

Championing children's rights

*Nicola Killean on becoming
Children and Young People's
Commissioner Scotland*

A momentous milestone

*Our members and partners
celebrate UNCRC incorporation*

Recipes from the heart

*Community group comes
together through cooking*



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Publications

Ensure your library is up to date with CPAG's essential handbooks. cpag.org.uk/shop

CPAG in Scotland gratefully acknowledges the financial support of the Scottish Government towards our welfare rights services in Scotland.

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Welcome

When I think of the people working across the children's sector, from social workers to teachers, policy experts to charity leaders, three qualities come to mind – hardworking, determined and resilient.

Despite external pressures, money worries and political frustrations, professionals working with and for children never stop trying to make our country a better place to grow up, and this issue of *Insight* celebrates their unwavering persistence.

From learning how The Yard fought back against funding cuts to the community group boosting mums' confidence through cooking, there's lots of inspiring projects to discover. Plus, we dedicate four pages to the UNCRC, exploring the many possibilities afforded by the landmark legislation.

When it comes to building a better world, there will always be challenges – but as the people featured in this edition have proven, nothing is impossible if we fight hard enough.



Alice Hinds
Editor

Alice Hinds

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Cover: Qi Zheng

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Members' Community

A warm welcome to all our new members

We would like to extend a warm welcome to all the fantastic organisations that have recently joined Children in Scotland membership: Alcohol Focus Scotland, Borders Additional Support Needs, Carolina House Trust, Clydebank Women's Aid, Grampian Women's Aid, Hillwood Primary School, Nurture One Ltd, Little Bugs Nursery, Parenting Across Scotland, Scottish Children's Reporter Administration, Seedlings Children's Therapeutic Services, Support from the Start, Tangerine Youth Group, Tiny Changes, and WISE Mentoring.

Head over to pages 38 and 39 to get to know some of our new members a bit better.

Be part of our Annual Conference 2025

After the success of this year's event – which saw more than 400 delegates, speakers and exhibitors come together at Murrayfield Stadium – our Annual Conference will once again be held in late May, and we want our members to be part of the planning process.

If you would like to hear more about Children in Scotland's Annual Conference 2025, including opportunities for sponsors, exhibitors, workshop leaders and keynote speakers, scan the QR code and our Learnings & Events team will get in touch!



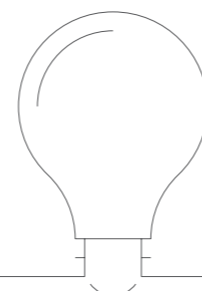
New modules added to Children in Scotland's eLearning Hub

We have recently launched a diverse range of free, high-quality modules on our eLearning Hub for professionals and practitioners working across the children's sector.

Understand how trauma impacts the brain and body with two new modules developed by the More Than My Trauma partnership. Develop strategies for supporting young children with visual impairment with our new module in partnership with Visibility Scotland and Sight Scotland. And learn more about Scotland's national approach supporting the wellbeing of children and young people with our Introduction to GIRFEC.



To explore our eLearning hub, please visit:
childreninscotland.org.uk/elearning



Bulletin

Discover the latest news, momentous milestones and innovative research from our members

Exploring the voice of the baby

Scottish arts and early years organisation, Starcatchers, has recently shared the findings from pioneering research it conducted in partnership with the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland and Queen Margaret University.

Launched in June, *The Voice of the Baby: A Reflective Guide for the Arts*, provides a methodology for engaging in meaningful participation with pre-verbal and non-verbal children and, alongside a suite of resources, aims to support its practical application for professionals who work with babies, toddlers and very young children.

Starcatchers' Chief Executive, Rhona Matheson, said: "Babies are born communicating, but because they are non-verbal, they are very often left out or forgotten when it comes to including their 'voices' in matters that affect them. Our Voice of the Baby In Practice work breaks down the barriers to meaningful consultation with babies and uses the arts as the vehicle to ensure their voices are heard and understood."

To find out more about Starcatchers, visit:
starcatchers.org.uk



A momentous moment for children's rights

Tuesday 16 July marked an historic moment for children's rights in Scotland as the UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024 came into effect.

Celebrating on her social media, Juliet Harris, Director of Together (Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights), shared a picture (above) of the UN and Scotland flags flying together on the summit of Ben Nevis with an accompanying caption which opened: "A new dawn for children's rights".

The photograph offered a fitting tribute to the countless steps so many children, young people and their supporters have taken to reach this monumental point.

To find out more about Together, visit:
togetherscotland.org.uk

Celebrating 80 years of One Parent Families Scotland

This year, One Parent Families Scotland (OPFS) is celebrating 80 years of creating lasting solutions to the challenges of poverty and the barriers that many single parents face. Spanning as many decades as possible, OPFS has been collecting personal anecdotes and messages from the single parents, staff members, volunteers and supporters it has worked with and will build a brand new web page to display all the photos and stories received celebrating the charity's eight-decade legacy.

To find out more about One Parent Families Scotland, visit:
opfs.org.uk



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



A new Chief Executive for Harmeny Education Trust

Recognised sector leader for care and education Harmeny Education Trust welcomed Gavin Calder as its new Chief Executive earlier this year. With plans to build on the legacy of Neil Squire, who was Chief Executive for 14 years, Gavin brings a wealth of experience in educational leadership and his passion for sport, music and outdoor education.

On joining Harmeny, Gavin said: "Throughout my career I have always had the welfare and emotional security of the individual child at the heart of everything I try to do. It is a great privilege to have been given the opportunity to take on the role of CEO of Harmeny Education Trust at this exciting time in the life of the organisation."

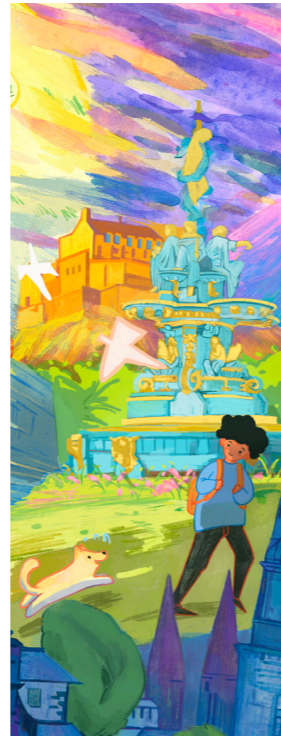
To find out more about Harmeny, visit:
harmeny.org.uk

The art of collaboration

With the UN Convention on The Rights of the Child (UNCRC) now incorporated into Scots law, as part of our long-term collaboration with Edinburgh College of Art (ECA), we asked a group of MA Illustration students to consider the theme of ‘challenges and opportunities’ for the cover of our new edition of *Insight* – and we were blown away by the depth of their creativity

As you will see on pages 18-21, UNCRC has the potential to change how children and young people are represented in society, but there are still many barriers that continue to impact not only the lives of our younger generation, but the charities and organisations working with and for them. Working alongside editor, Alice Hinds, and designer, Angus Doyle, ECA students crafted complex front covers to represent this ‘push and pull’, and we’re sure you’ll agree the final result is absolutely incredible!

Students also submitted designs for our personal reflection piece, written by our Head of Policy, Projects and Participation, David Mackay, and for the four-page feature interview with Children and Young People’s Commissioner Scotland, Nicola Killean. Here, the successful students share how they brought their designs to life. ●



Qi Zheng (Cover):



“The theme of the cover is ‘challenges and opportunities’, so I researched many activities that could reflect this theme, and finally decided to choose the theme of mountain climbing. Climbing to the top of the mountain is a challenge for everyone, but the sunrise from the top is unique and beautiful, and the scenery along the way is beautiful when you are trying to reach your goal. I want to convey the idea that it is always worth the effort.”

Magda Ćwiek (Personal reflection, page 7; Interview, pages 8 and 11):



“The guiding idea behind my illustration for the interview with Nicola Killean was the unique relationship between the children and young people of Scotland and their Commissioner – a role reversal of sorts, in which, as Nicola herself points out in her introductory video on the Commissioner’s website, it is the children who are the bosses. I wanted my illustration to reflect a spirit of collaboration, both between young people working together towards creating a better future, but also between them and the adult representatives who help make sure those ideas have the chance to blossom through crafting policy changes to reflect the children’s needs.”

“In my personal reflection illustration of David Mackay, I wanted to make sure to represent the values the Head of Policy, Projects and Participation stands for – outspokenness, thorough research and well-informed decision-making, inclusion, education, accessibility. I included simplified, symbolic representations of those keywords in the background surrounding David’s portrait, filling the remaining space with dynamic colourful splotches to show his passion and energy, all using the brand colours of Children in Scotland to craft a clear linked between those qualities and the charity’s incredible and impactful work.”

@mcwiek.illustration



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

As I approach the end of my first year as Head of Policy, Projects and Participation, it’s good to take a step back and reflect on what has been a busy period and a turbulent time for people working across the children’s sector.

On a day-to-day basis, it’s quite easy to become overwhelmed by Scotland’s ‘to do’ list. We regularly see children and young people struggling to access their basic rights – whether that’s their right to education, to healthcare or simply to have their voices heard in decisions affecting their lives. We also see financial pressures that are forcing services to close, and that are challenging organisations to do more with less.

As a keen gardener, in those moments when the challenges seem unsurmountable, I like to remember this quote from Henri Matisse: “There are always flowers for those who want to see them”.

These words remind me that there is beauty and hope in the world – it’s just sometimes you need to look hard to find it!

One thing that has galvanised me since starting my role is the incredible people I have met – passionate and creative professionals working hard to ensure children, young people and families get the support they need. My own team at Children in Scotland helps to provide daily inspiration. They are hard-working and highly skilled, and always looking to ‘find the fun’ in any work they deliver. Anyone working with children and young people will know the importance of joy and humour in building trusting relationships, but it’s also vital for building connections with colleagues and maintaining a positive outlook.

Another example that comes to mind is a recent roundtable meeting I attended at the Scottish Parliament,

organised by the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health. This event explored paediatric waiting times and showcased some important community-based family health and wellbeing interventions. It highlighted what can be achieved through vision, energy and cross-sector collaboration, even with limited resources. It also provided hope – hope that we can do better for families if we listen to them and work with them to meet their needs.

Equally inspiring are the children and young people I have met and worked with over the past year. This includes brave individuals who have chosen to tell their stories to help improve the lives of others. And children and young people generously sharing their time, their creative ideas and their wisdom. Some of these interactions have been the highlight of my working career and will stay with me forever.

To be clear, the hard work and dedication of children and young people and the children’s sector workforce, although inspiring, is not enough on its own. We must be strong and stand together to continue to fight the injustice and inequality that exists across our society.

When I started my new role last October, I talked often about the green shoots of hope that come with the incorporation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). This legislation passed in December and most of the provisions in the Act officially came into force in mid-July. Although this is just the start of a journey, it is something to be celebrated, and certainly provides me with hope and optimism.

Applying a children’s-rights lens to our work, and to political decision-making in these challenging times, will hopefully lead to more flowers for us all to enjoy. ●

“There is beauty and hope in the world – it’s just sometimes you need to look hard to find it!”



Illustration: Magda Ćwiek

“Children and young people are amazing at helping us face challenges – they are so insightful”



One year into her role, Children and Young People’s Commissioner Scotland **Nicola Killean** discusses priorities for her time in post, UNCRC, the importance of listening to young people’s views, and her hopes for the future

Interview by **Alice Hinds**

Aiming to champion and safeguard the human rights of Scotland’s next generation, the Children and Young People’s Commissioner Scotland plays a vital role in ensuring all young Scots get the chance to grow up in an environment filled with happiness, love and understanding.

Appointed to the position in 2023, Nicola Killean brings a wealth of experience to the role of Commissioner, having worked with children of all ages throughout her career, and over the course of her term, young people’s voices will continue to inform her work.

After graduating from the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama with a degree in music education, Nicola worked as a nursery teacher, and later became one of the country’s first cultural coordinators, focusing on designing arts projects as social development and intervention models. Her career then led her to the role of Scottish Officer for the charity Youth Music, before she set up Sistema Scotland in 2007.

During her time at the charity, Nicola – who was awarded an OBE in 2020 – helped design the Big Noise initiative, which delivers social impact programmes across five cities, and supports more than 3,500 children and young people.

Here, one year after taking up her post, Nicola speaks to Children in Scotland about what she hopes to achieve as Commissioner – and why children and young people “give her the fuel” to push for change.

Alice Hinds: You have a wealth of experience working directly with children and young people for many years now – what achievements from your career so far will you use to help inform your work as Commissioner?

Nicola Killean: I’ve been lucky throughout my career to work with children and young people across a really wide age range, engaging with babies and toddlers right through to young adults and school leavers.

Having this opportunity at Sistema Scotland, and through the Big Noise programme, gave me an amazing perspective around the importance of ensuring children feel included. My previous experience helps keep my focus as Commissioner broad, but I recognise the importance of always doing targeted work, too, particularly engaging with children whose rights are most at risk.

When I started the job in August last year, one of my top priorities – and duty – was to continue listening to children and young people, using their insights to shape the work we’ll do over the coming years because, after all, I work for them and their rights.

It’s only by really listening to children and young people articulate the truth about what they’re experiencing every day, and what they’re experiencing within our different systems, that we are able to understand where we have made progress, where we should celebrate, and where the work still has to be done.

Children and young people are amazing at helping us face challenges head on – they are so insightful, and so full of suggestions about ways we can make things better, so the more we can tap into that knowledge, connecting the dots and ensuring decision making is influenced by their insight, the better.

AH: What made you want to take up the role of Commissioner?

NK: I was drawn to this role by a combination of being a real champion for children and young people, and a drive to make sure their rights are protected, respected, and fulfilled. And while shouting from the rooftops about how capable and amazing they are, we can also continue to focus on raising the bar to improve their lives.

“One of my top priorities was to continue listening to children and young people, and use their insights to shape our work because, after all, I work for them and their rights”



I always say that children and young people give us the fuel to continue to do our work, to fight for things to be better. So, the more that we can be with them, listen to them, and draw on their insight, the stronger we will be.

The key skill that I'm going to try and draw on is a tenacity to find ways to navigate complex challenges, while still understanding how difficult it can be for practitioners and organisations to find meaningful ways to work.

AH: When it came to developing your strategic plan for the next four years, your team listened to thousands of children and young people both online and in person to hear their views. What did they identify as the biggest challenges and issues to tackle?

NK: Creating a new strategic plan was a great opportunity for me because it gave me a really clear mandate to reflect on what children and young people want us to work on, how they want us to work, and how they want their Commissioner to fulfil their role.

Consistently, children and young people told us they were concerned about some key themes, including education, poverty, climate change, discrimination, and mental health. We

Opening page and spot illustrations: Magda Ćwiek

Above: Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland Nicola Killean

Photo © Stewart Attwood Photography, 2023

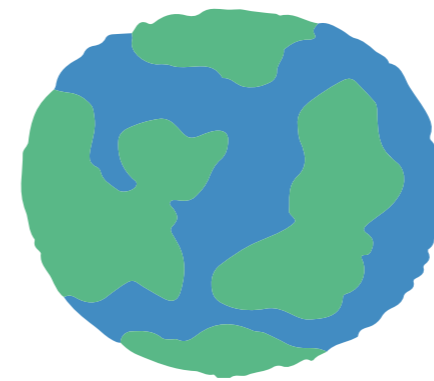
“There’s a lot of work to do, but it’s also an optimistic time. We are able to look at how far we have come within Scotland, and then brace ourselves for what we need to do next”

know that more action is needed to support these issues – and there are lots more emerging new issues that children and young people are facing that many of us didn't need to face when we were growing up, too.

What has really struck me is the pressure felt by many children and young people, which comes from a combination of things. Some of it comes from the education system, while some of it is from social media and the weight of expectation. There's this huge pressure placed on them, so we need to pay a lot of attention to that, and ensure that the systems we create to support them don't add to that feeling of pressure.

There's a lot of work to do, but it's also an optimistic time. We are able to look at how far we have come within Scotland, really celebrate our successes, and then brace ourselves for what we need to do next to continue the progress and make things even better.

AH: The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) was incorporated into Scots law in July this year. What are the potential benefits for Scotland's children and young people and their rights? And what do you think will be the challenges of incorporation?



NK: With the UNCRC being incorporated into Scots Law, children and young people will see that the campaign they led for such a long time has really made a difference.

One of the huge benefits will be a continued culture shift, as incorporation means that children's rights must be considered first – whenever decision makers are considering a new law or policy, children's rights have to be at the beginning of that process and not at the end. The opportunity within that is huge, but it does need all of us to continue to press and insist on change.

Children and young people will also be able to see that their voices, and embedding their opinions within decision making structures, is important and is their right. And for those of us working throughout the different systems, the ability to spot where we can embed children's voices is essential.

Whether you're running an organisation or you're embedded within a huge statutory system, this is the moment to be looking out for those infrastructure changes and opportunities, which will be a huge part of the momentum of incorporation. In Scotland, the third sector is key for innovating and driving change, so it's important that they, as organisations, look at their ways of working and how they can place children's rights and their insights within the structure of decision-making.

Incorporation of the UNCRC also gives us opportunities through increased powers. For example, it will allow us to ensure there is access to justice for children and young people in some areas, and it will give the Commissioner's office the ability to use litigation powers in other areas. The beauty of the role of Commissioner is that I've got the independence to be

“I learned very early on in my job that earning the trust and respect of children and young people is so vital – as adults, we almost feel an entitlement that they will respect us, but we have to earn it, and prove we are worthy of their trust”

able to say the really hard things that need to be said, and I'm absolutely committed to working collaboratively with the sector to add value to everything we do.

However, it's important to remember that we're not starting from scratch. Many duty bearers and organisations have already been embedding children's rights in all that they do, and across the country there are lots of brilliant examples to draw upon.

AH: What are the best lessons children and young people have taught you over the course of your career?

NK: There are so many things I love about working with children and young people. I love how honest they are, and their capability to understand complex ideas and topics. I also love that they are able to articulate what they think and feel, and if you really invest the time to listen, you can learn so much.

Long-term, relationship-based practice can be transformational for children and young people. I learned very early on in my job that earning the trust and respect of children and young people is so vital – as adults, we almost feel an entitlement that they will respect us, but we have to earn it, and prove we are worthy of their trust.

For some children that can take hours or weeks, and for others it can take years. But when you are able to put relationship-based practice in place, it's absolutely priceless. •



To find out more about the role of Commissioner, visit cypcs.org.uk

Navigating the third sector's "perfect storm"

From the cost-of-living crisis to funding cutbacks, The Yard CEO **Celine Sinclair** discusses the challenges facing Scottish charities – and how they are fighting back to continue supporting families

Interview by **Alice Hinds**



“It is the most challenging funding environment, at a time where we have the highest and most complex level of need”

Left: The Yard supports disabled young people aged zero to 25 from its three centres

There is no doubt in Celine Sinclair’s mind that third sector organisations are currently facing one of the most challenging economic environments of the past two decades – and it’s having a dramatic impact on vital community-based services.

Chief Executive of The Yard, a charity supporting disabled children and young people aged zero to 25 through adventure play, Celine says the current situation is a “perfect storm of challenges” as the ongoing recovery from the pandemic has combined with the cost of living crisis and a stagnation of funding from local and national Government, leading to many charities struggling to provide for the growing number of families in need of support.

“It is undoubtedly the most challenging funding environment that I’ve experienced,” she explained. “And it’s at a time where we have the highest and most complex level of need from enormously resilient, wonderful children and families.

“We’re seeing decreased support within local authorities, increased need within the third sector, and increased complexity of need because of the environment that our families are facing – it’s a perfect storm of challenges for families, who are already pressed and are experiencing the knock-on effect of being unable to access education, childcare, emotional and practical support, and many other vital services.

“It is having an enormous impact in terms of the mental health and

wellbeing of parents and children and young people.”

In addition to cash-strapped local authorities having to make cuts, and a significant reduction in community fundraising and corporate donations, Celine believes one of the most significant barriers is the Government’s decision to limit funding cycles, which has led to a real-time reduction in support for charities that are growing.

For example, as part of the recent “Campaign for Fairer Funding”, The Yard and its supporters called on the Government to review and reconsider its decision to keep the Children and Young People Early Intervention Fund at 2016 levels. By rolling forward the grant without an adjustment for inflation, the charity argued,



it would represent a drop in support, with The Yard’s backing falling from £163 per family annually to only £39 per family.

Celine explained: “The reality for third sector organisations is that there’s limited funding from Scottish Government, and the funding cycles have been very disrupted as a result, not just of the pandemic, but the constraints on budgets. So, where we would usually have seen five-year funding being released, we have instead seen numerous roll forwards.

“When the renewal process came in for the Children and Young People Early Intervention Fund, for example, it was rolled forward for two years. So, in real terms, the funding was minute relative to the original percentage that was committed. Basically, funds that were already depleted were not keeping up with inflation.

“Our organisation supported around 500 children in 2016 with a turnover of under half a million pounds. In 2022, with a roll forward of our fund again, we were supporting 2,300 children across three sites with a turnover of two million pounds. So, the proportionate funding was effectively less than 5% as a core grant from Scottish Government, whereas, at the outset of the agreement to fund our work, we received a grant of about 20% – which is quite low when you consider that our social return on investment is more than 23 pounds per one pound received.”

She added: “In essence, charities are facing disinvestment because the level of funding that has been provided proportionately reduces over time as their level of work increases.

“What’s more, rolling forward funding at the same level for two years doesn’t allow charities to invest in the development of future services or plan effectively. All the third sector organisations I know will be on a three-to-five-year development plan, which is very important when working with vulnerable families. In order to build a quality service, you need to build quality relationships, and in order to build quality relationships, you need to have consistent staffing – and the funding cycles, therefore, can decimate quality because we’re not able to plan ahead and build a permanent team.”

The outcome, however, was positive for The Yard, with the Government committing to provide up to £2million of future funding over the next three financial years after then First Minister Humza Yousaf visited The Yard’s Edinburgh head office late last year.

“We were absolutely thrilled that Scottish Government made the decision to make an investment in our services,” said Celine. “It was recognition that our model of whole family support, using the vehicle of play, is a very successful one.

“We provide a very broad range of services at The Yard, and I believe the Scottish Government has recognised that a model of birth right through to young adulthood, and consistent, trusted relationships, are a really good investment.”

Offering a varied programme of drop-in, respite and transition youth clubs, early years and specialist sessions, inclusive play and disability training from its centres in Edinburgh, Dundee and Fife, The Yard is now hoping to expand its services by opening a new location in Glasgow –

something that has only been made possible thanks to the additional funding.

Celine said: “At The Yard, children and families all have an opportunity to access fun, friendship and peer support, as well as an opportunity to find information, informally and formally, through our family support services – and through just talking to each other.

“Our centre in Dundee is now going to increase thanks to Scottish Government investment, and we’re absolutely thrilled to say that The Yard will be moving into the west of Scotland, too.

“We’re open six days a week, 350 days a year, so families have that safe space where they can come and find somebody who understands. All our staff are there to support families, play with the children, and support them to get the information they need to be a bit more resilient. Everything comes from a place of real kindness and understanding.

“Every single person who works with us is invested in making children and family’s lives more fun and more fulfilling and that is what they do every day. The relationships that are born and built between children and families and the team that supports them are absolutely pivotal – they are the cornerstone for success.”

She added: “It’s a positive picture for The Yard’s services, and we are enormously appreciative of the investment that has been made. We will honour that by working with partners on the ground to realise the best service and best experience that we can give to children.” •

Above, left: Celine Sinclair

For more information, visit theyardscotland.org.uk

Laughter is the best medicine

Working to help vulnerable people overcome feelings of powerlessness, anxiety and isolation, Edinburgh-based charity Hearts & Minds delivers therapeutic clowning sessions across a range of settings, from paediatric healthcare units to school classrooms. As the charity celebrates its 25th anniversary, Programme Engagement Manager **Fiona Ferrier** – aka Dr Spritely – shares what makes laughter so powerful

Working as a clowndoctor, no two days are ever the same – and that's because the children and young people we work with are all unique.

When we visit hospitals, hospices, respite care settings and schools, we arrive with a lot of artistic tools in our bag, including improvisation, music and songs, dances, magic, puppetry, games and storytelling, which we use to help form genuine connections with often scared, anxious and worried young people.

And while we have extensive training and expert techniques ready at hand, it's always the children who inform our play, as every visit is a co-creation between us and them. As soon as we enter the room – be it in a classroom or hospital ward – we take the children's lead, sitting with them at their level to let them know we are creating a safe space to explore their feelings and emotions.

For example, we might go into a room and the child is just sitting quietly, not quite ready to engage, so we sit there quietly with them. Then, after a few moments, they might catch our eye, and we look back at them or our fellow clowndoctor and let out a playful, 'Whoa!' to catch their attention. From there, we build and build the interactions until, by the end of the visit, we're all playing a silly game with everybody in the room saying 'Whoa!' every time they make eye contact.



“It may sound simple, but encountering the child exactly where they are in that present moment lets them know we're going on an adventure together, and they are leading the way”

Other games we play can be as simple as knocking on the door and telling the children we have a delivery, before proceeding to push a giant invisible box into the room – and we never know what will be inside. We ask the kids to 'open' the box and sometimes it's a fish that we throw around the room, while on other occasions we've 'found' giraffes, sharks, robots, an Xbox... anything they could possibly imagine.

It may sound simple, but encountering the child exactly where they are in that present moment lets them know we're going on an adventure together, and they are leading the way. It's all about giving young people agency in an environment where they might have lost self-confidence or faced powerlessness, anxiety, isolation and boredom as they go through painful, distressing or confusing treatments and procedures.

One of the most powerful things about the clowndoctors programme is that it's inclusive for everybody. It doesn't matter about age or ability, whether the child is verbal, non-verbal or has complex needs, every individual can have a participatory play

session where they are at the heart of the fun – even if it's just a wink or smile – and we know playing with us can help reduce stress and anxiety, while improving communication and social skills.

We've worked with children who, teachers tell us, never speak outside of the home, but while playing with the clowndoctors – who, of course, are very silly and can't remember the words for things – start talking away. And because they are playing, they often do things without realising, like physiotherapy exercises or school work, too.

I've been Dr Spritely for 20 years now, and I can honestly say every day still feels new and exciting. It's wonderful to feel that you are making a difference to children's lives and, ultimately, it's such a joyous privilege to meet so many wonderful young people and be a part of helping them feel better.

Joy and laughter are powerful tools, and when I put on my red nose, switching from being Fiona to becoming Dr Spritely, I know something special is about to happen. •

Opposite: **Fiona Ferrier as Dr Spritely**
Above: **Hearts & Minds works with children of all ages**

For more information about the work of Hearts & Minds, including the clowndoctors programme, visit heartsminds.org.uk

Inspiring the next generation of creative leaders



Since Braw Talent's inception in 2019, it has worked with a wide range of organisations to inspire children and young people to explore their creativity in unique and diverse ways. Founded by three teachers, who recognised the barriers many young people face in accessing creative experiences, it is inspiring the next generation of creative leaders. We speak to Co-Founder, **Darren Osborne**

Interview by **Sophie Ward**

Braw Talent supports children and young people to amplify their voices by harnessing their own creativity. What inspired you to start a social enterprise with this mission?

I used to run a creative studio that specialised in design and film and began working on film-making programmes with the community. I loved the work and seeing how engaged the kids were, they all loved it! I thought, 'I want to do more of this!'

I went on to qualify as a teacher and during my probation year, was lucky to meet two other teachers (Co-Founders Colm Keegan and Lydia Everitt) who felt the same. We had all witnessed the barriers to young people accessing creative activities, particularly in deprived areas, and were aware of the challenges in addressing the issue within the classroom.

From our experiences as teachers, we found it alarming how many children arrived into secondary education unaware of certain things. When I asked them, 'What creative career options can you have?' they would answer artist, art teacher, musician, music teacher. They didn't know other jobs existed within the creative sector.

Lydia and I were both art teachers and Colm was a music teacher. We decided to use our creative skill sets to make education programmes that fit within the curriculum for excellence and provided accessible and inclusive creative experiences from a younger age. We wanted young people to view creative activities as more than just hobbies, but viable career options.

Why is it important that all children and young people are given the opportunity to explore their creativity?

It's so important that the creative sector has diverse voices. A staggeringly high percentage of people that work in the film industry are from

privileged backgrounds and that's not healthy for creative outputs. Film and TV needs voices from all backgrounds.

It's also important that young people realise they can use their creativity to share their experiences and that their stories are valid and worth telling. Whether creating visual art, music, creative writing or animation, we want to help them to see that they can use these devices to amplify their voices.

You support young people to use creativity to tell their own stories. What impact does this have on your projects?

Often when organisations are getting in touch with us, they have research they are sharing and, while you can add quotes alongside the data, putting the young people that were involved at the forefront is just so much more powerful.

Our most successful projects have been when using animation, it's a powerful way of telling a collective story. While in filmmaking it can be difficult for the story not to belong only to the person who we see on the screen, with animations the children create characters and a story together.

With children taking the reins, it offers another level of creativity. It's one of the reasons I love working with young people, they bring those unique and creative ideas to the table that us adults couldn't possibly come up with!

How does your team create a space that encourages all your participants to explore their creativity?

We usually have an initial meeting to get to know each other, which includes introductions and icebreakers. At this stage, we want to make it clear that they are leading us and this always brings excitement.

By the next stage, they have already bought into the process. We make the tasks

fun and creative and keep the atmosphere relaxed so there is no pressure for all participants to speak. Usually, we find that all the young people have lots to share!

Any sessions after that are really hands on. We'll have stations around the room with different groups, the artists focused on creating props and characters or the animators working on lightning and stop motion animation. Young people decide where they want to work but we're always having lots of fun.

Are there any projects that stand out or have made a particular impact on you?

We worked with the National House Project and Staf (Scottish Throughcare & Aftercare Forum) on an animation project called 'Cinderella: In Our Words'. One of the young participants was so interested in animation and showed real talent throughout the project.

We then worked on another project, the East Dunbartonshire Champs Board, and the same young person happened to be involved again! This time, we were able to bring more advanced equipment as we knew they were capable. We then invited that person to do a paid internship with us working on an animation with Save the Children. It went on to win a Silver Award at the Scottish Design Awards 2023!

Knowing we had supported a young person through that journey and received such a fantastic accolade at the end, it was such a stand-out experience for me! It's also given us motivation to develop that area of our business and create more opportunities for young people.

It's clearly an inspiring job. Do you have any moments that you particularly look forward to during a project?

One of the moments I love, is when I can take a step back and just watch the children busy in their various creative groups but working as a team. It's the best!

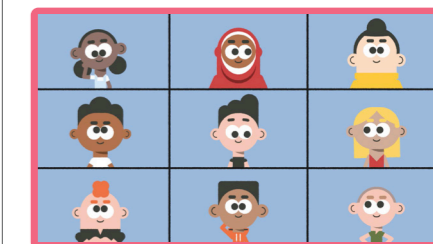
Another is the premiere. It's a chance for the young people to really feel a sense of pride at what they've created. We include a Q&A at the end, so the young people can go on the stage and talk about the process. There's such camaraderie between them, they've always formed a wee crew by this time.

We had one in Clydebank Cinema and the young people were able to invite their family and friends, local councillors, and other representatives. It's important that our creative projects have life outwith the place they were created. We want the young people to realise that it's the start of the journey. ●

Opposite, top: *Creating 'Alright', an animation project with Clan Childlaw, Youth Just Us and Staf*

Opposite, bottom: *Co-Founders, Darren Osborne and Lydia Everitt, with young adults from the Prince and Princess of Wales Hospice who participated in a series of creative workshops delivered by Braw Talent*

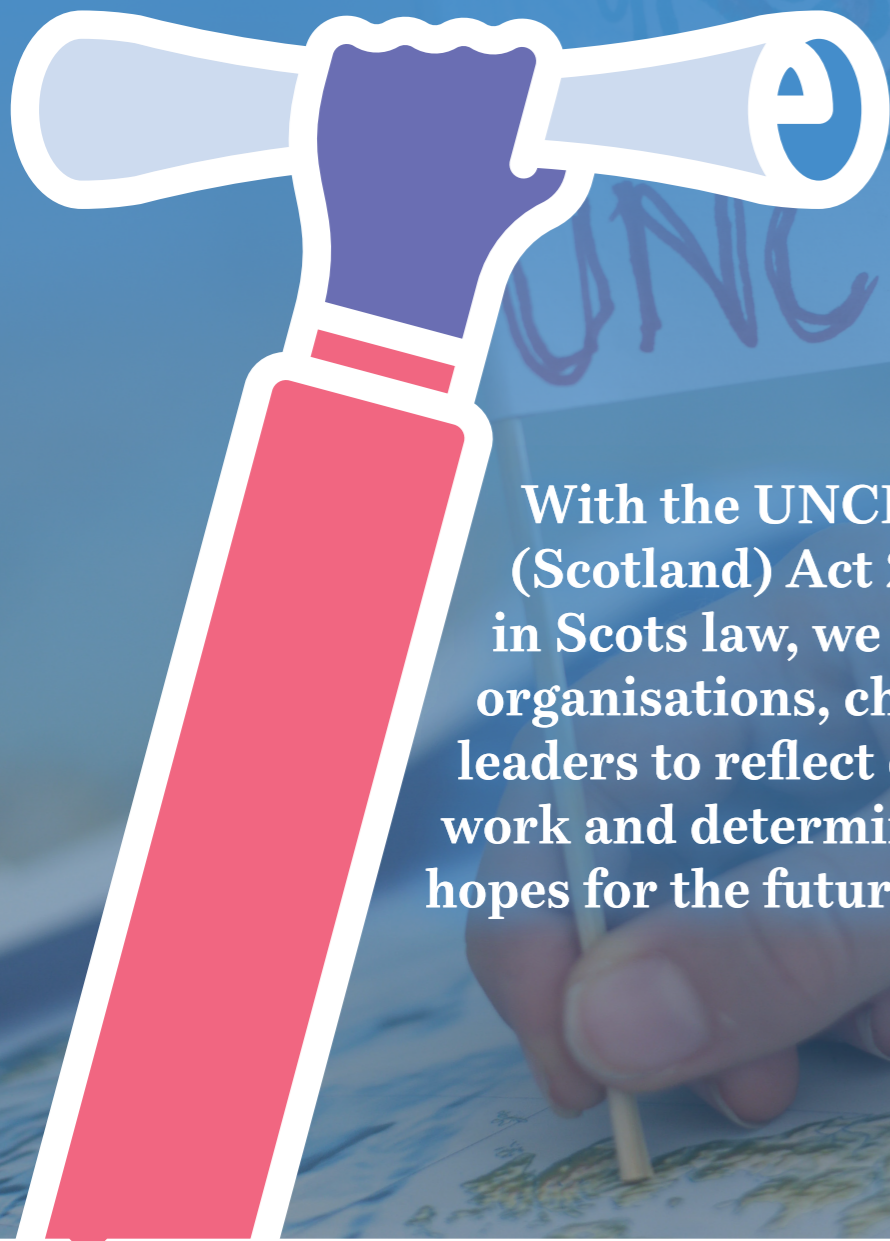
▶ *Watch: Braw Talent's recent project with Children's Hearing Scotland, Our Hearings Our Voice and Scottish Children's Reporter Administration*



To find out more about Braw Talent's work, visit brawtalent.org

Celebrating an historic moment for children's rights in Scotland

With the UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024 now enshrined in Scots law, we asked members, organisations, charities and sector leaders to reflect on years of hard work and determination, sharing their hopes for the future



Dr Judith Turbyne,
Chief Executive, Children in Scotland

Children and young people's rights as outlined in the UNCRC are now to become part of law in Scotland. This is truly a moment to stop, take a deep breath and smile. It has taken a lot of effort and energy from children, young people and adults to make this happen.

So yes, let's celebrate, and then let's roll up our sleeves and start the very important work to ensure that this really makes a positive difference for all children and young people across Scotland.

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



The commencement of UNCRC incorporation was a really momentous day for Scotland, and although the legislation is not as strong as we had hoped, it is still a significant step forward in ensuring children's rights are promoted and upheld across our society.

It is important to recognise that we're just at the start of an exciting new chapter, and we now have a platform upon which to build our future. There is some really positive legislation in place in Scotland, but just because something is in law, doesn't mean it automatically happens. We have seen challenges with implementation with lots of other legislation, including The Additional Support for Learning Act, so we must ensure UNCRC is meaningfully enacted, and that children and young people are truly respected, protected and empowered while their rights are upheld at all times.

Children in Scotland will continue to work with our members, partners, Scottish Government, MSPs, children and families, and wider society to work towards giving all children in Scotland an equal chance to flourish.

“It is important to recognise that we're just at the start of an exciting new chapter, and we now have a platform upon which to build our future. There is some really positive legislation in place in Scotland, but just because something is in law, doesn't mean it automatically happens”



Sara Lovelock,
Chief Operating Officer, Carolina House Trust

Carolina House Trust is responsible for delivering the best possible care for children who, for various reasons, cannot live with their own families. To maintain optimum standards in care, we welcome the UNCRC, which will ensure that children's rights remain at the heart of our organisation, from planning and service delivery to decision-making.

We are particularly determined to ensure that all of our communications are inclusive so children really understand their rights and their role in shaping the plans that determine their care and are currently working with children to review our portfolio of communications so their voices remain at the centre of their care.

Marie Harrison,
Senior Policy Officer (Children's Rights), My Rights, My Say



With UNCRC being incorporated into Scots law, it is our hope that children across Scotland will be more able than ever to exercise their rights.

As a network, My Rights, My Say supports children aged 12-15 with additional support needs to share their views and experiences related to their education and the support they receive in school. The limited reach of the Additional Support for Learning Act, however, means that only children aged 12-15 or 16 and over have specific rights. For example, to request assessments or make a reference to the tribunal, children outwith these age groups cannot access statutory advocacy and support to share their views in formal processes.

It is our hope that the UNCRC Incorporation Act will facilitate a change in this and ensure that all children, regardless of their age, and regardless of how they communicate, will be able to access services like the ones My Rights, My Say currently provide. We realise this will not happen overnight but My Rights, My Say provides evidence that a structural support mechanism must be in place if rights are to be actioned in practice, and not just remain a theoretical concept.



**Cathy McCulloch OBE,
Director Children’s Parliament**

In 1992, children called for a “children’s parliament; a place where children are taken seriously and where we can talk about things that are important to us, not just to adults”. Thirty-two years later, Article 12 of the UNCRC has been embedded in the new Act. But our excitement is about much more than a child’s right to have a say. What we will have at the heart of all we do with, and for children, is the right for every child to have their human dignity respected and their best interests served. For a country that often tolerates, rather than values, children, Scotland now has an opportunity to ensure environments around children are based on love, kindness and understanding; environments where children blossom, habits of a lifetime begin, and we begin to see the culture change to which we aspire.

**Jamie Speirs,
Senior Solicitor, Scottish Child Law Centre**

Our ambition is to create a better society through the realisation of children’s rights. UNCRC incorporation is a big step toward achieving this goal.

As a specialist hub providing free legal advice, expert training and partnership work to influence long-term change, our services are much in demand. We see children and families try to navigate a complex legal system, often while facing barriers to accessing justice. Access to justice is a key component to successfully realising children’s rights. Our hope is that the new legislation will facilitate both long-term changes to the wider legal system and immediate changes to support those children and families most in need.

By empowering children and families to realise their rights, we have the best chance of creating that better society.



**Georgette Cobban,
Senior Development Officer (The Promise), ACVO TSI**

As supporters of the third sector, we are hopeful that incorporation of the UNCRC in Scots law will focus the minds of decision makers on the delivery of The Promise for children across Scotland, and help communities in their ongoing fight for fairness.

The third sector can only do so much with the limited resources it has, however, this Act presents an opportunity to force systemic change at a national level for some of the most serious issues facing society, such as child poverty. At this stage we can only be hopeful. The record of successive local and national political administrations has failed to deliver the wholesale changes required to ensure that for every child, they have what they need to grow up loved, safe and respected.

“*This Act presents an opportunity to force systemic change at a national level for some of the most serious issues facing society such as child poverty*”

**Abbie Montgomery-Fox,
Practice and Policy Team Manager, Children’s Hearings Scotland**

Children’s Hearings Scotland see UNCRC incorporation as a fundamental step in ensuring all children are safe, respected, treated equally, provided with the support they need to thrive and have agency in their own lives. Our hope is for a children’s care and justice system where the duty to uphold the rights of children is fully realised. We will work with partners to make sure mechanisms are in place so that children are aware of their rights and that there is accountability for any breaches of these rights. We hope for robust routes to remedy, so that all children know how to challenge duty bearers when their rights are not realised, and there is a high-quality support in place so they can do this effectively and consistently.



**Juliet Harris,
Director, Together (Scottish Alliance for Children’s Rights)**

Together (Scottish Alliance for Children’s Rights) has always championed the idea that “rights should be part of the culture of life” and recognised that “if it’s not the law then people might not give me my rights”.

These words, originally spoken by members of the Children’s Parliament in 2011, resonate deeply as we celebrate the commencement of the UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024. As we celebrate 13 years on, those former members of the Children’s Parliament are now adults who have watched subsequent generations campaign to make children’s rights binding in law. The countdown to commencement has prompted widespread action across Scotland to embed a children’s human rights approach into public services, showing that legal protections are crucial for ensuring the rights in the UNCRC are given the priority that children need.

I strongly hope that children’s human rights become an intrinsic part of Scottish life, with tangible progress felt by every baby, child, and young person, especially those most at risk. This legislation marks a significant step towards our vision of a Scotland where all children’s rights are respected, protected, and fulfilled.

“*I hope that children’s human rights become an intrinsic part of Scottish life, with tangible progress felt by every baby, child, and young person*”



**Jane Malcolm,
National Operations Manager (Scotland), National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA)**

We’re excited about the UNCRC Incorporation (Scotland) Act 2024, having long recognised and promoted best practice in rights-based approaches by the early learning and childcare sector.

Private and third sector nurseries demonstrate excellent practice in relation to babies’ rights, as they, and other non-verbal children, are often left out of rights discussions because of their perceived lack of voice. However, at NDNA we are supporting approaches for all nursery children to be heard and have their views acted upon.

Implementation of the Act means the voice of all children, including babies, will be front and centre across society throughout Scotland. Decisions about ELC by public bodies will have to take account of the impact on children. This will mean that NDNA can advocate on behalf of children to ensure they experience high quality, equitable childcare regardless of their background, where they grow up and the type of provision they attend.

**Marguerite Hunter Blair,
Chief Executive, Play Scotland**

Play is fundamental to the lives of children and young people. Our ambition for the children of Scotland is that our country becomes the first play-friendly country in the world, with play at the heart of the culture of childhood. To achieve this, we need to become a much more child-friendly country – and that is our hope for UNCRC incorporation.

Scotland’s Play Strategy has a vision for every child to enjoy life-enhancing, everyday play experiences. It is essential that the refreshed Play Strategy is properly resourced to ensure that all children and young people can have their right to play realised.

Play Scotland hopes that the strong legal framework for Play in Planning and UNCRC incorporation will foster and promote societal attitudes that support and encourage children to have control and choice and be able to decide what, where and how they play.



Girls' rights are human rights

With new policies aiming to protect and advance human rights for children and young people, **Katie Horsburgh** from Zero Tolerance explores why a gender-neutral approach means girls are falling between the cracks in legislation

At the heart of Scotland's landmark decision to incorporate the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) into Scots law is the belief that all children deserve to have their human rights realised and respected.

However, despite the Government's commendable investment in children's rights as a whole, research and evidence shows that girls are still not accessing their rights equally.

Girls can face significant challenges in realising their rights – especially when they are affected by further structural inequalities such as racism, poverty, ableism, homophobia, and transphobia – and if we want to make Scotland the best place in the world for all children to grow up, we must avoid a gender-neutral approach, instead addressing girls' specific needs and experiences, while tackling the discriminations they face on a daily basis.

UNCRC becoming law in Scotland is a really exciting moment, but as a gender-neutral convention, it inadvertently prioritises the rights of boys and the issues that predominantly affect them. By talking about children as a homogenous group, girls continue to get left behind.

Similarly, the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) convention – part of the proposed Human Rights Bill – only mentions girls in related to education, despite violence and harassment affecting women of all ages.

Girls experience extremely high levels of domestic abuse, sexual assault, rape, and stalking, and according to Scottish Government figures, one in three 13 to 17-year-olds have experienced some form of sexual violence. So why have girls' needs been left out of this legislation?

By not doing enough to address the rights of girls and young women specifically, we are leaving them to fall between the cracks in legislation that should be designed to ensure they grow up safe and supported – something which Zero Tolerance explored in detail through our recent report, 'Girls' rights are human rights.'

Documenting research and exploring different pools of evidence from many fantastic organisations working directly with girls and young women, the report outlines the substantial barriers that prevent girls from realising their rights, and argues that emerging and evolving legislation, policy and practice are doing little to address the negative and often harmful experiences of girls.

Given the fact that human rights are a helpful measure of equality or inequality, providing a framework for improvement and a way to focus our efforts, it makes sense that we should create a link between the two. We need to further explore ways to understand girls' rights as human rights.

At Zero Tolerance, our focus is on tackling the root cause of gender equality, eradicating men's violence against women and girls. To do this, we need to create the right environments and cultures that will allow children and young people to grow and develop equally, and that starts with gender-sensitive approaches and considerations.

Our message for anyone working on children's rights in Scotland – and on women's rights, too – is to explicitly name girls' specific requirements when doing human rights work. By doing this, we can create a Scotland where all girls can thrive. •

“UNCRC is exciting – but it inadvertently prioritises the rights of boys and the issues that affect them more**”**



Katie Horsburgh is Policy and Practice Officer: Children and Young People at Zero Tolerance.

For more information and to read the full Girls' rights are human rights report, visit zerotolerance.org.uk



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Behave! Redefining “challenging” behaviour

As behaviour in schools continues to be a hot topic for educators, **Billy Anderson**, Head of Services at Children in Scotland, discusses the importance of language for supporting children and young people



Schools are difficult places to be for lots of people – and for lots of different and complex reasons.

How we behave as human beings in a school environment is often described in the polarising terminology of ‘good’ or ‘bad’, ‘acceptable’ or ‘unacceptable’ – but behaviour itself is actually neutral, and it is the interpretation that we place on it that gives it a label.

These interpretations vary widely between individuals based on their own experiences, values, socialisation, culture and understanding. This is why we need to be extremely careful about the language we use to describe behaviours and the resultant narratives that this inevitably produces.

In a previous role I always used to ask the following question during recruitment interviews for staff working with children aged 11-17 who, at that time, had been categorised as being out of school due to various ‘social, emotional and behavioural difficulties’:

“What is challenging behaviour?”

Each time I asked that question, very few (one from memory) gave me the answer I was looking for, and almost everyone would start reeling off a list of behaviours such as, spitting, swearing, physical violence, shouting, interrupting. It was music to my ears when that one person responded with: “they are only challenging behaviours if you find them challenging personally”.

“There is an element of control or power, exerted by adults, that can have long-term implications on trust and relationship building”

This response encapsulated the nature of behaviour being neutral, and also placed the process of interpretation firmly in the reflective control of the self.

Too often we respond or react to behaviours as slaves to the pre-programmed ‘fight or flight’ mechanism for self-preservation. However, we cannot perform our duties as educators (in the widest sense) of children and young people without demonstrating the ability to empathise, understand and display compassion. We must have an acute awareness of our own responses and reactions towards behaviours so that we do not contribute towards a society that only has the ability fight or flee.

There is an element of control or power that can be exerted by adults when guiding behaviours that can have long-term implications on trust and relationship building. If reading this through one lens it can be damaging, but if we read it through a more reflective lens, then it can be empowering. Even the word ‘behaviour’ will conjure up a negative connotation in the majority of people’s minds. For example, we’ll say: “what are we going to do about your behaviour?” or “sit and think about your behaviour” and “there are issues with your behaviour”. Sometimes it’s just simply “behave!”.

All of these phrases are neutral yet instinctively land in a place of negativity in our comprehension.

I always think back to taking a young lad back into school for a meeting with a guidance teacher about reintegration, after two years of non-attendance. He was a tall lad for his age, and when in reception, he chose to lie down across a few seats as we waited. He was stressed and managing his stress by relaxing. A member of staff came around the corner and berated him immediately – in a raised voice – for lying down.

“Who do you think you are? Other people have the right to sit here. What kind of way is that to conduct yourself?”, they said.

An altercation quickly ensued and some choice language was used by the young person as the staff member made their way along the corridor. The guidance teacher then appeared and said: “Hey you! I’ve not seen you for ages! How are you? Come with me and let’s hear what you have been doing.”

These were two very distinct approaches by two very different individuals in the space of five minutes. And this was one moment in time within one school with four people involved (two teachers, the young person and me), who were all coming at the situation from different perspectives, with different thoughts, and each one of us came away from those interactions with different impacts.

For anyone to learn about how best to support children and young people, they must be reflective about their own behaviour and the role it plays when interacting with others. We need to be able to identify our own stress levels as well as others, and learn how to communicate appropriately with each other with the main aim, surely, being one of reciprocal learning – and an ability to reflect, empathise and regulate.

In the words of Epictetus: “Men are disturbed not by the things which happen, but by the opinions about the things”. •

“Most approaches in this field tend to focus on techniques that will attempt to change the behaviour of children and adults displaying ‘behaviours of concern’. We do not believe this is enough. Even where people have been extensively trained in such techniques problems persist – or in some instances are made worse”

(R. Mills & M. McCreadie 2018)



Billy Anderson, Head of Services at Children in Scotland

For more information, visit childreninscotland.org.uk



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SEP 25

Children in Scotland Networking Event

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Empowering care experienced young people to write their own story



Launched earlier this year, the “My Journey” journal was created by care experienced young people in the Highlands, and allows young people aged 12 and up with care experience to record important information about themselves.

Providing a secure space where they can record their stories, accomplishments, rights, and plans for the future, thousands of copies of the book have already been distributed to care leavers through local councils and social workers, and the ultimate goal is to provide a copy to every young person with care experience in Scotland.

Here, **Kelly Blackmore**, Wellbeing and Learning Support Manager at UHI Inverness, and head of the “My Journey” project, shares how young people were instrumental in bringing the book to life.



Highland organisations interested in working collaboratively to help improve outcomes for children and young people recently established the Highland Strategic Partnership to strengthen their approach.

The Partnership includes Aberlour, Barnardo’s, Highland Council, UHI Inverness, Action for Children, Highland Third Sector Interface, and others working within education, and one of its aims was to identify gaps in service delivery to improve the experiences of children and families in their own communities, as well as those who are cared for by Highland Council, directly and indirectly, through Council-commissioned activities.

The Partnership also use its collective experience and expertise to support children and families’ involvement in the design of new and existing services to help transform their lives, ensuring the partners’ commitment to keeping The Promise.

During consultation sessions with both professionals and care experienced young people, the care experience journey was examined from the point of view of a young person, and through a professional lens. A graphic designer recorded the discussions visually for both sessions, so everyone could visualise and consider the journey. These sessions enabled the partners to map out the care journey and identify what community-based specialist/universal services and support were available, and where and when these services would be offered and provided.

It was also an opportunity for both professionals and young people to share their own experiences and views about what was working well within the Highlands – and what could be better.

A small group of care experienced young people from UHI Inverness got together for further consultation work to identify improvements, and conceived the idea of the “My Journey” book. Elisabeth Cairney and Lyndon Fraser then worked with a cognitive behavioural therapist and graphic designer to create a book/journal for other care experienced young people, to help them to feel in control of what is happening on their care experience journey.

“*It was an opportunity to share experiences and views about what was working well within the Highlands – and what could be better*”

The book is person-centred and interactive. Each section within the book provides young people with an opportunity to write important things about them – things they want to capture and remember. The sections within the journal include: About Me, My Home, My Community, Important Meetings for Me, Moving On and Living Independently, and Important Things to Me.

To date, 1,500 copies have been printed and given to care experienced young people Scotland wide, with a further 1,500 copies currently in print!

Young people who have received a copy of the book have shared how much they love it, and expressed that it’s nice to be able to capture their thoughts and feelings in their own words.

They especially like the prompts throughout the journal, which help them become more aware of what additional support/resources they are entitled to. Biz and Lyndon, who were involved in the project, now want to ensure that all care experienced young people in Scotland have access to this journal, and they’re also keen to develop this resource to ensure that it is accessible to young people who may have additional support needs. •

Photos: Care experienced young people can use the “My Journey” journal to capture important moments



For more information, and to request a copy of “My Journey”, visit aberlour.org.uk

Recipes from the heart

Created by The Mums' Group at Edinburgh-based charity Multi-Cultural Family Base (MCFB), *Mums and Spices 2* is not your ordinary recipe book. **Sophie Ward** sat down with Saira Chaudhry and Elizabeth Hampson to hear how a group of mothers from diverse communities have used their shared love of cooking to find independence, build skills and grow confidence

Mums and Spices 2 has all the ingredients of a great cookbook. Delicious-sounding recipes – most definitely. Beautifully presented dishes – check. Personal touches and a hearty portion of soul? Absolutely!

But behind the 46 pages of mouth-watering recipes, there is another story of women coming together, supporting each other, building confidence and finding a place for themselves and their families in Scotland.

“The initial idea was to support vulnerable mums who were isolated socially, had a language barrier and didn't feel included in the community,” explained MCFB's Project Worker, Saira Chaudhry, of the group behind the *Mums and Spices* cookbooks.

The Mums' Group, as it is known, was formed in 2019 as a result of the 4-2-7 project run by MCFB, which works with vulnerable and disadvantaged children, young people and families to create better life opportunities and promote wellbeing.

The 4-2-7 project, which supports children aged four to seven years old, many from Black and Minority Ethnic communities, who are experiencing difficulties managing the transitions to primary school, also included a focus on the mothers of these children, creating a specific group which enabled them to seek support.



“It makes such a difference to children if their mums are happy and confident, and that's what the Mums' Group aims to do – give them confidence and independence,” said Saira.

Having only been able to operate online during the pandemic, and with the increased social isolation of mothers apparent, the group, led by Saira, was reignited with a sense of urgency once restrictions were lifted. In-person meetings were reinstated, and the priority was

to support group members to build confidence, language skills and independence.

“When you're not born here and you don't have family or many friends, you don't see the reason to go out,” added Saira. “Who are you going to go out for coffee with? Yourself? That's the main concept of this group, to encourage mums, bring them together, give them independence and ownership of the things they want to do.”

Meeting on a weekly basis, the women, who come from a range of different cultures and backgrounds, gathered at the MCFB office, where they chatted together about their lives and personal experiences. They planned outings to get coffee, go for walks, enjoy nature and, of course, share their joy for cooking! Describing the change in the women's confidence levels over this time, Saira added: “I wish I could show you a before and after! It's amazing!”

Saira attributes building trusting relationships between herself and the women as a key reason for the group's success: “We work with the women very sensitively, building trust and providing assurance that we are here for them and we're trying to help them, nothing else. This trust is key and is a very important factor for the wider work of MCFB as well.”

Following this first year of confidence-building, the Mums' Group were ready for a challenge that would develop their skills, and the creation of a cookbook was the perfect project.

“Cooking is something natural to them,” said Saira. “They are not professionals, but they do it all the time. It's a regular activity for them, and it's a cultural thing as well. They didn't need to do a course or learn anything for that. The recipes they shared came from the heart.”

Every Thursday, the MCFB office became a hive of activity. Each week, a new recipe was tackled, with a different ‘head chef’ taking the lead within the group, while their children offered support by chopping, dicing and preparing the ingredients.

When asked if it had been challenging to choose which recipes made it into the final cut, Saira and Elizabeth both give a laugh of affirmation. To help, Saira narrowed the brief: “They had to choose something that evoked a memory or reminded them of childhood.

Living in this country they can lose touch of memories and they are not close to their families, so the recipes were to be a reflection of their life.”

The result was 25 cultural recipes from Pakistan, India, Syria, The Philippines, Egypt and Nigeria, which also celebrated the 25th anniversary of the MCFB.

Once each recipe had been prepared in the office, photographs were taken and the food was tasted. “We created really amazing memories while cooking the recipes,” said Saira.

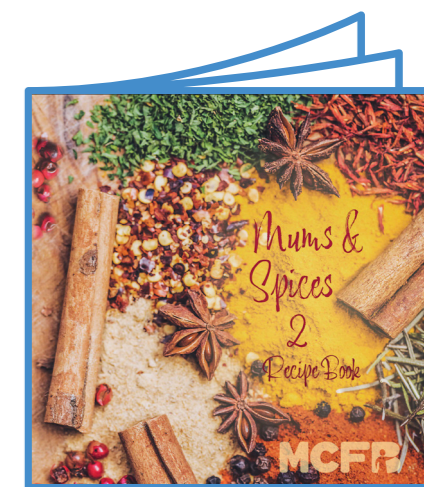
In addition to creating happy memories and strengthening their relationships, the project enabled the group to expand their skills and employability, with one member going on to find work as a cook, and others now preparing to do their food hygiene certificate.

“When we started there was no concept of working as they didn't have qualifications,” explained Saira. “Now they don't think about it. This book has made the difference, making them realise what they can do.”

With the book printed and launched in December 2023, there is no suggestion of the group slowing down. Weekly meetings are continuing, a family bowling trip is being planned, and the group recently shared their culinary skills with a much wider audience when they were hired to cook on the MCFB stall at the North Edinburgh Community Festival in May.

Listening to Saira and Elizabeth speak passionately about the group, it is impossible not to feel inspired by the impact Mums' Group has had on the lives of the members – and their families as well. The *Mums and Spices 2* cookbook is clearly only one memorable chapter within a much bigger story. Saira smiled: “It's like they are creating the recipe of life.” ●

“It makes such a difference to children if their mums are happy and confident, and that's what the Mums' Group aims to do – give them confidence and independence”



To buy your copy of the *Mums and Spices 2* recipe book (above), email elizabeth.hampson@mcfb.org.uk

To find out more about the work of the Multi-Cultural Family Base, visit mcfb.org.uk

Opposite: Multi-Cultural Family Base's Mums' Group

Changing the tempo of live music experiences

Learn more about the Live Music and Mental Health Project, which engaged with children and young people to explore new ways to promote access to live concerts and performances for wellbeing

“*Children and young people and their imaginations took the reins, and it was exciting to see how they brought the research topic to life so quickly*”

Words: **David Mackay**

In 2023, as part of a partnership project with the University of Stirling and the Scottish Ensemble, Children in Scotland ran a series of innovative workshops which aimed to explore the barriers that existed to children and young people accessing live music experiences.

Following on from research undertaken in 2021 through the Emerging Minds Special Interest Group on Live Music and Mental Health, which found that live music was both positive and impactful for children and young people's mental health and wellbeing, this project looked to explore the issue further by examining how live music



experiences, which are often delivered with only the adult population in mind, could be made more accessible to children and young people.

Working with more than 90 participants – including children and young people, musicians, music and arts youth engagement workers, teachers, and mental health practitioners – our research co-produced ideas for delivering live music to children and young people to support their mental health and wellbeing. It is hoped that the suggestions generated by the initiative could be used by organisations and individuals when creating live music events in the future.

Composing the workshops: The Innovation Labs

“The workshop format enabled the performers to actively engage with their audience, hearing in real time the impact of different approaches to performance on young people’s feelings and emotions” – Stuart Burns, Head of Artistic Planning, Scottish Ensemble

The research was conducted during three two-day workshops or “Innovation Labs”, which took place in Inverness, Stirling and the east of Glasgow.

As the name suggests, the facilitators wanted innovation to be at the heart of the

workshops. We were also intent on creating an environment that felt distinctive from a school classroom and encouraged participants to be adventurous, creative and curious.

Confidence-building was another key outcome for the project, both supporting those delivering youth music to develop their skills, and empowering children and young people to have their voices heard in the design and delivery of youth music opportunities. To support the aims, the workshops had an intergenerational, co-production approach, which saw participants, with different ages and backgrounds, working together as equal partners.

Hearing everyone’s voice

“I don’t really like talking in class with other people, but I felt more comfortable with [people here]” – Project participant

As is so often the case when exploring creativity, children and young people and their imaginations took the reins, and it was exciting to see how they brought the research topic to life so quickly. After the initial welcome and icebreaker, participants were split into groups and tasked with creating a band name that would represent them during the workshop. We knew we were in for a lively session when we were introduced to the bands which included the Funky Pheasants, Zodiac Daredevils, and The Prancing Purple Pugs.

The workshops were structured around a total of four live music performances. The groups engaged in more traditional audience experiences, as well as interactive performances exploring mindfulness and physical space. It was interesting to see the different ways everyone responded to the performances including one participant choosing to enjoy the music from underneath a table.

While the intergenerational format did create some

challenges and learnings for the future, particularly in relation to how the adult participants understood their role, the outcomes were overwhelmingly positive, with the children and young people feeling empowered and supported to share their views and experiences.

Conducting the evaluation

“I didn’t want to be someone who swooped in at the end with a badge and a clipboard to interrupt the fun and collect data from everyone!” – Louise Honeybul, Research Assistant, University of Stirling

An innovative evaluation was led by researchers at the University of Stirling. Focused on developing a multi-method approach that was inclusive to all the participants, the researchers used traditional qualitative and quantitative evaluation tools, such as surveys and interviews, but adapted them to be engaging for the children and young people.

Written feedback was collected via a large graffiti wall, which included question prompts, and could be written or drawn on throughout the workshop. Verbal interviews were also conducted in an ‘on-the-street’ style, which is commonly seen on social media platforms. Participants were also given the chance to respond physically with a ‘This or That’ game which allowed researchers to collect the data in a participatory and fun fashion.

The final score

“We have the power to change the current climate of live music in our local area and provide a better social environment for everybody” – Project participant

In March 2024, we published the final report detailing our findings from the three Innovation Labs. The research identified key barriers to making live music accessible and acceptable. Cost and transportation were identified, as well as additional support needs and more holistic barriers such as safety.

Enablers included free or heavily subsidised tickets, the provision of transportation to support children and young people to access gigs, and creating youth-led programming or co-ordination of festivals and venues.

Participants also highlighted the importance of location and setting for improving access, and supporting the mental health and wellbeing benefits of live music experiences with ideas ranging from a concert in a car park to a festival in a forest. Responsibility was also put on established Scottish artists and promoters to support emerging or local bands and musicians.

The Live Music and Mental Health Project provided an important platform for children and young people to share what’s important to them and work together with professionals to develop new approaches to supporting mental health and wellbeing. We hope the report and findings will inform anyone working on co-design projects with children and young people, now and in the future. ●

Opposite: A young participant meets Scottish Ensemble musicians



David Mackay is Children in Scotland’s Head of Policy, Projects and Participation.

For more information on the Live Music and Mental Health Innovation Labs, visit childreninScotland.org.uk/live-music-and-mental-health-innovation-labs

The road to safer journeys

Discover how Road Safety Scotland is putting children and young people's views at the heart of vital learning resources

With responsibility for road safety learning and publicity, Road Safety Scotland's (RSS) learning resources have always been 'child-centric', co-produced with teachers and pupils, and linked to Curriculum for Excellence.

Aiming to ensure all learning resources are of a high quality and fully fit-for-purpose, RSS recently commissioned The Leith Agency to create new educational material for several of its online resources, creating refreshed designs that were made not just for children but by them, too.

Working with Children in Scotland's Policy, Projects and Participation Team, RSS sought the voices and opinions of children and young people to ensure the information would engage learners in a way that was appropriate, relevant and challenging to them.

RSS believes road safety learning should be accessible for all children and young people in Scotland, with access to key learning made available at every stage on their journey towards becoming safe, independent road users.

The foundation for all RSS activity is a commitment to the use of analysis and evidence, and RSS has been at the forefront of driving an evidence-informed approach to road safety learning and publicity in Scotland for many years.

RSS sees road safety as a lifelong-learning process and, therefore, the knowledge, skills and attitudes which will be required when young people become independent road users – across all modes,



including as pedestrians, cyclists, passengers and drivers – need to be embedded from the start.

When it came to creating the new digital resources, RSS knew children's voices would be vital, and asked Children in Scotland to help support the involvement of young people to share their views on the review and re-design through dedicated workshops.

Parisa Shirazi, Children in Scotland's Senior Policy, Projects and Participation Officer, who helped lead the recent in-person sessions, explained: "Our approach to engagement is framed around the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) with a focus on Article 12, which states children and young people have the right to have their views heard on the issues that affect their lives.

"Young people have invaluable perspectives, views and voices, and it is our job to create the

spaces and opportunities for them to be involved. From our own experience, involving children and young people not only enriches the process of creating new resources or policy ideas, but also makes the end result so much better than it would have been."

In the first phase of the project, Children in Scotland worked with secondary school pupils, delivering sessions at King's Park Secondary School in Glasgow, and Marr College in Troon, while further workshops were also later held at Dalry Primary School in Edinburgh.

Activities included drawing 'journey maps' to encourage pupils to consider the different road safety issues and risks they may encounter on their route to and from school, as well as group discussions to review current RSS resources – including videos and interactive games – and give their views on what new educational material should include.

“The impressive insight of the young people led to ideas such as a future-proofing ‘cringe check’ of the new resources before they go out”

Parisa continued: "We spent time with pupils to see what they think young people should learn about in road safety, find out their views on the current resources available, and give them the chance to come up with their own prototypes of fun resources to share their 'top tips' with the designers.

"We were really impressed with the thoughtfulness and insight of the young people, who came up with ideas such as a future-proofing 'cringe check' of the new resources carried out by young people before they go out.

RSS is currently undertaking a review of all its road safety learning resources to ensure they are accessible for children and young people with mild to moderate additional support needs, while also developing a new road safety resource for children with complex additional support needs, which will be ready by spring 2025.

As part of this work, Parisa and her team visited Glasgow's Hazelwood School, which is

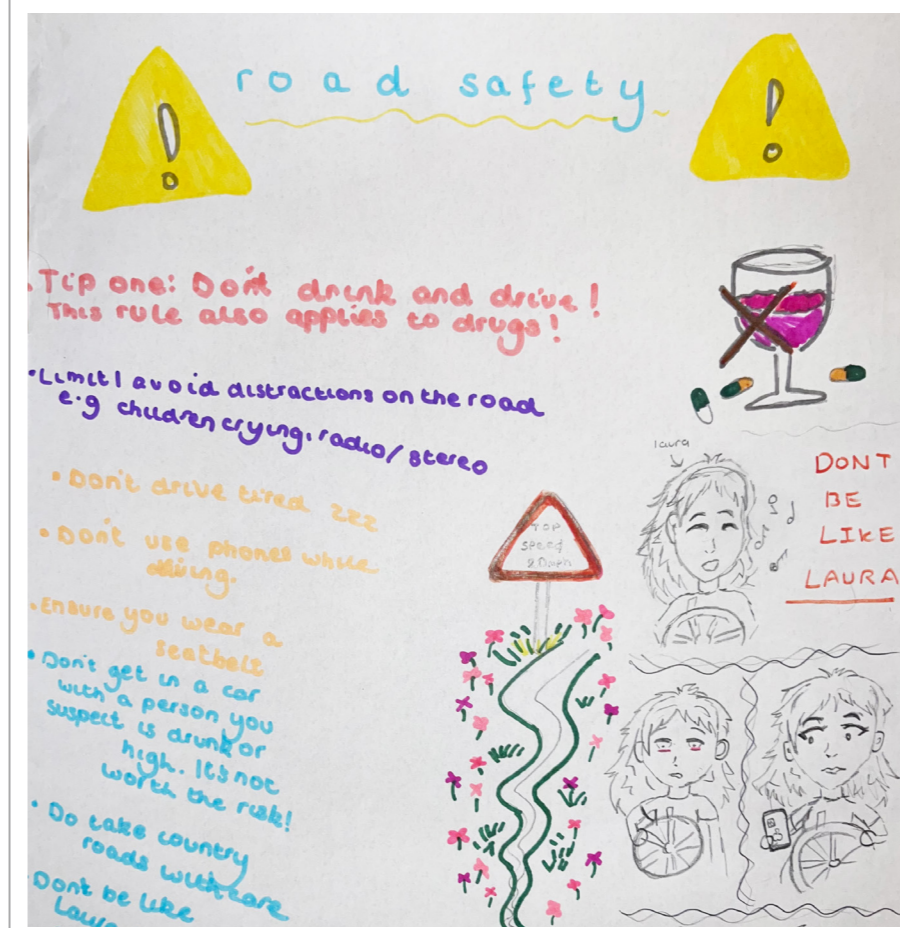
attended by children and young people with sensory impairment and complex learning needs, and Oaklands School in Edinburgh, which provides an adapted and supportive environment for learners aged three to 18 years old with profound and multiple learning disabilities and associated health care needs. With resources spanning a large age range, as well as a variety of additional support needs, RSS says it is imperative pupils are engaged in experiential and active learning, helping them prepare to make safer choices to protect themselves and others in the road environment.

Debbie Nicol, from Road Safety Scotland, added: "Many children and young people don't have the ability to make good judgements about safe road use, and a lack of experience means they are at greater risk.

"These days, children and young people enjoy more freedom and travel further from home to school, college or social events and, although their road safety knowledge is high, it's often not used. They may know what they should do – but they often make mistakes or are unsure of how to use their road safety knowledge.

"Updating our resources has been vital to ensure children and young people's learning about road safety is not only age-appropriate, but a lifelong practice that is both accessible and engaging."

Opposite and below: Young people developed road safety artwork at an RSS workshop



To find out more about the road safety engagement work with children and young people, [click here to read the full report](#) or visit roadsafety.scot

Stories of the love, hopes, dreams and fears that unite us

Discover how the (Un)Seen, (Un)Heard project, developed by LGBT Youth Scotland, is giving young people a voice for tomorrow

Words: Clare Forrest

Capturing and celebrating young LGBTQ+ people's stories of what life is like in Scotland, (Un)Seen, (Un)Heard is a social history project from LGBT Youth Scotland and funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

From stories of life, family, education, work and relationships, these stories will be preserved for future generations in local and national archives, with the main collection held at the National Library of Scotland, a digital exhibition held online, and physical exhibitions happening throughout the year.

In 2023, LGBT Youth Scotland celebrated being a registered charity for 20 years, and in that time, it has supported thousands of young people – but without having the resources to fully record and document the experiences of young people who access these services.

The project aims to connect LGBTQ+ people of all ages to their shared heritage, increasing LGBTQ+ visibility across Scotland. By raising awareness, providing solidarity, strengthening communities, diversifying current archives and informing current and future policy-makers, LGBT Youth Scotland aims to foster a real sense of progress and pride.



(Un)Seen, (Un)Heard is working with current and former young people to gather their collective experiences, and present them in an accessible and engaging way. The project team attended and interviewed people across Pride events in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Oban, and Inverness. There have been workshops across the country, conducting individual and group interviews with young people, and facilitating creative sessions where people have been able to make artistic and written submissions.

Schools can get involved by accessing an education pack, filled with ideas for self-led and teacher-led activities that encourage young people to share their stories. Young people can also submit their stories by completing a questionnaire or written submission, and by uploading artwork, poetry and songs through an online portal.

While LGBTQ+ people have historically been overlooked in archives, the archives that do exist contain many stories from older generations. These provide crucial insights into the history of the LGBTQ+ community in Scotland. However, LGBT Youth Scotland is in a unique position to capture young people's experiences and give them the opportunity to share their own story in their own voices. Young people tell us that being LGBTQ+ means they face barriers to achieving their full potential in education, work, relationships,

and that Scotland does not feel like a safe and inclusive place to live, love, or learn.

Additionally, the hard-won progress of LGBTQ+ rights over the past 20 years has been stalled by the current debate on the rights of trans individuals, and this has led to a time-sensitive need to celebrate young people's stories and raise awareness.

The stories that have been collected are diverse – from stories of joy and hope to everyday experiences, and heart-wrenching accounts of the challenges faced by young LGBTQ+ people today. There are accounts of the challenges faced by LGBTQ+ people in rural communities, experiences of coming out to friends and family, and some discuss how religion, race, gender, or economic status have affected their identity.

Young people recall their first Pride, what it means to them, and the importance of celebrating how far the LGBTQ+ community has come, and how far Scotland still must go until LGBTQ+ people can live in peace and safety.

There are stories of the love, hopes, dreams and fears that unite everyone. •



Clare Forrest is Development Manager for the (Un)Seen, (Un)Heard project. To discover the Digital Exhibition, visit lgbtyouth.org.uk/unseen-unheard-welcome

How eLearning can create powerful change

As part of our Learning Focus series, **Gill Chester** from Little Man Project, explores the process of creating bespoke online modules, and why charities can benefit from their use

What do you think of when you hear the word 'eLearning'? Death by clicking? Courses full of information that doesn't feel relevant to your staff and volunteers?

Generic or 'off the shelf' course libraries are cost-effective for meeting your compliance obligations. However, they are created to support a broad audience and focus on delivering the topic, rather than meeting a goal. These courses must ensure learners see all the information they need on a topic, and it is then left to the learner to work out how to apply the content within their setting and organisation.

Bespoke or custom eLearning is different.

Creating courses designed specifically for your organisation allows you to put the goal and your organisational context at the heart of the course. This isn't just about making it look and sound like you – although this is very important. It's about solving your problems in that area.

Let's say you have identified an issue with reporting safeguarding concerns. People may not make a report for many reasons, but telling them facts and figures about safeguarding probably won't solve the problem. It is more powerful to explain the process in your setting, and then tell relevant stories that allow them to practise applying their knowledge in a context that's relevant to them.

And it gets even better. Do you have expertise in your charity that you want or need to share with others? Perhaps you have a methodology you have perfected for using play to support children's communication skills? Or there is a need to improve people's understanding about a disability you specialise in? A custom eLearning course based on your expertise may be the answer to extending your reach and meeting your charity's vision.

This course can then be given to partners, relevant organisations and the public sector, or even sold to recover the costs involved in its creation. Many charities are already doing this, including Fostering Network and Children in Scotland.

Of course, there are potential costs involved.

But if you don't have the money within your charity, it's worth exploring funding opportunities from corporate donors, philanthropists and grants. You may even be able to sell the idea of the course before you've even created it to guarantee you can recover the costs involved in its design and development.

If your interest is piqued, our last tip is to find an external supplier that specialises in working with charities to create bespoke eLearning with a proven track record in creating resources that drive change. •

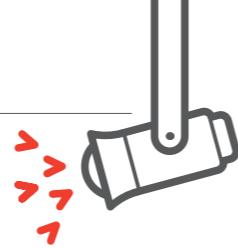
“Creating courses designed for your organisation allows you to put the goal and your organisational context at the heart of things. It's about solving your problems”



Gill Chester is Director of Little Man Project, charity eLearning experts, which has created online modules for Children in Scotland. To find out more about the support they can provide, visit littelmanproject.com

For Children in Scotland's eLearning Hub visit childreninscotland.org.uk/learning/elearning

Meet our new members



Some of the members who have joined our vibrant community in the past six months introduce themselves and share the different ways they are supporting children and young people across Scotland to flourish



Alcohol Focus Scotland (AFS)

We are the national charity working to reduce harm caused by alcohol. By using the best academic research and the real-life experiences of people affected by alcohol, we promote the most effective preventative policies.

Working with Children's Parliament and local young people's organisations, we are enabling the voices of children and young people to be heard on how alcohol affects them, and what they want to see change. Having successfully campaigned for minimum unit pricing of alcohol to be renewed, and for the price to be updated to 65p per unit, AFS is now focused on the government's consultation on alcohol marketing, which is due later this year.

Our joint **Alcohol Free Childhood** campaign, in partnership with Children in Scotland, calls for children to be able to play, learn and socialise in places free from alcohol marketing. We also offer a range of **training courses**, including to support nursery workers, teachers and social workers supporting children who may be affected by parental or carers drinking.

To find out more, visit alcohol-focus-scotland.org.uk



Carolina House Trust (CHT)

Caroline House Trust offers family-based care to children and young people across Scotland. Founded in Dundee in 1815, CHS is one of the oldest children's charities. While our aim of "providing safe and nurturing homes for children and young people to meet their potential" remains steadfast, we continue to develop therapeutic methods of practice.

We provide Fostering & Continuing Care and Supported Care by recruiting, supervising and supporting foster carers, and host families, who support separated children or unaccompanied asylum-seeking children settling into life in Scotland while they await the outcome of the asylum process.

Our community and their families meet regularly for community events, and this year, we were rated as 'very good' by the Care Inspectorate for the quality of support we offer. Our commitment to being a growth mindset organisation is noted for the learning, continuous improvement and positive outcomes for our young people.

To find out more, visit carolinahoustrust.org.uk



Little Bugs Outdoor Nurseries

Established by former primary teacher Louise Licznarski, Little Bugs Outdoor Nurseries are located at Fordell Firs, near Dunfermline, and Abercorn on the Hopetoun Estate in South Queensferry. These nurseries, operating since 2021 and 2022 respectively, prioritise learning through play in nature, fostering child independence and embracing risky play for holistic child development and well-being.

Due to high demand for advisory services, our team, led by Louise, is spearheading the creation of a new association, The SOLA initiative, which aims to provide a platform for outdoor practitioners registered with the Care Inspectorate and Education Scotland, offering representation and a collective voice. Little Bugs advises external agencies and collaborates with private nurseries, local authorities, and government bodies, promoting outdoor learning and advocating for its benefits in early childhood education.

To find out more, visit littlebugs.co.uk



Parenting across Scotland

As a membership organisation working with members, partners and stakeholders, Parenting across Scotland brings the parenting voice to national and local policymakers and service providers. Our aim is to raise the profile of key issues facing parent-carers in Scotland and create improvements in policy and practice.

Our key policy priorities include child poverty, family support, children's rights, and leisure and play. Our quarterly newsletter brings together policy, practice and research news relating to parenting.

Our 2024 Parenting Evidence Review – written by The Lines Between – examines research on the views and perspectives of those in a parenting role in Scotland in 2023, and draws on research from more than 4,000 parents and carers from more than 26 local authority areas.

To find out more, visit parentingacrossscotland.org



Seedlings Children's Therapeutic Services

My name is Karen Sykes and I am an experienced Children's Therapist working within Edinburgh primary schools, supporting children and their families since 2015. My case load is hugely varied but I frequently work with the impacts of trauma, attachment difficulties, loss and neurodivergence.

My aim is to improve my young clients' wellbeing through relationally focussed, trauma-informed, play and art-based therapeutic interventions. I have found my clinical 'home' and professional passion working with young children in this way, and becoming an embedded part of school communities, and deepening my relationships within them over the years, has been central to my approach.

I also offer clinical and professional supervision to other therapists and non-therapists, and believe in bringing warmth, compassion and playfulness to my therapeutic and supervisory work.

To find out more, visit seedlingstherapy.co.uk



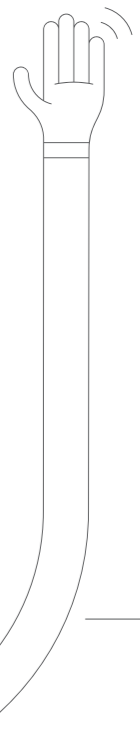
Tangerine Group

We are a group for parents of children with complex needs and their children. Our kids need support to take part in activities. We often sit beside them with a smile on our face but bored rigid at the lovely class instructor. Instead, we have events where the parent and the child are equals. No-one is better than anyone else. No-one is more important – and no-one is bored. The group is run by parents and the outcomes are made because there's a real need for them!

There's no top slicing of funding – every penny is spent on the group and we're spending valuable, quality time with our kids and our peers. Making memories and encouraging positive memories to build on for the future. And our kids get to make positive and fruitful memories with their families and peers.

I also offer clinical and professional supervision to other therapists and non-therapists, and believe in bringing warmth, compassion and playfulness to my therapeutic and supervisory work.

To find out more about Children in Scotland's member community, visit childreninScotland.org.uk/membership



Upcoming Children in Scotland events and learning opportunities

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 needs of practitioners across a range of disciplines



Sep 10 Understanding Pathological Demand Avoidance (PDA)

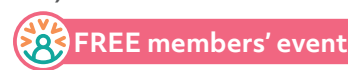
Ruth Fidler | Tuesday 10 September, 10am-12pm

This webinar will help you understand the distinct behaviour profile associated with Pathological Demand Avoidance (PDA). £40 members / £55 non-members.

Sep 12 Embedding children and young people's voices in your organisation

Children in Scotland (David Mackay) | Thursday 12 September, 10am-11.30am

Understand the rationale and benefits of embedding children and young people's voices. FREE members' event / £15 non-members.



Sep 19 Children's Rights and the incorporation of the UNCRC

Children in Scotland | Thursday 19 September, 10am-12pm

Learn about children's rights, key articles of the UNCRC and how the UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024 supports best practice in the workplace. £40 members / £55 non-members.

Sep 24 Building resilience: empowering yourself and supporting young people

Jan Montgomery | Tuesday 24 September, 2pm-4pm

Through building resilience, professionals can support their own wellbeing and combat burnout, compassion fatigue and vicarious trauma. £40 members / £55 non-members.

Oct 3 Child Protection Lead

Barnardo's | Thursday 3 October, 10am-3pm

Overview of child protection lead roles and responsibilities in Scotland. For those who oversee a team working with children and young people. £89 members / £99 non-members.

Oct 8 Delay or deficit? Assessing children's development after lockdown

Child Development Series

Jeanne McLaughlin | Tuesday 8 October, 10am-12pm

Gain confidence in recognising whether a child's development is delayed or needs further assessment through exploring current research. £60 / £90: buy 1 get 1 50% off / £120: buy 2 get 1 free.

Oct 30 Empowering children: executive function skills to thrive in a dynamic world

Child Development Series

Nicola McAllister | Wednesday 30 October, 10am-12pm

Learn to create experiences and interactions to strengthen children and young people's executive functions. Suitable for all ages and needs. £60 / £90: buy 1 get 1 50% off / £120: buy 2 get 1 free.

Oct 31 Right to be Heard (UNCRC Article 12) for Local Authority members

Children in Scotland | Tuesday 31 October, 10am-11.30am

Get to know Article 12, which sets out the right for children to be listened to, and what this means for local authorities.

