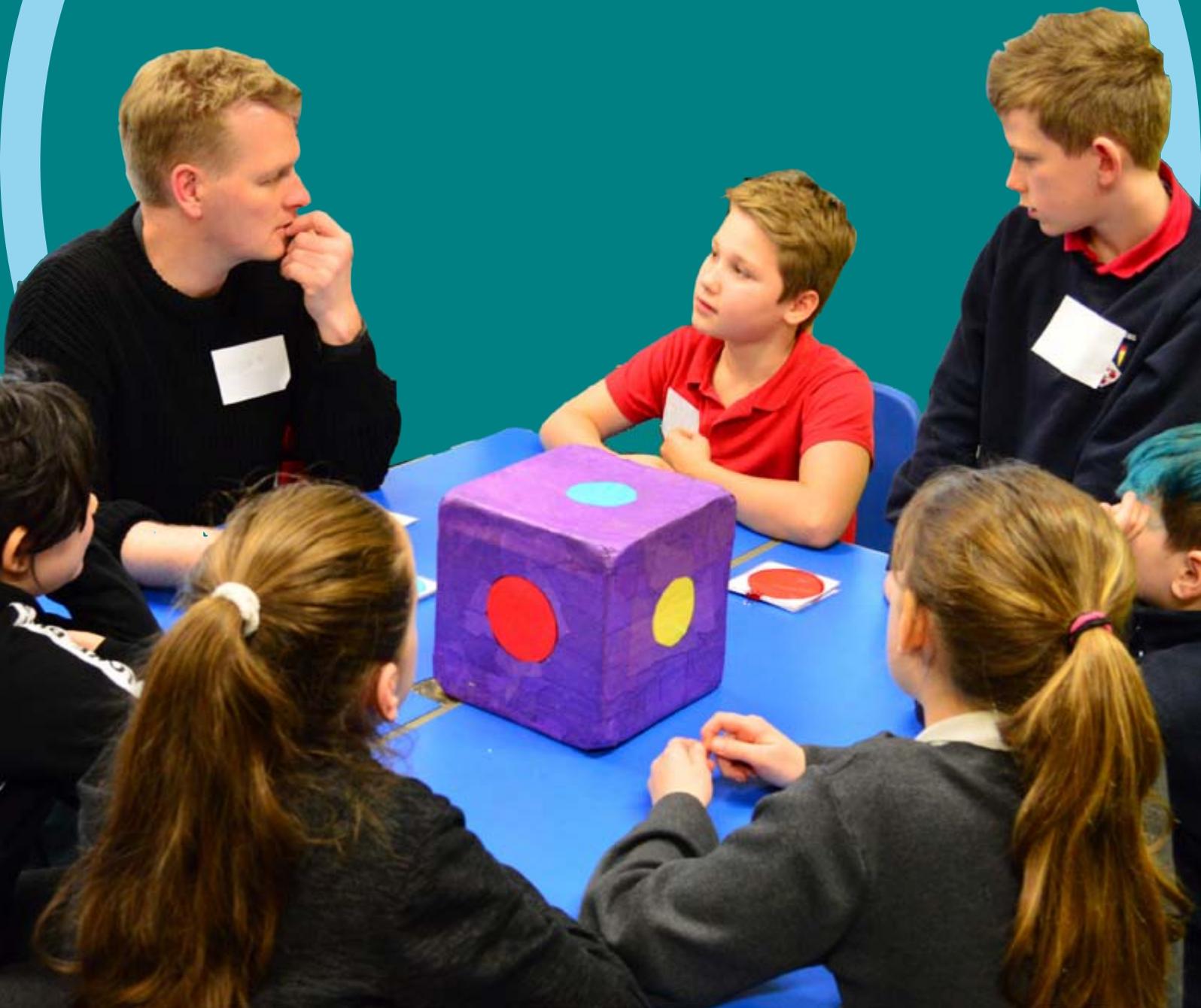


What kind of Scotland?

Children influencing Scotland's future





Contents

INTRODUCTION 5

HOME 6

SCHOOL + LEARNING 13

COMMUNITY 24

SCOTLAND AND ITS PLACE
IN THE WORLD 29

CONCLUSION: WHAT KIND
OF SCOTLAND? 37

 **Children's
Parliament**
giving ideas a voice

info@childrensparliament.org.uk

www.childrensparliament.org.uk

 @creative_voices

Scottish Charity 026427

© Children's Parliament 2017

Image: Human Dignometer *Imagining Aberdeen* (2016)

“When adults yell and use their power to make you feel embarrassed or bad, that’s not supportive. You don’t want to play when that happens.”

MCP, Active Children

Foreword

Children’s Parliament stands as a shining example of how to deliver real change for children. Over the last 21 years it has helped breathe life into the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and changed the way we do things in Scotland. It has placed children at the heart of its work and ensured they are seen not just as passive objects of care and charity – but as human beings with a distinct set of rights.

The recognition that children should grow up in an environment of happiness, love and understanding sits at the heart of our commitment to them, and those values flow through this important report. The UNCRC covers all aspects of children’s rights and this report gives focus to those rights in the places that matter most to children: home, school and community, as well as looking at Scotland and its place in the wider world. It also importantly asks, what kind of Scotland do we want?

Scotland is fortunate to have a rich and vibrant civil society which does amazing work with and for children and young people. Their views and experience must inform the decisions we make today if we truly want to make a better Scotland for tomorrow.

Bruce Adamson
Children & Young People’s Commissioner Scotland

Introduction

Children’s Parliament is celebrating its 21st birthday. Over the years, we have developed an approach where children explore their rights to be healthy, happy and safe across the domains of home, school and community.

As we look back on our achievements, and continue to deliver inclusive and creative programmes of work, we hear consistent and challenging messages from children about their experiences of growing up; some of these experiences reflect their right to be born into and grow up in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding, but some do not.

In this report children define the kind of Scotland they want to live in, a Scotland that we adult duty bearers have a responsibility to make real.

Cathy McCulloch & Colin Morrison
Co-founders, Children’s Parliament

Home

Implementing the rights of the child means paying attention to family life.

The idea and realisation of children's human rights in the family environment is sometimes resisted. This can be portrayed as an effort to protect the home environment as something special, something private, something small and domestic. Eleanor Roosevelt challenged that idea with this:

"Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home - so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world. Yet they are the world of the individual person. the neighborhood he lives in; the school or college he attends Such are the places where every man, woman, and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere."

There is a view that the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is anti-family, but this is not true. In fact, the UNCRC views the family as:

"the fundamental group in society and the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members...particularly children" and recognises that "the child, for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality, should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding".

Home: what matters most to children?

For children, home life is what matters most. When we talk to children about being healthy, happy and safe at home they identify all the small acts of care and kindness that mean so much – a cuddle, quiet time, being read to. A child's love for, and devotion to, their parents is something quite special. A review of Children's Parliament's work tells us that what matters most to children is:

Love

Whenever we talk to children about their needs and their rights we find children's conversations revolve around love. If there is a bottom line, a key message, this is it: children need to be loved. Children know when they are loved – it is the bond they have, the protection they need and the basis for the confidence, agency and resilience they need to grow and flourish and manage adverse childhood experiences.

"I believe that people don't have to ask for love."

MCP, *Imagining Aberdeen*

When adults at home understand their responsibilities

Children identify that an adult at home has these responsibilities:

- to keep children safe and healthy
- to help children learn and grow
- to be positive about, and respectful of, children
- to provide a loving and caring home for their children
- children understand they should help at home, but they need adults at home to be able to look after them.

Home: things that need to change

From Children's Parliament's body of work, consistent messages emerge about what undermines the realisation of rights in the home environment. Over our 21 years children have talked with us about:

Poverty

Children identify poverty as the most important barrier to a good life. Some say they worry that their family does not have enough money to buy what they need. Poverty affects children day to day, in terms of practical things like having enough food to eat, a house that is warm and has the necessities of life, but also because worrying about money is stressful for adults. Children see, hear and feel this worry and stress. Children say that the cost of things at school can get in the way of their full participation in learning. In Scotland today, some children rely on the food they get at breakfast club or school lunch, and when they go home the best option is to go to bed to stay warm.

When your house isn't suitable

Children talk about living in accommodation that is too small for their family. Children talk about sharing rooms with older or younger siblings, or not having access to a garden when there are little children in the house; this matters because proximity to safe outdoor play has an impact on efforts to tackle inactivity and childhood obesity. Children can worry that a home is just temporary, and that they might have to move again, lose friends or have to change school.

Being hit

Children understand why there are rules about behaviour at home. They understand that adults can be annoyed or upset when a child doesn't do as they are told, or breaks a rule, but they do not think that it is okay for adults to hit them.

Not enough freedom

Sometimes children feel that adults can be overly worried about them, and then restrict the freedom they need to go out to play or to meet friends. Children would welcome more time to be on their own or with friends to play, explore and have fun without direct adult supervision. However, we also hear from some children that they only feel safe when they are with or being supervised by an adult; these children have become worried about being in the world unaccompanied by an adult.

When someone dies you need help and support

When children experience the loss of a loved one it impacts upon them in a profound way. Many children come to terms with this through a process of grieving, and

with support from family, school and friends. Sometimes children need more help, particularly when the person who has died is very close to them such as a parent or main carer. This help may not always be available when the child needs it.

Unhappy parents

Children feel worried and distressed when there is arguing at home. Children talk about being in a home environment where parents are 'stressed'. They are fearful of parents splitting up. When parents separate, there is a fear of losing contact with a parent. Sometimes this happens because of family breakdown.

Being around alcohol and adults drinking

Children identify that alcohol is connected to arguing and violence at home. Across our work children tell us that they do not like to be around adults when they drink, and they want adults to drink less.

When being in care isn't as good as it should be

Children who are looked after want to be seen and understood as individuals, with all their talents, ambitions and experiences, not just as a 'child in care'. When they are looked after, children may not know their rights or what their rights mean in day-to-day practice. Children say that getting to know them as individuals is important, this means spending time with them and having some consistency in who the professional people are who engage with them. Children who are looked after say they experience many changes of carers, teachers and social workers and this undermines trust and communication.

When trust is built with a child who is looked after, this can help a child understand their story and what brings them to the point in life where they are looked after. Children tell us that a particular problem is when teachers do not know a child is looked after or do not understand that home-life might mean the child can be upset, worried or stressed; all of these things will affect how the child learns. Looked after children can find the idea of moving up to secondary school particularly daunting and may need additional support from both primary and secondary school around this transition. Finally, although it helps when professional people like teachers understand that a child is looked after, children want their privacy to be respected and want to be involved in deciding who knows what about them, especially when they know that some adults can judge a child simply because they are looked after.

Home: what kind of Scotland do children want and need?

Children enjoy talking about family life. They understand that bringing up a family and providing what they need – emotional and practical things – can be both lots of fun and difficult for parents and carers. Children's wellbeing at home would be enhanced by family environments where they are loved and feel safe, where families do not worry about having enough money to get by, where they live in neighbourhoods where people are kind. To achieve such an outcome, children want family life, for them and for the generations of children to come, to be characterised by the following things:

A family where basic needs are met

At the heart of children's understanding of wellbeing is the family and life at home. Children need love, to be safe and to have basic needs of a home, a good diet, enough sleep, to play.

The early years

We often ask children to think about what the idea of a 'best start' means. The overwhelming emphasis from children is that from pregnancy through to 8 years old children need love and care, safety and protection. From the perspective of the child:

- When they are pregnant, Mums need to be careful and feel safe, they need to have confidence and look forward to having their baby. First time Mums need help and support. Midwives are really important. Mums need to have a family around them. They shouldn't drink alcohol or smoke or take drugs.
- Babies need special care and a safe home, they need people to play with them. For babies to be healthy and have strong bones and teeth they might need visits from people like health visitors. They need to be warm and fed and have their nappies changed. They need their Mum and Dad and their Grandparents.
- Toddlers need to be helped with learning how to talk and walk. They need watched 24/7. They still need healthy food. They need to be able to play and to start to make friends. They might need day care. They need to learn the difference between right and wrong.
- By the age of 5 children need their own hobbies and interests, toys and friends. They need a good school. They need lots of attention from their family. They need respect. They need to eat breakfast, lunch, dinner and supper.
- By the age of 8, children need to try new foods, they need exercise and to be healthy. They need to be with their family and they should be able to express what they would like to do. They need friends, fun and freedom. They need brothers and sisters that are nice to them. They like to have games and technology.

"Be caring in your heart."

MCP, Together We Can Fix It

"Role models are important. Everyone needs someone to follow and inspire them."

MCP, Me + Us

The house you need

Children want every family to have a home that is big enough as children grow, that has access to a place to play, where children are not woken up by noisy neighbours.

Being connected to your Dad

For children who do not live with their Dad, or who only live with Dad some of the time, there is often a sense of missing him and wanting him to be more present in their lives. Where parents are having a difficult time getting on, more help is needed so that there is a focus on supporting the child to maintain relationships with both parents.

Improving the experience of being in foster care

Children say that foster care can be improved by helping children understand why they are in care, by keeping siblings together, by introducing children and foster carers before being placed, by allowing and helping children to keep in touch with their birth family and friends and by ensuring that their voices are heard when decisions are being made about their placements. Children and foster carers need to build positive relationships based on trust and respect. Children want to feel like they belong and are loved in their foster families. Foster carers should get training that helps them be the best they can be.

Children who are looked after at home need more help and support and they want adults to understand that they are not a homogenous group. They understand that the needs of children who are looked after at home are different than other looked after children. Children might need additional support from services so that they can participate in groups and other opportunities. Children themselves can recognise that they need additional support, they understand that parents and carers at home might not be able to provide what they need. Children want to make sure that the help provided does not punish parents for not coping, because this makes it difficult for children to ask for or accept help. It is important that there is excellent communication between all the professionals and agencies who are working with children, parents and carers to ensure that there are no gaps in provision.

Home

Key messages

In our 21st birthday year, a review and refresh of our work tells us that:

- When we explore the domains of home, school and community with children it is clear that the home environment is what matters most, home is the place where they identify they most need to feel happy and safe.
- When agencies work with children and families, early intervention is a professional and moral responsibility; we understand the markers of future alienation, and we are not labelling children by intervening and supporting them early, rather we are taking active steps to ensure their freedom from the burden of inequality and exclusion.
- Children are very aware of the worry and stress that a parent might experience. They worry too. Children want their parents and carers to get help when they really need it.
- Emotional wellbeing is at the heart of realising rights; when children feel positive about themselves, their abilities and futures, they are more likely to engage positively with the world around them. They are also more likely to be aware of their emotions and manage them, cope with uncertainty and recover from adversity. When the child is met with neglect or violence, or any of the other negative experiences which children identify, this is not 'just adults behaving badly', these acts are infringements of rights.

“It is important that looked after children think they are loved. Even if they are in care, they all have the right to be loved.”

MCP, Seen + Heard Fife

“When children get shown respect and kindness, it makes you feel happier and have a happier day. It makes you feel like a normal human being, rather than like a wee person with no worth.”

MCP, CP Investigates Bullying

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

MCP, A Teaching Workforce for Scotland

School + Learning



Image: Embark: Routes to Reading (2014)

Articles 28 and 29 of the UNCRC describe the child’s right to an education as being concerned with “The development of the child’s personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential” and although we have fallen short of full incorporation of the UNCRC into Scots Law (children in various Children’s Parliament programmes and consultations have concluded that full incorporation is necessary) these articles and specifically this language is used in the Standard in Scotland’s Schools Act (2000). The right to an education is enshrined in Scots Law.

The law says that “an education authority shall have due regard, so far as is reasonably practicable, to the views (if there is a wish to express them) of the child or young person in decisions that significantly affect that child or young person, taking account of the child or young person’s age and maturity”. As adult duty bearers, those employed by public bodies, including professionals working in learning establishments, are obliged to make legal commitments real in practice.

The Government says that its ambition for Scotland’s education system is that it delivers excellence and equity. For Children’s Parliament, working with children and reflecting on what a school or learning experience is like when it is excellent and equal, means asking: Why do some children struggle at school? What would an excellent school be like? What would a school be like if everyone had the same opportunities and no-one was left behind?

School + Learning: what matters most to children

For the most part, most children like going to school. They are curious and interested in learning. Children flourish and learn in a school environment in which they say their rights are respected and promoted. In these learning spaces, children have identified this means their school is a place where:

Everyone is safe, cared for and included

For children who experience school in this way this means that adults and children show and feel mutual respect. It means that there is an understanding of every individual's needs and backgrounds. In this environment children say that teachers trust children. Importantly, lessons are interesting and teachers are 'firm, fun and fair'.

Children are free to learn

Being free to learn means being given responsibilities and a degree of independence to guide one's learning. It means there are times to be serious and to have fun. Children need access to the outdoors in the school day to explore and use the natural and built environment. Being free to learn also means that pupils with additional support needs like dyslexia, or a disability that affects learning, or who are behind in work get more attention.

Everyone is happy and healthy

In this school, children have a wide range of books and computers that are working. There is variety of choice of healthy, good, enjoyable food that is cooked in the school. Playgrounds are large, clean and safe; they have some soft surfaces and nice features - like ponds. Children also have someone they can talk to about their feelings, no-one else will find out, and children do not get into trouble for what they say.

Everyone has their say

In a school where there is a focus on excellence and equity, the school has a pupil booklet about children's human rights to give to every child in the school. The school has a suggestion box for ideas to improve the school and everyone comes together regularly to discuss the school community - everyone takes part including parents, the janitor, the cook, the teachers and the pupils. Pupils have their voices heard on topics like spending money and choosing books and games but importantly also have opportunities to share their views about teaching and learning. Teachers respect pupils and pupils respect teachers.

Everyone is important and special

A positive start to the day means everyone starts school with a chat and breakfast. Everyone's achievements are recognised, however small, and people find ways to encourage others. There are chill-out and time-out rooms and everyone has time to talk. Everyone concentrates on the positives. Worries and concerns are not swept under the carpet and children are encouraged to talk and to listen to one another.

The school environment is considered

Schools work best for children when the indoor and outdoor environment is warm, colourful, welcoming and there are opportunities across the school day to learn about how to protect and love our environment, locally and globally. Children have opportunities to share their views about how school space is used and to contribute to the look and layout of the internal and external environments.

School + Learning: things that need to change

From Children's Parliament's body of work, past and present, consistent messages emerge about what undermines learning and infringes on the realisation of rights in the school environment. Children talk with us about:

Shouting

In every discussion facilitated by Children's Parliament about life at school, children talk about adults shouting. It is identified as one of the fundamental things that undermine the child's human dignity. Of all the messages children have developed over the years though engagement with Children's Parliament programmes this one message remains consistent - adults must stop shouting at children.

Being labelled or having privacy disrespected

Children understand that we are equal but different. They are accepting and patient with diversity. But they feel excluded when the extra help they need is seen as a problem. They also do not want 'a need' to become a label that defines them. Sometimes being identified as having an 'additional support' need is a private thing, and children want to be able to decide who needs to know what, and when.

Distractions in the classroom

Children recognise that class mates can be distracting or disruptive. While patient on most occasions, when a classmate has a bad day or is upset, children do see disruptions to learning as a problem. Rather than punishment, however, they see the solution lying in more attention and more time for some children.

"It's important to let people know your experiences, good ones and bad ones."

MCP, Seen + Heard Fife

"Shouting doesn't help me learn."

MCP, A Teaching Workforce for Scotland

"We are taking our example from you." MCP, StreetsAhead Glasgow

Bullying

In their recent Concluding Observations on the UK's report to the UN Committee on implementation of the UNCRC, the Committee said that Government and public bodies must "intensify efforts to tackle bullying and violence" (Paragraph 49a).

Children report that bullying is usually addressed after it is uncovered as 'a problem', and seen as an issue for an individual or small group. The failure then is to deal with the matter strategically; this requires the time to explore the contexts, practices and mindsets of the place and people where the bullying happens. It seems that in response to bullying, we adult duty-bearers have individualised and trivialised it, we think that writing a policy will do the job, or we turn our heads so as not to see it. In Children's Parliament work which sought to identify what a rights-based approach to bullying would be like, children identified the need for adults to be available and able to listen to concerns, to dispense with investigation and punishment, and instead focus on fixing relationships. The children were focused on genuine prevention and early intervention and the need to focus in schools on the importance of relationships characterised by human dignity, empathy, kindness and trust.

'When you feel sad or down'

Children would not normally use the language of 'mental ill-health' or 'mental health problems' when they think about what gets in the way of learning and doing their best, but they do regularly identify feelings such as sadness, worrying or feeling down as barriers to participation and engagement at school. They report that sometimes adults do not notice, or they tell them to cheer up, or that things will be okay. Children want to be able to talk to someone in school about their feelings, and to be able to do that in confidence.

Punishment

Children want adults to stop using punishment as a way to manage behaviour. Many schools operate some version of Golden Time when children are 'rewarded' with time when they can play games or access an iPad. When behaviour is considered 'bad' this time is deducted and children are made to do 'work' as a punishment. Children view this as unfair or harsh, they do not think it changes behaviour as it is often the same children who are punished.

When there aren't enough resources, including adults to help

Children report that help is not always available when they need it in terms of support for learning or for other worries or concerns they have. Children generally report that teachers and PSAs/Learning Support staff are doing their best, but there simply aren't enough of them or they do not have enough time to give to individuals.

When things cost money

Activities or trips that cost money exclude some children from participation. Children who do not want others to know they cannot afford to take part then pretend they do not want to do something or they are simply not included because they do not bring in the money requested.

Things that get in the way of playing sports

Children say that some things impact negatively on their sporting opportunities: the cost of taking part, dependence on over-busy adults, gender stereotyping, lack of opportunities for children with disabilities, having fewer or different opportunities because they are young, and adults who shout and take the fun out of sport.

Homework that gets in the way of life outside school

Children have different views on homework – some like to do some, others don't like to do any. All children would agree that homework, to some extent, gets in the way of playing and free time they value. In some schools, children say that homework is too much, or that if they struggle with it there is no-one at home who can help. In these circumstances homework, or failure to complete it or bring it in to class, creates worry and problems for the child.

Adults not understanding, not listening

At the heart of a rights-based relationship is the adult who is listening. Listening, and finding the time to do so, facilitates an understanding of the child's views and experiences. Children say that adults in school can sometimes appear to be too busy to listen, too preoccupied with their own lives, or impatient. Children worry about getting a row if they are critical or unhappy about something.



"Children have opinions and they should not be overlooked just because of their age"

MCP

Image opposite: *Imagining Aberdeen Mural*, 2016

"Empathy changes how you see the world."

MCP, Me + Us

School + Learning: what kind of Scotland do children want and need?

Children's wellbeing at school and engagement with learning would be enhanced by a clear commitment to equity and getting the support they need. They need more chances to play and join clubs; teachers to listen to children; help with any problems or worries (especially bullying); learning about life, not just subjects; and everyone being praised and rewarded for doing well. To achieve such an outcome, children want learning and school, for them and for the generations of children to come, to be characterised by:

Teachers who love their job and love children

Children want and need their teachers to love what they do and the children they teach day in, day out. Children can tell when a teacher or other adult in school has these characteristics, and they will respond positively to those adults who express their joy and appreciation of children. If Scotland is to be the best place to go to school, a stated national aspiration, it needs to be the best place to be a teacher.

Increased confidence and capacity as learners

Children want to do their best when it comes to school and learning. Children's Parliament's work on attainment evidences that for many children in primary school there is a lack of confidence, skills and understanding when it comes to what being a 'successful learner' is. Viewing attainment and the poverty-related attainment gap as a human rights issue means addressing the cultural barriers to the child believing, and seeking to be successful, in learning. Work with teachers to increase understanding of the critical importance of helping children develop positive self-regard as a learner is essential. Work with parents and carers also needs to be done to raise the value of and importance of learning and increase understanding of what they can do to help their child. More needs to be done to build the learner or academic self-perception of the child and the classroom-based relationships which will address deeply embedded cultural barriers to learning.

"Sometimes you worry that you're not good enough. Your friends can help and encourage you. When you work together, it's better because you have someone to look after you and help you learn more."

MCP, Active Children

The same chances and opportunities for all children

Children want and need adults in school to understand their needs and be there for them to support learning and engagement in the full life of the school, as and when they need it. This is partly about an adult commitment to seeing learning and school from the child's viewpoint, but also a matter of appropriate resourcing, particularly for children with additional support for learning needs.

More fun, play and sports

Schools should be a place of fun. Children want to do more fun things, to play in the classroom. Children want adults to play with them more. In many Children's Parliament programmes children say that playing is the best thing about being a child. Play in the community can be restricted because of feeling or being unsafe in public places and adult worries can restrict outdoor play experiences which means play and fun activities at school become even more important.

Children want school playgrounds to be stimulating places where they can feel free. Every playground should be like a garden, with places to explore.

Children want more PE at school. PE at school is best when children have a say about what they are doing and when specialist PE teachers or coaches are involved. Children like additional after school, lunchtime and weekend sports at school as well as community-based opportunities. Children say that facilities in primary school need to be better. Children think that facilities in secondary schools are better because young people's interests are taken more seriously. On occasion children report being excluded from PE or games sessions in school as a punishment. This should not happen.

Adults who teach or coach sports should be kind, patient, calm, knowledgeable, experienced, and most importantly they should not shout at children taking part.

Children say that sports clubs provide opportunities to have great teaching or coaching and to play a sport competitively. Being part of a club can take an interest or skill further than playing at school can. Children enjoy the opportunity to participate in and to learn about new and different sports and sporting activities.

Opportunities to read for learning and for pleasure

Reading is important. Children value having a choice in what they read; they recognise that sometimes it is necessary to read an assigned book in school and that these experiences challenge them and introduce them to new ideas but their enjoyment of reading increases when they can select their own reading material. For many children, the biggest challenges when reading are noise and distractions from classmates, friends and family. They feel frustrated and unfocused when they cannot get on with their reading because of outside interference.

Children emphasise the importance of, and pleasure in, reading on their own, but they also enjoy being read to and sharing in the collective experience of hearing a story. Reading provides an opportunity for children to explore a vast array of feelings, make connections to characters' experiences and develop a sense of empathy. Children make connections between reading now and success in the future. They see reading as an essential life skill that impacts on their ability to do well in their education and to get a job when they are older. They also recognise that it is good to read now, because as adults they will read to their own children.

Having a say about what happens at school – individually and collectively

There has been discussion recently as part of the Education Governance Review, about accountability and governance arrangements for schools and education. For Children's Parliament, the problem is that discussion is often adult-oriented, top-down, rather than child/learner-centred. Children want to do well at school and thrive on opportunities to engage in learning that includes their views, helps them understand the purpose of what they do and the progress they are making. Children know they have a right to an education but there are not enough opportunities to talk about what the experience of learning and going to school should be like. Children tell us that they do not feel that they are engaged in planning or leading their learning enough. While they feel some sense of control in terms of doing work on their own, finishing it when they want to, or making a choice about which activity to do, they rarely report involvement in deciding on what they learn or how it is organised or facilitated. For some children learning can feel unchallenging or repetitive.

Other agencies have reported on formal structures such as pupil councils when it comes to learner participation and engagement and have highlighted that these often have limited scope and impact. Many of the children that engage with Children's Parliament are not the children who are engaged in these formal structures. What children tell us is that they want to be involved day-to-day, both individually and collectively, in the classroom and across school, on matters of teaching and learning. This means identifying what works well for them but it also means recognising what does not. Teachers need to be reflective practitioners, with the skills and confidence to be both supported and challenged by children.

Recognition of wider achievements

Children like it when wider achievements are also valued and recognised – such as doing well in sports or hobbies or community activities. Children report that the current manner in which these informal achievements are recognised is very much down to the individual teacher or school leader.

Make sure parents and carers are involved and on board with learning

Children like to see their parents involved in and celebrating their learning and achievements. But for some children, parent and carer connections with school are tenuous or only exist when there are 'problems'. At Children's Parliament, we seek to engage children living in areas of deprivation, or who may be one of the one in five children in Scotland's schools with an additional support need. We make significant efforts to engage parents, carers and family members in understanding their child's work with us and help to recognise and celebrate achievement. To make parental engagement work our experience tells us that it must:

- Start with an understanding that the parent may themselves have been failed by the education system.
- Be established early and be sustained across transitions.
- Start positively, so that a relationship is built where there is a shared understanding that we all want the best for the child.
- Be focused on fixing problems where they exist, and not on blaming.
- Use social media as well as paper information home in school-bags.
- Use celebrations and informal gatherings to have positive conversations.

In our work in schools we also see success where there is investment in professional staff who can form home-school links and where proactive, friendly, approachable staff meet and engage with parents at home and in the community where they can be supported to engage positively in school.

Be better at how we use technology in schools and for learning

Children say that technology is an important part of their lives and that it should be incorporated into more aspects of teaching and learning. The games children perceive as educational could be more like other games they play, with an emphasis on making them 'feel more fun'. Younger children like using technology with their parents or carers so that they can be supported in accessing technology; by the early years of secondary school children appreciate feeling trusted to go online on their own. Children want adults to help them navigate technology so they feel safe, confident and capable. With children using technology for fun and learning across school and home this area of learning is clearly one in which adults from school and home need to be connected.



The right to challenge infringements of rights in the school environment

A key aspect of children have their say about learning and life at school must be the access to redress when their rights are infringed. Children understand that a part of their right to have their say should mean the right to complain and have that taken seriously. The right to complain is also seen as a sign that the rights of the child are taken seriously. However, children worry about the repercussions of making a complaint at school. Children feel a complaint should be part of a process that addresses problems and finds solutions. They understand that not complaining can leave you feeling frustrated and have a negative effect on how you feel or get involved with things. In Children's Parliament work on these issues, children identify that an adult with responsibility to seek or hear a child's complaint must be trained and have an understanding of children's rights and how to communicate with respect for children. Children identify a range of matters they would like to have the opportunity and confidence to complain about – from personal experiences such as bullying or having something stolen, to wider experiences such as children in care not being treated well or those who need it not getting enough support at school. In discussing what can go wrong in school, children see value in early intervention, putting things in place to solve problems without having to complain – they like peer mediation, working together to find solutions, adults who step in and help resolve things quickly and the opportunity to campaign with other children.

Children are more likely to complain if they have the confidence and skills, know where to go or who to speak to, have trust the person will listen and take it seriously, and know that something will be done about it.

School + Learning Key messages

In our 21st birthday year, a review and refresh of our work tells us that:

- Learning happens when children are happy and safe.
- Building the child's positive connections with school and learning are protective.
- When it comes to improving educational outcomes for children the empathic teacher is the key – it is all about relationships.
- A school concerned with wellbeing is a school focused on relationships.
- The Scottish Government produced a template for the 'Common Core of Skills, Knowledge and Understanding and Values for the "Children's Workforce" In Scotland' published in 2012 (www.gov.scot/Publications/2012/06/5565). This applies to teachers and all staff working in the school environment. The work has been done and this now needs to be properly resourced and implemented as a contribution to achieving our ambitions for Scotland and our children.

“Our views are important, we see the world in an imaginative and positive way. We need to be valued for what we can offer the world now as children, and not just as citizens to be.”

MCP, Mapping the Future

Community

Children's lives are lived locally; in many ways the spaces they occupy are small scale, their neighbourhood is their habitat. Children probably go to a school nearby, they walk or scooter about, they use local shops or go to local parks or clubs and activities. For some children, freedom within this space is limited by adult worries or restrictions, or perhaps by barriers to inclusion, faced most powerfully by children with disabilities. Children are also important users of public services and this section of the report also considers how they engage with services and the practitioners who deliver them.

Community: what matters most to children

Children know a lot about their communities, this is reflected in past and current Children's Parliament programmes. As they grow into middle childhood and early adolescence children are more able to explore the world outside the family, in the streets and neighbourhoods where they see and feel how their communities really are. A review of Children's Parliament's work, refreshed by recent workshops with children, tells us that children like:

To be involved, to talk about real issues

Children have the capacity and honesty to identify and reflect on what is good about their community and on community problems. Children do not feel defined by the challenges their communities face and with appropriate approaches and time they balance concerns with optimism and aspiration. When children articulate their views on their community – and then share these with adults – the adults are often pleasantly surprised by the commonality that exists.

Opportunities to get involved in sports and clubs

For children, being involved in local sports and clubs is fun; taking part with friends is important. Children rely on adults in their family to support their sporting activities; they want adults to play sports with them, to take part and to have fun too. Great sporting opportunities for children are about friendship, learning, excitement, challenge, achievement and being fit and healthy. However, girls report that as they grow, the opportunities for them are more restricted than they are for boys.

Polite and helpful people make a good community

Being out and about in their community means that children come across people of all ages – they like it when their local shopkeeper is funny, when their lollipop person always has a smile, when their neighbour stops and has a chat about a game they are playing. When children talk with us about their community they talk about the built environment and nature, but they also talk a lot about community being the people they live alongside. When people are kind this makes for a better place to live.

Community: things that need to change

Consistent messages continue to emerge from children about what undermines or infringes the realisation of their rights in their community. Children talk with us about:

Poverty

As already stated in discussing the home environment, children identify poverty as the most significant barrier to a good life. Children recognise when they live in a community where poverty affects a lot of children and their families. Children talk about families not having enough to eat, of children being hungry in Scotland in 2017.

Being around alcohol

Across our programmes and activities children are unanimous and explicit that violence in the community (and at home) is driven by alcohol use. Children are exposed to alcohol use in public places – when they pass adults who are inebriated outside a pub on their way to school, or young people or adults drinking alcohol in parks and in the streets at any time of day.

Violence and fear of violence

Fear of violence in public places stops children going out to play. This is exacerbated by people drinking alcohol in public spaces. Worry about violence also means that adults do not let them out to play, or restrict the places they can go.

Dog mess

Children are disgusted by dog mess on pavements and in parks and playgrounds, it stops them playing in spaces that are supposed to be for them. When owners do not pick-up or when councils do not clean it up, it tells children that no-one cares about their streets and play spaces.



Image opposite: StreetsAhead Glasgow (2012)

Streets and buildings that are vandalised and abandoned

Children care very much about how their community looks. As they walk about their area they are aware of places that look frightening or abandoned. For children, when a street looks like no-one cares it must mean that no-one cares.

Community: what kind of Scotland do children want and need?

Children's wellbeing in the community would be enhanced by more things to do, help to make friends and play outdoors, safer and cleaner parks and environments, better and safe public transport, police that help you, opportunities to volunteer, having someone or some place to go for support. To achieve such an outcome, children want their communities – for them and for the generations of children to come - to be characterised by:

Opportunities to have a say

Children have the capacity to reflect on and discuss issues which are complex and often difficult to hear. While adults intuitively want to protect children from behaviours or experiences that might harm them – violence or exposure to alcohol or drugs - these can be realities and children benefit from opportunities to share and articulate their experiences.

Safe places to meet and play

Community centres, family centres and local programmes provide children and families with safe places to meet and play. In addition, children want outdoor places to be accessible to them. Children also want more community-based sports activities where they can play for fun and be active – these need to make every effort to involve girls as well as boys.

Getting help on time

Early intervention and prevention of escalation builds resilience and provides support before crisis happens or deepens. Children say that when a family needs help it needs to be provided then, not after a long wait, and not after a problem becomes a crisis.

Respectful relationships with professionals in public services

Children want to be involved in decisions that are made about them. When they meet a professional person, children want to be spoken to directly. Staff need to use the child's name, ask questions and engage with them as the service user or patient, rather than talking primarily to their parent or carer. Children want to understand what is being done to them and why. Children repeatedly stress the importance of an adult's tone of voice and manner of speaking, especially when they may already be nervous or scared. Children want to develop relationships with professional people in a service they use, for example they would like to see the same doctor, dentist or nurse. Children often accompany parents when they are using services and so waiting rooms should be comfortable and child-friendly, including toys, books, posters and technology for children and young people. To help children understand what a service does (whether it is for them or their family) there should be easy-to-access information for children and young people.

Streets and parks that are clean with lots of trees and flowers

Children want their local environment to be well looked after, dog mess-free and beautiful.

Jobs for people

Children love to imagine themselves as adults and the jobs they might do. Having aspirations, imagining oneself as a happy, healthy and engaged adult is important to the child's developing sense of self and their role in society. When children talk about the adults in their lives they also recognise that adults need to have employment opportunities, and that working and having a good wage means that families can provide what everyone needs.

*Community
Key messages*

In our 21st birthday year, a review and refresh of our work tells us that:

- Children care deeply about their streets, neighbourhoods and local environment and want to have a say about them.
- Children have views on the design and management of their communities but are rarely engaged in planning or decision-making processes. Children should have both support and opportunities to understand and influence their communities.
- Children love to get out and explore in nature; in urban neighbourhoods, we need to do more to create exciting, stimulating natural environments.
- Children's aspirations for their communities often match those of adults; opportunities to share and work together can only lead to enhanced wellbeing for all.

"Sometimes when you say something and adults don't believe you that makes you feel sad, that they are not being kind and that's when sometimes if they don't trust me, then I don't trust them."
MCP, CP Investigates Bullying

“Everyone should be able to join in. If you are a boy or a girl or if you are from a different country, no one should say you can’t join in or stop you from playing.”

MCP, Active Children

Scotland and its place in the world

This chapter addresses issues of children’s identity and belonging, to Scotland and to the planet. Reviewing our work and facilitating new conversations has allowed us to reflect on children’s perspectives on their country, and its place in the world. It builds on learning from the earlier exploration of children’s perspectives and insight on life at home, at school and in the community.

This final chapter reminds us that children have capacity to reflect on complex issues. They can articulate what they need to flourish, and they can identify some of the barriers to the realisation of their rights and what actions might mitigate these obstacles. The challenge for government and public bodies with interests and responsibilities in the promotion of children’s rights and wellbeing, is to give these voices prominence and value.

Children are fascinated by the local, national and global environments in which they live, and want to be a part of protecting these environments and living sustainably. Experience shows that children’s voices have most impact when adult duty-bearers and those who make strategic decisions engage directly with children (who have been supported to engage) rather than when other adults mediate children’s messages.

Scotland and its place in the world: what matters most to children

Children are keen to explore what being Scottish means in contemporary society, and what kind of Scotland they want for children in the future. Reflecting on life as young Scots, a review of Children’s Parliament work tells us that children like:

Scotland’s beauty, history and people (and the weather)

When children are asked to describe Scotland they often talk about beautiful landscapes and fascinating history. They also talk about Scots being friendly and open to welcoming people from all over the world who come here. Children recognise the national stereotypes and myths that might be part of a tourist view or expectation of Scotland (but they like these things too); kilts and tartan, bagpipes, stories of Nessie and Greyfriars Bobby. And then there is the weather, which children love (the sunny day, the snow) and loathe (the rain and the wind) in equal measures.



in place; these provide safety and security for children. They also understand there are consequences to any action we take. An awareness-raising and training programme is essential to challenge the current view of children's rights and promote an alternative approach that enables the development of rights-based cultures around children.

You can be who you want to be

Although children do talk about bullying and discrimination, they also identify that Scotland is a country where people can be who they want to be, and can be anything they want to be.

Looking after the environment

Children do a lot of learning at school and at home about reusing, recycling and reducing waste and the impact they/we make on our planet. They tell us that more can be done. This is a poem written by a child engaged on one of our programmes:

Scotland is a safe country for children

At school and at home children learn about the experiences of children in other countries. Some Scottish children have had personal experience of leaving a country of birth because of turmoil or war. Children here in Scotland feel their country is a safe place to be, compared to many in the world.

Learning about their rights

Creating and providing opportunities to work together to explore ideas of identity and belonging helps children understand their own rights and the rights of others. Children tell us that they enjoy taking part in programmes and projects – with us and with their schools and after-school clubs – that explore being a child and learning about their human rights. Children tell us that adults often put information about their rights alongside 'responsibilities'. Children learn that rights and responsibilities go together and that you can't have one without the other. As adults we understand that due to the misperceptions and misunderstandings around children's human rights, adults frame rights in this way as a way of managing children's behaviour. It can feel scary for adults who don't understand the impact and protective nature of rights to suddenly tell children they have rights. However, it is critical that children learn they have rights to be healthy and happy and safe and that these rights are unconditional; they are not dependent on behaviour or background. Children understand, accept and want to have boundaries

If everyone lived like Scotland

*If everyone lived like Scotland
We would need three planets,
If you stop using so much stuff
We'd only need two planets,
And if we completely cut down
As much as we can,
We'll only need one planet*

Poem: Climate Change Project (2008)

Scotland and its place in the world: things that need to change

From our body of work consistent messages emerge about what undermines or infringes the realisation of the rights of the child at a national and international level. Children talk with us about:

Poverty

In an earlier chapter, exploring life at home, we reported that children identify poverty as the most important barrier to a good life. When discussing Scotland as a nation, children also talk about poverty as a problem we face. At school, many children are learning about what poverty means to families here in Scotland and in other countries and so they understand that poverty is a global issue.

Homelessness

Children are very concerned about homelessness. Earlier, we reported on what children see as the need for every child and family to have the home they need – a permanent, stable place of their own, with space for everyone and access to places to play – but they are also concerned about the people they see in cities and towns who are on the streets asking for money. Children understand that people in such circumstances may have many problems, perhaps with drugs or alcohol, and they would like us to be able to help them.

Experiences of discrimination and inequality

Children and their families can experience discrimination, prejudice and inequality in the community - where this happens this is a burden children bear too. While children talk about Scotland as a welcoming, inclusive place they also recognise that racism and other forms of prejudice and discrimination also exist.

Ignorance and prejudice are learned

When children reflect on the idea of human dignity they recognise that if they say or behave in certain ways which discriminate against or hurt another person – through words or actions – it is because they have learned this language, belief or behaviour from adults. They also say that it is not inevitable that children will adopt negative adult values or behaviours, they identify that if children have the opportunity to learn to be positive toward others (at school, or because they know other children or grown-ups with different ideas) they can learn what fairness and kindness mean to them.

Animal cruelty

Children love their pets and other animals they care for, and are concerned about cruelty to animals or when animals are abandoned.

Cars

Cars are often a danger to children, children say that parental worries about traffic can mean they are not allowed to play in the street. Parking is also a problem, with cars parked on the pavements or blocking places where children could play or cross the road.

Concerns about climate change

Talking with Children's Parliament about climate change, children have learned about the nature of our atmosphere, about the causes and effects of greenhouse gases. They have explored energy production, transportation, and how our consumer choices affect climate change. They have learned about a growing world population, and how our history and industrial development here in Scotland has played its part in today's climate change. Children are worried about the future of children, animal and plant species in Scotland and around the world if we fail to address climate change.

Poor health

Children worry about the major health problems that Scotland faces, they talk about heart disease, cancer and obesity. Children who use health services are very positive about them, and the great NHS staff they meet. They would like to see Scotland as a country that is looking for cures and ways to improve the health of every person.

“We’ve spoken about things to do with Scotland and we discussed some of the problems Scotland faces. I have learnt lots of new words like stereotype, empathy and respect. I have felt like my opinions matter, not just to people around me, like my friends and family, but to people who don’t know me too.” MCP, Me + Us

Scotland and its place in the world: what kind of Scotland do children want and need?

Children want Scotland, for themselves now, as well as for the generations of children to come, to be characterised by:

Opportunities to take part

When children learn about their rights, and think about the relationships and experiences every child needs, they are inspired to get involved, feel connected to others, and have their say. When children experience participation as a positive thing then having their say becomes the habit of a lifetime.

A clean environment

Children want their parks, beaches, urban spaces and countryside to be clean and pollution free so that they can play and other species can flourish.

A childhood free from tobacco, alcohol and drugs

No child wants to be around adults who are smoking, drinking alcohol or taking drugs.

A kinder place, a country where no-one is left out

In developing our understanding of the nature of rights-based relationships, children have led Children's Parliament to define such relationships – between children, or between adults and children – as based on ideas of human dignity, kindness, empathy and trust. Children talk with Children's Parliament about being left out, about not having friends, about their family being picked on or harassed, and this tells us that as a country we have some way to go to make inclusion and opportunities for all a reality. A commitment to early intervention and prevention of inequality and discrimination means starting with inclusive values-based learning in childhood.

Children acting on climate change

Children would like to be involved in Scotland's response to climate change, so that they can influence what Government decide. They want to be able to learn about approaches and solutions that they can adopt in their lives, and how they can influence family members. They feel they are capable of understanding the complex problems and decisions that need to be made about transport, energy production and use, agriculture and industry as well as local or individual behaviours and choices about how we get around, or what food we eat.

A Government that understands and acts on children's human rights

Children want the Scottish Government to understand more about children's lives and what it means for them to have their rights. They tell Children's Parliament that the Scottish Government needs to know what children's rights are, to implement the UNCRC, and help all adults in Scotland understand children's rights. Children identify that it is the Government's job to make sure that children in Scotland are treated well and not stereotyped as troublesome. The Government should also make sure that children learn about and understand politics.

Scotland and its place in the world key messages

In our 21st birthday year, a review and refresh of our work tells us that:

- Children feel passionately about the local and global environment.
- Children care about others and believe the world should be a fairer place.
- To improve experiences and outcomes for children we need to influence the adults around them – shifting judgemental, negative or limiting interpretations to views and behaviours that are inclusive, caring, supportive and optimistic.
- Across many Children's Parliament programmes children express the view that their rights should be enshrined in law, that adults and institutions should not be able to choose when a right is respected or realised. Full incorporation of the UNCRC is a fundamental requirement if Scotland is to be a country where respect for rights is fully understood and supported.

**“Children's rights
are important
because they are
essential to make a
child's life livable.”**

MCP, Seen + Heard Fife

Conclusion: what kind of Scotland?

What have we learned from the thousands of children who have engaged with Children's Parliament over the past 21 years? We have learned that children want to live in a world characterised by **kindness, empathy** and **trust**. That children are attuned to the intuitive idea of human dignity, which is embedded in every United Nations human rights treaty. For Scotland, this would mean we become a country where:

- Our children are born into and grow up in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding.
- Our children live free from poverty.
- No child is left worried, in isolation or to go hungry.
- We secure and enhance the life chances of children by supporting families when they need it.
- Our children learn in an education system which is built from the idea of human dignity and respect for rights.
- In our schools, children are loved and nurtured; they play, learn and flourish.
- Our schools build positive attitudes to learning and tackle inequalities in outcomes.
- Our communities are safe places where children are valued, nurtured and trusted.
- Our children engage positively with the built and natural environment, and play their part in its care.
- Our children are included, involved and respected as users of public services that understand and fulfil their duties in terms of children's rights and wellbeing.
- We live in sustainable communities and citizens of all ages are involved in decisions about them.
- We love and protect our built and natural environments; people of all ages play a part.
- Scotland looks outward, our national identity is inclusive of all.
- We do what we can to build a world where every child lives their life with dignity.



Image opposite: StreetsAhead Glasgow (2012)

Appendix

The following 44 Children's Parliament projects, consultations and programmes have been reviewed in the writing of this 21st birthday report:

- Active Children www.childrensparliament.org.uk/our-work/past-work/active-children/
- Adolescent wellbeing www.childrensparliament.org.uk/our-work/past-work/adolescent-wellbeing/
- Age of Criminal Responsibility www.childrensparliament.org.uk/our-work/past-work/crim-resp/
- Art Puts Colour and Joy into Things
www.childrensparliament.org.uk/our-work/past-work/art-puts-colour-joy-things/
- Best Start in Life www.childrensparliament.org.uk/our-work/past-work/best-start-in-life/
- Children, Technology and GLOW
www.childrensparliament.org.uk/our-work/past-work/children-privacy-technology/
- Children's Hearings Reform
www.childrensparliament.org.uk/our-work/past-work/childrens-hearings-reform/
- Children's Manifesto
www.childrensparliament.org.uk/our-work/past-work/childrens-manifesto/
- Children's Parliament National Sitting 2015
www.childrensparliament.org.uk/our-work/past-work/national-sitting-2015-2/
- Children's Parliament National Sitting 2016
www.childrensparliament.org.uk/our-work/past-work/childrens-parliament-national-sitting-2016/
- Climate Change Project www.childrensparliament.org.uk/our-work/past-work/climate-change/
- Consultation with children on the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill
www.childrensparliament.org.uk/our-work/past-work/children-and-young-people-bill/
- CP Investigates Bullying www.childrensparliament.org.uk/our-work/cpinvestigatesbullying/
- CP Investigates Learning www.childrensparliament.org.uk/our-work/past-work/learning-attainment/
- Dad's Project www.childrensparliament.org.uk/our-work/past-work/the-dads-project/
- Developing a Digital Learning Strategy for Scotland
www.childrensparliament.org.uk/our-work/past-work/developing-digital-learning-strategy/
- Do the Right Thing Local Projects
www.childrensparliament.org.uk/our-work/past-work/do-the-right-thing/
- EcoCity projects www.childrensparliament.org.uk/our-work/past-work/ecocity/
- Embark: Routes to Reading
www.childrensparliament.org.uk/our-work/past-work/embark-routes-reading/
- Fairer Fife Mural www.childrensparliament.org.uk/our-work/past-work/fairer-fife-mural/
- Gamechangers: Girls Get Active
www.childrensparliament.org.uk/our-work/gamechangers-girls-get-active/
- Glasgow 2014: The Legacy
www.childrensparliament.org.uk/our-work/past-work/glasgow-2014-legacy/
- Home Free www.childrensparliament.org.uk/our-work/past-work/home-free/
- Identipix www.childrensparliament.org.uk/our-work/past-work/identipix/
- Imagining Aberdeen www.childrensparliament.org.uk/our-work/imaginingaberdeen/
- Leaders of Learning www.childrensparliament.org.uk/our-work/past-work/leaders-of-learning/
- Living Lomonds Landscape www.childrensparliament.org.uk/our-work/past-work/living-lomonds-landscape/
- Mapping our Future www.childrensparliament.org.uk/our-work/past-work/mapping-our-future/
- Me + Us www.childrensparliament.org.uk/our-work/past-work/me-and-us/
- Moving On Up: Transitions programme
www.childrensparliament.org.uk/our-work/past-work/moving-renfrew-transitions-project/
- NHS Lothian Consultation/Strategy for children and young people
www.childrensparliament.org.uk/our-work/past-work/nhs-lothian-consultation/
- Police Powers to stop and search children and young people for alcohol
www.childrensparliament.org.uk/our-work/past-work/police-powers/
- Pushing the Boundaries
www.childrensparliament.org.uk/our-work/past-work/pushing-the-boundaries/
- Raising Complaints
www.childrensparliament.org.uk/our-work/past-work/consultation-raising-complaints/
- Realising Ambition www.childrensparliament.org.uk/our-work/past-work/realising-ambition/
- Right to Play: Article 31
www.childrensparliament.org.uk/our-work/past-work/article-31-right-play/
- Seen + Heard Fife www.childrensparliament.org.uk/our-work/seenandheardfife/
- Sporting Chance www.childrensparliament.org.uk/our-work/past-work/sporting-chance/
- StreetsAhead Glasgow www.childrensparliament.org.uk/our-work/past-work/streetsahead-glasgow/
- StreetsAhead Tranent www.childrensparliament.org.uk/our-work/streetsaheadtranent/
- Teacher Employment Review
www.childrensparliament.org.uk/our-work/past-work/teacher-employment-review/
- Under the Same Sky: Children's Parliament at the United Nations, Geneva
www.childrensparliament.org.uk/our-work/past-work/under-the-same-sky/
- Wee Democracy Project www.childrensparliament.org.uk/our-work/past-work/wee-democracy/
- Wee Voices www.childrensparliament.org.uk/our-work/past-work/wee-voices/

Thanks to:

The thousands of children who have so willingly, enthusiastically and seriously engaged in our programmes and shared their views and experiences with us.

The many parents and carers, community members teachers, social workers and other professional colleagues for their support and engagement in our work.

Our skilled and dedicated team for their huge commitment and their ability to demonstrate how using a rights-based approach directly improves children's outcomes.

Our Trustees who bring a wealth of experience and commitment to the Board.

Joanna Boyce, Yonnie Fraser and Lyver Chavez, our core, freelance artist/actor pedagogues who bring inspiration, exceptional skills and love for children.

We acknowledge the support of the Scottish Government through a CYPFEIF and ALEC Fund Grant



For those with a visual impairment, a PDF of this report is available on our website: www.childrensparliament.org.uk



2017
our 21st birthday year

“There would be no human dignity without empathy, trust and kindness in the world.”

MCP, CP Ambassadors



 **Children's Parliament**
giving ideas a voice

Children's Parliament
Summerhall, Edinburgh, EH9 1PL
0131 558 9030
info@childrensparliament.org.uk
www.childrensparliament.org.uk
 @creative_voices
Scottish Charity 026427
© Children's Parliament 2017