

Children's Parliament investigates: Food & Fairness

For the University of St. Andrews
September 2023



University of
St Andrews

 Children's
Parliament

About the Project

Children's Parliament and the University of St Andrews School of Medicine worked in partnership to bring together children from two schools in Fife to investigate their views on food and fairness. Using a rights-based approach, this project aimed to listen to the views and experiences of children and understand their perspective on food and the relationship between food and health inequalities. The aim of the project is to inform further research

and influence policy development in relation to food and health inequalities. Engagement in, and learning from the project, will support the participating researchers to further develop their children's rights-based approach to research.

This report shares the key messages the children would like to share with adults to bring about changes in food policy in Fife and beyond.

What we did

In Spring 2023, Children's Parliament and the University of St Andrews facilitated two full day workshops with two P5/6 classes on children's human rights in two primary schools in Fife. All children who took part in the project automatically became Members of Children's Parliament (MCPs). From these two classes, 12 Investigators were chosen to investigate concepts surrounding food and fairness in a series of six workshops over the following three months.

As part of the project, the Investigators set a series of missions for their classmates to investigate food and fairness in greater detail. The themes of the six workshops were:

- **Children's human rights**
- **Access to food**
- **Food and identity**
- **Information and marketing of food**
- **Food, play and exercise**
- **Food and the environment.**

“To make things right, adults need to listen to children about their opinions on food especially in school”

- Adult at sharing event

Our sharing event

The culmination of the Investigators work was an event where they shared their key messages about food and fairness with adults who can influence food policy in Fife. The guests at the sharing event included representatives from Fife Council, NHS Fife, adults from third-sector organisations that campaign on access to food for children, as well as parents and carers. A rights-based process empowered the children to have their voices heard by adults who could influence change in food policy.

Our partner schools

We worked with children in P5 and P6 in two Fife primary schools in Glenrothes for this project: Rimbleton Primary, and South Parks Primary.

Unless otherwise stated, all quotes and artwork are from participating Members of Children's Parliament in these schools.

A word from our partners at the University of St Andrews

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Researchers from the University of St Andrews School of Medicine approached Children's Parliament after acknowledging a need for a children's rights approach to research on Children's health and wellbeing. The University and in particular the Population of Behavioural Science division in the School of Medicine is an advocate for the reduction of health inequalities. Researchers in the division are working to understand health inequalities and their impact on children and young people, with a view to developing new and innovative means to influence policy and improve the health of the public.

It is understood that food is critical for health, and has a significant impact on inequalities, however, we must understand this relationship in more detail and the other factors which influence it. To do this it is important to involve those impacted and learn about their perspective, in this case children. This project has provided an opportunity for a unique partnership with Children's Parliament, resulting in valuable findings from the perspective of children, as well as an improved understanding of the necessity of a children's rights approach spanning into research practice.

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Children's Human Rights

"A child should have a full life."

Children's human rights are at the heart of Children's Parliament's work and this project. The impending incorporation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) into Scots Law will ensure children's rights are respected and protected. At the forefront of this project is Article 12 of the UNCRC, which states that children have the right to be listened to and taken seriously.

The following values have informed this project:

- **Dignity**
- **Children feeling happy, healthy and safe**
- **Children being treated fairly**
- **Children being listened to by adults**



**"Having a dream-ment;
when you dream of all your
achievements."**

Dignity

**"When you are sad, you don't
feel special."**

**"Sometimes I look in the fridge
and there's nothing there."**

**Children feeling happy,
healthy and safe**

**Children being
treated fairly**

"No-one should be hungry."

**"Adults don't always listen to
how we feel about food."**

**Children being
listened to by
adults**

Sausage & mash



When I eat
it it reminds
me of
when I
was
young!

with
my mum
dad Liwis Harris
inis and me and
bob & bubla

Liwis Harris inis
mum dad Schae
Emily Eilidh Gracie
Grampa gran gran
COZINS



full
Relax

full

Food and Access

For children, having access to food goes beyond the physical availability of food. Children told us that access to food includes considering people with special dietary needs or those who have allergies, as well as practicalities such as transport and convenience.

Access to food for children also includes how and where they eat. Food is not just fuel for children but is linked with feelings, relationships and family circumstances. Additionally, children see the inequalities in access to food both in school and in their community.

The key messages the children shared about food and access:

“Some people can’t afford food.”

“Food is very expensive.”

“Unhealthy foods are cheap and healthy foods are not”

Cost of living and equity of access to food: The children see the effect the increasing cost of food is having on families and children.¹

“Money can get in the way if parents don’t get paid much.”

“Sweets are cheaper than fruit.”

“Stop rising the price of food at shops.”

Food, transport and choice: Not having access to private transport affects access to a wider range of food due to many supermarkets being out of town.

“If your parents can’t drive, it’s too far to a shop that sells cheap food, you’ll have less money to buy food.”

“Having no car and living far away from shops.”

“You might not have enough money for petrol to go to the shops.”

¹ This has been raised in other Children’s Parliament work such as the recent Calls to Action on the Cabinet Takeover 2023 childrensparliament.org.uk/cabinet-takeover-2023/

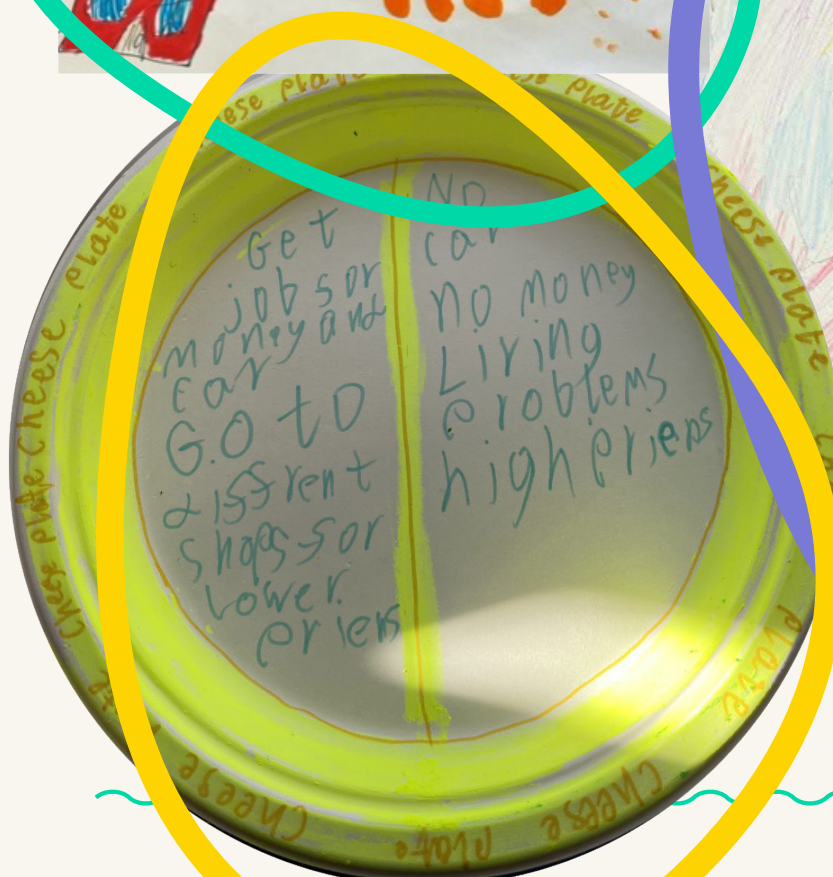
“[My parents] have to drive to Asda as I’m lactose intolerant and they stock that type of food.”

Inclusion and choice: Children see that when they or one of their family members have allergies or dietary requirements, they might not have enough choice.

Clubs and activities: Children saw the link between taking part in sports and other clubs can affect access to food.

“If you feel hungry you can’t play.”

“If I go to club, I have dinner before cause when it finishes, I might not have time to have food.”



Food and Identity

Children told us how food plays an essential role in shaping their identity. They feel that food can connect them to their own and other cultures. The children told us how they see the relationship of food with certain occasions. They also associate food with

memory and stories. Having a choice over the food they eat and being listened to was also a highlight for the children, as it gives them a sense of agency. The children explored food and identity by creating self-portraits using images of food.

The key messages the children shared about food and identity:

"I like to have sour food eating competitions with my grandad!"

"Cucumber reminds me of my Spanish friend, it is the only word I know in Spanish."

Food informed memories and stories: Food goes beyond the 'food as fuel' narrative and children associate food with good, and not so good, memories.

"When I eat my grandad's food, I feel sad because he died."

"[my favourite food is] ice cream as it reminds me of good days."

Food and relationships: Food is important when it comes to spending time with family.

"I feel special whenever I eat with my family cause it's not often that we do that."

Culture and heritage: Children's own and other cultures are introduced and celebrated by new and different food.

"My grandad is Danish, so I like the pickle tasting things."

"Haggis: as it's Scottish and I am from Scotland."

"It's really good to eat food from other cultures and places."

“At Christmas we eat together at the table in the kitchen.”

Food and celebration: Food plays an essential role in celebrations and holidays and helps children to make positive associations with food.

“On my birthday the birthday person gets to pick. I pick Doughnuts.”



“You might not want to eat it if you don’t like it.”

Choice and sharing their likes and dislikes: Children want to be listened to and have a say on what they eat.

“Children need to be given a choice about their food.”



Activities: Food has a strong connection to activities they like to take part in.

“[I like] sausage suppers, I get it from the Gorgie chippy in Edinburgh when I go to see my team there.”

Information & Marketing

The children examined what they need to know to make decisions about food consumption. This session saw the children make choices between 'good' and 'bad' food at a buffet of food and

then the children created adverts showing what they wanted adults to know about when offering food to children.

The key messages the children shared about food information and marketing are:

Food should be hygienic and safe to eat.

"Children should be able to eat safely."

Adults need to be honest about what food they are giving to children.

"Don't lie about the food you make."

Choice: children want to be able to make the choice between what is 'good' and 'bad' food.

"If you eat chocolate every day, you feel bad."

They want to know where their food comes from.

"At school, I don't know where it's all from!"

Knowledge: They have a good understanding of the nutritional aspects of food and what is 'good' and 'bad' food and how their food choices can affect them.

"I want to be a professional footballer; I can't eat junk food."

Food should be appealing and fun! In their adverts, the children created scenarios where 'healthy' food was made attractive and fun for children.

Food pricing and marketing needs to be fair: In their adverts the children acted out scenarios where they felt that food was aggressively marketed or too expensive.

Play and Exercise

The children explored the relationship between food, play and exercise. They explored what is needed to support play and exercise but also what barriers there are to playing. As part of this theme,

the children designed and conducted a playground survey to discover what their school mates thought about play and food.

The key messages the children shared about food and play and exercise:

Food is important to fuel play.

“If you don’t eat much, you’ll get tired.”

“The more you play the more hungry you get.”

When talking about the relationship between play and food, the children see it in a wider holistic sense.

“Exercise makes your heart goes faster and makes you active.”

“[play] releases a feel-good hormone called endorphins into your brain.”

Food and play are an integral part of school life, nearly every child interviewed as part of the survey said they had a “play piece”. However, children can be left out of play if they do not have access to food.

Playtime and having a snack are important for building relationships with friends.

“If we don’t have anything for break our teacher will give us a wee cereal bar – or if you are hungry in class.”

“I read in a book that the best way to eat food is with friends.”



Food and Environment

To examine the link between food, fairness and environment, the Investigators conducted a tour of their local area looking at shops, takeaways and public spaces. They

examined the impact these spaces have on both their local environment and wider environmental issues. Their understanding of these issues is informed by a sense of fairness.²

The key messages the children shared about food and environment:

They recognise the impact of transporting food over long distances and the impact it can have on local communities.

“Don’t get strawberries from Egypt but get them from Fife as they travel less far, are tasty and won’t rot!”

Use of space: while using local space to grow food would be beneficial, the children stressed that this could impact on the availability of land for children to play on.

“This place is for play, you don’t grow food here as children would trample it.”

“We can’t grow food here because some people might not care and run on it and cats will go in it and might ruin it too!”

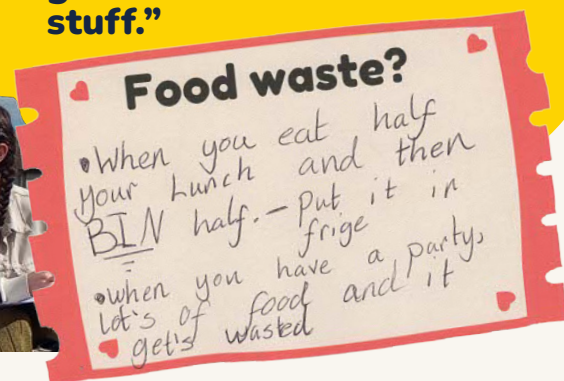
Food waste is a problem and they shared ways in which to combat food waste.

“Food waste is when you are eating stuff and you only eat half and bin the rest.”

“Make straws out of sweets so you can just eat it!”

People should eat more seasonally to reduce environmental impact.

“Eat more seasonally so there’s not a lot of gas from vans and other stuff.”



² In previous Children’s Parliament projects, the link between food, the environment and sustainability has been raised by children. See the following projects for more information:
childrensparliament.org.uk/climate-change/
childrensparliament.org.uk/learning-for-sustainability/



Cross-cutting Issues



Throughout the project, there were a number of consistent issues with food which the children told us regardless of the theme they were investigating at

that point. These issues stress the notion that food is not purely functional and fulfills many roles in helping children feel happy, healthy and safe.

Food and relationships are important:

“We have food as a family so we can chat.”

One of the main issues children told us throughout the project was the importance of sharing food with family and friends. This was not only limited to regular mealtimes but as an important part of their culture and special occasions.

“I eat Polish food with my Babcza (Grandma).”





“You get forced to eat it [food].”

“You might not want to eat it if you don’t like it.”

Choice of food was important this could be about food at home or at school.

“We would like a bigger selection of food every two weeks [at school] because every two weeks you do the same meals over and over!”

“Eating with others makes you feel happy.”

Food has emotional value and affects their wellbeing.

“Food makes me feel fresh.”

Key Messages

The key messages from the project were shared by the children with adults who can influence food policy in Fife. The children led an event in June at The

Rothes Halls in Glenrothes where, using activities and discussion, they shared key messages with the adults.

The key messages the children shared were:



Children have worries over people accessing food.



We Would like a bigger Selection of food every two weeks because every two weeks you do the same meals over and over and over.



Food is important to children to build relationships and feel happy, healthy and safe.



Children need to be given choices about their food ☺



Children want adults to listen to children on food choices.



Acknowledgments

Children's Parliament would like to say a huge thank you to Dr Andrew James Williams and Lynsey Brown, our partners from the University of St Andrews, School of Medicine for their unwavering commitment, support and Unfeartieness throughout this project.

We would like to pay a special thanks to the 12 fantastic Investigators who were involved in this project; their sense of curiosity and dedication have been an absolute joy. The children and staff of P5/6 at South Parks and Rimbleton Primary Schools have been absolutely fabulous, and we would like to extend a massive thank you to them.

About The University of St Andrews School of Medicine

The University of St Andrews School of Medicine engages students at undergraduate and postgraduate (taught and research) level. The School currently teaches approximately 700 undergraduate medical students on the three-year BSc (Hons) Medicine course. After graduation from St Andrews, they go on to complete the clinical phase of their Primary Medical Qualification training at one of six partner medical schools. The school also offers a four-year, graduate-entry undergraduate course delivered jointly by the Universities of St Andrews and Dundee, in collaboration with the University of the Highlands and Islands and NHS Scotland. Postgraduate programmes are in development to meet the needs of a range of health professions and disciplines through flexible learning, interprofessional education, and shared learning opportunities.

The school's research work is divided into four divisions: Cellular Medicine, Education, Infection and Global Health, and Population and Behavioural Science. Its primary research objectives relate to the early diagnosis of disease, promotion of digital and data-driven health science, and advancement of innovation in medical devices. In pursuit of these objectives, the school has been committed to equality and the advancement and promotion of the careers of women in science, receiving an Athena SWAN Silver accreditation in 2023. It is also consistently ranked in the top five on national student satisfaction surveys for both the quality of its teaching and research and the overall student experience.

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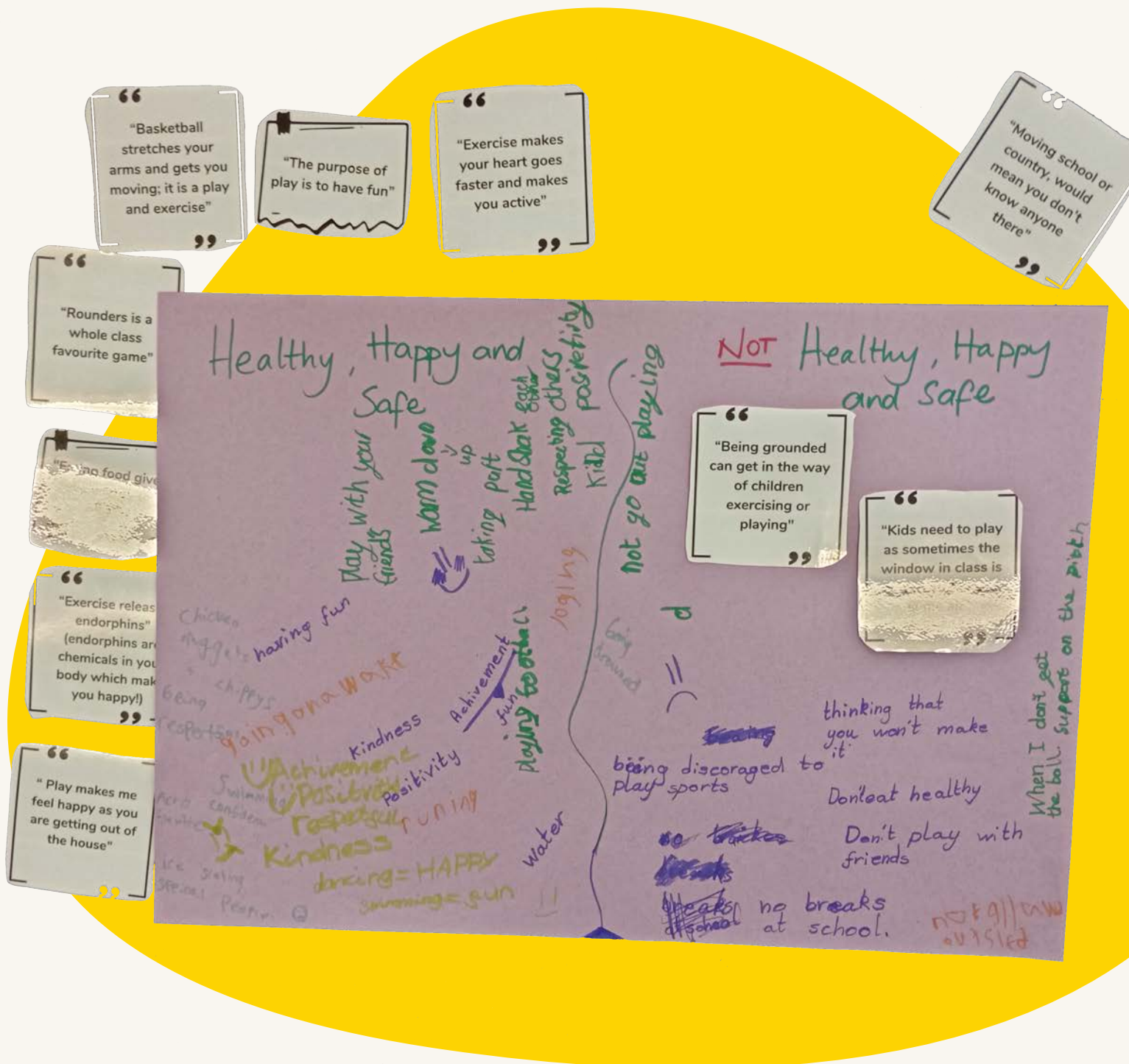


Unfearties

Unfearties are individuals who are courageous in discussing children's issues, are making a difference in children's lives, and who are willing to speak up for, and stand alongside, children. This Children's Parliament initiative has attracted more than 1,000 people to join, including doctors, nurses, teachers, parents, carers, civil servants,

local authority workers, third sector practitioners and United Nations deputy high commissioners.

Visit childrensparliament.org.uk/unfearties to find out more and join the brave band of Unfearties!



More about Children's Parliament

Our dream is that children grow up in a world of love, happiness and understanding. Our mission is to inspire greater awareness and understanding of the power of children's human rights and to support implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) across Scotland.

For more about our story and the work we do:
www.childrensparliament.org.uk

