young people with additional support needs celebrated publicly, in equivalence to attainment and exam results. The Scottish Commission for Learning Disability is one great example of leadership in this area, celebrating annual learning disability awards.

### Review roles and remits of support staff

The points within the report related to Pupil Support Assistants (PSAs) sing to me. A call is made for a review of the roles and remits of these crucial support staff. I completely agree that standards of practice, learning pathways, career progression routes and remuneration need to be looked at. Currently, the status awarded to PSAs says all the wrong things about our education system.

The Review itself was conducted in a very short timeframe, with evidence gathering taking place over just a few months. It was reflective of the urgency to re-evaluate how those with additional support needs were being supported throughout their learner journeys. The response must be treated with similar urgency and made a priority.

Previously, there have been too many examples of agreement about action required but failure to progress. There were too many testimonies provided, detailing where things can be better for children and young people for us not to support, champion and action change. The past few months have shown that things can happen quickly. That it can be possible. Collaboration between services and sectors is what we need – for all our children and all of their potential.

The response to the report's recommendations from the Scottish Government, COSLA and the Association of Directors of Education is due to be provided in the autumn. I feel that children, families and practitioners justify a much speedier response than this, or the risk is that the momentum is not upheld.

### Sally Cavers is Head of Inclusion at Children in Scotland

> Read our summary of the ASL Review, produced using accessible language, [here](#)

> Find out the latest on the *Not Included, Not Engaged, Not Involved* report [here](#)



## Priority number one



*John Dickie* explains why tackling child poverty must be at the heart of our recovery

The world has changed in ways none of us could have foretold when we wrote about our call for a top-up of child benefit as part of Children in Scotland's 25 Calls campaign in 2018.

The good news is that the campaign bore fruit. The new Scottish child payment will offer an additional £10 per week for children in families in receipt of universal credit (or equivalent legacy benefits). This increase will make a real difference to families struggling to put food on the table, heat their homes and pay for school trips or other activities.

The bad news is that, even before the coronavirus crisis hit, nearly one in four Scottish children were locked in poverty. Even without the impact of COVID-19, reaching the statutory 2030 Scottish child poverty targets requires lifting 140,000 children out of poverty. More is needed if progress against these targets is to be made.

Coronavirus has exposed the precarious vulnerability of low income families and risk to wellbeing inadequate income creates.. Increasing evidence suggests households with children have been disproportionately affected by the financial impact of the global pandemic and are being pulled deeper into poverty.

Children's charities report increased financial stress and associated anxiety, loneliness, and complex mental health problems amongst the families they work with. Simultaneously, the charitable hardship funds they operate are under increased pressure.

Children, young people and parents have also highlighted their struggle to find the resources to engage with school during lockdown, presenting long-term risks to education.

In this new context, the call to boost family income is more urgent than ever. Financial support offered by both Scottish and UK government is welcome, but, to date, there has been no additional financial support aimed directly at families with children. The Scottish Government's decision to prioritise the child payment is important. Serious consideration must now be given to prioritising roll-out and increasing value, in light of the additional pressures on family incomes.

The pandemic has exposed the acute financial vulnerability facing Scotland's families. In the short-term, existing delivery mechanisms need to be used to provide emergency financial support to all low-income families.

The approach to recovery must also ensure that all children grow up in families with genuine financial security and protection against economic shocks. The Scottish Government's child poverty targets, delivery plan and new Scottish child payment provide a hugely valuable asset, which must now inform every aspect of our approach to economic and social recovery.

**John Dickie is Director of CPAG in Scotland**

> The full version of this blog can be read on our website [here](#)

> 25 and Up is the next stage of our 25 Call campaign. [Visit the 25 Calls campaign site](#) to find out more.





# Better BAME representation in education: How do we make it happen?

In 2018, Intercultural Youth Scotland published a groundbreaking report which identified the lack of representation of black and minority ethnic people and culture in Scotland's education system. Since then, campaigners have continued to highlight the significant lack of Afro-Scottish and Black British history in the curriculum, and called for changes in how we educate our young people – a call which has gained even more traction in light of the Black Lives Matter movement.

We asked three campaigners to share their thoughts on how this could be achieved.



**Eunice Olumide**  
Gallery Owner,  
Writer and Model

Twitter:  
[@euniceolumide](#)

Gallery:  
[ogallerylondon.com](#)

> Eunice's petition to reform the curriculum closed on 5 August. Find out more and follow progress.

> Find out more about the African Diasporic Business support fund at [adbsf.org](#)

We need to reform our education system to include a robust account of Scottish, Black British and African Diasporic history

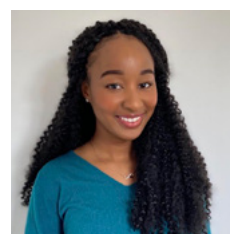
When I was at school, we learned nothing about the history and the role that Britain played in colonising Africa, nor the way the West benefitted from colonialism and the transatlantic slave trade. We were also not taught anything about the many prominent Afro-Scottish, Caribbean, and Black British figures who have contributed significantly to the UK's culture and economy.

My petition to put Afro-Scottish history on the curriculum aimed for real long-lasting, permanent change and a commitment to pro-active, anti-racist action. This would negotiate, rectify and recognise those real-life events and contributions that continue to shape and support our society today.

The Scottish education system needs to include all Afro-Scottish history including artefacts of African diaspora, cultural and economic contributions, the role of the British Empire and the benefits to Scotland from colonies of the Caribbean and Africa. It should also focus on pre-colonial African Scottish history, right through to key historic figures during and post-colonialism.

We need to know about John Edmonstone – one of the most important figures in scientific research and a teacher at Edinburgh University where he trained Charles Darwin. We need to remember Sarah Forbes Bonetta, a Yoruba Egbado Princess from Nigeria sold into slavery becoming the much beloved Goddaughter of Queen Victoria and Philippa of Hainault, the first Black Queen of England. We need to learn about the incredible hidden figures like Katherine Johnson, the African-American female mathematician at the heart of NASA's space programme that put the first man on the moon.

But education reform is just one of the steps. My campaign also calls for a charity fund to support BME businesses, the creation of the first BME Heritage Museum, a monument in central London to honour the contribution of diaspora and the first ever film based on true-life stories of systematic racism in Scotland.



**Tobe Amamize**

Twitter:  
[@TobeAmamize](#)

> Tobe's petition for compulsory education of Black History in Scottish schools is on [change.org](#). Sign Tobe's petition

Racism thrives on ignorance. Changing our curriculum will lead to real, enduring change

Having graduated from high school this year, I wish I could say my experiences were different from black students of 20 years ago. I wish I could say we are not still having the same conversations and that times have changed. That our education system today, reflects the diversity seen on the streets of Scotland. Regrettably, that is not the case. Instead, we have taken a stagnant approach when it comes to the education of Black History in our schools.

Over the years, it has been observed that a contentious part of our society's history that many are not proud of has been omitted from the school curriculum. The resultant effect is a whitewashing of Scottish history and a limiting of our knowledge and understanding of who we are.

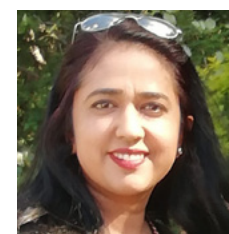
The present curriculum has left us in the dark, ignoring the systemic racism present in our society today.

By failing to provide education on the context of racism, we have fostered an environment of ignorance which has become the perfect climate for racism to thrive.

We must not let the discussion of race end with one episode of 'Roots' in our History class, or simply raise the "Red Card to Racism" at school assemblies. What we need is for the Scottish Government to have a robust conversation and give legislative backing to what and how this part of our history is covered and taught in our schools.

It is time for us to address our past. However difficult it may be, we must begin righting the many wrongs we have made over the centuries. Teaching Black History in schools is not where it ends. It is where it begins.

Racism thrives on ignorance. We must educate to tackle it and make real change for future generations.



**Nuzhat Uthmani**  
Primary Teacher and  
BAME activist

Twitter:  
[@NUthmani](#)

> Find out more about Global Citizenship Education Scotland, and the resources available. Visit the website

Follow on Twitter  
[@GCEducationScot](#)

Diversifying the workforce to include the experiences of BAME communities at all levels of learning must be a priority

The answer is simple. The process is more complicated.

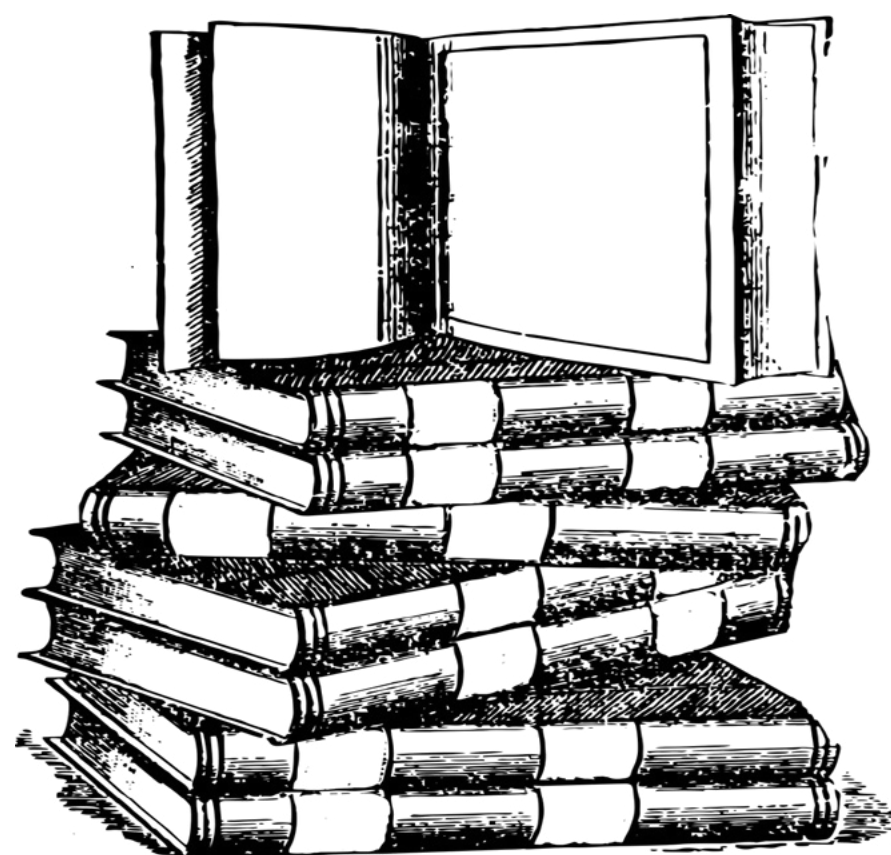
It's great there is a fresh focus on the idea of 'decolonising' the curriculum, but the most important way to diversify our teaching is to employ a far more diverse workforce. BAME communities should be seen at all levels of education and visible to our learners as role models. The inclusion of their lived experiences in the school system will bring value that cannot be produced by any hours of Continuous Professional Development (CPD).

I fully support a national review of the curriculum, however that will take time. In the meantime, we are the leaders of change in our classrooms. The Curriculum for Excellence, at primary school level at least, allows great flexibility with regards to content we can teach. We, as teachers, have a responsibility to question whether what we are teaching is diverse enough to represent today's society.

We may think we believe in antiracist education, providing equal opportunities to all our learners, but our practice will only be truly inclusive when we consider including examples of stories, contributions and characters from all walks of life.

Finally, we have to be the change. Not wait for it to happen. We need to start thinking about embedding diverse resources across all aspects of our teaching, so that BAME representation is not seen as an 'other' but becomes a part of all of us, as a society.

My website on Global Citizenship Education offers resources and lesson planners that provide examples of how this can be done. As teachers we need to embrace diversity, not thinking of it as change, but instead a different way of thinking that fosters openness, tolerance and understanding.





# "People with a knowledge of animal sentience are likely to be more responsible members of the community"

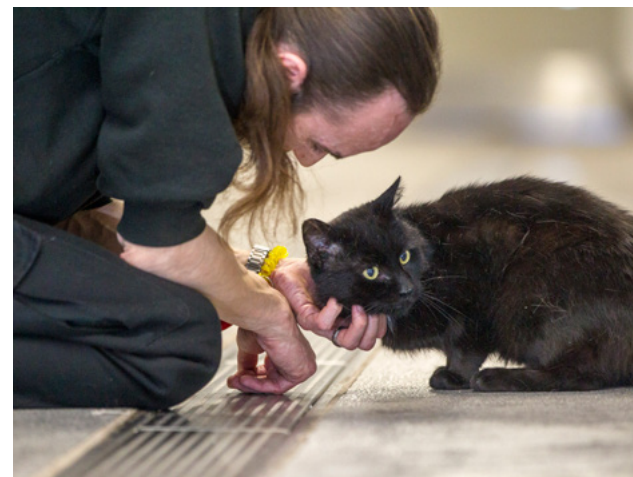
The Scottish SPCA may be best known for investigating cruelty, but they also conduct education work and run a number of programmes offering support and rehabilitation to young people who have displayed violence towards animals. *Gilly Mendes Ferreira* explains more

The SSPCA is one of Scotland's oldest charities, established back in 1839 with the mission of encouraging kindness towards animals.

In our early days, we worked to care for and improve the working conditions of cart horses and equines in Edinburgh. Over time, our reach and responsibilities have grown. We have the legal powers to investigate people who are cruel to animals and report them for prosecution. We have nine animal rescue and rehoming centres, a national wildlife hospital, a nationwide network of inspectors and animal rescue officers, a special investigations unit to tackle serious crimes, an animal helpline which is open every day of the year and an education team that inspires and informs every generation to ensure prevention is at the heart of what we do.

Whilst many associate us with investigating cruelty, this is just one piece in a big jigsaw. Through campaigning for legal reforms in animal welfare, delivering workshops across the country and encouraging responsible animal citizenship towards pets, farm animals and wildlife, we hope to deliver systemic change in Scotland's relationship with animals. Ultimately, this would reduce the need to rescue and rehome animals or to investigate cruelty. In that sense, our core mission has never changed, even as we have grown.

As Head of Education, Policy and Research, I oversee the delivery of our intergenerational education initiatives across Scotland, engage with politicians and



**"We hope to deliver systematic change in Scotland's relationship with animals"**

stakeholders to highlight where the law could be improved to help animals, and work with universities and other partners to conduct research which will have a direct benefit on animal welfare whilst also establishing ways to protect the human-animal bond and tackle the link between animal cruelty and violent crime globally.

## Educating the next generation

Since our inception, we have always delivered an education programme in some form. We offer free education workshops to every school in Scotland and in a typical year we see over 210,000 school children. Our preventative work fits with Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence and as we progress in to the new academic year we are striving to do even more when it comes to digital learning, supporting health and wellbeing and developing the young workforce.

We deliver age-specific interactive workshops to make sure young people are informed, feel inspired and have fun. All our workshops are based on evidence collected through research – meaning we know they have a tangible impact on improving a young person's understanding of animal welfare. In particular, this means they know animals have feelings, needs and that we all have a responsibility towards them. We have also embraced the use of robotics and coding which has really enabled us to support the STEM agenda in Scotland.

We know people who grow up with a knowledge of animal sentience are more likely to be responsible members of the community. We also know animals and activities which involve connecting with nature can offer significant benefits when it comes to a person's mental health and wellbeing. That's why highlighting the strength of the human-animal bond in society and working with organisations who support not only animals but humans too is so important.

## Animal Guardians programme

Our Animal Guardians programme works with young people who are showing behaviours towards animals which give cause of concern. A young person can be referred by parents, guardians or a group in their life and get one-to-one support to help nurture their compassion and empathy towards the animals (and in turn people) they interact with. Since launching in 2018, we have supported over 120 children.



Animal Guardians was introduced as part of our efforts to break the link between animal cruelty and violent behaviour towards humans referred to as 'First Strike'. Over the years, we have managed to get many key groups such as vets, social workers, emergency services and others to recognise this link exists. Displaying the potential to harm animals from a young age can be an indication that something is wrong in that child's life and that they need support. If not addressed they could grow up to be violent towards others and face challenges in their day-to-day adult life. Many of the children we see on the programme come from chaotic family backgrounds in homes where violence has been normalised. We do not want pets to be forgotten victims in circumstances where the relationships between humans has been fractured and broken. Sadly, this is often the case. We want to play our part in supporting that animal, that child and that family.

As a result of the coronavirus pandemic, we've been unable to visit schools to deliver our usual free workshops. Instead, we developed a suite of curriculum-linked online learning resources for children as part of home-schooling support. The challenges facing everyone in education at the moment have been well-documented, and we are keen to play what part we can to help.

## Helping animals in need

One thing which has remained constant is the need for us to continue to take calls to our animal helpline and, wherever possible, attend to reports of animals in need. An average year will see us respond to over 80,000 incidents where an animal requires help, meaning our network of inspectors and animal rescue officers have strong ties to the local communities they serve. Whilst we are often associated with cruelty, we

spend far more time working with people than animals to show them what changes they can make to benefit both human and animal, particularly in a household. The human-animal bond is a sacred thing, and we will only consider breaking it as a last resort. Sometimes a pet can be the only real companion someone has, or the glue which holds a family together. For every person who is cruel to an animal, we encounter hundreds who dearly love them.

**"Many of the children we see come from homes where violence is normalised"**

Over time, we hope the emphasis on educating people on animal welfare will reduce the pressure on our frontline teams. Scotland will be a much better place when there is less of a need for an organisation which exists to prevent cruelty to animals. We look forward to the day when we are able to prevent cruelty, rather than respond to it.

Mahatma Gandhi once said 'the greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated'. Every single thing we try to do is geared towards making Scotland a better place for all animals to live. But in improving things for animals, we can deliver change which benefits people of all ages today, tomorrow and for years to come.

**Gilly Mendes Ferreira is Head of Education, Policy & Research at the Scottish SPCA**

> Find out more about the pioneering Animal Guardians programme, and work with other young people at [www.scottishspca.org/our-work/our-work-with-young-people](http://www.scottishspca.org/our-work/our-work-with-young-people)

> Images supplied by SSPCA



## People, projects, perspectives

# Lives in lockdown

Over the last few months, Parenting across Scotland asked parents to share their experiences of the virus' impact on daily life. *Clare Simpson* reflects on some of the common themes emerging, and considerations for the future



Families have been under incredible pressure during the COVID-19 global pandemic. When Scotland entered lockdown in March, almost overnight workplaces, schools and childcare settings were closed. Parents and children were told to stay in their homes and became reliant solely on each other for support.

Life completely altered for us all. Parents have been, and continue to be, front and centre during this crisis, trying to do the best for their children in this strange new reality. Families have had to grapple with a huge variety of issues, balancing working from home and home schooling, finances and potentially even negotiating the benefits system for the first time.

Every family's story is different. Our ongoing *Lives in Lockdown* project asked families to share their experience of how lockdown and the pandemic is affecting them. It is a platform to talk about how parents have been navigating the challenges of national lockdown, but ultimately, knowing how the pandemic is affecting families will help us let the Scottish Government know what issues parents are facing and what support they need.

The accounts we have heard have been varied and cover a wide range of topics, but there are

some clear common threads. Home schooling, particularly if parents are working from home, and concerns about mental health top the list. Parents have also told us about losing their jobs, shopping for relatives and not having any support with children with additional support needs.

### The challenges of home schooling

So far, without exception parents told us that they found home schooling challenging. Shouldering the responsibility of your child's educational journey for part of the academic year while trying to work at the same time is virtually impossible. Add to this that local authorities, schools and individual teachers take different approaches and have differing expectations.

When schools were supportive and appreciative of how difficult delivering schoolwork might be at home, for a range of reasons, the pressure was eased slightly.

*"We are helped a lot by the attitude of our head teacher, who has made it clear that schoolwork comes second to doing whatever we think is necessary to keep our children safe and well",* said Lucy, a mother of one.

However, it was so much harder when the school didn't take that line, or for parents who didn't have the resources to home school, are single parents

or parents of children with additional support needs. There was also concern that how things are taught are different in the classroom and home, with many parents reliant on their own knowledge and experiences.

The challenges of juggling responsibilities for education with work commitments was a common theme.

Some were trying to work out a routine for their family that balanced the commitments of working parents with the requirements for home learning.

Others had pre-school children at home they were trying to keep occupied while they worked. Toddlers photobombing Zoom meetings is an amusing image; the pressure of trying to get your job done and keep children happy at the same time, not so much.

Schools have returned in August, but with predictions of the virus returning and potentially being more difficult to manage in winter months, it is not impossible that blended learning may be revisited as an option in the future.

If this is the case, educationalists and employers need to talk to one another about how they could co-operate to enable the impossible task of working while home schooling to be managed better. I would also urge the Scottish Government to consider the merits of a Scotland-wide virtual school, as Jenifer Johnston of Reform Scotland has suggested.

Ultimately, we need to find answers that work for families. To do so, we need to listen to and learn from families about what worked and didn't work for them.

### Concerns about mental health

Parents discussed the impact the lockdown has had on mental health — either their own, or their child's.

One parent, Michelle, was worried about the effect on her four-year-old son, having spotted a noticeable change. Others were feeling the pressure of being full-time carers, when previously they had had help and support from outwith the home.

Helen, who was pregnant with her second child, told us: *"I cannot cope with providing full-time childcare at home because he triggers very severe anxiety in me".*

Lockdown has been hard on people's mental health, exacerbating existing problems as well as creating new ones. Support for the mental health of parents and children is vital as we move on to the next stage, and we need to consider the support that could be put in place should the situation arise again in the future.

### Rising poverty levels

Even before COVID-19 struck, as many as one child in four was living in poverty with families struggling to put food on the table and many forced to resort to food banks. The pandemic has seen many more lose their jobs or be furloughed and has plunged families who were only just managing into poverty.

Michelle, a single parent, told us: *"I am on Universal Credit. I am affected by the third child cap... I cannot find any extra help to pay for necessities*

*and feel that I get passed from pillar to post. I don't know how we will manage. How do I afford everything and provide for my children?"*

As the effects of the pandemic continue post lockdown, we will be facing increased levels of poverty and economic insecurity. Addressing this has to be a priority. Without their most basic of needs met, families are struggling to survive.

### Appreciating the positives, and looking forward

In amongst the difficulties, it is important to recognise that there are some positives. We have heard of the value of the extra one-to-one time spent with children, or a renewed appreciation for resources at their disposal, such as a garden or other, easily accessible outdoor space. There is also an acknowledgment of the additional family time gained in what usually may have been reserved for work or travel.

From the responses, it is clear a tremendous ethic of solidarity between parents and communities came to the fore during lockdown. There was an unspoken commitment and agreement to stand together, to help each other and to follow the rules and guidance around lockdown, and it's subsequent easing, for the benefit of other families as well as our own.

As we emerge into a strangely altered new world, we must listen to parents and carers about what support they need and ensure that we support each other to continue the ethos of kindness and collaboration that has helped families through these dark times.

### Clare Simpson is Manager of Parenting across Scotland

A report from the *Lives in Lockdown* project is due to be published in October.

> [Read more from Lives in Lockdown here](#)

> [Lockdown is easing, but the effects of the pandemic continue. If you would like to share your account please email Parenting across Scotland via \[aclancy@childreninscotland.org.uk\]\(mailto:aclancy@childreninscotland.org.uk\)](#)

> [Read Jenifer Johnson's blog on why Scotland needs a virtual school here](#)





# Transforming an in-school service

How does school-based mental health support and counselling work when there are no school buildings to work in? *Nick Ball* tells us how the Place2Be service adapted during lockdown – and how staff are helping prepare for the next term

Place2Be provides in-school mental health support and counselling. When Scotland entered lockdown and school gates were shut, our contact with children, young people, families and partner schools changed overnight.

Like many others, we worked tirelessly to make sure that the young people and families we work with continued to get support. We moved from face-to-face sessions to providing support via phone sessions with young people and parents and carers of younger children. We also offered a remote parent counselling service. Although initially a response to the COVID-19 crisis, due to unprecedented need, this continued over the summer break.

In telephone sessions, parents and young people frequently talked to us about loneliness, tensions in relationships at home, and their health concerns. Parents also shared their worries about financial insecurity after being furloughed, or losing their jobs.

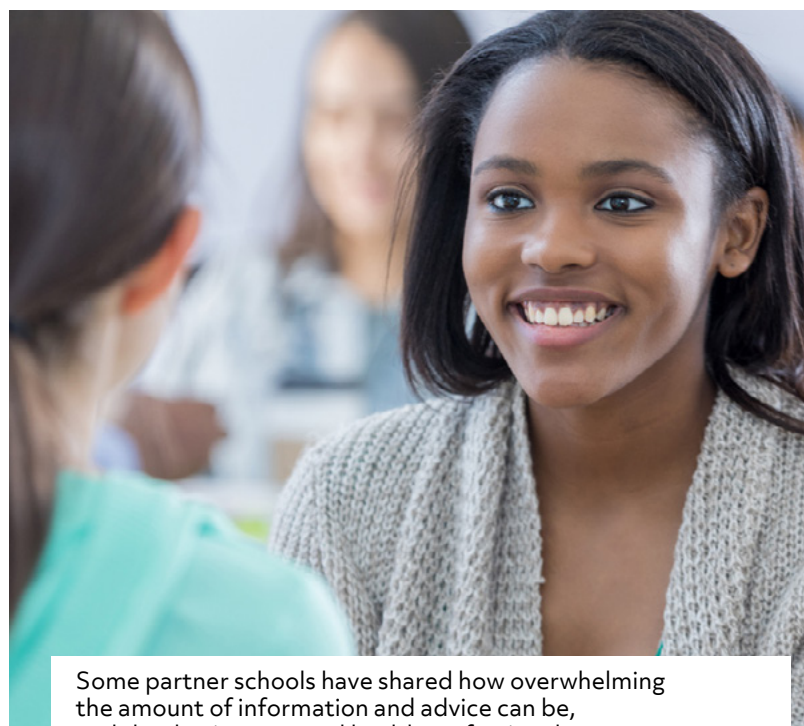
Another stark reality for many families is coping with bereavement and loss, whether this is the loss of a loved one, or the loss of their way of life that we have all been deprived of over the lockdown period.

It is worth noting that whilst there are huge challenges, lots of parents have talked about the pleasure of reconnecting with their children. For some parents, lockdown was an opportunity to enjoy engaging with their children's learning in a way that is often not possible with the general stresses of everyday life.

The feedback we received overwhelmingly showed that families welcomed someone connecting with them. A lot of the time my role is to offer encouragement and advice, but we can also act as a helpful bridge between families and the school. This was particularly helpful or useful when there might be concerns about schoolwork or a lack of access to supplies, for example.

As well as supporting young people and families, we also offered consultation sessions for school staff, which have been well used and welcomed by the school's management team. I've been able to signpost school staff to relevant advice and resources, including tips for parents on how to talk about coronavirus and wellbeing-themed activities for families.

**"Parents valued the chance to reconnect with their children"**



Some partner schools have shared how overwhelming the amount of information and advice can be, and that having a mental health professional as part of the school team really helps.

More than 900 Scottish school staff registered for our online introductory mental health training course, emphasising the need to help schools as they prepare to manage and support the children and young people within their care post-lockdown. We also have a set of downloadable resources for primary and secondary schools with assembly and group activity ideas to support with community recovery which draws on themes like hope and connectedness. We hope teachers and school staff will use these to promote emotional wellbeing and resilience for all.

For families, we have launched a free online parenting course for parents and carers in our partner schools, and have a range of available resources, including creative arts and crafts projects from our Art Room team.

Providing mental health support services has never been more important – both during the lockdown, but also in the months and years that will follow. We adapted our service to continue to support young people, families and school staff and will continue to do so as we move forward.

**Nick Ball is Place2Be Project Manager, based at Balgreen Primary School, Edinburgh**

> Find out more at [place2be.org.uk](https://place2be.org.uk) or via Twitter @Place2BeScot

Image: istockphoto ©SDI Productions

# Recognising the value of connection

In the Scottish Borders, Aberlour has been working with social workers to coordinate wellbeing checks for families who have children with complex needs during lockdown and as restrictions ease. *Sarah McNaught* explains more

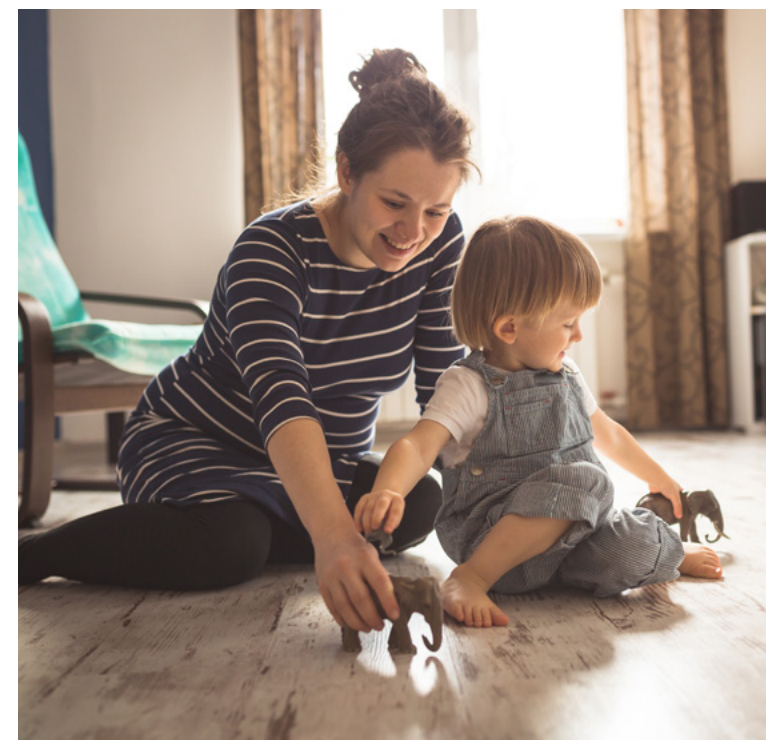
A recent data intelligence report published by the Scottish Government highlighted that the number of vulnerable children will increase due to additional pressures on families and communities as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak. Loss of income and isolation from loved ones has created increased stress and anxiety for families on the brink of crisis. Added to this, they found children with a pre-existing health condition or disability are more likely to face additional pressures as parents say they cannot access their usual treatment services or community supports.

The Aberlour Options Borders service offers short breaks for children and young people with a disability or other complex needs. Our residential short breaks and weekend activity clubs provide the children with one to one support while giving families time to recharge. However, since March, in response to government guidance, we have had to offer a much-reduced short breaks service. Recognising the significant impact of this on families, we have made contact with approximately 30 families a week for 'wellbeing checks' through email or telephone.

**"Contact has been a lifeline for many families"**

These weekly check-ins have proven to be a lifeline for many families in isolation. Our staff provide a friendly ear and identify any needs or issues within the family. They offer direct support or share information with social workers, helping to reduce their workload – a welcome support as social work services face increased pressure during lockdown. Staff have also assisted in very practical support to families, delivering grocery shopping, medication and other essential items if required.

*"The wellbeing checks are well received",* says Jessica Entwistle, Acting Service Manager at Aberlour Options Borders.



*"It has helped us sustain relationships and build trust with families who may not necessarily have been forthcoming about the challenges they were facing. It has enabled them to know that whatever they are struggling with, we can help, and, when necessary pass that on to the right people to make sure they get everything that they need."*

One family that has benefited from the bespoke, flexible support was a single mum and her two children. Supporting her children during lockdown created significant additional pressures as she was unable to leave the house for shopping or daily exercise. She also struggled to secure a delivery slot from supermarkets and pick up other essential items. During this challenging time, our staff helped deliver grocery shopping to the family, and essential hair clippers for her children.

Not only have these checks strengthened the relationship with families we support, but they have allowed collaborative work between Aberlour, social workers and other local partners to adapt to our collective response to families and communities.

*"I feel like we all know each other a lot better."* Jessica continues, *"We're working together with families to reduce anxiety and ensure everyone feels supported."*

During the summer months we ran a holiday activity club, supporting 38 families. Social work teams were able to assist our staff in highlighting which families were a priority and would benefit most from attending. The holiday club was run in four locations with one or two children at a time, adapting as restrictions eased in Scotland. They included visits to the park, crafts, indoor games and other child-led activities. A local focus has ensured families weren't excluded from accessing the service due to travel restrictions still faced as lockdown eases.

The Aberlour Options Borders service has observed that a close partnership with local services, an adapted model of delivery, and building consistent connections has been a lifeline for many of the most isolated families during the coronavirus crisis. Looking forward, communication with external agencies will be essential for identifying families and providing collaborative support to them in the Borders as they continue to face challenges long after the lockdown period.

**Sarah McNaught is Head of Marketing and Communications at Aberlour**

> Find out more at [aberlour.org.uk](https://aberlour.org.uk) and follow on Twitter @AberlourCCT

Image supplied by Aberlour



Introducing...

# "There isn't an age limit on leading change"

**Mhairi McCann** talks to us about the importance of STEM in achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals – and why young people can, and should, be at the forefront.



**Mhairi McCann**  
Founder and CEO  
Youth STEM 2030

> Find out more about  
[Youth STEM 2030](#)

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Twitter [@YouthStem2030](#)

> Mhairi is also a  
member of Children in  
Scotland's advisory group,  
Changing our World.  
[Find out more about all  
of our participation and  
engagement work.](#)

**Set up Youth STEM 2030, to help make the world a better place.** It really is as simple as that. STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) is too often seen as nothing more than a set of subjects to make up part of the school timetable, but it shapes so many aspects of our lives.

**At a time when we face such big global challenges, STEM is more important now than ever.** Through innovation, discovery and research in STEM disciplines, we can help solve the global challenges we face, creating a better and more sustainable future for everyone.

**We have ten years to achieve the internationally agreed UN Sustainable Development Goals.** Countries across the globe have agreed to work towards a world where there is no poverty, inequality is a thing of the past and everyone has access to good quality education, healthcare, nutritious food and clean water. But the agreed deadline of 2030 is fast approaching. We need a decade of action.

**Change will happen, facilitated by forward-thinking and globally connected young people.** Youth are already experimenting, designing and innovating – some from school desks and university labs, others from kitchen tables and in local green spaces. But the power of youth to use STEM to make a difference remains untapped potential.

**Our first project, Youth STEM Matters, is an entirely youth-led scientific journal which provides young people with a platform to share their research, ideas and innovations with the world.** It publishes articles written by the world's youth, covering all science, technology, engineering and maths disciplines. Every article is linked to at least one of the UN Sustainable Development Goals meaning we provide youth with an opportunity, and a voice, to contribute to global challenges.

**Ultimately, Youth STEM 2030 is about empowering young people to use STEM to make a positive contribution to the world.** After all, there isn't an age limit on leading change.

# Thank you

to parents for their hard  
work during lockdown



We would like to say 'thank you' to parents and carers for helping children feel safe and secure during these challenging times. It has felt like a long haul since schools closed in the dark days of March when things felt frightening and far from normal. Our children have experienced some peculiar and confusing times with home learning just a part of the unusual situation.

Schools and local authorities have relied on parents and they need to nurture this involvement.

Parents have become more engaged and empowered in their children's learning but we cannot stop here. We need to build on this engagement and continue to remind parents that they play a key part in their children's learning.

There are likely to be fewer opportunities for parents going into school in the short-term because of safety measures, but parental involvement needs to be embraced in other ways. Many schools have been creative in the ways they have reached out to parents and families over the last few months; imagine how much relationships could improve if this continued. Working in partnership benefits everyone, especially our children.

We have heard from so many of you over the past few months and we are keen that you stay in touch. Please join the discussion on Facebook or Twitter, or

**SIGN UP TO OUR NEWSLETTER**

Your voice is important to us.

**Joanna Murphy, Chair**  
**The National Parent Forum of Scotland (NPFS)**  
[npfs.org.uk](http://npfs.org.uk)



**Promoting the parental voice**  
because our children do better when we are engaged in their education

Our next issue will be available in December 2020.

**Want to contribute?** If you have a campaign, project or new resource you would like to share, or would like to be considered for our comment column, contact [jdrummond@childreninscotland.org.uk](mailto:jdrummond@childreninscotland.org.uk)

**Advertise with us.** Contact [thope@childreninscotland.org.uk](mailto:thope@childreninscotland.org.uk) for our competitive rates.





## Background

Neurotransmitters are chemical messengers in the body, required for biological functions to occur. Their function is to transmit signals from nerve cells to target cells, in muscles, glands, or other nerves. Neurotransmitters are important in the foundation of biological functions, including muscular movement and neuropsychological development.

Paediatric neurotransmitter disorders are genetic disorders which occur when the body cannot synthesize, metabolise and catabolise (breakdown) neurotransmitters. There are a number of classes of neurotransmitters but here we will focus on monoamine neurotransmitter disorders which can affect levels of dopamine, serotonin, histamine, adrenaline and noradrenaline<sup>1</sup>.

## The Role of Dopamine & Serotonin

Dopamine sometimes known as the reward neurotransmitter also plays a key role, in muscle movement and coordination, memory, learning and behaviour.

Serotonin is an inhibitory neurotransmitter which helps regulate mood, sleep and the body's natural rhythms.

Absence or reduced levels of these neurotransmitters can lead to a wide variety of signs and symptoms. These can often be confused with other more common diseases seen in babies and young children for example cerebral palsy or epilepsy. Left untreated neurotransmitter disorders can lead to severely compromised neurological function.

## Signs and Symptoms

**Movement disorders** – these are conditions which affect the way a child's body moves. There may be too much, or too little movement and the child may have problems with their balance and coordination. They may have uncontrolled jerky movements, experience repetitive facial movements, for example blinking, sniffing or coughing. Uncontrolled and sometimes painful muscle movements/spasms (dystonia) can also be present. Any of these may be confused with symptoms of epilepsy.

**Decreased muscle tone** – hypotonia or floppy baby syndrome, babies have little or no resistance to passive movements

**Increased muscle tone** – arms or legs are stiff and difficult to move this is called hypertonia.

**Eye Involvement** – There may be drooping of the upper eyelid a condition known as ptosis and an eye movement disorder called oculogyric crisis. Oculogyric crisis refers to dystonia in the ocular muscles. This manifests as bilateral elevation (rolling) of the eyes, backward and lateral flexion of the neck which can last for several hours and may be mistaken for an epileptic seizure.

**Developmental delay** – babies fail to meet any of their developmental milestones.

**Autonomic dysfunction** – this refers to problems with the part of the nervous system responsible for control of the bodily functions, such as breathing, the heartbeat, and digestive processes. Flushing maybe present along with nasal congestion, insomnia, irritability and crying.

**Feeding difficulties** – babies have difficulty feeding and gaining weight.

**Red flag symptoms** which might lead to suspicion of a neurotransmitter disease include: <sup>2</sup>

- Difficulty waking in the morning
- Mixed movement disorder
- Autonomic dysfunction
- Involvement of the eyes

## What to do if you suspect a neurotransmitter disorder?

Many of these features that have been described can be seen in children who do not have a neurotransmitter disorder. However, if you notice a number or combination of these red flag signs and symptoms, then it is important that they are highlighted to the parent or primary care giver and encouragement given to have them reviewed by a doctor.

1. <https://teachmeanatomy.com/nervous-system/components/neurotransmitters/> – accessed 09/07/2020

2. Ng J, et al. Nat Rev Neurol. 2015;11(10):567–584

# RECOGNISING NEUROTRANSMITTER DISORDERS



Paediatric neurotransmitter disorders are rare neurological disorders with onset during childhood<sup>1</sup>



They are often misdiagnosed due to the presentation of neurological symptoms that overlap with those of other conditions<sup>1,2</sup>



Motor symptoms are a prominent feature of these conditions due to deficiencies of dopamine and serotonin<sup>1,4</sup>



Patients presenting with 'red flag' symptoms should be referred to a specialist for further diagnostic evaluation<sup>4</sup>



Differential diagnosis should be performed by a specialist paediatric neurologist and involves combining patient history, physical examination, biochemical tests and genetic analysis<sup>1,2,4</sup>



Early and accurate diagnosis is important because many patients respond favourably to treatment<sup>2,5</sup>

1. Brennenstuhl H, Jung-Klawitter S, Assmann B, et al. Inherited disorders of neurotransmitters: classification and practical approaches for diagnosis and treatment. *Neuropediatrics*. 2019;50(1):2–14. 2. Ng J, Heales SJ and Kurian MA. Clinical features and pharmacotherapy of childhood monoamine neurotransmitter disorders. *Paediatr Drugs*. 2014;16(4):275–291. 3. Siu W-K. Genetics of monoamine neurotransmitter disorders. *Transl Pediatr*. 2015;4(2):175–180. 4. Ng J, Papandreou A, Heales SJ, et al. Monoamine neurotransmitter disorders – clinical advances and future perspectives. *Nat Rev Neurol*. 2015;11(1):567–584. 5. Bindu PS and Taly AB. Neurometabolic disorders: A diagnostic approach. *Indian J Pract Pediatr*. 2016;18(2):48–60.





## Supporting children and young people who internalise their distress

Jan Montgomery



## Dr Temple Grandin: The loving push for children and young people with ASD

Dr Temple Grandin



## Health Inequalities: Peer Research into the role of communities

Chris Ross, Children in Scotland



## Mud, mess and magic: outdoor learning on a shoestring with Juliet Robertson

Juliet Robertson



## More than my trauma

Dr Bruce Perry

This webinar series is a partnership between Children in Scotland, Aberlour, Clackmannanshire Council, Kibble, Seamab and Staf. Find out more and book your place here



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