

A photograph of children in a room with a wall covered in yellow sticky notes. The notes contain handwritten text such as 'Talk to you', 'Things to do', 'My dream', 'Find something', 'Sleep!', 'ASE', and 'Help!'. A child in a camouflage shirt is pointing at a note. A teal speech bubble is overlaid on the top left.

Children's voices influencing
services in Aberdeen

Imagining Aberdeen: Imagineers Investigate

Project delivery:

January 2019 -
December 2019

Project partners:



About the project

Children have a right to take part in and influence how adults plan and run services for them in the areas where they live and learn. Aberdeen City Council is looking to the long-term future to ensure that Aberdeen is not just a Child-Friendly City, but a Rights-Respecting City. The Imagineers Investigates Programme is helping to make this a reality by investigating four priorities set out in the Local Outcome Improvement Plan.

This programme builds on the last four years' work that Children's Parliament has been doing to support children to play a key and meaningful role in shaping the city of Aberdeen.

What we did

Between January – December 2019, the Imagineers carried out investigations into **mental health, attainment (doing our best), transition to adulthood (our hopes and dreams for the future) and alcohol and drugs**. From these, some additional key issues emerged - **having an adult to trust, bullying and the importance of sleep**. In each investigation, the Imagineers were charged with identifying challenges and opportunities for making services better. The Imagineers then met with Champions - key decision-makers and duty-bearers in the City and from across services - to share their thoughts and explore how their issues and ideas could be taken forward.

Children's Parliament uses a rights-based approach. We work with children to explore their rights in the environments of home, school and community. Through workshops and creative activities, we encourage children to discuss their needs and help them to share their views and experiences in order that they can influence decisions made with and for them.

Our Champions

Our Champions are a selection of key personnel from Aberdeen City Council, NHS Grampian and Police Scotland (North East). The role of the Champion is to listen to the Imagineers, share what they have heard and take direct action so that tangible improvements are made for children across Aberdeen. A further expectation is that each Champion takes what they have learned and explores how they can embed a children's rights approach in their department and organisation.

This magazine shares the key messages from the Imagineer Investigations and asks that you, the reader, help turn their views into positive change.



Mental Health

The Imagineers acknowledged that we all have mental health. When a child has good mental health, they can pay attention at school, have good relationships and play. When a child has poor mental health, it gets in the way of doing their best at school, making friends, and doing the things they enjoy.

in out
in out
in out
breath in and
out



All children need to be loved.

If we don't feel loved, then we can become lonely.

Love is what kids need most.

Help adults understand that their actions matter.

Divorce, parents working too much or not having time for us, abuse, someone dying, teachers being negative, parents drinking or using drugs or arguing can all make a child feel sad and depressed.



Adults' behaviour can have a positive impact on our mental health too.

Sometimes adults need help so they can help us eat healthy and be active and give us compliments and encourage us.

Take time to understand us instead of punishing us when we are not coping.

Self-harming behaviour is more than cutting yourself. It can be damaging relationships, getting into fights, not doing well at school or not attending school. Try and understand what is going on in our life and in our heads instead of automatically giving out detention or worse, abuse.

Every child should have space at home.

Children need time to think, chill, do homework and be on our own for a while, away from siblings.

Equip children with the right skills and tools so they can care for themselves.

Things that help keep us calm include: breathing, meditation, getting enough sleep, being active, doing something we love.

Doing Our Best

The Imagineers learned that all children have the right to an education that meets their needs. They found that in order to do their best, children need to have a good relationship with their teacher. All children need to feel safe and welcome in their school, and be treated with kindness when they are there. Children also need to be set up for the day, having eaten and had a good night's sleep.

Good teacher

helpful
good listener
good explaining
careny



"Teachers should be kind to children. I want to see them hugging!"

"Teachers should ask about your weekend - so they know you and you know that you have someone that will listen to you."

"Food recharges people and gives you energy to do what you need to do."

Make shout-free schools.

If you shout at people you might hurt their ears and make them sad. If you shout and spit in their face it makes the child feel horrible and scared. We can't ask for help if we are scared of our teacher.

Give us teachers who are positive, respectful and take the time to build relationships with us.

It is important to have someone who we trust and who can relate to us, as this helps us do our best in school.

Make sure all children have enough food.

Food makes our brain work. We need it to be able to learn.

We need more P.E. and outdoor learning in the school day.

There should be more time to be active and play. They are good for your health, give you more opportunities, teach you how to respect other people and learn communication skills.

Ask us how we want to learn and what we want to learn about.

Learning should be fun and interactive. We want to look forward to going to school.

We need buddies to help us with the school day.

Being a buddy makes you happy because you are making someone else happy. Younger children know who to go to and have someone they can ask for help.



Alcohol & Drugs

The Imagineers found that children see alcohol everywhere – on sale in shops, smashed bottles in their parks, at home and parties. When adults drink alcohol or get drunk this makes children feel unsafe because they don't know what that person will do, say or what might happen to them. This impacts children's relationships with the people they love. Alcohol stops children feeling included.

"Not being able to play in the parks near your home because they are not safe gets in the way of our dreams. It could affect your social life or make you not want to go outside."

Make the places where children live and play, safe.

Sometimes we are scared to play in the park because of broken bottles and syringes, or adults and young people drinking. When this happens, we can't socialise with our friends.

Make more free or cheap activities or games where children and adults play together.

This makes us feel happy and included. Lots of space in the city is taken up by pubs and bars that only adults can go to.

Give teenagers things to do in their school and community.

This will mean they are less bored and less likely to drink or smoke. This will make our communities safer.

Parents and carers need to be able to recognise the impact that drinking at home has on their child.

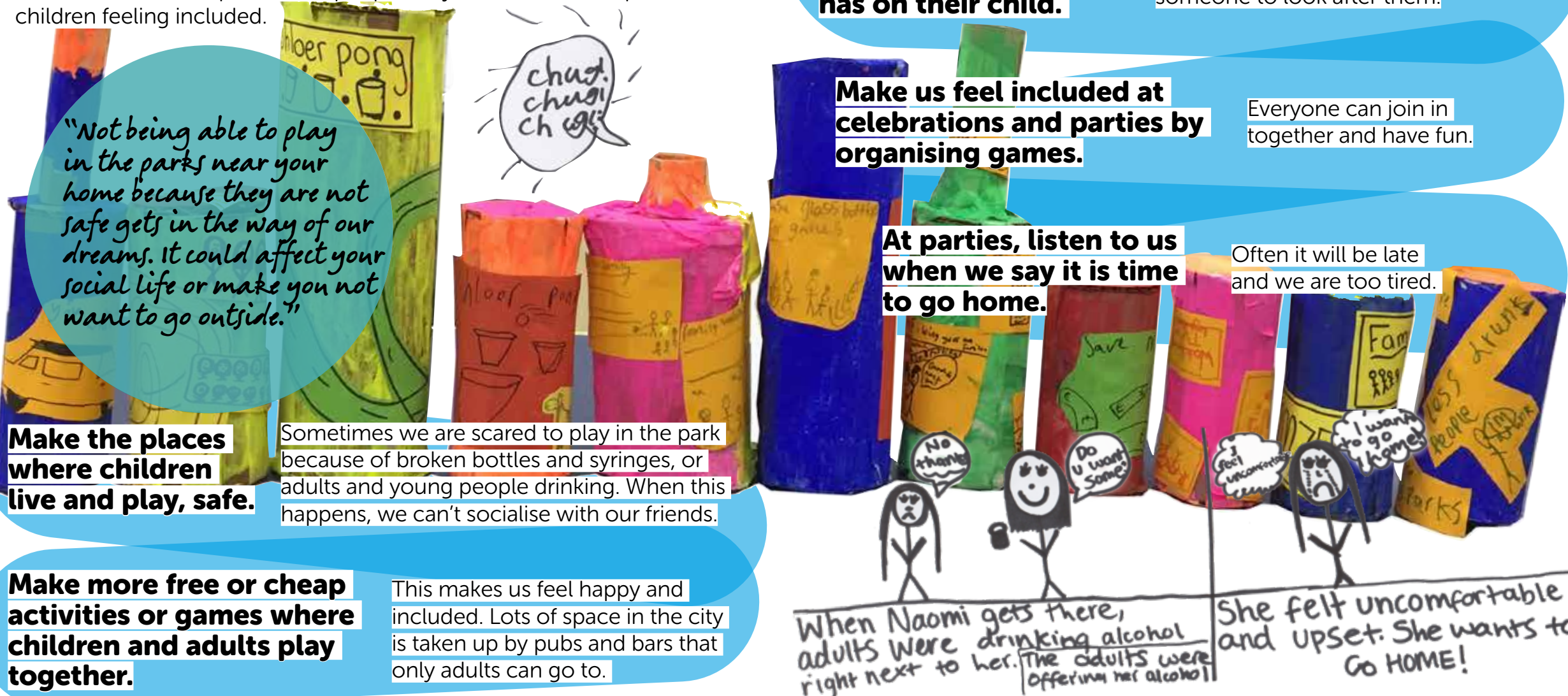
Without alcohol, home is a quieter and calmer place where families spend time together watching tv or playing games. Children feel safe because there is someone to look after them.

Make us feel included at celebrations and parties by organising games.

Everyone can join in together and have fun.

At parties, listen to us when we say it is time to go home.

Often it will be late and we are too tired.



Our Hopes & Dreams for the Future

The Imagineers believe very strongly that every child should be encouraged by the people in their lives and given opportunities to help them flourish. Adults can do this by praising, including children, and speaking up for them if a child doesn't feel like their voice is heard. If their teachers, parents and carers say **'I believe in you'** it makes children feel self-confident and able to achieve their dreams.

"Compliment us on things we are good at"

We need your encouragement.

If you are told comments like "you are never going to get where you want", then you feel like you can't do it. Be positive and support us to get better at things.

Let us be more flexible around our choices.

We should be able to change our mind and change subjects. Sometimes we don't know what we want to be.

If you are good at something or enjoy doing it, you should not have this taken off you when you are struggling to cope or not doing your best at school.

This is what makes a child feel positive and have good self-confidence. It is important that teachers always let children participate.

Make sure ALL of our schools are supportive and fun, so we can feel positive about going.

If you go to a school that isn't doing well and everyone knows that, it makes you feel negative about going and learning. It makes you embarrassed.

Support the adults we love, so they can be people who will inspire us and be positive role models.

These could be our parents and people who care for us or someone who keeps an eye on us at the school gate.

A Trusted Adult

Imagineers know the importance of every child having an adult they trust in their life. Someone they can speak to, who they feel they can share their worries with, looks out for them and who will help them stay strong. The role of the trusted adult is to make time to really listen and make the child feel safe and valued.

Children need time.

Adults have to find the space in their day to stop and listen to us.

Adults should be kind and not judge.

They should understand how we might feel and make us feel loved.

All children need someone who will really listen.

We need adults to look at the child when they are talking, and stay quiet, calm and be ready to listen.

Confidentiality matters to children.

Children want to tell a trusted adult their worries, but they don't want this person to tell other teachers and professionals what they have shared. There should be trusted adults to speak to in private without the worry of it being spread. Children understand that an adult can share worries if it is really serious or they are concerned for a child – for example if a child tells you they are getting abused, hurt, bullied or not enough food.

The Imagineer guide to sharing a worry in a trustful and respectful way:

Take the child aside. Say this is too serious and you have to tell someone, and that you are really, really worried about them.

Calmly explain to the child how you are going to share their worry. If the child knows you are going to tell someone else, they will be mentally prepared for something to happen.

Let the child have a say on who you tell.

Just tell what the other person needs to know. Don't go into details.

Sometimes a child wants to be there when you tell, to have their say as there might be repercussions. If the child isn't there it could lead to their problem getting bigger and bigger.

Do it discreetly, don't share in public.

Do not do it in front of other children.

Walk the child home or back to class to make them feel safe.

The adult should keep a close eye on the child.

Bullying

Imagineers identify that bullying gets in the way of children being able to do the things they want to. It makes them feel scared, embarrassed and alone. It can stop children going to school. Adults need to listen to children and understand how serious the impact of bullying is on children's lives, so that all children can feel welcome and able to take part in the activities they want to do.



"You have confidence and then a bully says something that makes you feel bad."

Every child should be taken seriously

Adults may say that it is just a joke and that the child that is being bullied is just overreacting and taking it too seriously, but they aren't.

Teachers need to listen to both sides of the story from children.

Adults should understand that behaviour is communication and that sometimes bullies act the way that they do because of how they are feeling or what is happening in their lives.



Teacher



Set times for meals so kids don't get too hungry or too full before bed.

Adults can help. By listening to you, and the adults could sing to you or read to you.

"Having worries or feeling stressed out can keep us awake."

All children should be given a good night hug and kiss.

Parents and carers need to talk to us about our worries last thing at night, so we have nice dreams and positive thoughts for the next day.

All children's bedrooms should be warm, comfortable and noise-free.

Siblings, parents watching TV or noises outside, like traffic or noisy neighbours can disrupt our sleep. Being too cold also gets in the way.

Make sure our phones aren't keeping us awake at night.

Having our mobile phones before bed gets in the way of us going to sleep, because it distracts us. Social media, messages and phone calls can wake us up.

Every child should have a bedtime routine.

Not having a bed-time routine makes it hard for us to sleep, having different bedtimes at the weekend can make it difficult to get up for school.

Sleep

"Please keep the noise down when we are trying to sleep, or we won't have a good day the next day."

TEMPERATURE Adults could give you a extra blanket

Adults...

LISTEN
HELP
SHARE

Listen to our voices

Help by acting on them

Share what you hear, it's up to you to change people's thoughts on children and make sure they pay attention to our rights.

Children's Parliament
Imagining Aberdeen

Imagining Aberdeen is a partnership between Children's Parliament and Aberdeen City Council



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The Imagineers are a group of 40 children, aged 9-13, from across the city. The children attend these schools: Airyhall Primary School, Bramble Brae Primary School, Danestone Primary School, Fernielea Primary School, Forehill Primary School, Greenbrae Primary School, Manor Park Primary School, Riverbank Primary School, Tullos Primary School, Lochside Academy, Northfield Academy and St Machar Academy. Our thanks go to all the parents, carers, teachers and PSAs who have supported the Imagineers' participation.