

Fighting for the future

Climate activist Mikaela Loach discusses building a better society for all

Recovery, support and justice

How can the Bairns' Hoose model reach its potential?

Accessible arts

Meet the theatre company setting the stage for visual performances



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Welcome

When I joined Children in Scotland a little over six months ago, I knew I would be part of a team that was dedicated to listening, gathering evidence, and sharing learning to uphold and strengthen children’s rights.

What I didn’t realise, however, was that I would also have the pleasure of working alongside so many talented, passionate and inspirational colleagues and members, each working hard every single day to make children’s lives better – and doing so by going straight to the source.

Inspired by our contributors, the theme of this fifth issue of *Insight* is “young voices” with many articles and features exploring the importance of listening to young Scots to improve our work and their lives. From projects to policy, campaigns to creative spaces, there’s no area children and young people can’t be involved in. I hope we’ve made the case for prioritising their views.



Alice Hinds
Editor

Alice Hinds

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Members' Community

A warm welcome to our wonderful new members

We would like to extend a warm welcome to the fantastic organisations that have joined Children in Scotland in membership over the past six months: 3D Drumchapel, Anim8s, Biggar Youth Project, Clued Up Project, Craighead Country Nursery School, Family Journeys, Firsthand Lothian, Highland Action for Little Ones, Home-Start Caithness, Leith Community Archers, Mikeysline, Moray Rape Crisis, Multi-Cultural Family Base, Our Promise, Play Therapy Base, Sereniti, South Ayrshire HSPC, Team Jak, Thrive CIC, Visibility Scotland, and West Barns Village Hall.

Yopa proudly supporting 30 years of Children in Scotland

On Thursday 30 November, we celebrate 30 years of Children in Scotland with an anniversary networking event at Edinburgh's City Art Centre. We are thrilled to be working with award-winning estate agent Yopa, which is supporting the event, as part of an ongoing corporate partnership with Children in Scotland, providing invaluable support to our work over the coming months.



Free training for members

We have fantastic opportunities for our members to develop their knowledge and strengthen their practice with a wide-ranging programme of free training opportunities over the next six months, and beyond. Gain a greater understanding of the UNCRC with Children in Scotland's policy team, join representatives from Visibility Scotland as they share their expertise on visual impairment in the early years, and hear from Children in Scotland's Chief Executive, Dr Judith Turbyne, as she leads sessions on governance and strategic planning.

Friday 1 December 2023 – **Right to Education (Article 28 UNCRC) for Local Authority members**

Tuesday 30 January 2024 – **UNCRC training for Local Authority members**

February 2024 – **Visual impairment in the early years** (date TBA)

Thursday 18 April 2024 – **Getting your governance right**

Thursday 23 May 2024 – **Demystifying strategic planning**

Book your place at childreninscotland.org.uk/events

Children's Sector Strategic and Policy Forum – 2023 elections underway

Elections are currently taking place for the Children's Sector Strategic and Policy Forum. The Forum, co-ordinated by Children in Scotland, brings together sector leaders to discuss issues of strategic importance for the children's sector.

Open to new members who hold senior positions in the children's sector, those wishing to stand should bring experience in priority areas including education, help and support, early years, parenting and equalities.

Elections will run until 29 November 2023. If you have any questions about the process or standing for election, please contact Hannah Priest at hpriest@childreninscotland.org.uk



Bulletin

Discover the latest news, events and innovative projects from Children in Scotland members



Welcoming a new Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland

Nicola Killean has embarked on her six-year term as the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland. The former Chief Executive of Sistema Scotland becomes the country's fourth Commissioner since the role was created in 2004.

Introducing herself in the role, Nicola spoke directly to her new 'bosses' – children and young people across the country. She said: "With my team, I will work to make sure the laws affecting your lives are fair. We work with and challenge people in power to keep the human rights promises they have made to you. We're also here to help you understand how valuable and important your human rights are."

Find out more at glasgow.gov.uk/cypcs.org.uk

Connecting communities: Glasgow Life's Street Play scheme set to expand in 2024

Glasgow Life's Street Play initiative, which offers communities the opportunity to apply for free road closures so that children can play safely on local streets, is set to expand in 2024. The scheme, which grew in popularity prior to the pandemic, will be adding two further dates to next year's calendar with children able to explore their community streets across four weekends.



Councillor Angus Millar, City Convener for Transport and Climate Change, welcomed the increase in the availability of Street Play. He said: "It is an opportunity for children to reclaim the street space that is normally off limits to them and provide a relaxed environment for people of all ages to bring their communities together."

Find out more at glasgow.gov.uk/streetplay

St John's Hospital maternity and labour wards undergo transformation

Family spaces and waiting areas in the maternity and labour wards at St John's Hospital in Livingston have been transformed following a £43,000 renovation, fundraised by the St John's Fund held by the Edinburgh Children's Hospital Charity. Birthing partners, staff and local antenatal groups inputted into the design process, suggesting calming colours and a nature theme intended to reduce stress levels and give the areas a warm and homely feel.

Lesley Macaulay, Charge Midwife at St John's Hospital, said: "Thanks to this funding, the areas now feel much more comfortable and homely, making the experience of visiting the labour and maternity wards positive for new parents and their families."



If you have a project, event, campaign, service or staff update that you would like featured in the next edition of *Insight*, we would love to hear from you! Please send information about your work to Sophie Ward: sward@childreninscotland.org.uk



Is "trashion" the new fashion? Pupils at Arden School think so!

Over a 10-week period, pupils at Arden School in West Dunbartonshire tried their hand at recycling and upcycling waste products all in the name of "trashion", a global trend helping to make fashion more sustainable. Transforming recycled fabrics, bottles, cans, straws, newspapers and more into wearable art, the pupils created 12 impressive costumes to feature in a school "trashion" show with the outfits modelled by staff, pupils and Hugo, the school dog. Pupils loved taking part in the project and were even more passionate about recycling by the end.

Explore iconic heritage sites for free

If you're looking for a memorable day out this autumn, Historic Environment Scotland is offering free entry to some iconic heritage sites on the first Sunday of every month until March 2024. From Edinburgh Castle to Skara Brae, Scottish residents can discover castles, abbeys and more – all you have to do is pre-book your free ticket and provide proof of your address on arrival.

Drawing on unheard voices

With the overall theme of listening to children and young people's voices, it was particularly special to continue our collaboration with students at Edinburgh College of Art for this issue of *Insight*. Working alongside editor, Alice Hinds, and designer, Angus Doyle, a group of fourth year illustration undergraduates used their creativity to explore the issues and ideas raised in three articles, as well as the edition's front cover, showcasing not only extraordinary talent, but impressive understanding and sensitivity. Here, the successful students, whose pieces are featured throughout the issue, share their methods and inspiration.



Ally McKay (Cover):

"When tackling the cover illustration, I wanted to communicate the message that we, as adults, should not talk over children or assume what they want, but lift them up and empower them to use their voices. Thus, I landed on showcasing a group of children being lifted by a supportive hand, championing positive change. The symbols in the background reference areas of change, as well as some of Children in Scotland's past design elements. It was such an inspiring prompt and a joy to illustrate."

@allymckayart



Lucy Stewart (Personal reflection, page 7):

"When creating my illustration for Rachael Hatfield, I decided to show her journey from the parliament work she did in her youth to her work and hobbies today through Guides badges. I was a Guide for many years and thought that using badges would work perfectly to illustrate her achievements (a camera for her photography and a handshake to represent parliament) and the journey that led her to become a Board Director today. I used a bright colour palette and white stars of visual flourish to convey that Rachael has her heart set on improving the lives of children for the better."

@sounds_sketchy_illustration



Yutong Lu ('The power of music', pages 16-17):

"In my illustration, the record player in the little girl's hand was inspired by the first musical gift my parents gave me as a child. I wanted to use it to represent the power of music that can provide children with infinite reverie and vitality. A musical childhood is a blessing, so I implemented bright colours to give the audience a joyful and optimistic vibe. The characters surrounding the illustration represent the soulmates that kids imagine through the music. Music can help children deal with anxiety, while also promoting creativity, so my idea was to show that it is essential for children's development, as outlined in the article."

@imcecilia_l



Anna Bonsignorio ('Supported parenting over substitute parenting', pages 20-21):

"This article immediately caught my attention while deciding which I would like to illustrate. I was truly impressed by the importance of this project and I felt the need to illustrate it. As I always do when I start a new project, I created a mindmap with all the article's keywords alongside all the words that came to my mind while reading the article. I later started sketching some drafts. My intention was to convey feelings of safety and protection which are the same feelings I felt when reading about the Shared Lives project. The figure in the background represents the social care workers, who protect the families, while the characters represent diversity in parenting. The smoothness of the hair is meant to depict warmth and a sense of belonging to the reader."

@annabonsignorio.art



THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH
Edinburgh College of Art

Thank you to all the students who took part in this collaboration, and congratulations to the illustrators who had their work chosen. A special thanks also goes to Harvey Dingwall, Programme Director BA (Hons) Illustration at the ECA.

Rachael Hatfield Board Director, Children in Scotland

In early 2022, I applied to join the Board of Children in Scotland, and attended my first meeting that April. I wasn't sure what to expect in all honesty – looking at all the paperwork I received was a little daunting, but there was plenty of support from day one to make sure I felt comfortable.

The thing I valued most from the support I got in those early days (and that I still get now) was being treated as an equal partner. I'm never seen as "just a young person", and my knowledge and skills are valued as much as those of everyone else around the table.



It is important that organisations which represent children and young people have those groups involved in their strategic decision-making processes. In my view, when a decision is made at any level that will impact children or young people, it is crucial that their voices are listened to and acted upon before anything is finalised. Young people often see things in a different way from the adults in the room and, in an ever-changing world, it has never been more important to be aware of the different perspectives we all hold – something I hope the charity sector will continue to take forward in the future.

Before I started volunteering, campaigning and becoming active in youth groups, I didn't realise that my voice would be key to getting my rights upheld in many aspects of life.

In 2015, I attended my first Highland Youth Parliament conference, and while I wasn't too keen at first (public speaking was a nightmare idea for me), my youth worker insisted I give it a go. That conference was an eye-opener, as it brought together young people from across the Highlands, who wanted to see changes in education, healthcare, travel infrastructure and so many more everyday things that impact our lives.

Little did I know on that first nervous day that, over the next four years, I would go on to be Vice Chair of Highland Youth Parliament. During my time as an elected member, I also worked as a youth worker, supporting young people to go to local youth forums just like I once did. And nowadays, I can be

found volunteering as a leader with Girlguiding, standing by a football pitch capturing photographs of youth matches with Youth Football Scotland, or working with Highland-based charity Inspiring Young Voices, which does amazing work on amplifying the voices of young people who face societal barriers.

I've seen a lot of change over the past few years that highlights just how much more aware young people are of their rights. The youth-led campaigns on SQA examinations during the pandemic, and the changes that stemmed from young people across the country coming together to have their rights upheld, is a great example.

I've seen engagement in projects increase too, as we've moved to digital meetings. Rural young people aren't leaving home in the wee hours to get to Edinburgh or Glasgow for 10am for a short meeting, and I've seen young people openly challenge when they've had to, which is something that I wouldn't have done a few years ago before I found my voice.

As we celebrate our 30th anniversary at Children in Scotland, I hope that the organisation will continue to play a part in working with children and young people across Scotland, giving them opportunities to use their voices, uphold their rights and create a society they are proud to live in.

Here's to at least another 30 years of giving each and every young person the equal chance to flourish, be heard and be unapologetically themselves. ●

"I've seen a lot of change over the past few years that highlights just how much more aware young people are of their rights"

Illustration:
Lucy Stewart

“Climate justice offers us a pathway to a world where all of us are free”

10



Mikaela Loach, best-selling author and climate justice activist, discusses finding her voice, encouraging other young people to be the change they want to see in the world, and how we can work together to build a better society for all

Interview by **Alice Hinds**

At just 25-years-old, Mikaela Loach has already achieved more than many people could manage in a whole lifetime. And yet, freshly graduated from university, she's just getting started.

Alongside fellow Paid To Pollute campaigners, in the past few years, the young activist has taken the UK government to court over its public payments to fossil fuel companies, built a social media community of more than 180,000 like-minded people, launched a successful podcast, and penned a best-selling book, *It's Not That Radical*, which explores the intersectional issues of capitalism, white privilege, poverty, and climate change.

If all that wasn't enough, the articulate campaigner has also taken part in countless protests, including camping outside Westminster Abbey, alongside studying for a medical degree at the University of Edinburgh, which involved completing clinical placements throughout the pandemic.

Here, Mikaela, who has been named as one of the most influential women in the UK climate movement by the likes of *Forbes*, *Global Citizen* and *BBC Woman's Hour*, speaks to *Children in Scotland* about her journey from teen activist to fighting for climate justice on a world stage – and how our young people can do the same by working together for collective change.

Alice Hinds: What sparked your journey to becoming a leader in the UK climate movement?

Mikaela Loach: I was in my fourth year studying for a medical degree in Edinburgh, and I had already been involved in campaigning and talking about climate issues online. I met some other people who were also interested in tackling the fossil fuel subsidies – basically, the Government paying public money that could be used for schools or hospitals or the public good to multi-billion pound fossil fuel companies, encouraging polluting. So, alongside two other people, Jeremy and Kairin, I took the UK Government to the High Court with a campaign we called Paid to Pollute. At the same time, we were also competing against the Cambo oil field in the North Sea, which the UK Government was trying to get approved. Within just six months and a lot of campaigning – definitely not just me on my own! – we managed to indefinitely pause the project, which was a huge win.

AH: Many children and young people feel their opinions are not valued. Having got involved in activism at a young age, what helped you find your voice?

MK: I think it was just knowing that nothing has ever changed passively in this world. If we want things to change, we have to make them change.

As young people, we're often told that we are naive or immature, and we don't understand the world for wanting things to be different, wanting a world where everyone is safe and has dignified and free lives. But, actually, what is often characterised as naivety is our greatest strength. We can see that so much of this world doesn't make any sense, and rather than allowing ourselves to be shut down by other people, we should instead say over and over again – 'this world does not make sense and that we want something different. We want something safer and better. We deserve that and we can get that.'

When it comes to climate crisis, young voices in particular are so important. We are one of the most impacted groups in this world, and we are going to be impacted disproportionately by this crisis. It's so important that we do speak out, and realise that so many of the liberties and freedoms that we have now are because other people chose to be brave. Whether it was the civil rights movement, women's rights and suffrage, or disability justice, people put their heads above the parapet and spoke out – and that's how change happens.

“This world does not make sense and we want something different. We want something safer and better. We deserve that and we can get that”



AH: Within your best-selling book, *It's Not That Radical: Climate Action to Transform Our World*, you talk about "active hope" – do you think there is a risk of young people, in particular, struggling with eco-anxiety and feeling hopeless about their future?

MK: I talk about active hope because I see hope as an active stance. Often, we're told that things, the world, will just get better over time – but it's not passive, it's an active process, and we all have to be part of making the world better.

Eco-anxiety is rife in young people, we feel so anxious about our future. That anxiety comes from feeling that there's nothing that we can do about it, as if the future has already been written and we have to just be OK with it. We can combat that by realising that we do have agency, we do have power, we can do things, and the future is not written – we are the ones writing the future, so we have to have the bravery to write something different.

AH: You also say in the book that you are often framed as "radical" to invalidate your opinions – but isn't there an urgent need for us all to be more radical when it comes to tackling climate change?

MK: In the mainstream media, radical is defined as ridiculous, outrageous, impossible. Whereas the things that

we actually need to create a better world are not ridiculous, outrageous or impossible – and we need to frame them as common sense. It's so important that we frame a world where everyone gets to live in dignity, a world where everyone is housed, where no one is fearing a climate crisis, where no one is having to choose between heating or eating, as common sense because they are, and that's what we all want.

In order to get this world we all deserve, we have to go to the roots of these systems and rip them up. We have to make sure the work we're doing is not just, you know, painting the world green whilst it looks the same and still has oppression and inequality. Instead, the foundation has to be transformed to create a world that is different in a better way. So, in that sense, we definitely need to be more radical when it comes to tackling the climate crisis. And we also need to be, all of us, pushing a bit beyond what currently feels brave and go beyond that.

AH: Scotland's First Minister Humza Yousaf recently said he was "disappointed" in the UK Government's decision to approve the development of the Rosebank oil field, 80 miles west of Shetland. Do policies that move away from green energy leave you feeling frustrated?

MK: It's brilliant that Humza Yousaf said that he was disappointed because we should all be absolutely and completely outraged by it. If Rosebank is extracted from and burned, the emissions from just that one oil field alone would create more emissions than the 28 lowest income country's annual emissions combined. That's ridiculous. We should all be outraged and trying to take action, and we can do that through Stop Rosebank, which is the campaign around this issue.

Yes, policies that move away from green energy leave me feeling completely frustrated – but if I just sit in that frustration and anger, I'm not going to do anything. Anger is a really great motivator, but we need to find a way to channel that into taking action that will actually stop new fossil fuels and actually create a better world. I do that through campaigning.

AH: Do you believe politicians and world leaders have a responsibility to future generations when it comes to actively tackling climate change?

Opening page: Mikaela Loach delivering a petition to 10 Downing Street as part of the #StopCambo campaign

Above: Mikaela Loach in Holyrood Park, Edinburgh

Photos © Mikaela Loach

"I see hope as an active stance. Often, we're told the world will just get better over time – but it's not passive, and we all have to be part of the process"

MK: Absolutely. Politicians and world leaders should always have a responsibility to future generations when they're making any policy, but especially with the climate crisis because it is so urgent. For future generations, we need to have a policy of no new oil and gas and scaling down fossil fuels rather than scaling them up. Having no new oil and gas is key if we want to have future generations and if we want to have a world for us to live in.

AH: Alongside climate change, Scotland's younger generations are facing a plethora of injustices that will impact their future. How do you remain optimistic in the face of so many challenges?

MK: It's hard. All the oppressive issues in this world are connected to each other. There is no single issue struggle because we do not live single issue lives, as the great [American writer] Audre Lorde said. I understand that if all these issues are connected – and in my work I have an intersectional lens that sees these connections – then I'll know that the work I'm doing to unravel one part of the oppression will unravel the whole tapestry. It reminds me that what we're fighting for is not just one siloed liberation, it's the liberation of all of us – and that's exciting. Climate justice offers us a pathway to a world without misogyny, without homophobia, without racism, without classism, without transphobia. A world where all of us are free. We can do that, but we have to fight for that. Even just saying that has brought me some more hope.

AH: How can young people in Scotland get involved in climate change activism, and lead the change they want to see in the world?

MK: My friend, Tolmeia Gregory, has a brilliant poster that says, 'There's a role for everyone in the climate movement' and that's so true. It all starts, in my opinion, with joining a group in your local area. So, in Scotland, there are groups like This Is Rigged, Climate Camp Scotland, and Fridays for Future. It's really important that we join a group because we will do so much more together than we are able to do on our own. •

It's Not That Radical: Climate Action to Transform Our World is available now. For more information, visit mikaelaloach.com



Mikaela answers quick fire questions from *Changing our World*, Children in Scotland's young people's advisory group, which has identified climate change as one of its most important issues

What do you think is the most effective method for change?

Collective action. Coming together and doing things in groups, and causing disruption to the system, rather than allowing the system to continue, I think, is really important.

What positive change have you seen in our climate policy?

In Scotland, the SNP has taken a just transition more seriously and, in particular, has taken no new oil and gas more seriously, too. I hope they continue to do so because that's really, really important for us.

What motivates you in your work to tackle climate change?

I truly believe that through climate justice, we can finally create a world where all of us are free, all of us are safe, all of us liberated, and no one is oppressed. I fight towards that vision of this liberated world – it's not just about stopping the bad stuff, it's about creating good things as well.

How can young people create change?

By joining groups in their local area, by using the skills they already have, and by having conversations with people in their lives to transform things – and always doing this work in a way that you're organised and together.

I often say to draw a Venn diagram, with one circle labelled with what brings you joy, another circle labelled with what you're good at, and the other circle is what you care about. Where those three circles overlap, that's where your role is. Do what you can already do really well, and do it to help us move towards a better, safer future, and a climate just world.

Whose responsibility is it to tackle climate change?

It's all of our responsibility. It doesn't mean that we caused it, and it doesn't mean that we are all equally responsible for the causation, but we all have some sort of responsibility for tackling it, especially those of us who live in the global north. Every generation has had the responsibility to create a world that's better than the one that we were given, and I think that's on us to do, especially as young people. We have so much power to do that.



Supporting women, fighting for change

Looking back over the past 50 years, Glasgow Women's Aid CEO **Angela Devine** can see how far Scotland has come to expand, uphold and protect women's rights and freedoms – but with organisations like her own still facing unprecedented demand, it's also clear society hasn't yet come far enough

Interview by **Alice Hinds**

Ever since it was established in 1973, says Angela Devine, more and more women have sought the support and advocacy services that Glasgow Women's Aid offers – including safe, anonymous refuges for those experiencing domestic abuse, play therapy for children, survivor-led peer-support groups, and a 24/7 crisis support helpline – and even if funding was available for 10, 20 or 30 more outreach workers, it still wouldn't be enough.

"We've come so far, but there's still misogyny out there, and it's massive," Angela explained with a knowing sigh. "When I started my role here as manager in 2013, I had 32 staff. I've now got 54. We had £1.4 million income, and we've now got £2.9 million. We had 32 refuge spaces, and we've now got around 50. We now have eight children's outreach workers and, honestly, I could have 20 more and still not fulfil the need.

"Yes, we've made massive inroads, and feminism has grown and brought a lot forward. But when we were established, the movement was there to smash the patriarchy – and we're still here doing the same thing because it has not disappeared. Looking back, the changes that women have fought for, and the rights that women have gained, sadly, have all been given to us by

"We've come so far, but there's still misogyny out there, and it's massive. We now have eight children's outreach workers and, honestly, I could have 20 more and still not fulfil the need"

men, and we still need to fight so they can't take them away."

Male violence against women is still the leading cause of premature death for women globally, and one in five women will experience domestic violence over their lifetime. Here in the UK, police receive a domestic abuse-related call every 30 seconds and, in Scotland alone, it's estimated at least 30 women were killed by partners or ex-partners in the past four years.

"We need to make sure that the protection of women and girls from any type of violence – domestic abuse, honour-based violence, female genital mutilation – is at the forefront of every government policy," she explained. "We need to be protecting women, and there needs to be a better strategy because there are so many challenges to women's services right now.

"I do feel Scotland is leading the way as best it can, but the funding isn't always there. With the greatest respect, everything usually comes down to money – and women and children experiencing domestic abuse are not the priority. We don't shout out loud enough about the number of women who are dying due to domestic abuse, and it's frightening."

For today's girls and young women, the same injustices faced by previous generations persist but, Angela says, social media has added a whole new set of issues. "When we go into schools and do prevention work, the number of young people that accept a certain degree of control and think, 'Oh well, it's just that person' is shocking," she said. "Healthy relationship prevention work is desperately needed from the outset. It's a massive issue.

"And it's an issue from such a young age, as social media is used in abuse constantly. It's phenomenal the impact that it's having on children as a whole – and I don't know what we'll think when we look back in 10 years' time. It's not just abuse from adults, either – in children and young people's own relationships, 99% of the time, social media is part of the abuse."

As well as providing support for young people whose mum or caregiver might be facing abuse, Glasgow Women's Aid works with schools and community groups to teach girls and teenagers what healthy relationships should look like, and to explain issues like coercive control, gaslighting, and grooming.

Angela continued: "What we find time and time again is that if children are not supported as they go into young adulthood, they are vulnerable and open to grooming and abuse. It's very difficult because how do we engage with those young people? How do we get the message across that it's not OK? You and I might have a very different method of taking in information than somebody who's 14 and at school. We might notice something on the train or in an article in the paper – for children, it's social media."

As part of important outreach work, Glasgow Women's Aid recently launched Enough!!, a support service for 13- to 19-year-olds, who are worried about their relationships. With a dedicated Instagram account,

"When we go into schools and do prevention work, the number of young people that accept a certain degree of control is shocking"

as well as a weekly telephone hotline, Enough!! enables the charity to engage directly with young women in a way that is accessible to them.

"Having a flexible service that can meet and adapt to the individual needs of our young women allows the project to respond to what a young person is experiencing and be heard," explained Angela. "By placing importance on each young person's physical and emotional safety – but also on their personal growth and potential to thrive – Enough!! offers young women an opportunity to process their experiences, have their voice heard where they feel it should be heard and install a strong sense of self into the young person."

She added: "It can be difficult for an adult to recognise when they themselves are in a coercive relationship and the same is true for our young women. This is why it is essential for us to have in place prevention and intervention programmes that speak to our young people in a relatable way."

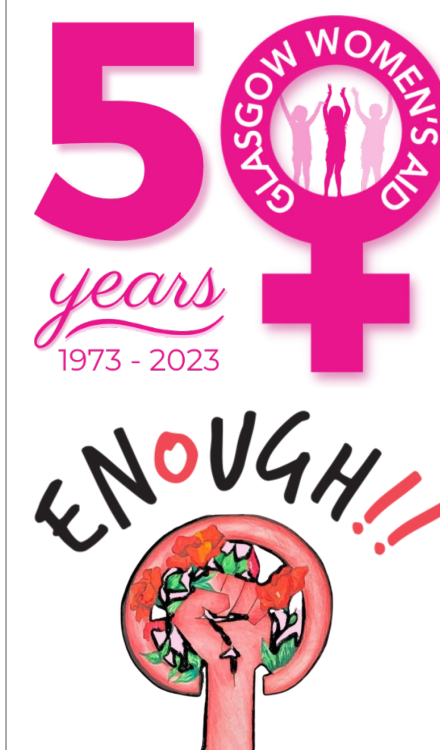
As Glasgow Women's Aid celebrates how far Scotland has come over the past 50 years, Angela says we must look forward to ensure the next half century welcomes even more progress.

"As a front-end crisis service, we don't see, generally, what happens in 10 or 20 years time," she said. "So, we need to make sure that the work we do from the outset is meaningful and targeted and needs-lead." •

Left: Glasgow Women's Aid is celebrating its 50th anniversary in 2023 and has recently launched its Enough!! service to support 13- to 19-year-olds who are worried about their relationships

For more information, visit glasgowwomensaid.org.uk

To access the Enough!! support service for 13- to 19-year-olds, visit glasgowwomensaid.org.uk/enough



Hand in hand: making theatre accessible

Using sign language as its first language, Krazy Kat Theatre, under Artistic Director **Kinny Gardner**, is setting the stage for performances that captivate children with mime, puppets, dance and more

Interview by **Alice Hinds**

Combining mime, dance, song, puppets and sign language, Krazy Kat Theatre is quite unlike any other professional children's theatre company.

Established in 1982 by friends and fellow performers, Kinny Gardner and Alastair S Macmillan, over the past 40 years the touring company has been committed to developing access to arts activities for deaf and disabled children throughout the country, creating and performing magical, visual-led productions that go far beyond the spoken word.

In fact, so pioneering is its work, Krazy Kat is the only professional children's theatre company in the UK that uses sign language as its first language – something which has led Artistic Director, Kinny, to be regarded as a leader in the development of visual theatre with integrated signing.

"I have a deaf nephew, Gavin, who wasn't diagnosed until he was four," said Kinny, from Edinburgh, who studied classical ballet and later worked for many years with The Scottish Mime Theatre. "At the time, we wondered what provisions there would be for him, and out of that came the idea of creating a theatre company. We weren't a sign language company to begin with – that was developed over a number of years – but our work has always been

visual, and over the years, our puppetry, dance and mime had more and more moving and less and less speaking."

Accessibility and a passion to communicate are at the centre of every Krazy Kat performance, and developing each show, Kinny says, is an organic process that involves finding innovative, unusual and engaging ways of telling a story. With 90% of deaf children born to hearing parents, who have little or no background in deafness, Kinny believes it's critically important to champion the value of sign language, challenging misconceptions, and proving that accessible arts can be stimulating for all.

"One of the biggest things we do with Krazy Kat is signpost to a lot of young families that

sign language is just that – a language that you can learn," he explained. "We try to allow the families – and children – to recognise their potential.

"Our language is three-dimensional, and the visual aspect of our language is absolutely vital. Hearing children are fascinated with sign language because they're kinetic and just want to move. However, creating the shows is high maintenance, hard work, and it's not just a question of sailing into a room with a couple of interpreters!"

Carefully crafted puppets, sets, costumes, songs, dances and more all come together in Krazy Kat shows, enhancing the sign language while providing a 'break' for children who are deaf or hard of hearing.



"One of the biggest things we do is signpost to young families that sign language is just that – a language that you can learn. We try to allow the families – and children – to recognise their potential"

Kinny explained: "Receiving sign language is very tiring for a wee one's brain. I read a beautiful piece by a deaf writer, who said that coming home from a full day of signing feels like having done *The Times* crossword, a Sudoku puzzle, and a game of Monopoly all in one afternoon.

"For that reason, we have developed 'eye breaks' during our performances, which take the form of a puppet or dance routine or the Japanese storytelling style Kamishibai, which uses cartoon pictures within a little box. There are many ways to break up the need for language by focusing on visuals."

"Sign language is very interesting because there's a lot of local dialect – numbers and colours can be different, for example – and that's something I really enjoy when we're working on a new piece for a school or club," he added. "It's a very lively and alive language because movement keeps on flowing and changing."

As well as live performances around the country, Krazy Kat's hands-on experiences, where children become the actors, recently received funding through Creative Scotland's Open Fund awards to bring a new workshop, 'Hearing George, Deaf Dragon', to deaf and disabled support spaces around the country.

Workshops, Kinny says, are a great example of play being "the bridge to independence" as well

as self-esteem and confidence. "Hearing George, Deaf Dragon' is all about conflict resolution and working co-operatively," he explained of the themes running through the sessions. "As part of the workshop, the children play together, exploring things like anger and why we get angry, and then we make our own dragons. "We slowly build up from one-to-one co-operation to then working in fours, and eventually coming together as one large group, where we've all got the same purpose, working in the same way. The sense of achievement at the end is amazing."

For theatre companies, organisations and charities hoping to make their work more accessible for children with deafness, Kinny says there are lots of innovative projects available to learn from – and making mistakes is just part of the journey.

"For organisations, it can be very daunting to make work more accessible – but once you start, it's remarkable how many people are doing the same thing," he said. "It's important to remember, you're not on your own.

"It's also important not to try and reinvent the wheel. Different sizes and shapes of wheel already exist and there are lots of methods that you can use as a yardstick for your own work. For any company thinking of expanding disability arts awareness and availability for children, there's lots of funding available, too.

"When we started Krazy Kat, we had a lot of support, but not very much financial backing – mostly because no one had any idea what on earth we were doing! Way back in the day, I was making the puppets and Alastair was driving the car, but now we have wonderful designers, beautiful actors, and lots more people who work with us. Having started from a very small base, just outside Aberdeen, bit by bit our gallusness increased, and we applied for more funding, which has helped us grow.

"I would encourage any organisation to have an internal review, celebrate the positive points they might already be doing, and then think about how those can be improved. It's important to make mistakes, too, because it means you are trying.

"As Scottish writer George MacDonald said, the only way to find out what is on the other side of the door is to go through it.

"I find it very reassuring and very exciting when I see companies trying to expand what they offer. There's so much joy to be had in the childlike pleasure of sharing a story or show." •

For more information, visit: krazykattheatre.co.uk

Opposite: **Oliver in the Overworld.** Photo by Robert Workman

Above: **Matress! Matress!** Photo by Chris de Wilde

The power of music: how musical creativity can support children to grow, develop, learn and flourish

By *Alice Hinds*



From lullabies in the wee small hours to picking up the recorder in primary, singing in the school choir to streaming the latest pop songs with friends, music has always played an important role in childhood and beyond.

As a universal language, music has many powers beyond bringing us pleasure and enjoyment – not only can simply listening to our favourite songs lower blood pressure, relieve pain and reduce anxiety and depression, but research has shown that playing an instrument can even stimulate brain cells to improve functions like memory and abstract reasoning skills. For children and young people, therefore, access to music can be beneficial for many developmental milestones, and a range of arts organisations, social groups and community projects around Scotland are putting musical creativity at the heart of their work.

Founded in 1997, Drake Music Scotland, for example, works with more than a thousand disabled young people and children with additional support needs every year, taking specialist workshops into schools to help pupils develop musical ability as well as confidence, self-esteem and social skills. In 2022-23 alone, the charity worked across 59 schools in 14 local authorities to deliver 821 sessions – the equivalent of around 2,500 hours of tailored lessons – and Emma Lines, Head of Learning at the charity, says she has witnessed many transformational moments as pupils pick up an instrument for the first time.

“Drake Music Scotland utilises a tailored, specialist approach in all the work we deliver,” she explained. “We believe that everyone should learn in the way they need to learn, rather than how a teacher wants to teach, and often, young people who would not normally have the chance to participate are able to take part in music-making opportunities through our projects.

“We have had many instances where we have witnessed teachers’ and parents’ views of what a young person or group of young people is capable of completely change following working with us. For example, we have had young people who we were told would absolutely never be able to play in front of others or be able to go to another venue out of school, perform to an audience at concert venues and alongside their peers.”

Pioneers in finding new approaches to make music more accessible, Drake Music Scotland tutors also use accessible instruments to allow more children to embrace their inner composer, songwriter and performer, as well as Figurenotes, a unique notation system where each note is represented by a colour and each octave by a shape, which makes reading scores much easier.



Emma continued: “We work with a variety of technologies such as the app ThumbJam on iPad – which has Figurenotes built in – ROLI blocks, a touch-based and programmable controller, ERAE Touch, a polyphonic MIDI controller, and CMPSR, a joystick-designed midi instrument. By offering a fully tailored approach through these instruments, we are able to really work to the individual needs and preferences of each disabled musician.

“We also use Brainfingers, a headband that reads brainwaves, which can be controlled with jaw clicks, as well as various software programmes on laptops. Each technology we use is set up to work with the individual needs of the player, according to their range of movement and preferences, which can be life-changing.”

Enabling young people to play music in whatever way feels good is a goal shared by Jen O’Brien, the Founding Director of Music Broth, Scotland’s musical instrument and equipment

library. Launched in 2017 with just eight instruments, the social enterprise now has a collection of more than 3,000 guitars, amps, drums, cellos, violins, pianos, trumpets and more, all of which are available to borrow from as little as £6 per month.

“Everything we do has been really community driven,” said Jen. “We do six-pounds-per-month memberships, but if somebody comes to us and that’s too much, we will look after them. We don’t do means testing or anything like that – as long as some people are paying in, it covers other people who can’t afford to.

“We’ve seen demand just continue to grow over the years, but particularly from young people, who have been given a limited choice of instruments in the school. It’s often a case of, you know, ‘We have nine clarinets and that’s what you can have’ and they want to do electronic music, music production or something different because that’s how they express their creativity. It’s really important to have the option to access something that is not traditionally in your family, either, so we provide a very wide range.”

As well as being “Scotland’s loudest library”, Music Broth also offers workshops and online tuition, while regularly working with the likes of charity Refuweggee to hold child-friendly sessions, where, Jen says, the change in children’s confidence can be “astounding” as they make friends, develop their creativity, learn, and even improve their mental health.

She said: “Playing music really allows children to express themselves, especially if they’re maybe a new Scot and don’t have full English language skills just yet. They don’t have to be able to speak to people during our sessions – they can copy someone else playing a chord on a guitar or copy a drum beat, and suddenly they are communicating and being with people without any social pressure to speak.

“Our space is really welcoming and open, and we aim to be really inclusive so everyone can be whoever they want to be, and pick up whatever instrument they want, whether they’ve made noise with it the past or they’ve never made noise with anything before.”

Another key aspect of both organisations is seeing music as a route to employment, too, with Drake Music Scotland and Music Broth encouraging young Scots to follow their dreams – no matter how big.

Emma said: “We have disabled musicians we have been working with for a number of years since they were at school and now are in their 30s. They are establishing themselves and their musical careers, with our support, as artists, composers and performers in their own right.

“When young people have access to music and are provided with appropriate opportunities for their needs, creativity – as well as the social skills, musical skills and confidence that come from learning music – can be harnessed. Once this is in place it improves the overall wellbeing and the skillsets of young people – it’s a no-brainer.”

“If you want to have music for your hobby, mental health or even just a little bit of escape time, that’s totally cool,” added Jen. “But if you want to make a career out of your talents and your skills and the effort that you put in, that should be valued, so we’re really keen to provide these pathways.” •

For more information, visit drakemusicscotland.org and musicbroth.org

Illustrations: Yutong Lu

Children's rights and AI: balancing innovation with protection

With the rapid development of Artificial Intelligence increasingly impacting children and young people's everyday lives, as well as shaping their futures, we speak to **Gregory Metcalfe** at Children's Parliament about a project which is placing children's views at the forefront of AI implementation in Scotland

Interview by **Sophie Ward**

Artificial intelligence (AI) is a global phenomenon that presents challenges and opportunities for children and young people around the world. Scotland's AI Strategy, published in 2021 by the Scottish Government and the Scottish AI Alliance, set out the vision for the development of "trustworthy, ethical and inclusive" AI with children's human rights at its centre.

The strategy highlighted the importance of adopting UNICEF's policy guidance on AI, which was created from the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), enacting policies and systems that "protect children, provide equitably for their needs and rights, and empower them to participate in an AI world by contributing to the development and use of AI". With the strategy published, the Scottish Government needed the right team to ensure children's voices were being listened to in the delivery of the vision.

With the complexities and uniqueness of the topic, requiring knowledge of AI systems, policies and ethics as well as children's rights and participation, the project was to be collaborative, drawing on the expertise of three different organisations: Children's Parliament, the Scottish AI Alliance and The Alan Turing Institute.

"It's been really nice working with both organisations and having the



different expertise to draw on," said Gregory Metcalfe, Children's Parliament's lead on the *Exploring Children's Rights and AI* project. "I've learnt a lot and having those other organisations to make sure we are getting it right and that we are understanding the issues ourselves well enough to then think about how to approach them with children has been really important."

The project has been divided into three stages. Stage one, delivered between August 2022 and March 2023, explored children's understanding of AI, introduced the subject of children's rights, and how AI systems could impact them. Given that AI is a concept many adults struggle to wrap their heads around, how did the project team approach the subject with children? "We take a children's rights-based

approach to our work which is the foundation for our participatory practice," Gregory explained. "In essence, we ensure children have knowledge of their rights and that they experience rights through our direct work. Additionally, we support adults to understand their obligations and demonstrate human rights values, creating the right environment for children to participate. With this in place, we find that children are more than capable of expressing their views, even on complex subjects such as AI."

Engagement work has taken place in four different schools in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Stirlingshire, and Shetland. "Between the four schools there is a real range of experience and that's always what we are looking for, to get as much insight as we can

from the children, and one of the important factors is having that range of lived experience." Children's Parliament, in partnership with representatives from The Alan Turing Institute, held initial workshops with 87 children aged between seven and 11, known as 'the AI team'. Alongside these sessions, a small group of three or four children from each class was assigned the role of project 'investigators'. They were tasked with taking a deeper dive into the various issues surrounding AI, attending online sessions alongside the project leads.

"We had to spend some time early on in the project unpicking what exactly AI is and what it isn't, and where it is found and where it is not found," Gregory explained. But by the end of the first year the children were confidently exploring AI in relation to broader themes. The project team created a variety of mediums to help the children to communicate their views on the subject. The children created community maps, temperature scales, wrote short stories and news bulletins and, of course, asked lots of questions with project leaders, who ensured children felt listened to and valued. With the physical distance between the children and lack of opportunity to meet in-person, leaders created connections between the groups where possible, including the introduction of Max the dog, a project mascot chosen by the children.

A 'longlist' of issues was reduced to a few focus areas. Children felt strongly about AI implementation keeping them safe and protecting their privacy. Highlighting their concerns in this area, Gregory said: "The children demonstrated great awareness of the potential for AI to worsen existing security risks around data privacy, while also expressing optimism that AI systems could, and should, be used to make children's lives safer both on and offline." While exploring the quantity and

quality of data, the children also became concerned about the potential for AI systems to reflect existing bias in society. "They think that AI developers need to take great care with how they design AI systems and the data that they use," explained Gregory.

The children also voiced concerns about how effectively AI could be used as a tool for teaching, with worries that it might be relied on too heavily. The children also highlighted inconsistencies in the teaching around AI across different schools and felt it was vital that all children learn about AI. Gregory noted: "The children observed that the level of support they receive in understanding AI depends, at the moment, on the confidence of the adults around them."

Throughout the first exploratory stage of the project, the partner organisations found that the children tended to focus on the positive uses of AI and the benefits its implementation could bring to their lives. "Overall, the children have been excited to learn about AI and are broadly optimistic about its potential to effect change in the future. They see a role for AI in supporting children's human rights," said Gregory.

The project is now in its second phase and the children are applying the themes developed in phase one to real-life AI systems, attending workshops with developers and policymakers and sharing their views on current AI projects in development. It's an exciting phase for the team. "What we're working towards is culture change within the sector," said Gregory. "We're aiming to reach a point where those involved in making decisions about AI development think about children's rights from the outset of any new innovation."

Gregory admits that the rate at which AI is developing and the changes to legislation surrounding it, mean it is hard to know exactly what "child-centred AI" will look like in the future. What is clear is that to ensure AI is implemented in Scotland in a way that will benefit children and their rights, the sector cannot afford to sit back and watch. "I think the most important thing here is that the children's sector continues to promote children's rights across the board, and that we recognise that AI will play an increasing role in children's lives," said Gregory. "As such, it is important that we continue to collectively hold the AI sector to account with regard to ensuring that children are meaningfully involved in decision-making when it comes to the development, use and regulation of AI, and that the UNCRC is recognised by those involved as a baseline for ensuring that children's rights are upheld." •

“In the right environment, children are more than capable of expressing their views on complex subjects such as AI”

Opposite:
Young people at work during the *Exploring Children's Rights and AI* project

Exploring Children's Rights and AI is an ongoing project running until 2024.

You can find out more about the project and keep up to date on the outcomes of stages two and three by visiting childrensparliament.org.uk

Supported parenting over substitute parenting

Membership charity Shared Lives Plus recently led a project to develop a new type of service, which enables parents with additional support needs to care for their child at home. Here, [Ali Miller](#) explores the innovative project, and discusses how a holistic approach could better support new parents to thrive as caregivers

We've all heard the saying "it takes a village to raise a child" – but what happens when you aren't lucky enough to already have a support network in place? For a large percentage of parents with learning disabilities, these circumstances often mean having your children removed from your care.

In fact, around 40-60% of parents with learning disabilities in the UK have their children removed into the care system, despite evidence showing that, with the right support, they can thrive, flourish, and grow as caregivers.

Working around the country, Shared Lives is a unique model of social care that supports thousands of people with learning disabilities, as well as a range of other health and social care needs. In Shared Lives, a person with care and support needs moves in with, or regularly visits, an approved Shared Lives carer, and together they share family and community life. As a model that has evolved in parallel with the learning disability community, Shared Lives carers support people with all aspects of daily life – including becoming parents for the first time.

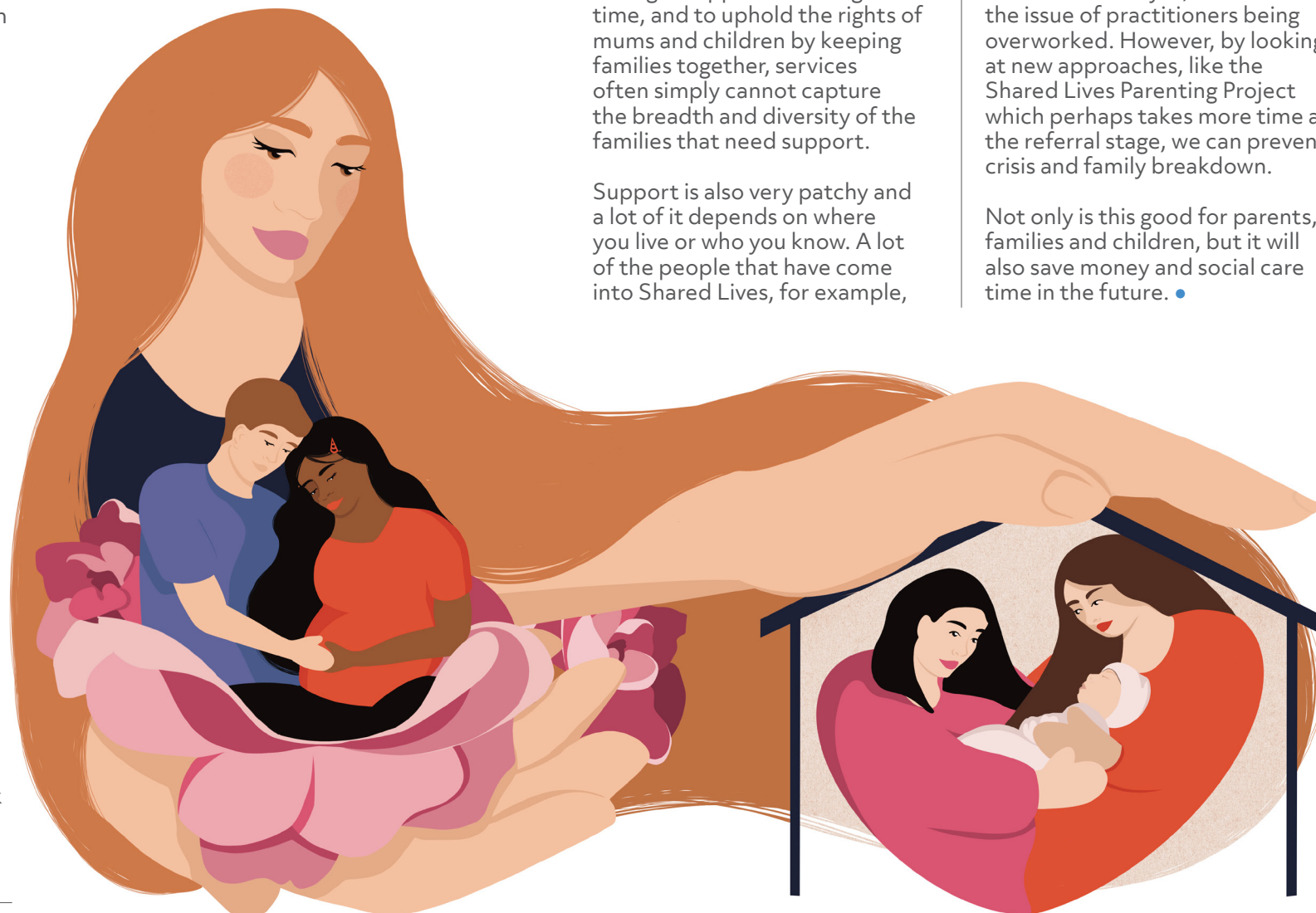
Working alongside The Promise, we recently developed The Shared Lives Parenting Project in Scotland, which was designed to provide new parents and their children with the simple

yet hugely impactful start that all families deserve – a loving home filled with people who care. Setting out to establish a small number of Shared Lives arrangements with parents with learning disabilities, the aim of the project was to allow the parents with additional support needs to retain full responsibility for their child, furthering the principle of providing 'supported parenting' rather than 'substituted parenting'.

Putting into practice the aspirations of national policy and guidance for parents with learning disabilities, the project saw Shared Lives carers help three new mums navigate parenthood, living together in the same space to help them learn and practice caretaking skills in a safe environment. Unlike in many social care settings, the supported person and their child are completely integrated into the family home, providing a genuine, real shot at ordinary family life.

As a very organic process, the carers were able to constantly flex and adapt their support, assessing moment to moment. In practice, that meant if mum was really struggling, they could add in a bit more care giving, demonstrating or helping with whatever elements they were finding challenging. If, on the other hand, mum was doing really well, they could back off and simply be in the next room having a cup of tea, saying 'I'm here if you need me'.

“Supported parents with learning disabilities can thrive as caregivers”



While the group of parents involved in the pilot was small, the impact has been hugely significant, as all parents involved made considerable progress, gained confidence, forged meaningful relationships with their new babies – not to mention their Shared Lives carer – and strengthened their community ties.

It's not our job to tell parents the best way to parent. It's our job to provide safety that's equally nurturing and caring, and that's how Shared Lives is different to some of the statutory services that currently exist for parents.

Every bit of policy out there recommends supported parenting until substituted parenting is needed – but there's a big gap between what policy says to do and what services allow for. Even though policy does encourage the care sector to look for whole family support, the right support at the right time, and to uphold the rights of mums and children by keeping families together, services often simply cannot capture the breadth and diversity of the families that need support.

Support is also very patchy and a lot of it depends on where you live or who you know. A lot of the people that have come into Shared Lives, for example,

haven't come through the 'normal route' – it has always come about because someone knows someone.

If I had a magic wand to wave in the area of policy, I would use it to put policy into practice, and for making sure that people know more about what services they can access, while also looking at the evidence for alternative models. Just because a service hasn't been implemented widely or isn't the mainstream way of supporting people, does not mean it should be automatically discounted.

The evidence from some of Scotland's smaller, lesser-known, community-based support models is so overwhelmingly positive, so it's very frustrating that although the policy backs it up, the practice doesn't always.

Yes, it is harder to look at innovative models. Yes, it takes more time. And yes, there is still the issue of practitioners being overworked. However, by looking at new approaches, like the Shared Lives Parenting Project which perhaps takes more time at the referral stage, we can prevent crisis and family breakdown.

Not only is this good for parents, families and children, but it will also save money and social care time in the future. •

“It's not our job to tell parents the best way to parent. It's our job to provide safety that's equally nurturing and caring”



Ali Miller is Development Officer for Parenting Project Scotland.

To find out more about the work of Shared Lives, visit sharedlivesplus.org.uk

Illustration: Anna Bonsignorio

Setting the standards for Scotland's Bairns' Hoose model

Providing a safe and therapeutic space for children and young people who have been victims or witnesses of harm, the Bairns' Hoose model has the potential to transform the care, justice and recovery systems. Here, *Henry Mathias* explores the background to implementing the model, and discusses the challenges that lie ahead

Just a few months ago, Scotland's first "Bairns' Hoose" opened its doors, marking a significant step forward in our country's commitment to providing co-ordinated, comprehensive support under one roof for all children and young people in the protection and justice systems.

Informed by the Barnahus model, which originated in Scandinavia in the late 1990s and has since become commonplace across many European countries, it has taken years of hard work and determination to see this innovative, holistic approach become reality.

Implemented as a key action from The Promise, and underpinned by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), Scotland's Bairns' Hoose model centres on the creation of safe and welcoming places for children to go once a crime of abuse or violence has been reported, and brings therapeutic support, child protection, recovery and justice services together in one place through a "four rooms" concept.

With cross-party support, and a commitment from the Scottish Government to make a Bairns' Hoose available to all children who need it by 2025, the Care Inspectorate joined forces with Healthcare Improvement Scotland in 2019 to set about creating national standards to support a consistent, national implementation of the Barnahus model.



When we began this work, we already knew that Scotland's protection and justice systems hadn't always worked well for children and young people. Many families told us that after being a victim or witness, interaction with a multitude of statutory services – including the police, social workers, doctors, nurses and other professionals – made the experience even more

difficult. In fact, many described the process as re-traumatising, as young people had to relive what had happened to them up to 14 times, often in different settings, with unfamiliar faces.

We also knew from our work bringing health and social care together to develop Scotland's Health and Social Care Standards, which came

into effect in 2018, that an integrated model with one common framework was no easy task. We have built on the strengths of the joint police and social work Scottish Child Interview Model and brought in other professionals to be part of a new multi-disciplinary team. The collective focus of the team is the safety and wellbeing of the child victim.

It's a considerable achievement that health and justice have come into the same space, which should mean that children and other family members experience a much more seamless and sympathetic all-round service. Being able to record video interviews to a consistently high standard in the Bairns' Hoose should also mean that fewer children have to be cross-examined for court cases going forward. Scotland has adopted an ambitious and inclusive Barnahus model by including health and therapeutic support and ensuring siblings and other family members are eligible. In keeping with the holistic Kilbrandon principles, children under the age of criminal responsibility whose behaviour has caused harm can also access the Bairns' Hoose, which adds a further layer of support.

To get it right and to make a difference, we needed children at the heart of the process. To make the standards outcome-focused, and embed individual, lived experience, children contributed to the drafting of the standards. We listened to and respected the voices of children, not by bringing them to an adult setting, but by funding participation groups that met in safe, protected spaces, which made it easier for them to express their opinions. For Bairns' Hoose implementation to be successful, the ongoing participation of children and organisations supporting them needs to continue.

It was really heartening to see cross-government support for the resulting standards, and even more encouraging that, as the standards were agreed, funding

was made available to test out different models. When the needs and rights of children, and an imperative for change, are the clear priorities, it's amazing what can be achieved.

Of course, the standards are all about aspiration and setting out what we would like to see develop over the coming years. With the first physical "Hoose" having opened, we still have a long way to go if we are to fulfil the ambition to make Scotland the best place in the world to grow up. But in a small country where people are well connected, adaptable and aspirational, great changes are possible.

Firstly, it will be important to test and pilot different ways of running Bairns' Hoose. While the standards say we should have health services integrated alongside justice, how that looks in practice will vary and will need to be tested as more multi-agency test sites are opened over the coming years. Secondly, Scotland's rurality will lead to challenges, and we will need to provide joined-up services and not allow geography to create a 'postcode lottery'. But if the Scandinavians can do it with their geography then, surely, so can we. And thirdly, we all know that children's access to mental health support, counselling and advocacy is still variable, so it will take time to develop a genuinely integrated culture, with an ethos of trust built between each of the different professionals involved.

Cultural change takes time, and plenty of practice. It's one thing to say that social work, police, health, justice and voluntary sector therapeutic support must work jointly, but it's quite another to make this happen in a meaningful and sustainable way. When a child goes to a Bairns' Hoose, it means entering a therapeutic environment, with all professionals responsive to the trauma they have gone through. It also means having the same trusted adult alongside them throughout the process.

The other area to consider is the impact on the protection and justice system itself. From the experiences of other European countries that have implemented a Barnahus model, we may see more people disclosing abuse, with the rates of prosecution going up significantly. •

“*We still have a long way to go if we are to fulfil the ambition to make Scotland the best place in the world to grow up. But in a small country where people are well connected, adaptable and aspirational, great changes are possible”*



Henry Mathias is Head of Professional Standards and Practice at The Care Inspectorate, the scrutiny and improvement body that ensures the quality of care in Scotland meets high standards.

Visit careinspectorate.com to find out more.

Opposite: The Bairns' Hoose illustrated Standards poster

Making a step change in Learning for Sustainability in Scotland

Across the world, children and young people are actively making their voices heard, asking governments to take urgent action on the biggest challenges of our time, with particular focus on social justice and climate and nature emergencies.

Time of change

At a time of potentially extensive and far-reaching structural change in Scottish education, this imperative is recognised in a range of major reports that have recently been commissioned by the Scottish Government. Professor Ken Muir's "bold and radical" blueprint for Scottish education, *Putting Learners at the Centre*, for example, recommends making climate change, human rights, and the Rights of the Child central to the future vision for education.

It's now more than 10 years since the initial vision for 'Learning for Sustainability' (LFS) became a feature of Scottish education. It's an approach to life and learning that enables learners, educators, schools and their wider communities to build a socially-just, sustainable and equitable world, and since 2013, LFS has been an entitlement for all young people, and a responsibility for all educators working in 3-18, as part of a whole setting approach. But is this aim realised in every setting, involving every educator, for every child and young person?

A movement for change

Responding to calls from children and young people and educators, the time is right for a step change, and we need to support them to develop and enhance the skills, knowledge, confidence and values needed to thrive in our increasingly complex and challenging world.

Scotland's refreshed Learning for Sustainability Action Plan, 'Target 2030: a movement for people, planet and prosperity', was launched in June 2023. Developed through a collaborative approach, which involved children, young people and educators, the plan outlines a vision of a Scotland where, by the year 2030, all 3-18 learning establishments are 'Sustainable Learning Settings'. This would mean weaving and embedding an ethos of learning for sustainability across and into the culture, curriculum and campus of each setting that ripples out into – and is supported by – their wider community. The plan contains 25 actions, grouped under five key themes, and its implementation is in the current Programme for Government.

The Target 2030 action plan states, "this vision and action plan is not just for a few, it is for everyone" – and bringing about such a comprehensive 'Movement for Change' will need us all to be involved if it is to succeed.

A strategic Leadership Group comprising expertise from across major educational bodies – including Learning for Sustainability Scotland – is already in place, aiming to provide collaborative leadership and partnership. Importantly, this needs the ongoing meaningful participation of children and young people in the development and implementation of the plan, and a parallel Children and Young People's Leadership Group is currently being convened.

This perspective was written collaboratively by the team at Learning for Sustainability Scotland; **Betsy King, Kirsten Leask and Pete Higgins.**

Learning for Sustainability Scotland works to inspire, inform and enable Scotland's capacity to contribute to sustainability at local, national and global level. You can find out more about their work at learningforsustainabilityscotland.org

But a successful 'Movement for Change' will need more. Leadership will be needed throughout the education system from everyone; children and young people, educators, parents and carers, leaders of education settings, local authority directors and their staff, local councillors, regional improvement collaboratives, national and regional agencies and bodies and many more. Ongoing discussion, dialogue, collaboration and co-creation will also be crucial.

The Target 2030 Call to Action is imminent, and Learning for Sustainability has the potential to enable and support learners, educators, schools and their wider communities to build a 'socially-just, sustainable and equitable world'. What on earth could be more important? •

“The approach enables learners, educators, schools and their wider communities to build a socially-just, sustainable and equitable world”

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14 – 15	Benefits for non-EEA nationals
16	Students and benefits – an update
21 – 22	Benefits for EEA nationals
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28 – 29	Benefits for EEA nationals – advanced
30	Kinship carers and the benefits system

DECEMBER 2023

5 – 6	Benefit basics in Scotland
9 – 10	Transferring to Scottish disability benefits

JANUARY 2024

11 – 12	QBC – making the most of your calculator
16 – 18 & 23 – 25	Introduction to welfare rights
29 – 30	Students and benefits – eligibility
31 Jan – 1 Feb	Income maximisation for older people

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pchalmer@cpagscotland.org.uk
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@CPAGScotland

FEBRUARY 2024

2	Universal credit - managed migration
6-7	Mental health and benefits
15-16	Appeals to the First-tier Tribunal
19	Adult disability payment – an introduction
20	Payments for children in Scotland
21-22	Challenging decisions – reconsiderations and other tactics
27-28	Challenging Scottish benefit decisions – redeterminations and other tactics
29	EXTRA DATE Benefits and the armed services community

MARCH 2024

5	Universal credit – an introduction
6	Benefits overview
7-8	NEW Universal credit – housing costs
12-13	Universal credit and students
14	Looking up the law online
15	Attendance allowance – an introduction
18	NEW Scottish carers' assistance
19-20	Universal credit update and tactics
21-22	Social security law update
26	Limited capability for work in universal credit
27	Scottish social security – an introduction

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Scotland's housing crisis is being felt more acutely by society's most vulnerable – we need to provide more security and safety

The conditions in which we know children thrive – with security, safety, routine and relationships – are extremely undermined by homelessness.

The upheaval of becoming homeless and having to live somewhere new is, in itself, disorientating and potentially distressing, and that's without factoring in the veritable 'lottery' of what standard of accommodation you might end up in and where. And then there's the somewhat more inevitable extended period of time until a permanent home is provided.

Imagine if you can (despite my many years in this sector I still find it difficult) what it feels like when this already disorientating and distressing situation is further compounded by domestic abuse, and potentially needing to flee for safety, maybe in the middle of the night, and without the chance to say goodbye to your friends or gather your belongings.

The most recently published statistics show homelessness rising by more than 10% in Scotland over the past year. There are more than 15,000 households living in temporary accommodation in Scotland, which include more than 9,000 children. The average time people remain in (often inadequate and unsuitable) temporary accommodation is 223 days.

In Edinburgh, where our charity is based and where we do a lot of our work, the statistics are even harder to bear. The latest figures show that, in March of this year, 2,755 children were living in temporary accommodation in Edinburgh, which is an increase of 280 from the previous year and represents 29% of all

children living in temporary accommodation in Scotland. What's more, when the average national wait for a permanent home can be up to 223 days, in Edinburgh, a family with children will wait on average 611 days in temporary accommodation.

In short, more people across Scotland are becoming homeless every year and they are remaining in temporary accommodation for longer. In Edinburgh, because of the shortage of affordable housing options, the housing crisis is being felt even more acutely by our most vulnerable.

Ending homelessness and stopping domestic abuse are both significant and complex challenges. Taking a public health view of both is a start, but it's going to be a tough tap to turn off. Until we do, we need to do all that we can to make sure that families who become homeless have somewhere they can feel safe and secure at a time when they are most vulnerable.

To help where it's needed most, we have partnered with social impact property fund manager Resonance and Patron Capital, a real estate investment firm, on their joint venture, the Women in Safe Homes Fund. This project will see 30 homes purchased so we can provide good quality accommodation to women and children fleeing domestic abuse. With our partners, we will also provide wraparound support to these families to help them get back on their feet. We're effectively helping people into a safe place with no need to share accommodation with strangers, which goes a long way to creating

some sense of security and, particularly for children, helps ease what will already have been a very tough time.

While we won't have been able to prevent them being in this situation in the first place, we can avoid compounding their trauma in a way that unsafe accommodation would. •

“Taking a public health view of homelessness and domestic abuse is a start, but it's going to be a tough tap to turn off. Until we do, we need to do all that we can so families who become homeless have somewhere they can feel safe and secure”



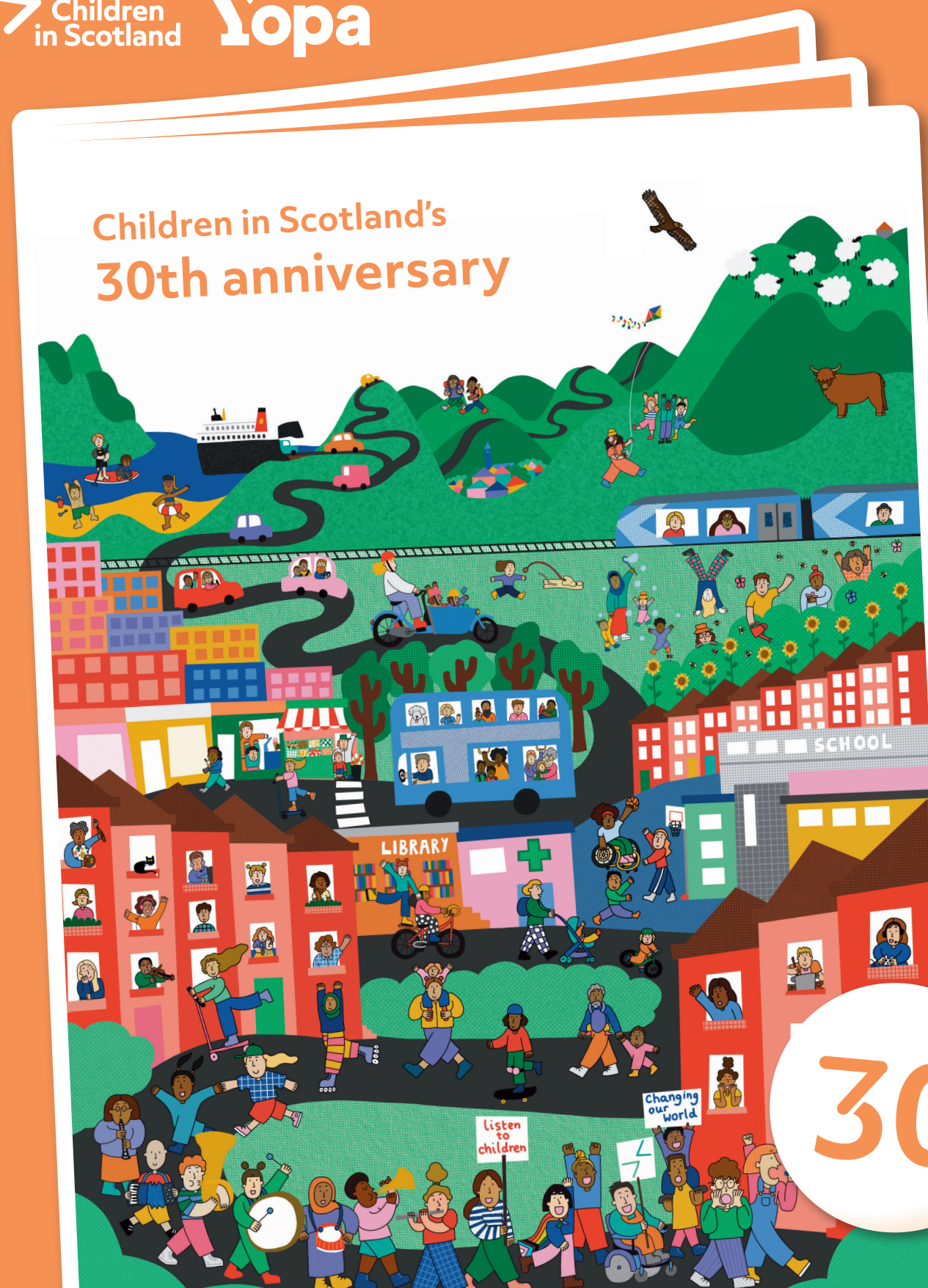
Amy Hutton is Director of Services at Cyrenians, a charity that tackles the causes and consequences of homelessness.

Find out more about its work at cyrenians.scot

Look out for our special 30th anniversary publication, celebrating the history of Children in Scotland, successes across the sector, and our valued members and network.

Visit childreninscotland.org.uk

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The language of childhood: Examining the link between play, health and children's rights

From the playground to the home, school to healthcare, **Julia Whitaker** believes play not only helps children be more creative and imaginative, but live happier and healthier lives. Alice Hinds spoke to the author about her new book, which explores the crucial link between children's play and their health and development

With a background in social work, family therapy and healthcare, Julia Whitaker has worked with children and families in a variety of settings, but in recent years, all her work has focused on one connecting factor – the importance of play.

After many years working with young people seeking help through Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), then called Child Guidance, Julia retrained as a play specialist, and began working in hospitals, where “giving up the talking and letting go of the language” allowed her to understand her young patients more fully.

“I’m a Londoner, so most of my play specialist career was in the big London hospitals, working in different specialties,” she explained over a Zoom call from her home in Edinburgh. “Then, when I moved to Scotland about 18 years ago, I worked in the children’s hospital in Glasgow in cardiac care.

“We used play to explain what was happening through storytelling and puppet shows, showing children the equipment and acting out what was going to happen. It really helped them to find their voice, to question and express their fears, and cope with pain too. After the event, when it was time to go back to everyday life, we again used play to help them process what had happened, and to adapt back to being just a child rather than a cardiac patient.”

Having witnessed first-hand the beneficial impact play could have on children’s health, Julia realised she needed to share her findings with more practitioners and began writing about the links between play and health with her now co-author Alison Tonkin, who has a research background.

In September, the pair published their fourth book, *Play and Health in Childhood*, which not only shares compelling evidence for the link between play and children’s health and development, but also the urgent need to respect play as a fundamental right that should be afforded to all young people. With a rights-based perspective, the authors argue that the child’s right to the best possible



“*Play can offer comfort, inspire hope and build resilience at times of uncertainty and change*”

health, as outlined in Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), cannot reasonably be met without also fulfilling Article 31, the child’s right to play.

“In all my professional career, I’ve been shouting out for Article 31, the child’s right to play,” explained Julia. “With this book, we unpick what exactly that means, and we’ve done things a little differently, so we think it will appeal to everyone who works with children.

“Play tends to be tagged onto the end of everything else, and even children know that – there was a piece of research done with pre-schoolers, which found they know they have to do their work before they can play.

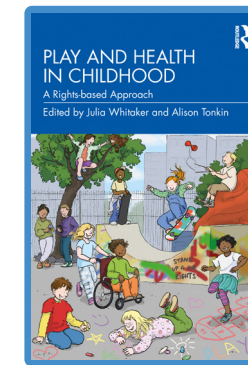
“The space for play is being really crushed in children’s lives from a very early age, as the drive shifts towards testing and standardisation. Even with the best intentions, such as exercise programmes, it’s all very regimented. But if you just say, ‘Well, this is a safe place for you to play, this is your time to go and do your thing’, we’ve found the achievements are so much better.”

Essential reading for students and practitioners in healthcare, social work, community work, early years and education, alongside examples of best practice from a range of settings – including schools, hospitals, charities, families and more – the book also features ‘case stories’ from 26 contributors.

Julia continued: “They’re a bit different from a case study, which is very objective and has to follow a certain format and is more subjective. Instead, each story includes emotion and opinion, which is actually probably more useful because it’s more authentic.

“For example, there’s a story by Grace, who’s seven, and writes a little paragraph about playing football and what football means to her. Then there’s Taylor, who’s 18 and in his first year at university, writing about how being playful while learning languages was a great release to him during Covid lockdowns.

“Each of the case stories bring out the whole idea that everybody’s different, play is different for everybody, and that it serves a purpose beyond just being a nice thing to do.”



And while play, Julia argues, has always been an important part of childhood development, post-lockdown it has never been more important to find more opportunities for expression through playfulness.

“What we did to children during lockdown was horrendous, there’s no other way of saying it,” she explained. “We totally walked over children’s rights to education, in many cases family life, and definitely to play as we closed the playgrounds and kept them away from their friends. The only good thing to come out of that time is that we’re now seeing what happens when you take children away from the structures and supports that they need.

“We have spiralling cases of children complaining of anxiety and depression, and many children are not going back to school. We owe it to them to take a step back now and learn from that time.”

With the book, Julia hopes a new generation of childcare practitioners, teachers and social workers will “think a bit outside the box about what we mean by play” and fully embrace the idea that play can “offer comfort, inspire hope and build resilience at times of uncertainty and change”.

She said: “The main thing about play is that it has got to come from within, it’s the child’s choice. Children have very little choice in their lives these days. There’s lots of things that they have to do, are expected to do, told to do or taught to do – so to do something that they choose to do, that comes from within them, is what makes play so special.” ●



Play and Health in Childhood: A Rights-based Approach by Julia Whitaker and Alison Tonkin, published by Routledge, is available now.

For more information, visit [routledge.com](https://www.routledge.com)

Switch on and tune in for success

Many may already have a favourite true crime podcast or love watching weekly news updates on YouTube, but digital media also offers fantastic opportunities to enjoy discussions dedicated to parenting, childhood development and education, providing useful learning tools for parents, caregivers and practitioners, too. Here, Children in Scotland staff share just a few of their favourite shows, series, social channels and more



Sophie Ward, Senior Communications Officer
The Duke of Edinburgh's Award Navigating Now

The Duke of Edinburgh's Award (DofE) recently launched a new podcast for young people, by young people. Created and hosted by young people aged 14 to 26 from all over the UK, *Navigate Now* discuss the big questions of the day, with help from guests including Anna Richardson, Melvin Odoom, Chris Packham and Jonny Wilkinson.



Annie Watson, Service Manager at Enquire
Some Families and *Pride and Joy*

Some Families is a podcast series by the authors of *The Queer Parent* book, and has interviews with lots of different LGBTQIA+ people who have made their families in different ways. BBC Sounds podcast *Pride and Joy* is hosted by Freddy McConnell, a trans dad who gave birth to his children – there's also a great documentary about him called *Seahorse* – which makes for really interesting listening. Similar to *Some Families*, *Pride and Joy* has lots of interviews with different queer people about how their families came to be.



Arran C. Purdie, Learning & Events Officer
Dr. Siggie

With more than one million followers on Instagram, Dr Siggie Cohen posts informative advice to help parents "feel more empowered and less stressed". Her informative videos explore how to talk (and not talk) to your children and, although I am not a parent, I think what Dr Siggie has to say is useful for anyone working and talking to kids. She is a great follow if you want practical tools for talking to everyone from toddlers to teens.



Simon Massey, Head of Engagement & Learning
Conversations with Annalisa Barbieri

In each episode of this regular podcast series, agony aunt and journalist Annalisa Barbieri helps listeners "learn more about yourself and the people around you" with really interesting results. There are many episodes about children, young people, parenting, family dynamics, additional support needs and more. Interesting listening from both a personal and professional perspective.



Alice Hinds, Communications Officer – *Insight & Magazine* Lead
Learning Conversations

Earlier this year, Education Scotland introduced a new series of podcasts to open up conversations about education. In each episode of *Learning Conversations*, Gillian Hamilton, Interim Chief Executive of Education Scotland, explores a range of different topics, including uses of Artificial Intelligence (AI) within the education sector, and career journeys – all of which are beneficial for parents, pupils and practitioners.



The Children in Scotland Podcast

Covering everything from digital campaigning to exploring diversity, pupil support, child poverty and inclusion, the Children in Scotland Podcast aims to gather and share interesting projects, work and developments from across the sector, engaging key organisations and individuals in timely debate and discussion. As part of our dedication to accessibility, a transcript is available for every episode of the podcast, as well as a YouTube video.

One of Children in Scotland's key priorities is leading and developing the children's sector workforce, using an innovative learning and events programme to meet the specific needs of practitioners across a variety of disciplines. With a mix of online, in-person and commissioned training opportunities, we have sessions to inspire everyone.

To browse our full programme, visit childreninscotland.org.uk/events



Upcoming webinars

- Nov 27

It's good to talk: navigating challenging conversations
Sandra Strathie | Monday 27 November, 10am-1pm
 Tough conversations are a part of any workplace, but by learning to handle difficult situations, we can strengthen our organisations and thrive at work. £55 members / £65 non-members.
- Dec 1

Right to Education (Article 28 UNCRC) for Local Authority members
Children in Scotland | Friday 1 December, 10am-12pm
 Take an in-depth look at the Right to Education under Article 28 of the UNCRC and its significance for Local Authorities. **FREE members' event**
- Jan 16

Person-centred planning: helping children determine their own futures
Jan Montgomery | Tuesday 16 January 2024, 10am-12pm
 Start off the new year by developing person-centred planning tools to support your work with children and young people. £40 members / £50 non-members.
- Jan 25

The invisible principles of child development
Nicola McAllister | Thursday 25 January 2024, 10am-1pm
 Unlock hidden keys to child development. Join Nicola McAllister's session to empower kids for success, beyond visible milestones. £55 members / £65 non-members.
- Jan 30

UNCRC training for Local Authority members
Children in Scotland | Tuesday 30 January 2024, 10am-12pm
 Explore the social and legal background to the UNCRC and the journey of its incorporation into Scots law. **FREE members' event**
- Feb 7

Child protection lead training
Barnardo's Scotland | Wednesday 7 February 2024, 10am-3pm
 This course is for people who have a lead role and responsibility within their organisation for child protection practice. Prior to attending this course, it is expected that you will have a grounding in child protection practice, and have previously completed child protection training course/s. From £99.

Save the date!



- May 29

Children in Scotland's Annual Conference 2024
 Wednesday 29 and Thursday 30 May 2024
 Edinburgh
 Early bird tickets available now!



Advocating for the rights of children – and using their voice to make change

Developing new ways of working, the team behind Enquire has been actively engaging with children and young people to share their thoughts and opinions with decision-makers. Here, we find out more

Words: Lucy Johnson

As Scotland's advice service for additional support for learning, Enquire has advocated for children and young people in Scotland to be supported, included and listened to throughout their education since 1999. Our role in making this a reality has been to offer advice and information about children's rights to additional support for learning to parents, carers, professionals and children and young people.

The way we have done this has been developed and adapted over the years, and our approach reflects not only changes within the additional support for learning landscape, but across Scotland itself.

The experiences and views of children and young people with additional support needs have always been central to our vision and values, but recently we have been actively shifting our approach towards being more aware of meaningfully embedding their voices across everything we do.

This conscious shift is recognition that – no matter the audience – our advice and information must place children and young people at the centre.

While Enquire is often seen as a service primarily for parents and carers, our team has always



worked directly with children and young people. Reach, our website dedicated to providing information and advice tailored for young people, serves as a platform to share, elevate and raise awareness about what matters to pupils with additional support needs. Until recently, our work with children and young people shaped the advice and information on Reach. However, we haven't consistently built what children and young people share with us into our resources for parents, carers and professionals as well as into the overall vision and direction of our work – and this is what we want to do more of going forward.

Ensuring children and young people's views are heard is one part, but the other, arguably more important, part is taking their views and feeding them to decision-makers. We know that Enquire can play a role in this process and better utilise what we hear from children and young people with additional support needs.

We now include the voices of children, young people and families with first-hand experience and knowledge of Additional Support for Learning (ASL) policy and provision into our outreach and information sessions, as well as

“This conscious shift is recognition that – no matter the audience – our advice and information must place children and young people at the centre”

our responses to government policy and consultations. We're also reviewing our social media presence to make sure we're reaching younger audiences, and threading pupil voices through all the advice and information on the Enquire website. Our recent development of the Reach website utilised what we heard directly from children and young people, and it is now more closely connected to the Enquire website for better advice and information.

This shift in focus can also be seen across other areas of work, including becoming a partner organisation in the Inclusion Ambassadors project, alongside Children in Scotland, a role we have held since 2018. This has enabled us to close the loop between what we are hearing from families and what the Inclusion Ambassadors are telling us. We have become well placed to make connections between areas of ASL that are arising as challenges across the board, as well as feeding what the Inclusion Ambassadors have told us into Enquire planning.

Alongside our own projects, there have been notable shifts in policy that have directly impacted our approach, too. Namely, Angela Morgan's review on Additional Support for Learning in 2020, and the subsequent action plans relating to the recommendations. The incorporation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is another area of changing legislation that we are bringing front and centre when planning where we want Enquire to move next as we believe we have a role and responsibility to feed into these changes.

We are committed to building on what we hear from children and young people who access Additional Support for Learning, making it central to all our roles.

This shift acknowledges that every member of the team, regardless of how much direct contact with children and young people they may have, is responsible for keeping children and young people at the heart of everything we do. After all, who better to tell us how it really is than those who are experiencing it?

We know we have the knowledge and expertise to speak about Additional Support for Learning legislation and children's rights. We know the networks and organisations and places where support can be accessed. However, we also know that we are not the experts in pupils' own lives. We are not accessing the Scottish education system and do not have first-hand experience of what's working and what isn't.

However, what we do know is the significance of school-family relationships. We also know that there is great work going on in schools, local authorities, and organisations across Scotland. We want Enquire to be central to the vital partnerships that must exist for children and young people with additional support needs to access the education they have a right to. While we are aware of what children and young people want, our role is to elevate their voices and help deliver the change that is needed for so many. •



Lucy Johnson is Senior Development Officer for Enquire, Scotland's national advice service for additional support for learning.

For more information about the service, visit enquire.org.uk



Promoting positive change

Children and young people speak out on how health-harming products are advertised in Scotland

Words: David Mackay

As outlined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), children and young people have the right to a healthy life. Yet, with the growing frequency in which they are exposed to advertisements relating to health-harming products, it is increasingly challenging for children and young people to make healthy choices for their future.

Concerted efforts are being made to reduce the harms caused by the advertising of health-harming products to people across Scotland. Through our support of the NCD Alliance Scotland, we have seen health organisations working together to create action, calling for the Scottish Government to restrict advertising and promotion of these products.

In November 2022, the Scottish Government launched a public consultation on restricting alcohol advertising and promotion, which cited evidence that highlighted links between alcohol marketing and children and young people's drinking behaviours.

Recognising the importance of children and young people's views, the Scottish Government commissioned Children in Scotland to support its engagement with the consultation. The *Alcohol Marketing in Scotland – Youth Engagement Project* report, published in July 2023, represented the voices of more than 100 children and young people from across Scotland.

Interesting findings emerged from the consultation. Children and young people were

supportive of restrictions on alcohol advertising in key areas, such as shops, online and television as well as phasing out alcohol sponsorship from sports teams and sporting events. Participants also suggested making the content of alcohol advertisements less appealing to children and young people.

Alongside our work on alcohol marketing, our children and young people's advisory group, Changing our World (CoW), has also been sharing experiences of vaping and e-cigarettes. The group's work on this topic has been completely youth-led. Emerging from discussions during the lunch break of an in-person meeting, the group has revisited the topic many times, and even led a workshop at Children in Scotland's Annual Conference in November 2022.

CoW has recently produced an evidence paper sharing views on vaping. Encompassing various themes, from the impact of vaping on health and wellbeing, to its environmental impact, the paper also highlights how the names, packaging and flavours of many vapes are attractive to children and young people, which was also cited by the young people involved in the alcohol marketing consultation. The paper will be published in November 2023.

Imposing tighter restrictions on marketing and promotion is only part of the picture. On alcohol consumption, young people expressed the need for a cultural change in Scotland and

spoke of how young people's attitudes to drinking are shaped by friends' and family members' behaviours. In relation to vaping products, CoW members have highlighted the importance of education on vaping and addressing peer issues.

It has been encouraging to see young people's views being listened to by Government ministers. Following the submission of our alcohol marketing report, Elena Whitham MSP, the Minister for Drugs and Alcohol Policy, thanked participants for sharing their experiences and ideas and assured them their views will be fully considered in the development of this important area of public health policy. In September, CoW members met with the Minister for Public Health and Women's Health, Jenni Minto MSP, to share their experiences and concerns around vaping.

We look forward to hearing from the Scottish Government about the next steps and seeing how young people's lived experience can inform positive action. Children and young people's passion in this area is clear, as well as their belief that introducing restrictions will lead to "healthier and happier people" in Scotland. •



David Mackay is Head of Policy, Projects and Participation at Children in Scotland

Children in Scotland's *Alcohol Marketing in Scotland – Youth Engagement Report* is available to read at childreninscotland.org.uk/alcohol-marketing-consultation-youth-engagement

Gaining knowledge of visual impairments



As part of our ongoing commitment to providing high quality learning opportunities for our members, Children in Scotland has teamed up with Visibility Scotland and Sight Scotland to offer a new **eLearning** module. Here, we explore why small adjustments in the early years can have lifelong effects

Words: Laura Walker

In Scotland, more than 4,500 young people have a significant visual impairment, yet it is still a disability that is misunderstood and underrepresented.

For many visually impaired children and young people, and their families and caregivers, frustrations are born from negative attitudes, and a lack of adjustment from others to ensure they can thrive, not just survive.

Visual support services for children can be difficult to navigate, and there needs to be more awareness of their specific needs, requirements, and the referral systems available. For parents and caregivers, support to navigate this journey is vital and must be immediate.

Simple adjustments and changes at the right time can have a profoundly positive impact on lifelong success, and the building blocks for life begin in childhood. Visibility Scotland, Sight Scotland and Children in Scotland recognise this, and are invested in supporting parents and professionals in the early years to enhance understanding and recognise visual impairment in children. We aim to ensure services are adapted and activated at the time of need, and that the learning environment around children can be modified to ensure their developmental milestones are achieved alongside their peers.

“We aim to create an equal and accessible Scotland, and we believe that together, through education and raising awareness, we can do just that”

Through education and positive reinforcement, negative social stigma barriers can be dismantled and replaced with positive learning spaces for everyone to grow and learn together – we aim to create an equal and accessible Scotland, and we believe that together, through education and raising awareness, we can do just that.

To help meet these aims, we have been working on an eLearning module to activate awareness and early intervention, which will help build a supportive culture within Scotland and beyond. We hope the Early Years Eye Education (EYEE) eLearning module will be the just the start, and we aim to create a training series to enhance learning in both education and social settings for everyone supporting children and young people.

The module is available now on Children in Scotland's dedicated eLearning Hub, so we encourage anyone with an interest in improving outcomes for visually impaired children and young people to seek out this innovative learning – and help us build a brighter future for all. •



Laura Walker is Chief Executive Officer at Visibility Scotland.

For more information about the partnership and the new eLearning module, **Visual impairment in preschool children**, visit childreninscotland.org.uk/learning

Listen and learn

As My Rights, My Say celebrates five years of supporting children aged 12 to 15 with additional support needs, discover how the service is putting young people's voices at the heart of its vital work

Words: **Marie Harrison**



As adults, we have a duty to ensure that all children are given the opportunity to make decisions, have their voices heard, and have their views considered on processes that affect them. It's not just the right thing to do – it's part of upholding their fundamental rights.

When changes were made to The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act (2004) in 2018, the rights that had previously been held only by parents and young people aged 16 and over were extended to 12- to 15-year-olds, allowing children in that age bracket to request specific support and assessments to enable their views to be heard in all matters that affect them.

That's when My Rights, My Say was first established, and in the five years since, the service has become a vital and practical instrument for ensuring that these rights are available, known and tangible to children – and not just a good idea in theory.

Part of a network of four organisations – Enquire, Partners in Advocacy, Children in Scotland and Cairn Legal – My Rights, My Say supports 12- to 15-year-olds with additional support needs to exercise their rights to be involved in decisions about their support in school, providing independent and confidential advice.

Ensuring children with additional support needs have a say in any decisions made about their schooling is important because children are not just "adults in the making" – they are also citizens and active agents with a vested interest in their life. If we fail to facilitate this, we remove opportunities for children to learn and grow.

Through my work, I have seen and heard from many children who, in their own words, have "checked out" of education and planning processes altogether, which is understandable. After all, if your views as a child or young person are repeatedly ignored or not sought out, it becomes all too easy to feel that no one cares or there is no point trying to say how you feel.

Handing over control to children and truly implementing their ideas can be scary for adults as we are used to seeing ourselves as gatekeepers and protectors. However, children and young people need us to trust them and listen to them, especially as they have a lot of insight that adults simply cannot understand.

Rather than adults guessing or making assumptions about what children feel they need, we must take a step back – and actively listen. Doing exactly that is one of the biggest strengths of My Rights, My Say as our staff are highly skilled and compassionate, and have a wealth of experience working with children and families. More than anything, we are able to listen, regardless of how children and young people prefer to communicate.

Every child is unique, so we need to be adaptable and explore different ways of liaising and collaborating. In our work, sometimes that means

"The teachers do their best I suppose, but it's not good. Like, it takes ages to get a support plan. That's not even happened yet. They say they have a meeting and then a person doesn't show up, and we have a meeting anyway but it's not a proper meeting like the way it was planned to be. That kept on happening and it doesn't feel amazing"

Young person on why they needed My Rights, My Say support

having a straightforward chat or using signs or visual cues. Sometimes children need us to observe them or simply play so we can learn more about who they are and how they communicate. Sometimes we talk via text messages. Sometimes we do arts and crafts and get covered in glitter. And sometimes, we need to let ourselves be humbled over a game of Minecraft by kids who are much cleverer than we will ever be.

If there is one thing that fills me with pride, it is our ability to create a space where children are in control, providing an accessible service that can receive referrals from all children, regardless of their communication needs.

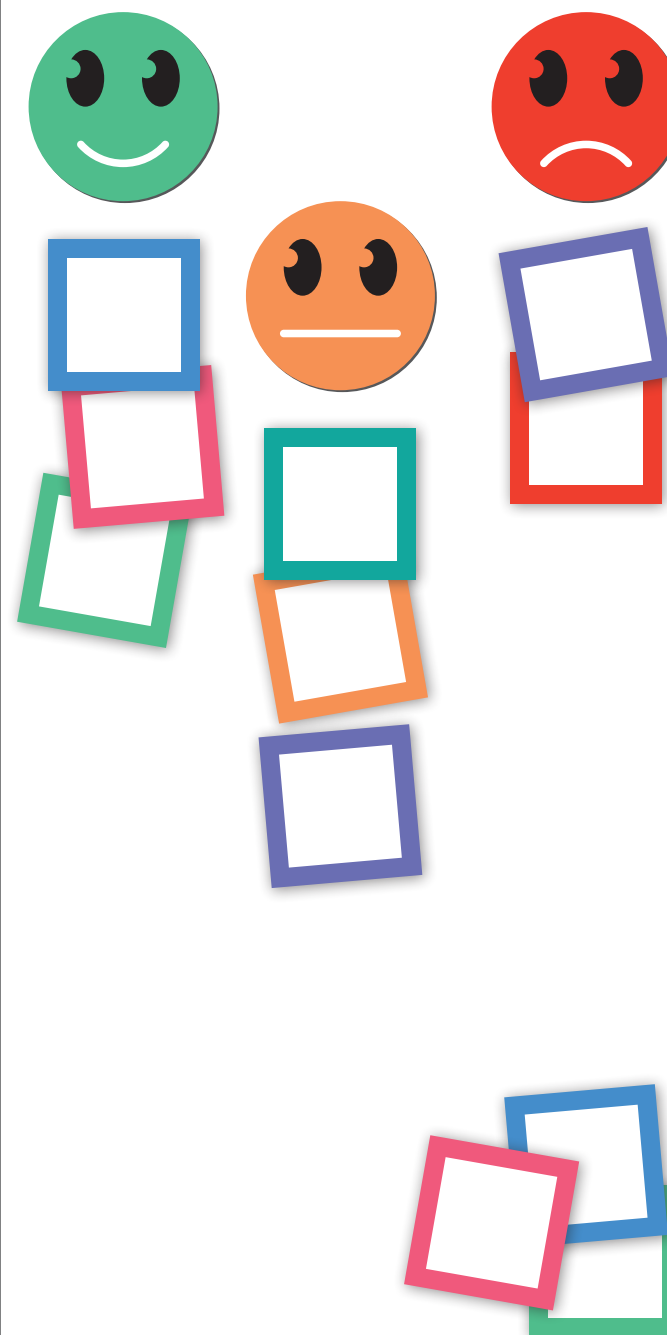
Over the past five years, one of our biggest successes has been taking four very different, but equally passionate, organisations, and creating an incredible network that allows us to lean on each other's strengths and skills. Through our collaborative approach, we have ensured that My Rights, My Say provides the right support for children and young people at the right time in their lives. We have developed strong working connections that allow us to quickly identify which support service is most suitable – and there are no professional egos, just a real and tangible willingness to do the very best we can for children with additional support needs.

As an exciting new development, we have recently started the process of establishing a My Rights, My Say participation group for children and young people who have used our services in the past. Our vision and values are based on the idea that all children have a right to be heard, and as a network, we need to practice what we preach. We want our children and young people to have the opportunity to influence the services we provide, get involved in planning and have a platform to share their knowledge and experiences with decision-makers. Our hope is that by getting children and young people more involved in policy and planning, we will be able to deliver on the recommendations from the Additional Support for Learning review and subsequent action plan in 2020 – and ensure that children with additional support needs are able to inform and affect change.

There have been many incredible moments since I started working with My Rights, My Say, but our ability to put the child at the centre of all we do and encourage true participation is one of the things I am most proud of – it is such a privilege to work directly with children and young people, and feel like you've had an impact on their life journey. To date, we have supported more than 900 children directly, and Enquire has provided information to more than 1,900 people.

The point of participation (and of My Rights My Say) is not to satisfy an adult agenda or a tick box exercise. It is to ensure that children can truly exercise their rights in a meaningful way, and that's exactly that we will continue to do over the next five years and beyond. •

“The point of participation is not to satisfy an adult agenda or a tick box exercise – it is to ensure that children can truly exercise their rights in a meaningful way”



Marie Harrison is Senior Policy Officer at My Rights, My Say and Children's Views.

To find out more, visit myrightsmysay.scot

Members' spotlight

Our network of members is vital to achieving our vision of ensuring all children in Scotland have an equal chance to flourish. In this edition's Members' Spotlight, **Sophie Ward** speaks with Salvesen Mindroom Centre about its work supporting neurodivergent children and young people through education, advocacy and research, as well as a new outreach service for families in North and South Lanarkshire

Salvesen

mindroom Centre

Salvesen Mindroom Centre has recently been awarded funding through the National Lottery Community Fund's Improving Lives scheme to launch a three-year specialist service in Lanarkshire. What is the service and what difference will it make for children and young people living in this area?

This outreach service will be delivered to neurodivergent children and young people and their parents and carers. We have two outreach specialists who will work with families in North and South Lanarkshire on a one-to-one basis. The support will be tailored to the individual and will address practical issues such as accessing health, social care, respite and other services.

We have witnessed a 137% rise in people using our services in Lanarkshire since 2018, so the funding will make a huge difference to the individual children and young people we will support – many of whom may be facing lengthy waiting times for diagnosis or assessments or may be missing out on accessing an appropriate education or social opportunities.

The new service focuses on providing one-to-one support. Why is a tailored approach so important when working with children and young people with neurodevelopment conditions?

No two neurodivergent people are the same, and family circumstances are all so different, so it's important to take a person-centred approach to achieve the best outcomes. We need to understand how each child or young person prefers to communicate and understand what is important to them, building a trusting relationship. With this approach, we can work collaboratively with the child or young person to achieve the best possible outcome each time.

Research is also a key area of your work with the Salvesen Mindroom Research Centre (SMRC) at the University of Edinburgh. How important is research for supporting and developing your work with children and young people?

To find out more about Salvesen Mindroom Centre, visit mindroom.org

Want to feature in our next Members' Spotlight? Contact Sophie Ward: sward@childreninscotland.org.uk

Research is very important to us as it's how we develop our understanding of neurodivergence and its impact on children and young people. We work closely with the SMRC to keep our learning up to date and to identify, and partner in, research projects that will make a practical difference to the lives of neurodiverse families.

For children and young people with additional support needs, their families, and practitioners, how do you recommend building effective relationships for working together?

It's vital to take the time to listen to children and young people and their families about what they need in life. They need to feel that they have really been heard. Equally important is to focus on strengths, and all the things a child or young person can do, not what they can't do. Being honest and following through on the things you have said you will do are also key to building effective relationships.

Why is membership of Children in Scotland important to you?

Membership of Children in Scotland helps us to keep in touch with how support for children and young people is evolving in Scotland and beyond. It lets us learn about best practice from others and share our expertise, too. ●



Supporting the Third Sector Project

The aim of the Supporting The Third Sector (STTS) Project is to support third sector partners to become more involved in local and national planning and decision-making.

We do that through working with Scotland's Third Sector Interfaces (TSIs) and facilitating the TSI Children's Services Network to ensure that local third sector organisations are involved strategically in national and local policy and practice.

The project is funded by the Scottish Government Strategy team and hosted through Children in Scotland.

For more information about the project, please contact:

stts@childreninscotland.org.uk

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For information on virtual courses, online training, bespoke training and in-person events, contact our Learning and Development Officer: alexwallis@playscotland.org



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