

LINKING LEARNING FROM OUR PILOT LOCAL PROJECTS TO DO THE RIGHT THING NATIONAL PRIORITY ACTIONS

The publication **Do the Right Thing** which lends its name to this Children's Parliament initiative was a statement of the Scottish Government's intent to improve implementation of the UNCRC in Scotland. A total of 21 priority action points were identified in Do the Right Thing following a consultation with agencies working with children and young people.

Do the Right Thing is available on the Scottish Government website here: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2009/08/27111754/0>

The purpose of our local projects was to promote awareness of children's human rights and the UNCRC, consider what UNCRC implementation looks and feels like locally and identify the challenges of UNCRC implementation in the day-to-day experience of family, community and school life. We are keen to encourage local partners to consider the meaning of national commitments, and for Scottish Government and other key bodies charged with UNCRC implementation to learn from local experiences.

From our delivery of the Do the Right Thing Local Projects we have learned more about a number of *general issues* which impact on UNCRC awareness and implementation and can also identify issues which relate to a number of the *specific action points* which Do the Right Thing identifies.

In general terms through our work with children, parents and professionals we have learned that:

- **There is a lack of awareness of children's human rights and the UNCRC**

This is a national issue which has been identified by the UN Committee which reviews implementation of the UNCRC in the UK. In terms of our local projects a majority of the children engaged in this pilot programme had not heard of the UNCRC nor were they able to identify what 'children's rights' might mean to them. Some parents had heard of children's rights but for the most part did not know how they related to their child's life at home, at school or in the community. Professional colleagues knew of the UNCRC and indicated they would welcome more opportunities to reflect on how children's human rights influence major public policy or interface with their day to day practice.

- **We need to make learning about rights holistic, cross curricular and relevant to the life of the child in Scotland**

Scotland faces a national challenge in the context of Curriculum for Excellence to make learning about human rights a cross curricular, relevant area. In these local projects, where children reported they have had some input to raise awareness of rights this appears to have been delivered in limited packages or one-off projects which do not necessarily relate to their lives as children in Scotland today, at school, in family life or in the community. For some, children's rights have been framed in learning about children in dire circumstances in countries affected by drought, famine, natural disaster and war.

- **The view that 'rights come only with responsibilities' remains problematic**

In some discussion there is a continued emphasis on the message that 'rights come with responsibilities'; made explicit in relation to children with the message that 'you don't have rights until you understand and are able to deliver on your responsibilities'; this is often interpreted as meaning if you are a naughty or undeserving child your rights are restrained in some way. To be clear, Children's Parliament facilitators have emphasised our interest in the social responsibilities that we all share (implicit in ideas of human dignity which we sought to promote) but we remain concerned that children may be encouraged to think that *anyone's* human rights are conditional. Our sense is that where rights are linked overtly to responsibilities we miss an opportunity to engage all children in an understanding that rights protect them, they promote their participation and they assure that services are made available to them. Where adults retain control over who bears rights and who does not children cannot learn the value of human rights and human dignity.

In terms of the specific action points raised in Do the Right Thing we have been able to identify learning and useful insights with regard to 7 of the key Do the Right Thing areas as follows.

DO THE RIGHT THING ACTION AREA 3: Promotion and awareness raising of UNCRC; including training of professionals who work with children

What did we learn from participants?	What needs to happen?
<p>As stated earlier there is a lack of awareness of children's human rights and the UNCRC amongst children and young people. Beyond general awareness there is also a lack of understanding about what the UNCRC means to children's lives here in Scotland and how the Convention might inform relationships with children in the context of services and family and community life.</p> <p>There have been difficulties in attracting participants to training in one of our project localities; this reminds us that professional colleagues are often busy and might not necessarily see the relevance/usefulness of CPD opportunities in this area.</p> <p>Even when professional participants are aware of the UNCRC or children's rights it appears we could do more to support them to apply these explicitly to their day to day practice.</p> <p>Meetings with parents highlighted that parents have not received information about the UNCRC and so are unsure what it might mean to family life.</p>	<p>Do the Right Thing has identified a number of actions which our experience tells us remain important. In particular CP would like to develop a role in extending our involvement in training on these issues which is creative, inclusive and participative.</p> <p>Our experience tells us that where professional CPD packages are linked to work with children, young people and parents too then the work is more usefully contextualised in the day to day lives of children's lives and professional practice.</p> <p>Our experience also tells us that Do the Right Thing is right to promote understanding and awareness at the local level.</p> <p>We have learned that there is a need for material and opportunities for learning for parents – while this project has not enabled us to develop a successful model for that work <i>yet</i> we have engaged successfully with some parents (here and in other work see http://www.childrensparliament.org.uk/family) and so we are keen to progress our thinking on this and come back to parents' learning needs in the near future.</p> <p>The challenge comes when we consider what Do the Right Thing describes as awareness raising and training which is "adequate and systematic". Our local projects have only begun to engage colleagues, children and parents in conversations about the meaning of children's human rights – where learning is facilitated by external providers it appears that local champions need to be in place to extend, deepen and sustain the commitment to promoting relationships and delivering services which are respectful of the rights of the child.</p>

DO THE RIGHT THING ACTION AREA 6: Advocacy services for children and young people

What did we learn from participants?	What needs to happen?
<p>While the Government action is concerned with advocacy services the concern of the UN Committee was on the broader issue of the principle of respect for the views of the child. This was raised as an issue across the Do the Right Thing Local projects.</p> <p>Some parents reported that schools need to do more to support pupil voice; experiences of some pupil councils are that they meet irregularly and do not attend to important issues. These issues were also identified in recent research here in Scotland¹.</p> <p>In professional workshops participants raised concerns that children and young people might not know what to do or where to go when they feel professionals or services are failing to respect their views, leading to frustration and alienation.</p> <p>Children and young people report that adult behaviour can be disrespectful or aggressive. They report that adults shout, they can be impatient and fail to care for them. Adults can behave in these ways in the context of home, community and school/service settings and this can be a daily occurrence. We are mindful of the response that might come from some adults hearing such claims, this is not an attack, nor are we naive or failing to recognise that parenting and work with children can be stressful and demanding <i>but</i> behaviours that would not be tolerated by an adult or colleague should not be acceptable in a relationship with a child.</p>	<p>We need to be better at enabling children's voices to be heard – whether that be in a formal advocacy type provision or in day to day service contexts. From our experience in our local projects we have learned that before considering what 'advocacy' might mean all professionals need to be part of learning about children's human rights and the idea of human dignity - and be able to relate that to their day to day interactions with children.</p> <p>Our local projects have also confirmed that the child's best advocate can be themselves, their friends or peers, their parent or carer. This means that all children and young people, and the adults who care for them, need opportunities to learn the skills, values and behaviours which the confident individual, successful learner, effective contributor and responsible citizen need. Such learning takes place across CP programmes and we are committed to continuing our commitment to engage positively with schools, families and communities to promote the voice of the child.</p> <p>In terms of negative adult behaviour which quashes the voice of the child – whether that be perpetrated by the professional person, parent or community member – we want to be part of a culture change which allows adults to challenge others, to be part of a society in which we are all guardians of children's wellbeing and participation.</p>

¹ Having a Say at School' reports at <http://www.havingasayatschool.org.uk/project.html>

DO THE RIGHT THING ACTION AREA 7: Participation of children and young people in schools

What did we learn from participants?	What needs to happen?
<p>In their discussion of what human dignity means to them children and young people identified that their sense of human dignity was undermined by 'not having my say'.</p> <p>As reported above parents were sceptical about the nature and quality of some pupil participation and influence at school.</p> <p>Children also report few instances where they engage meaningfully in reflecting on and directing the experience of school.</p>	<p>Children and young people need to be able to talk about teaching and learning. This needs to happen through formalised routes, such the Pupil Council, but it also needs to engage every child in discussing and planning their own learning as well as collective opportunities to meaningfully direct the experience of school.</p> <p>These local Do the Right Thing Local Projects have enabled us to work across whole school populations in the Primary sector and whole year groups in larger Secondary Schools – we are keen to develop this work and engage strategically with teaching colleagues and school management in exploring how an exploration of human rights, ideas of human dignity and their interface with participation in the school environment can bring about change in Scotland's schools.</p> <p>In addition to the work of this Do the Right Thing Local Project the Children's Parliament has conducted other work which helps schools to think about what meaningful participation might mean. In the work rights at school children considered what a school would be like if it reflected a commitment to children's human rights. Go here for more: http://www.childrensparliament.org.uk/schools/childrens-rights</p> <p>In work commissioned as part of the McCormac Review of Teacher Employment we have been speaking to children and young people about what quality and effective learning mean to learners, the kinds of relationships learners and teachers need and the skills and personal qualities required for teaching in the context of Curriculum for Excellence. Due to be published autumn 2011 go here for more: http://www.childrensparliament.org.uk/schools/teachers-review</p>

DO THE RIGHT THING ACTION AREA 9: Promoting positive forms of parenting

What did we learn from participants?	What needs to happen?
<p>While the Government action is concerned with 'promoting positive forms of parenting' the concern of the UN Committee was on the broader issue of 'positive child-rearing'; this perhaps suggests a broader societal or community responsibility toward children's wellbeing.</p> <p>Across adult and children's engagement in our Do the Right Thing local projects there was agreement that many of the essential needs a child has are those that must be met in the home.</p> <p>Children and professional participants were particularly aware of the importance of pregnancy and early years' experiences. Professionals were particularly keen to stress that when there is a failure to nurture and love children there are lifelong consequences; these concerns were perhaps the most urgent for many professionals engaged in the workshop programme.</p> <p>This particular action point is also concerned with 'non-violent forms of discipline'. In their discussions of what human dignity means to them children and young people were clear that being shouted at, violence and abuse, arguments and fights undermined their human dignity. They also extended this discussion into the harm that is done to children by having adults who are drunk around you, being left out and ignored, lied to and being shouted at.</p> <p>As stated above this work has also confirmed that parents know little about the UNCRC and what it means to family life. Parents did however recognise in their conversations with CP staff that this programme, with its focus on human rights and human dignity supports children to learn about emotional wellbeing.</p>	<p>There is limited literature on the interface between children's rights and family life. We do not know if parents, carers and children find the concept of children's rights helpful or not in consideration of their family life. We do not know enough about parents' and carers' thoughts or experiences on the practical implications of raising children in a manner which is conscious and supportive of their rights. At the Children's Parliament we conclude that we would benefit from knowing more about whether a respect for children's rights in the family environment simply equates with 'good parenting' or whether a respect for rights necessarily impacts on styles of parenting.</p> <p>The Children's Parliament would like to develop direct work with parents, in the context of whole community approaches, which involve further considerations of these issues.</p> <p>The Children's Parliament has previously piloted some work with families with the title the wee democracy project. In that work families reported that talking about rights at home (through our creative and inclusive approaches) improved communication, helped deal with family pressures and encouraged them to spend more time together. There is more about this work here: http://www.childrensparliament.org.uk/family</p> <p>Many of the needs children have in the early years have been discussed by children in another CP project. Find out more about the best start in life here: http://www.childrensparliament.org.uk/consultations/early-years</p>

DO THE RIGHT THING ACTION AREA 11: Improve outcomes for looked after children

What did we learn from participants?	What needs to happen?
<p>One aspect of the Government's intention to act in this area is to address stigma and discrimination against looked after children. This issue was confirmed as a problem in our professional workshops where the view was that looked after children can be labelled as troublesome and expectations of them in terms of educational attainment or behaviour can be low. There were concerns that all the agencies in a child's life might not be 'joined up' enough in order to ensure a coherent and positive approach to the child.</p> <p>Across professional sessions there was recognition that this vulnerable cohort of children and young people require particular attention in the promotion of awareness of their needs and attention to the experience of rights and human dignity.</p>	<p>Children who are looked after would benefit from greater awareness of their rights and opportunities to experience learning about rights and human dignity.</p> <p>Professionals in contact with looked after children as well as kinship carers and foster carers should be able to access information and learning about children's human rights and human dignity.</p> <p>Future Children's Parliament work, building on the Do the Right Thing Local Projects, could usefully prioritise contacts and work with these groups. Nationally, Children's Parliament would be pleased to work with others to promote a coherent approach to these issues.</p>

DO THE RIGHT THING ACTION AREA 16: Support delivery of the Curriculum for Excellence health and wellbeing experiences and outcomes

What did we learn from participants?	What needs to happen?
<p>Professional participants found it useful when discussion in their workshops linked notions of rights and human dignity with their understanding of Curriculum for Excellence, GIRFEC and other relevant policy matters. In this sense the discussion framed by the Children's Parliament material gave context and meaning to both.</p> <p>There was recognition in discussion with parents that this pilot initiative fits well with what schools have communicated they are doing in terms of Curriculum for Excellence in that it encourages children to consider citizenship and promotes discussion about health and wellbeing; particularly emotional health and wellbeing.</p> <p>In one discussion with parents they identified that work like this pilot initiative will help build relationships between children and participating adults, and encourage children to express views and adults to listen to them.</p> <p>For some teachers there are concerns about skills and professional boundaries when it comes to discussing health and wellbeing related issues with a child. This is recognised in the Scottish Government Do the Right Thing report. In the context of this Local Project work teachers expressed uncertainties about when it is important to respect the choice of the child to speak with a chosen adult and when matters need to be referred on to someone perceived to be more equipped to respond to 'health and wellbeing' issues (this does not relate to child protection issues where participants were aware of practices and procedures).</p>	<p>In this work the Children's Parliament has explicitly connected awareness raising and learning about children's human rights to Curriculum for Excellence and other key policy drivers and frameworks including GIRFEC. We would intend to do so in future work and encourage others to do so too. An observation would be that in terms of implementing Curriculum for Excellence and GIRFEC more explicit links should be made to the values and principles which we have discussed in these Do the Right Thing Local Projects.</p> <p>This work has confirmed that learning about rights is best undertaken when it recognises that rights are experienced (or not) in the context of relationships. In this sense Curriculum for Excellence can only bring about transformational change when it seeks to inform and influence adult/child relationships.</p> <p>In other CP work on rights at school children considered what a school would be like if it reflected a commitment to children's human rights. In such a school children said they would have someone to talk to about their feelings, this would be confidential and you wouldn't get into trouble for what you say. Go here for more: http://www.childrensparliament.org.uk/schools/childrens-rights</p> <p>In work commissioned as part of the McCormac Review of Teacher Employment we have been speaking to children and young people about what quality and effective learning mean to learners in the context of Curriculum for Excellence. Due to be published autumn 2011 go here for more: http://www.childrensparliament.org.uk/schools/teachers-review</p>

DO THE RIGHT THING ACTION AREA 18: Play

What did we learn from participants?	What needs to happen?
<p>In their Do the Right Thing Local Project workshops children placed great value on play and friendships. In some groups where Article 31 of the UNCRC was identified by children there was great delight in seeing the importance the Convention gives to play.</p>	<p>Further awareness raising and training on children's human rights and the UNCRC should include discussion of play as a fundamental right and support adults to consider their role in creating places and spaces for play. Discussing play with children in their workshops can also support their understanding of play as a right and help them consider how families, schools and communities can be encouraged to think about how they facilitate play opportunities.</p> <p>The Children's Parliament has conducted other work on the importance of play and the role of adults as facilitators.</p> <p>Go here for more: http://www.childrensparliament.org.uk/consultations/right-to-play</p>