Children's Parliament

"It's one of your rights to know your rights!"

Report on the Children's Parliament consultation on the Progressing Children's Rights in Scotland Action Plan 2018-2021







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Acknowledgements

Thank you to MCPs and staff from:

- Preston Street Primary, Edinburgh
- Dalmarnock Primary, Glasgow
- Park Primary, Oban
- Royal School of Dunkeld, Dunkeld & Birnam
- Manor Park Primary, Aberdeen

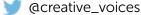


Image: Human Rights Defender, 2018



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About the consultation

As part of the public consultation on the Action Plan for Progressing Children's Rights in Scotland: 2018-2021, Children's Parliament undertook a consultation to explore children's views on how children's human rights are experienced here in Scotland.

As a nation we are committed to creating environments where children grow up loved, safe and respected, and the Scottish Government is now committed to incorporating the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) into Scots law. With these factors in mind it is imperative that children's views are sought in all matters that affect them, particularly in relation to their awareness, understanding and experience of their human rights.

In this consultation we worked with 157 children between 6 and 11 years old from five areas across Scotland - Aberdeen, Argyll & Bute, Edinburgh, Glasgow, and Perth & Kinross. In addition to representing a wide range of geographic communities, including rural and remote areas, children from specific groups were also involved in our body of work, including children with care experience, refugee and migrant children, and children with disabilities and additional support needs.

We began with a conversation about children's human rights and explored children's experiences, views and ideas relating to the following questions, using creative arts activities and small group discussions:

How do children What rights experience their need to be What are rights (or not) in defended in children's Scotland? Scotland? rights? How can adults help children **How can the Scottish** What gets in defend their **Government gather** the way of human rights? the views of children rights being on issues that are respected? important to them?

This consultation also builds on previous Children's Parliament work. With this in mind, for this report we revisit earlier reports with relevant themes, including: **Children as Human Rights Defenders** (a 2018 project leaflet about the role children have as human rights defenders), **Happy, Healthy and Safe in Care** (a 2018 project report with key messages from children with care experience), **Children's Parliament Investigates Bullying** (a 2016/7 project investigating bullying from a children's rights perspective), **All children should be healthy, happy and safe** (a 2016 consultation with children with disabilities about their rights), **Together We Can Fix It** (a 2015 consultation on raising complaints), and **How Does Your Garden Grow?** (a 2014 consultation report on the Children and Young People Bill).

The quotes and artwork in this report come directly from the children.

Parliament

^{*} All children who participate in our projects and consultations become Members of Children's Parliament (MCP). Unlike other parliamentary bodies, Children's Parliament is not an elected body. Rather, it is a participatory one that engages with children across a range of settings in order to include as many children as possible.

Children's Human Rights

Children's human rights are about ensuring that children are healthy, happy and safe and that they have a say in their lives. At Children's Parliament, we use a human rights approach; specifically, we use the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which provides a set of minimum standards against which we can measure how we are doing and below which we must not fall, and work to create environments where children experience their rights.

Across our body of work, children feel it is especially important for children and adults to be aware of children's rights. They view children's human rights as a way to ensure that children live free from harm and are able to thrive.

MCP age 12

"I think more people in Scotland (especially kids) need to know about their rights. If something unfair happens, then they know what to do."

MCP POP TO

"People only have one life, so you need to have a good one! Once it's gone, it is gone."

On the next page there are children's examples of what children need to be healthy, happy and safe, from before birth to young adulthood. These characteristics are not simply a checklist; they are the basis for a life lived with dignity.

Before birth

- Healthy mum who eats healthy food, does not drink or smoke
- Materials to be ready for the baby (e.g. cot and a baby blanket)
- Ultrasounds



Baby

- A name
- Bath
- Cot
- Breastfeeding milk
- Baby food
- Toys
- Good care
- Family time
- Nappies
- Baby gates



Teenagers

- Bras
- Sanitary towels and tampons
- Condoms
- Friends
- Relationships
- Money
- Social media
- Internet access
- Keys
- Privacy

Toddler

- Play and toys
- Milk
- Potty training
- Help to learn to walk and talk
- Vaccinations
- Childminders
- Naps
- Love and care
- Doctor
- Healthy food

12 Year Old

- Relationships and friends
- Entertainment
- Phone and headphones
- Education
- Deodorant
- Sports



5 Year Old

- Access to school
- Clothes and shoes
- Friends
- Pets
- Encouraging Parents
- Time to play
- Safe school (zebra crossings and lollipop lady)
- Nature and access to outdoors

8 Year Old

- School supplies
- Support
- Stationery
- TV / Xbox
- Pocket money
- School trips
- Sports, games and art
- Clubs to meet new people







Barriers to experiencing rights

Children say that in order to grow well, they need to have the right to a loving and caring family, to affection and attention, to friends, to freedom and play, to learn, to a clean environment, and to a home and community free from alcohol and violence.

Children recognise that not all children and their families feel healthy, happy and safe all the time. They may face difficulties or things that get in the way of them growing well. From this and other work, these are things children worry about.



"Children don't

they are small and still learning."

deserve to be hurt

but their bodies too, then the

child is really sad."

"My mum gives us our tea, but sometimes she doesn't have enough money for tea."

MCP, age &

"Families need money so that they can feed their families and have somewhere to live."

MCP, 800

Children worry that their family does not have enough money to buy what they need

Children understand that it is sometimes difficult for their family to buy enough food and to get clothes for children. They worry that their family cannot pay the rent and the household bills.

"My mum would always buy me or my brother's clothes first; she always has to get mine before hers. She's a single mum because my dad left."

MCP 900

MCP, age 10



"My mum had a job, working all the time, but now she doesn't get as many shifts so we're struggling at the moment."

Children worry about their parents splitting up

If a parental split does happen, some children lose contact with their mum or dad. Sometimes children know and understand why things happen, but sometimes nobody explains.

he's in jail."

"I don't see

mv dad 'cos

"When I'm at my pal's house me and my pal pretend we're going up the park, but we sneak away to my dad's work, so I can see him. Nobody knows."

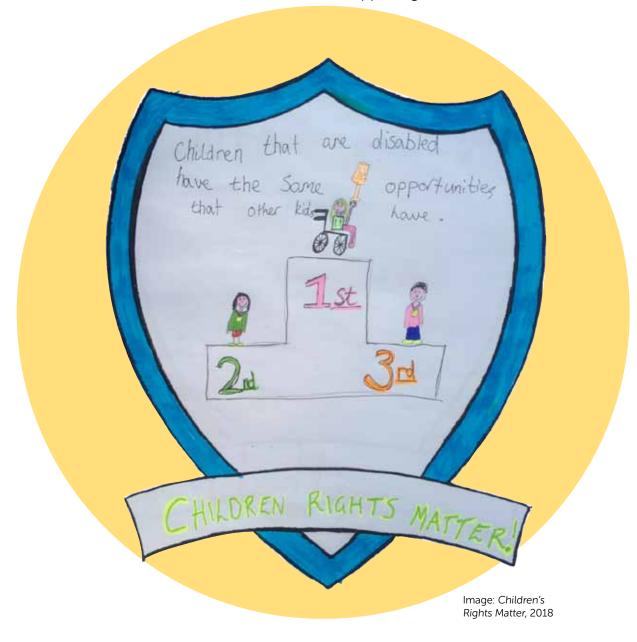
MCP, age 10

"I want to see my dad more, but my mum won't let me. I don't know why."

Children feel that some adults don't listen to them

They think that when adults don't listen to them it is because:

- Adults think children don't understand
- Some adults can be stubborn
- Adults think they know what's right
- If children go to them too much, they stop listening
- Maybe adults get bored
- If children get into trouble all the time, adults might stop listening to them
- Maybe adults don't want children involved in what they are talking about
- Adults don't realise children have good ideas or they think the children won't understand
- Adults think that if they were trying to tell the child something they don't like, then the child might make a big fuss and they think it'll be a lot easier if adults just decide
- Some adults don't want children to know what's happening.



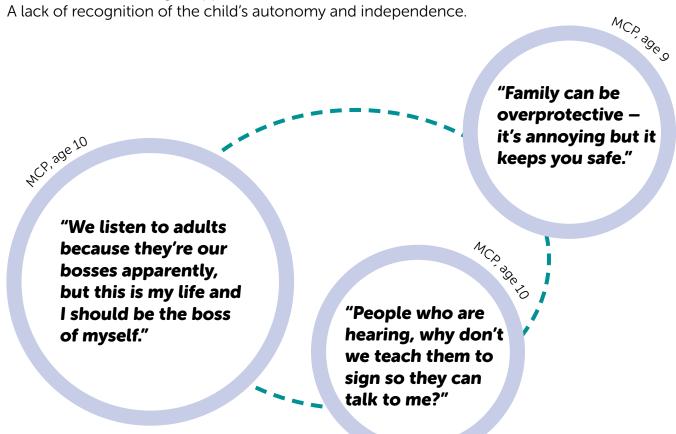
Children with disabilities

Children with disabilities can have different needs and face unique barriers to experiencing their rights fully. Children with disabilities need:

- The same opportunities as other children
- Familiarity and routines
- Medical care and doctors who are nice and friendly
- To know and trust the adults (outside the family) who provide care for them
- To have choices about aspects of their day-to-day life; things like deciding what to wear, what or when to eat, what activities to do
- For adults to take time and explain things in ways they can understand
- To have access to supports or devices that assist in communication, i.e. hearing aids/ cochlear implants, glasses, communication boards, etc.
- Opportunities to express their opinions in whatever way they can communicate.

For children with disabilities, there are things that get in the way of experiencing rights:

- When people see capacity in a limited or fixed way
- When other children behave badly or bully you because of your disability
- Spending a lot of time travelling between home, school, activities, hospitals, etc.
- Prolonged illnesses and hospital stays that disrupt day-to-day life
- People not having the skills to communicate with children
- When personal care isn't provided with respect or dignity
- Situations and experiences being too loud, bright or over-stimulating
- When there isn't enough support outside of school term times
- A lack of recognition of the child's autonomy and independence.



Children with care experience

Children with care experience identify many of the same things that keep them healthy, happy and safe. However, they also identify additional needs and supports in order to have their rights fulfilled and respected. They tell us that children with care experience need:

- To be loved
- Hugs and good cuddles
- To express their feelings
- Access to fresh air, green spaces and nature
- To have contact and time with their parents, siblings and friends
- To feel included and not be bullied because they are in care
- For social workers to do what they say they are going to do
- A social worker who works to keep them in a good home
- A social worker who keeps them informed about what's going on and when they are coming to visit them
- To trust the adults in their lives and for adults to be trusting of them
- School staff to support them and understand what's going on
- Some space and time for themselves their own room if possible
- Time and preparation when big changes happen
- Someone who knows where they are
- To have the same social worker for as long as possible
- No abuse, no hitting and no shouting.

Image: What a parent/carer needs to be, 2018

There are things that get in the way for children with care experience when it comes to experiencing their rights:

- · Children can feel different, unequal and left out
- Children worry a lot about their families and what will happen
- Children are forced to move home and school
- Children don't get to see their parents, siblings and friends
- · Children have to lie or feel caught in the middle
- Children can't go outside often
- Children don't have good food to eat
- Adults are too protective and won't let them take some risks
- Adults aren't good role models for them
- Children can't sleep because it's too loud inside or outside their house
- Children feel sick because they are worried or upset
- Children are lonely and heartbroken
- Children get assaulted or adults shout at them
- An adult blames the child for something they haven't done
- Children are compared with others
- Children are ignored and aren't believed
- Someone talks behind their backs, is spreading rumours and making things up
- Adults keep secrets and children don't know what's going on
- Children don't have a choice or a say.

What rights need to be defended?

When exploring their human rights, children identify issues that impact on their lives at home, at school and in the community. As the child's understanding of their own rights deepens, they are able to explore their own experiences and discuss areas where their rights or the rights of other children are not being respected.

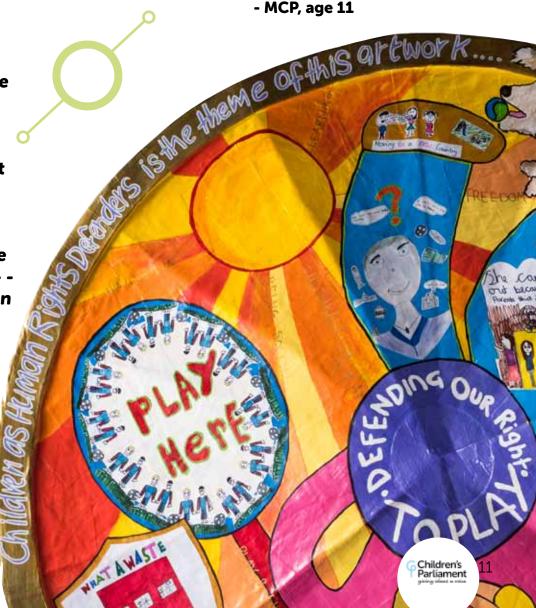
As part of our Children as Human Rights Defenders project, children highlighted five key themes related to the articles of the UNCRC which are most important and meaningful to them and which they wish to "defend".



Play helps us to be happy, make friends, be more confident and learn new things. Sometimes, our play areas are messy, littered or damaged, which means it's not safe for us to play there.

"We have the right to play and relax because to interact with friends and relax give us more energy. Who can help us? Scottish Government, parents and friends and our school."

"We chose this article because you can become stressed and tired if vou don't have time to relax and you can't concentrate. If you don't play with other people you can become antisocial and sad and you won't learn how to make friends. Who can help? - -Teachers and parents can help you and introduce you to new people and give you time to rest. Friends can help by playing with you." - MCP, age 10





Our right to education and a decent standard of living

Learning should be creative and fun! Schools should be safe places where our human dignity is always respected. We can feel left out at school if life at home is hard or if we don't have enough money for food, clothes, school trips or clubs.

"You have the right to help and financial support from the Government if you need... Kids need someone to protect them! It's so important! You need it!"

- MCP, age 7

"All children should have an education even if they're not close to a school."

"Make our classrooms safe please."
- MCP, age 9

"If they are poor, give them more money to buy food and drink and build more homeless shelters." - MCP, age 10





Diversity is important. We should be respected for who we are and be able to share our ideas as there are still lots of people who think children should be seen and not heard.



4 Our right to protection from harm

We want Scotland to be a healthy, happy and safe place to grow up. Being hurt can make us feel alone and make us lose our confidence. All adults should keep children safe from harm, not just parents, carers and teachers.

"I think all children should know their rights and know how to protect themselves."

- MCP, age 10

"Speak out if you're owneried about anything."

- MCP, age 9

"If you think you don't have a child's right, talk to an adult you trust to try and fix it."
- MCP, age 9

"Someone who knows where we are and makes sure we are safe."

- MCP, age 11

"We get assaulted or adults shout at us."
- MCP, age 10

"No abuse, no hitting and no shouting." - MCP, age 9



"We want adults who care for us, play and spend time with us." - MCP, age 10



We all need to be loved. Love helps us grow in confidence and feel valued. We all need someone to guide us, care for us and love us for who we are.

"Children have the right to a decent standard of living. Some homes aren't very clean because of cigarettes and alcohol. Some parents aren't responsible because of drugs and alcohol. The Government can help massively by providing a bit extra money so children can have a better start in life."

- MCP, age 10

"Children's rights are important, very important! It's actually a bit of care and love for you!"
- MCP, age 6

"To all adults: make sure that you take care of children properly and make sure the kids have a say. It's nice to be nice." - MCP, age 9

"Hugs and good cuddles."
- MCP, age 8

"Children need crucial people to guide them, otherwise they could develop depression and have trouble getting a job." - MCP, age 10 Children's Parliament 15

What adults can do to help children defend their rights

Children identified the following ways that adults across Scotland can help children to defend their human rights:

- By educating themselves on children's human rights
- Teach children about their rights and help other adults understand children's human rights too
- Involve children in decisions and take their ideas seriously
- Stop child poverty
- Stop children being bullied and abused children should be safe wherever they are
- Keep children healthy they need to play and relax, to get involved in sports and protected from drugs and alcohol, and eat healthy foods
- Make sure children get the medicine and care they need if they are unwell
- Try harder to reduce pollution
- Stop stereotyping all children and young people as trouble
- Protect children from harm and make time/create spaces where we can tell you how we feel
- Help create safer and happier spaces to play at home, at school and in our communities
- Listen to children's experiences and support them during the hardest times
- Be kind and encouraging to all children
- Help everyone understand how important love is.



Four Key Messages

Throughout this consultation process and across our work, four clear themes emerge, reflecting children's experiences of accessing and enjoying their rights in their everyday lives. In broad terms children describe and discuss not being listened to and taken seriously, not feeling safe, not being engaged and informed, and rights as aspirations not a reality as core challenges impacting on their ability to enjoy or to defend their rights entitlements in Scotland today.¹



MCP, 990 17

Children express very strong views about being listened to and taken seriously. They value when this happens and tell us that it makes them feel safe, respected and more confident.

"It feels like a weight has been lifted from you when you get to talk about something that is important to you."

MCP, age 10

"Adults think that some children are silly, so they assume all of them are like that and then they won't listen to them. No one seems to trust children, and they should!"

While children clearly value the opportunity to express their views and inform decisions made about matters which affect them, they also describe how their ability to participate meaningfully and effectively is often mediated by adults with power in their everyday experiences.

When this happens, it does not feel as if the rights of the child are front and centre in their daily lives. So, at the same time as asserting their right to a voice, children make a "plea" to adults to listen to them, make time for them, and to act on what they hear.

Real participation is when children are able to influence decisions, but they need a choice in how to participate, access to the correct and appropriate information, and the opportunity to build relationships with trusted adults. Listening to children's experiences and views will lead to better policies, practices and laws, and to better outcomes for children. It will mean that children feel more in control and happier with their lives as a result. Children remind adults that their rights are not gifts to be bestowed, they are entitlements.

¹ These themes are consistent with and resonate with the findings of an extensive international consultation on Children as Human Rights Refenders carried out by Queen's University, Belfast and Child Rights Connect in 2018 in which more than 2695 children aged 5-18 participated.

www.childrightsconnect.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/DGD-REPORT_WEB_en_def_web.pdf

2 Noticeling safe

MCP, age 10

Children tell us that they can feel anxious, unsafe or alone when it seems like they are not listened to or when they are unclear about their right to speak up when they have worries or concerns. They also feel like they may not be believed or may be punished for sharing their worries, experiences and views with adults. For these reasons, children may be less likely to share what is going on with them, which can impact negatively on their physical and mental health and wellbeing. Knowing that they have the right to protection from harm, abuse and neglect and having adults they trust to listen to them is vital to ensuring that they are able to have their rights fulfilled and to live a life of dignity.

"Bullying makes children feel horrible, abandoned and left alone. You feel like no-one ever cares for you"

Children highlight that they cannot and should not be considered as a homogenous group - 'children' as opposed to 'child'. They are individuals with unique needs, experiences, opinions and dreams. For children, relationships are key, and they want to be considered as unique individuals with their own experiences and story. Consistently children tell us that they want adults to take the time to get to know them, who they are, what they feel and what they want and need. This holds true for children with differing life experiences and across all the places and spaces that they inhabit. This requires particular consideration and sensitivity with regard to children with care experience, refugee and

migrant children, children with disabilities and other

vulnerable groups.

MCP, age 47

"I really want to stay with my foster carer, she's really nice. I can't tell my social worker because I'm frightened they'll tell my mum. When she gives me a bit of paper and asks what I want, I just say 'I don't know."

MCP, age o

"My dad doesn't listen to me. He just lays down on the sofa and that's it. I feel upset when he doesn't listen."

MCP, age 10

"If your parents are stressed about money and argue a lot, it'll impact you and you feel like you can't do anything about it."

While children may have different experiences from each other, they all ask for adults to treat them with human dignity, to show them empathy and kindness and to evidence that they can be trusted, all values and principles reflected and inherent within the UNCRC and a rights-based approach. If children do not feel that it is safe to share their views or speak up when they are being treated badly or unfairly, then adults working with and caring for children need to do more to show their support by creating spaces that are safe for children and to listen to and act upon what they are hearing.

Mospetine and find an

The rights to participate, have a say, and to get information remain largely unfulfilled for many children and only a minority of those Children's Parliament engages with are able to share where these rights are applied to them in their everyday experiences. In this consultation, children did not appear confident or informed around when and how their voices would be heard and acted upon at home, in school, their communities or by the Scottish Government.

Children's awareness and understanding of the concept of children's human rights varies across Scotland, between schools and at different ages. Some children have been introduced to the concept of human rights more broadly in school, some children had heard specifically about the UNCRC and were able to identify the rights outlined in the articles, and others were completely unfamiliar with human rights and/or the UNCRC. However, it appears that there is no consistent, strategic national approach or framework to informing children about their human rights.

Across our work, it is evident that children's human rights are not discussed or taught in any systemic way across the education system. It is not clear from children's responses that their voices and expression of their views are referred to as rights entitlements in any formal or explicit way within any of the spaces that they inhabit. However, it should be acknowledged that positively, children appear to know and are encouraged to use their voices to seek help from adults when they feel in need of protection or support. More could be done to further embed a rights-based approach in areas of a child's life.

MCP, age 10

"Nobody takes that much notice about a children's rights, so I and my classmates need you to change that. To help, you could tell people about it and then they can tell people and so on, so it gets the word out! I hope you take notice and do more about children's rights!"

Image:
Article. 42,
2018

You have the to know your rights.

MCP, age 10

"If adults obey these rules then millions of children could have much better lives than at present!"

These issues are brought sharply into focus by children when talking about their ability to make complaints about policies or services which impact on their lives. Children feel that when they complain and their complaints are taken seriously, it demonstrates explicitly their right to a voice is being honoured and upheld.

Children feel that providing a genuine, child-friendly approach to participation and opportunities to share their views and raise complaints will provide an opportunity to share power and control with adults. This impacts positively on children's lives, fostering their wellbeing and helping to boost their confidence.

"Mr Not Shoosh defends the right to having a say and your voice heard. His hands are loudspeakers and his hat is a microphone. He shouts 'don't be afraid to speak up' and 'children should be listened to."

MCP, age 10

"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, I don't really trust them."

Raising awareness and understanding of children's human rights is only the first step. This awareness and understanding needs to be paired with the realisation of their rights, so that children can experience rights as an everyday reality at home, at school, in their communities and across Scotland. More emphasis needs to be placed on creating spaces, systems and structures that employ a rights-based approach.

"I think we should learn about children's rights in school more, but it should be taught in a fun way and not just reading through a list of rights."

Mr. Not Shoosh,

MCP, age 10

2018

MCP, age 11

"Children's rights are important because you are a child! They affect you every day. It's one of your rights to know your rights!"



MCP, age 9

Children often view their enjoyment of rights as aspirational or disconnected from their own experiences because of the way they are taught and described by adults. Often children describe rights in relation to "other" children, usually with an emphasis on survival rights of food, water and shelter relating to children from "poor" countries or the developing world. Rights are the focus of a topic during lessons and are often used as a lens through which to look at issues impacting children elsewhere in the world. While this builds empathy and a wider worldview, children can then struggle to make connections to their own lives and experiences. It is important that children in Scotland recognise that human rights are theirs, too!

"You have rights. It's important that you can be yourself. If you have ideas show them, don't hide behind closed doors!"

The way that children's human rights and the UNCRC are framed is often aspirational, instead of looking at rights as the minimum standard below which we should not fall. Children often describe experiencing their human rights as "gifts" bestowed on them and are reliant upon knowledgeable, rights-respecting adults, instead of basic entitlements that they and all children around the world should have. It is a shift in our collective thinking that must change so that all children feel like their human rights belong to them all of the time simply because they are a child. It cannot be implied that human rights are contingent upon behaviour, demographics, or adults' benevolence. Children's rights are human rights.

Children intuitively and instinctively use language reflecting empathy, trust, kindness, respect, and safety when discussing human rights. They speak of these as essential to building a just and fair society and feel that all people should demonstrate and experience these characteristics in their relationships with others. Children are curious about the world and learn from the adults around them, so these values should continue to be explored with children as part of rights-based relationships and education.

"Children should have a say in the country they grow up in!"

MCP, age 10

MCP age 17

"Hopefully you can make children's lives better by using children's rights. Learning about it is fun and other schools should do it! I think you should make children's rights clearer to understand."

"Please make people follow children's rights better and make an effort to enforce them in Scotland and then we will inspire other nations to do the same."

A Call to Action



Adults should listen to children and take them seriously.

Children's views, ideas and dreams should lead to action and should mean that adults do some things differently.

Make sure that children learn about and understand democracy and civic participation.

Make rights a reality in children's lives at home, in school, in our communities and across Scotland. Make children's human rights a law.

Adults should use their power positively as they have the responsibility to promote, protect and achieve children's human rights in Scotland.

Children want all adults to know about and understand their duties in respect to children's human rights and the UNCRC.

Children want to be informed and learn about their human rights in fun ways that are easy to understand. It should be a part of education and adults should know about them too.

Referenced Children's Parliament reports

- Children as Human Rights Defenders (2018) https://www.childrensparliament.org.uk/our-work/children-human-rights-defenders/
- Healthy, Happy and Safe in Care (2018) https://www.childrensparliament.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/SeenHeardPoster2018Online.pdf
- Children's Parliament Investigates Bullying (2016/17) https://www.childrensparliament.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/CPIB2017NewspaperforWeb-1.pdf
- All children should be healthy, happy and safe (2016) https://www.childrensparliament.org.uk/our-work/past-work/all-children-should-be-healthy-happy-and-safe/
- Together We Can Fix It (2015) https://www.childrensparliament.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Childrens-Consultation-on-Complaints-Report-Final-April-2015.pdf
- How Does Your Garden Grow? (2014) https://www.childrensparliament.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/CP-How-does-you-garden-grow_-CYP-Bill.pdf



About Children's Parliament

Children's Parliament is Scotland's Centre of Excellence for children's participation and engagement.

Children's Parliament works for a future where all children in Scotland are actively engaged in shaping our world so that everyone is healthy, happy and safe. We believe all children should live and grow with dignity and be valued for what they can offer the world.

We work creatively through projects, consultations and training programmes to improve communication between children and adults and to build relationships based on mutual respect and understanding. This enables us to explore our world together. We provide children with opportunities to share their experiences, thoughts and feelings so that they can influence life at home, in school and in the community through change at a local and national level. Our interest is in working with children, the adults who love and care for them, and the wider community in which they live in order to support our country to meet its obligations to our youngest citizens.

Children's Parliament uses a rights-based approach and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) as the foundation for all of our work.

In 2017, Children's Parliament turned 21 years old. To celebrate our birthday, we reviewed our work and published "What Kind of Scotland?". This reflective and celebratory report highlights the voices of Scotland's children:

https://www.childrensparliament.org.uk/what-kind-of-scotland/

