



Service Design

Involving younger care experienced children

“ Anyway, being in care is not everything that defines who we are. It is sometimes difficult to talk about these things, but I think it is worth doing it. ”

Resource: **3**

A series of three resources for leaders, managers and senior practitioners

 **Children's Parliament**

In partnership with:

 **The Promise Scotland**
SUPPORTING CHANGE FOR CHILDREN,
FAMILIES & CARE EXPERIENCED ADULTS

Children’s Parliament, in partnership with **The Promise Scotland**, has created this series to highlight a children’s human rights approach to involving younger **care experienced children**, aged 9 to 14, in service design.

Resource one:

Why a children’s human rights approach is essential to keeping the promise and should underpin service design. This resource provides an overview of relevant legislation, policy and essential skills and knowledge.

Resource two:

How to put children’s human rights into practice by involving children in service design. This resource focuses on the principles of rights and planning for involving younger care experienced children.

Resource three:

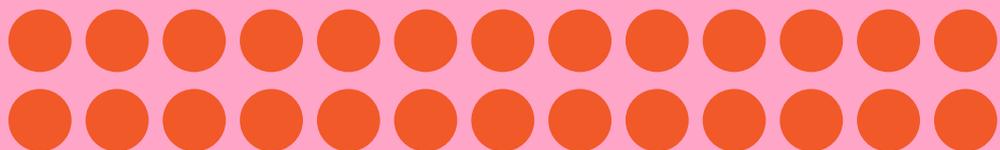
What younger care experienced children’s participation in service design looks and feels like in practice. This resource includes practical examples, tools and tips.

These resources will be useful to those with responsibility for designing and implementing service design programmes with and for care experienced children, including senior leadership teams and senior practitioners in government, local authorities, public bodies and third sector organisations.

These resources are rooted in Children’s Parliament’s work with care experienced children aged 9 to 14 and are primarily aimed at this age group. The principles and knowledge can also be applied when planning your work with care experienced children who are younger, although attention should be given to ensuring methods are age and stage appropriate.

For more information about our work with **The Promise Scotland** and to access all of the resources online, scan the QR or visit: www.childrensparliament.org.uk/our-work/the-promise/





What younger care experienced children's participation in service design looks and feels like in practice

Children's Parliament's model of implementing a children's human rights approach in service design with younger care experience children is the basis of this resource. Children's Parliament draws on many years of experience and the **'I am more than being in care': a consultation with children with care experience to inform the Independent Care Review (2020)**.

Our approach consciously builds a caring, creative space to support care experienced children to have their voices heard by adults who make decisions that impact upon their lives, and the lives of other care experienced children. This space helps children to develop skills, values and knowledge that enable them to voice their ideas, views and experiences.

It is not up to children to produce solutions to problems in the 'care system' but it is adults' responsibility to listen to their views, experiences and ideas. Equally, we do not need to keep asking children the same questions about issues we know the answers to and that were explored thoroughly in the **Independent Care Review**. However, we do need to know if things are improving, whether their experience is different, what the issues of concern are in their daily lives and in their experience of care.

We believe sharing examples of good practice is necessary as Scotland fulfils its commitment to children through implementation of the **UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)** and delivering on its **promise** to the care experienced community:

“ **All Scotland's children and young people will grow up loved, safe and respected so that they will realise their full potential, and that care experienced adults and families have the support they need to thrive.** ”

We hope this resource will help you and your team consider the fundamentals of your own practice and shape ways of working that embodies and expresses your shared values.

This resource aims to:



- share learning from Children's Parliament's work
- help you to put a children's human rights approach into practice
- enable you and your team to design a project or programme with and for care experienced children
- provide context and the practical resources to implement your project or programme.

This is not a step-by-step guide to activities but provides an overview, describing our approach and what we have learned as a result. If you would like us to work with you on a similar project, contact Children's Parliament.

This resource gives an overview and insight into a children's human rights approach to involving care experienced children in service design. We suggest you use it at the preliminary stages of planning your project or programme in conjunction with other resources from **Promise Design School** and **Children's Parliament**. These offer an overview of the service design, why it matters to keeping the promise (see **Resource one and Resource two**).

“ It is important that children with care experience think they are loved. Even if they are cared for - they all have the right to be loved. ”

Member of Children's Parliament



Children's Parliament practice model

The Children's Parliament practice model has developed over years of direct work with children and adults and demonstrates the transformational impact of rights-based practice on children and on the environments around them.

Children's Parliament practice:

is with children

requires the involvement of adults

is about human dignity

**has at its heart relationships based on
empathy, kindness and trust**

**embodies values that are brave, creative,
kind and fair**

**creates an environment imbued with equality,
agency and stewardship**

expresses love, happiness and understanding.

The Children's Parliament approach builds the capacity of children to advocate for themselves, claim their rights and defend the rights of others. Our practice requires the involvement of adults so that they understand their responsibilities and duties and can play their part in making change happen.

The idea of **human dignity** gives resonance to children's rights and is the foundation for rights-based relationships. The UNCRC speaks of the inherent dignity and worth of every person and that children should grow up in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding.

At Children's Parliament we believe that unless you explore human dignity, discussion of children's human rights lacks resonance. It is the foundation for rights-based relationships, which are fundamental to practice.

Considering the fundamental values and principles of your own practice will help you shape a project/ programme in a way that embodies and expresses them. In the following pages we describe how we put this model into practice.

“ Remember that being in care isn't the only thing about us - it doesn't define who we are! ”

Member of Children's Parliament



Rights-based relationships – kindness, empathy and trust

The UNCRC speaks of **the inherent dignity and worth of every person**. The idea of human dignity is the foundation for rights-based relationships, recognising that every child has rights which belong to them without discrimination of any kind, and that rights are ‘inalienable’, that is, they cannot be taken away.

Strong, caring, trusting relationships are essential to provide the safe and supportive environment to help children participate and encourage them to speak, if they choose to, about their experiences of care. Rights-based practice has at its heart relationships with children and adults based on empathy, kindness and trust.

Human beings are social creatures. How other people treat us influences how we experience ourselves – with loving and nurturing relationships, we know ourselves to be lovable, worthy of respect and care.

“ I would feel a lot better if adults explained decisions to me. Reasons are important. ”

Member of Children’s Parliament



Film: Children’s Parliament investigates...(2017)

In our practice, we aim to develop trusting relationships, however this may not always be easy for children and adults who have learned that the world is not to be trusted.

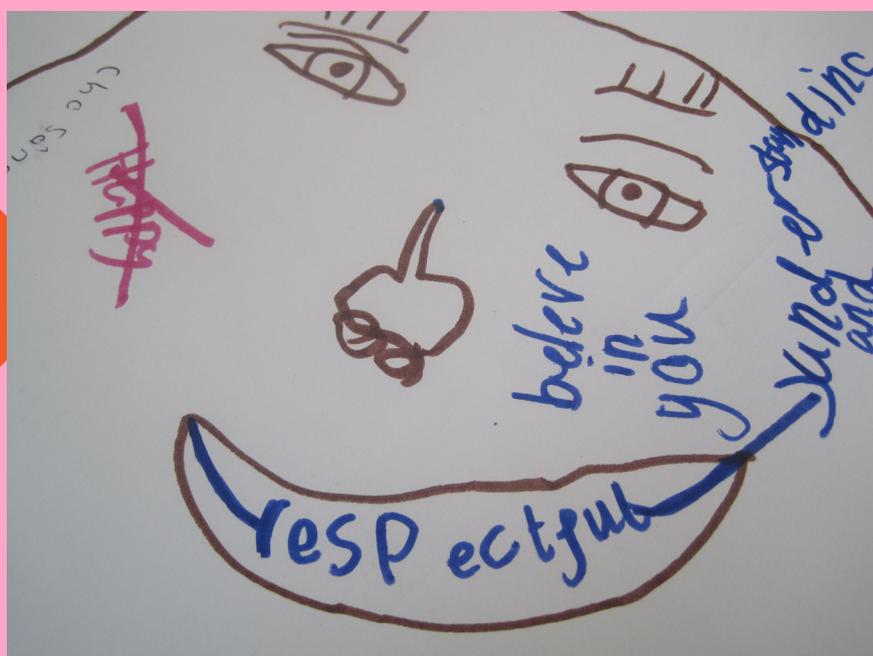
- We must be interested in how children are communicating.
- So that we do not miss important things, we need to give time to relationships, be curious, listen to children and each other.
- We practice and model **empathy** in our professional relationships, making visible the ability to empathise with other people's emotions and respond appropriately to them.
- We show concern for others, and try to understand how someone else feels, or how it might feel to be in their position – without making assumptions based only on our own personal experience.

At Children's Parliament, the **kindness** we bring to relationships means engaging with what is happening with children; noticing when they need support; responding accordingly. We should bring kindness to our interactions even when it is difficult, when we are tired or stressed. As professionals, we can take a moment to stop to ask ourselves **"what is the kind thing to do here?"**

Children with care experience are more likely to have experienced difficult relationships and adverse childhood experiences. The often-transient nature of the paid workforce in the 'care system' contributes to insecurity. Positive relationships are therefore particularly important.

“ I miss my dog so much,
nobody ever thinks of that. ”

Member of Children's Parliament



Love

Children tell us repeatedly that they need to know that they are loved. The UNCRC preamble states that children should grow up in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding, and acknowledges that love is an important need for every child.

Love is a powerful motivator for learning and for growth. A loving professional person is experienced by the child as an adult who believes in them and inspires them - if a teacher or practitioner has a loving attitude, then children will be supported to develop to their full potential.

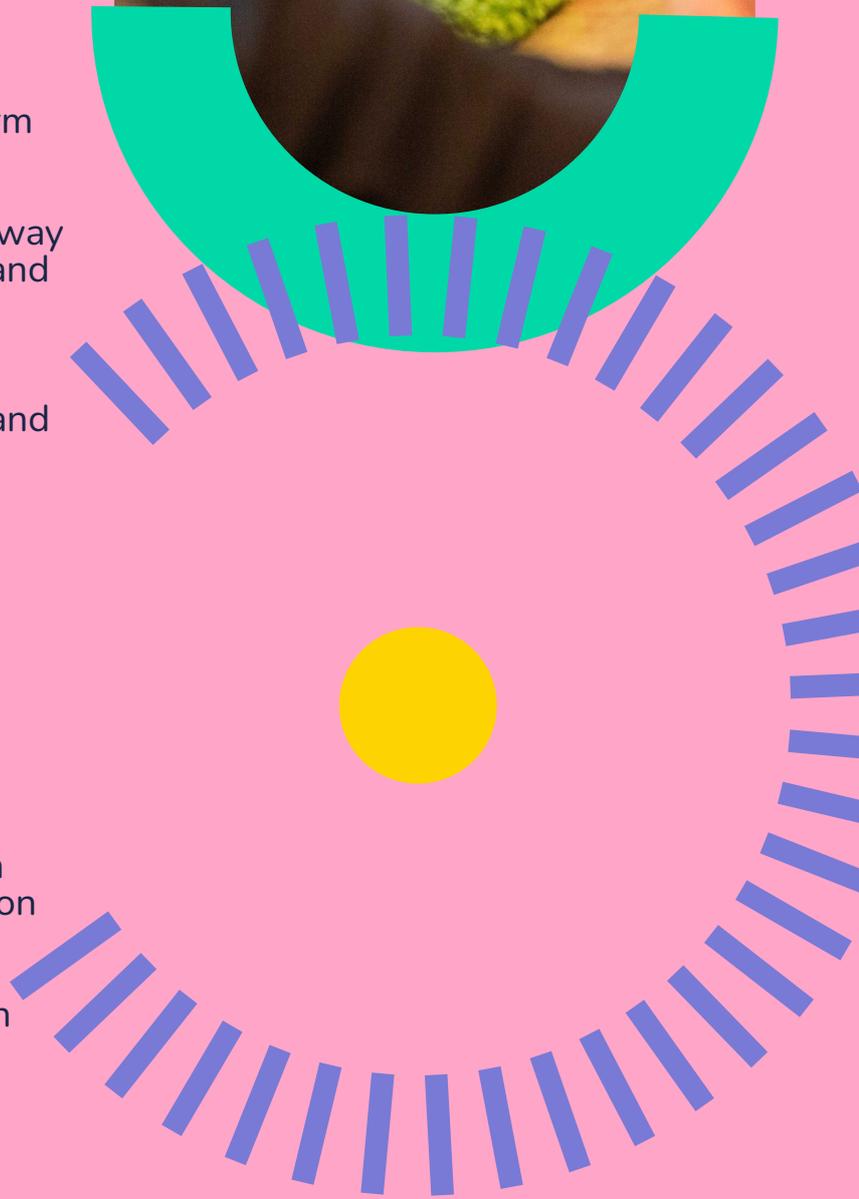
We believe love grounds professional practice in positive and practical ways. In our practice, love is conveyed through kindness, empathy, acceptance, building bonds and providing a sense of meaningful participation and engagement.

When relationships are built on love they can be understanding and forgiving; so, love can also frame a discussion that comes about when we need to support or challenge a child.



Values that support rights-based practice

- Viewing all children and adults as equals
- Treating everyone with respect
- Not shouting or raising our voices - we know it inhibits children's participation and wellbeing
- Adapting activities and pace to the needs of individual children and groups
- Encouraging children to try new things and be open to new ideas
- Creating structure and boundaries and allowing freedom within these
- Understanding and supporting children who are struggling. We recognise that all behaviour is a form of communication
- Using a range of creative arts as a way of exploring and expressing ideas and feelings
- Making enough time to allow conversations and ideas to unfold and deepen
- Opening up discussion rather than closing down ideas. All answers are valid, no matter how trivial or irrelevant they may appear
- Being present, avoiding being or appearing to be distracted
- Remaining aware that some issues raised may be sensitive for children and acting with care and compassion at all times
- Encouraging adults to participate in each activity and discussion.



Creative ways of working with children

Children’s Parliament uses creative, participatory and play-based methods to support children to meaningfully engage with ideas and matters of importance to them. To ensure children’s participation is engaging, fun, fair and meaningful, the use of creative processes is not only a good idea but essential.

- **Children like to be engaged in ways that are fun, creative and age appropriate.**
- **Opportunities need to be generated that allow children to share their views, experiences and ideas.**
- **Creative approaches provide an effective way to demonstrate rights-based practice.**
- **The results help to influence positive change.**



The use of creativity is a way to establish “**the environment and support that enables children to advocate effectively for themselves**”, one of the cornerstones of a children’s human rights approach in practice. The creative space enables us to get to know each other and build trusting relationships so that children **feel free** to explore ideas and **feel safe** to share their experiences and opinions. It is a space where we can introduce and explore the language and landscape of human rights.

Creative approaches may include making murals, a range of visual arts, drama, puppets, as well as digital and graphic arts, animation, storytelling, environmental arts, drama and music.

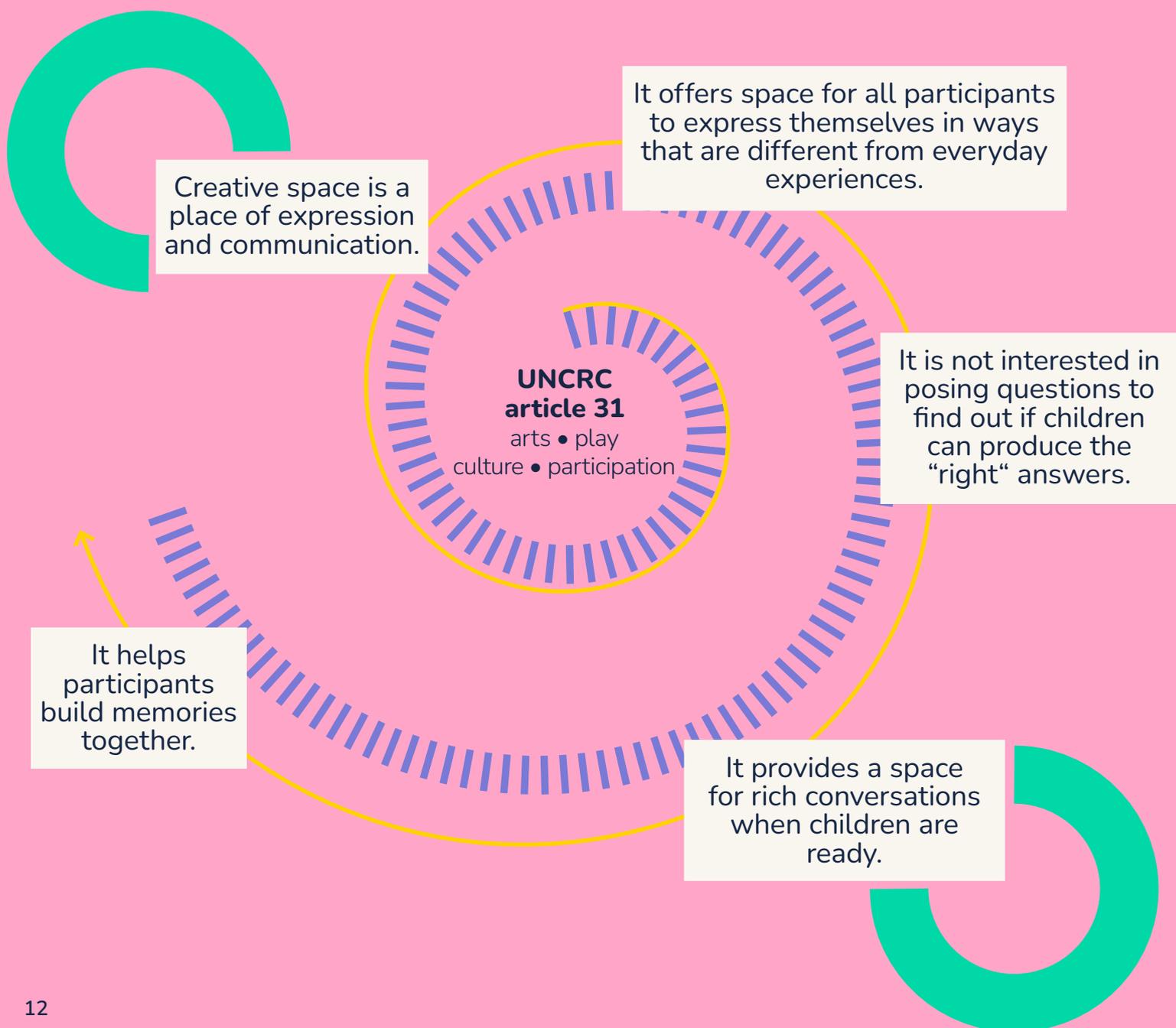
The pleasure and satisfaction of being involved in creative arts without the pressure of having to achieve a measured outcome is a good reason for delivering children’s rights work in this way. We know children can express their own ideas, when they are engaged and enjoying the experience and the creative space we establish is relaxed, fun and productive.

Our aim in establishing a creative space is that children can engage at the level they feel comfortable with and in ways that suit their preferences. This can be more conducive to participation for children who are not generally seen as the class “achievers” or who have faced challenges and struggles in life and school. In this space, we have seen children rise to challenges, achieving more than they themselves believe they can.

When our hands and minds are engaged with a creative task, the conversations we have are on a more intuitive level. There is breathing space and a change of pace, room for quiet and being together - enabling valuable conversations if a child wants to talk, but without any pressure to do so.

Adult-focused decision making, information sharing events and meetings can exclude the genuine participation of younger children. Creative space where **adults and children are working together** can shift the usual dynamics between them, so that it feels, and is, more equal. Events aimed at sharing findings, influencing decisions or presenting ideas can take the shape of interactive exhibitions, games, artistic activities or groupwork where children and adults participate equally.

Arts, play, and participation are all contained within article 31 of the UNCRC for a reason – the elements of article 31 are described as “mutually linked and reinforcing”. In Children’s Parliament, the creative approach is part of our shared journey to realising children’s human rights.



Trauma-informed practice

Children's human rights practice intertwines with what we have learned about the impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and the developments in trauma-informed practice in Scotland. At the heart of nurture and being trauma-informed is a focus on wellbeing and relationships and a drive to support the growth and development of children and young people. Developing positive relationships and creating a happy, safe, predictable space is core to practice.

It is now better understood that adverse childhood experiences and environmental factors, including experiences before birth, can impact negatively on child development. We recognise the impact of both positive and negative early childhood experiences and so we always seek to ensure our relationships are rooted in our values of empathy, kindness and trust, in very real ways that children can feel.

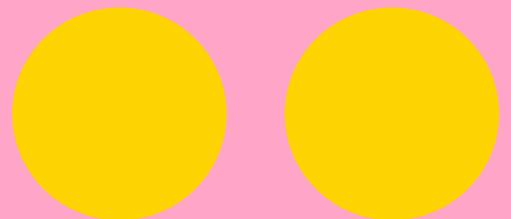
We can model behaviour that helps children develop self-regulation - the ability to regulate emotion, behaviour and attention. Self-regulation allows us to plan, problem solve and manage social interactions and with it comes things like persistence, resilience and confidence.

When we think about childhood and child development from a human rights perspective:

- we think about the assets and strengths of the child (never a deficit or problematic view)
- we recognise children's developmental needs and diverse evolving capacities
- we reflect on what adults should do or provide, for children's healthy development
- we view children at every stage as active actors and partners
- we seek to provide children with opportunities to grow and claim their rights for themselves.

The principles of trauma-informed practice are integral to children's human rights practice and essential to working with care experienced children. You will recognise these principles in the practice described throughout this resource.

- Safety
- Choice
- Collaboration
- Trustworthiness
- Empowerment
- Cultural consideration



Trauma-informed principles into practice

Creating a welcoming space with a positive and fun environment

Giving praise and showing appreciation

Establishing routines

Ensuring a calm environment with no raised voices

Supporting children to take things at their own pace

Using children's own ways of expressing themselves and their own language

Having skilled and listening adults

Reminding children to only share what they feel safe and happy to share

Helping everyone understand what helps the whole group feel safe, confident and happy

Providing one to one support for children who need it (when they need it – it might not be all the time)

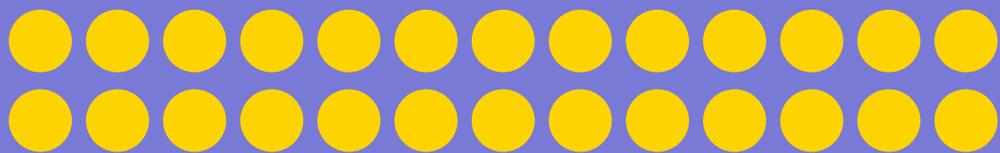
Engaging with supportive adults who know the child well, to make them aware of communication and support needs.

Additional support

Building trusting relationships may result in children disclosing worries or things that are happening in their lives that need to be followed up with families or social workers, teachers.

Supporting children's wellbeing concerns and ensuring the safeguarding of the child requires skilled staff members and needs to be built into the programme plans.

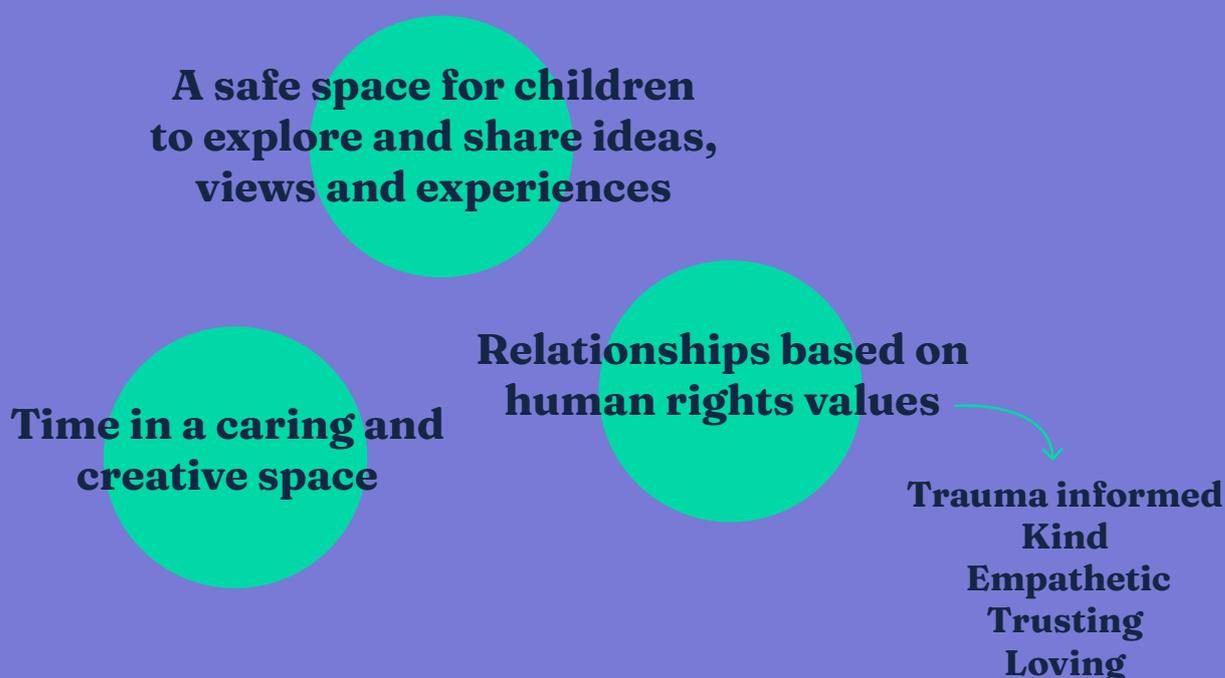
Occasionally additional home visits might become necessary to follow up on matters that are arising or to support a child to continue their involvement with the programme.



Creating a programme of work – a safe space for care experienced children

This section will share practice to help create a way of working to involve care experienced children in service design. It will share more of the Children's Parliament experience and use the **Pinky Promise** (the Care Review report for younger readers) as a resource.

Key elements



Planning your project

In our introduction, we noted that children do not need to be asked questions to which we already know the answers, or which have already been explored thoroughly in the Care Review. We need to know that senior leaders and other adults who will be involved with the programme are giving a clear commitment to engage. In planning to involve children we ask ourselves questions such as:

- Why do we want to run this programme or project?
- What do we hope will change?
- What do we already know?
- How do we know it's addressing the right issues or concerns?



Time and timing

Children's Parliament experience tells us not to underestimate the time for planning, preparation, partnerships, project delivery and for the overall impact to play out over time.

Planning your programme to span a **suitable period of time** is essential. Sufficient time is needed:

- to build relationships and trust
- for children to feel safe to explore their own ideas
- for children to feel safe and confident enough to share their experiences and ideas
- for adults to listen properly and to engage as equals
- for adults to find ways to take forward what they have learned from the children
- for changes to be implemented in policy and practice.

Being **clear about the purpose** of the engagement will help to set suitable timeframes. Practical things to consider:

- Is this a new group of children or an established one?
- Why and when are children being involved?
- Is there a deadline, for example information required to be fed into a wider consultation, report or service development?
- Will the children meet for short, regular amounts of time, for example two hours weekly or over a set period of time such as during the summer holidays?
- When are adult partners, stakeholders or champions going to be available?
- What are the ethical considerations?

Most importantly, remember **time with the children is precious**:

- Go at their pace
- Allow the conversations to unfold naturally
- Allow confidence to grow
- Be prepared to pause or take a breather
- Provide enough time for the children to come up with their own answers
- Avoid pressure to produce outputs for artificial deadlines
- Introduce the engagement with adults carefully and sensitively
- Remember children's silences can be as revealing as strongly expressed views.

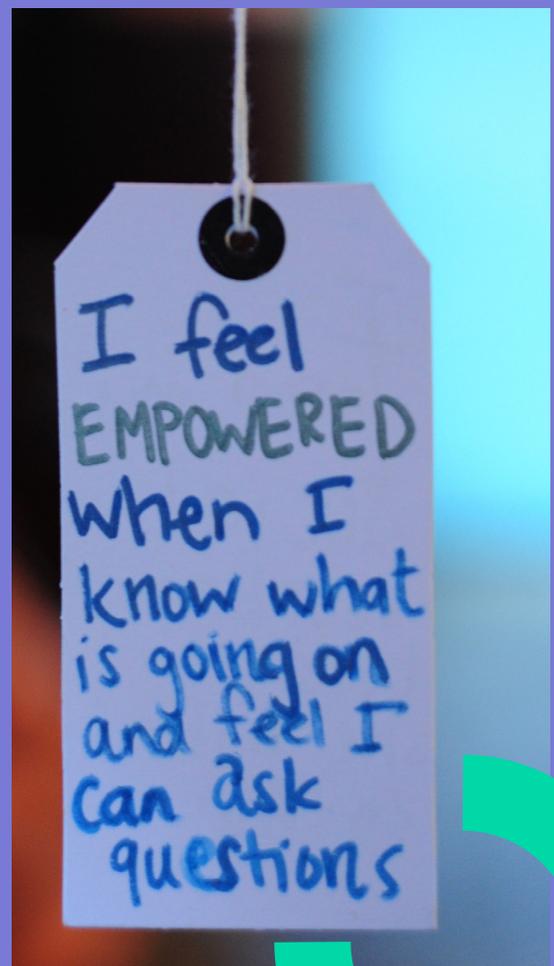
Involving adults

“ Talking to people genuinely helps no matter where you are. I also kind of learnt how to stick up for myself more. I just don't give up that easily when having an argument. I would also say that I stand up more for my rights, I have the feeling I now have a stronger say in decisions that affect me. ”

Member of Children's Parliament

Your project may involve inviting other adults into the space with the children. Involving adult champions, parents, carers and other people important to the child also requires careful consideration of timing.

- The early stages of a project are likely to focus on connecting with children in a meaningful way, developing the confidence and self-esteem of the children, and supporting them to begin to share their views and experiences.
- Key adults might be invited to drop by at the beginning or end of the sessions, to join for snacks or lunch, to make something creative together, to come to a special sharing session or to a celebration event to hear about the programme and the children's key messages for change.
- As time progresses, adults and the children might begin to explore key issues together and embark on investigations to develop thinking and explore the potential for change, with the aims of influencing policy and practice.
- It is important that adults who join sessions with children are prepared to outline how and when they will respond to the points children raise.





Tip:

Children's top tips for adults

View all children and adults as equals and treat everyone with respect.

Remember children have the right to not participate and must not feel pressured to share their views and ideas.

Avoid using jargon and acronyms.

Be clear that the adults and children each have new knowledge and expertise: it is about learning from each other.

Remember that all views and ideas are valid, no matter how trivial, irrelevant or impractical they may appear.

Adults should not shout or raise their voices.

Talk directly to children, not to or through a supporting adult – this makes sure they feel valued and that their views are not altered by adults' words or agendas.

Avoid putting individual children on the spot.

Further resources:

- **Guide - Our Hearings, Our Voice**
- **Climate Changemakers Guide for supporting adults**
- **Children's Parliament Investigates - How Professionals make rights real**
- **Project Change**
- **Child-Centered Design - Save the Children's Resource Centre**

CASE STUDY

I am more than being in care - Seen + Heard (2015-2020)

Seen + Heard Fife was a creative, human rights-based programme for children with care experience, aged 9 to 14, supporting them to explore what it means to be healthy, happy and safe in care. This project was delivered in partnership with the Fife Council Corporate Parent Board and 2bHeard, a project for care experienced young people in Fife. In Seen + Heard Fife, the children participated in a range of creative, reflective and relational activities that helped them develop confidence, sense of self and identity, build foundations for positive relationships with other children and adults, and speak about their experiences of care.

The programme took place over two years at the Falkland Centre for Stewardship, with monthly full day sessions where children were supported

to attend by their school, social worker or carer. The sessions had a consistent structure, including shared mealtimes, group and one-to-one check-ins, use of the woods and outdoor spaces, and shared routines. The children's views and experiences informed decisions made by Fife Council's Corporate Parent Board and helped improve services for children with care experience across Fife and nationally. The work was directly shared with working groups for the Independent Care Review.

In the first year, Papier-Mâché Week allowed the children to think about their future self. They were supported by professional artists to create a papier-mâché model of their future self, learning new art techniques and skills, all the while thinking about who they are and what they want for their future.



CASE STUDY contd.

These models were exhibited and the children shared their hopes for the future with people that mattered to them, friends, family and professionals. In the second year of Seen + Heard, the children looked more closely at the positive and challenging experiences they had with the 'care system' and what they needed to be healthy, happy and safe in care. Using creative approaches, such as poetry and art, the children explored their identities and dreams for the future; they developed their understanding of children's human rights and the impact these have on the lives of children with care experience. Their messages were shared with families, practitioners and decision makers, so that children's views and experiences could influence changes to policy and practice.



A two-day engagement exhibition named '**Process the Meaning**' was hosted at Fife College, Dunfermline (May 2019) which showcased all the children's work. Over two days and five sessions, the children hosted over 70 national and local stakeholders with responsibilities for care experienced children. By inviting stakeholders into this space, the children were able to share their work confidently, help the adults gain a first-hand insight into their experiences and ask them to make a difference for all children with care experience in Scotland.

Because of inviting many professionals over the years into the Seen + Heard space, understanding developed around what it means to be in care for the children and what they value, which informed good practice. For example, one of the children's Calls to Action resulted in social workers being required to remove their lanyard badges when visiting schools, to help to prevent stigma and to uphold children's rights to privacy.

In another example, engaging with the children gave some politicians and stakeholders a further push to advocate for free bus travel for children across Scotland.

Impressed by 'Process the Meaning', the Care Review commissioned Children's Parliament to facilitate a consultation with the children to further reflect on their experiences in care and feed into the Care Review's final recommendations. The children's contribution, as amongst the youngest children involved with the Care Review, provided key messages for changes to the care system and had an important impact on the Care Review.

To learn more: **Seen + Heard in Fife**



How will children become involved?

Whether the children are already part of an established group or if your programme will bring children together in a new way, their participation should always be informed and voluntary.

Steps

1. Discuss and agree the invitation strategy, roles and expectations with partners.
2. Arrange a briefing session with potential partners, for example, social work team leaders, primary school head teachers, to provide a clear understanding of the programme and expectations.
3. Obtain commitment from partners to support the programme, for example:
 - provide transport support for the child (financially if necessary)
 - ensure that children who are participating in school time are not marked absent
 - obtain commitment to share the learning from the programme in their sectors/team.
4. Ensure all information is produced in formats that are accessible to those who may need it, including child-friendly versions.
5. Consider other ways to include the voices of children if it is not appropriate or possible for them to be there for whatever reason.



Tip:

Mobile phones and other devices

Children tell us that adults using mobile phones in their presence makes them feel left out, ignored, and not listened to. We explain to children that one or two people will have responsibility for emergency calls and taking photographs which they will do in a corner of the room or outside.

Introducing your project with families and people who matter to the child

Meeting with children and those that care for them is a critical part of developing this work. This may be the first face to face contact with the children and their families. Home visits need to be planned carefully. Take into consideration families' preferences and availability to make the visit as convenient as possible for them.

Reasons to arrange home visits include to:

1. get to know the child and their families and carers, support workers, and vice versa
2. start to build positive relationships
3. share information about the project including venue, activities, food, and staffing
4. clarify any questions or uncertainties
5. provide images to visualise what to expect and make it come to life
6. talk about who else will be involved – explain that they all have different experiences but may also have shared experiences such as having lived in different households, having a social worker, living with grandparents or in a foster family
7. explore knowledge and understanding of children's human rights and the meaning of the group's values – dignity, kindness, empathy and trust
8. get to know the children's likes and dislikes – talk about food (to inform menus), creative arts they enjoy (to inform activities) and what they are looking forward to or are worried about (to tailor support)
9. do an activity together to give a flavour of the programme and to help conversation.





Tip:

Develop relationships with practical actions and gestures

Have a group ‘pet’ or mascot that the children collectively name and care for.

Send out letters between sessions if they are spaced apart.

Take pictures or make drawings of the children for a birthday calendar.

Celebrate birthdays with a card and cake.

Get to know the children, what they like and do not like.

Arrange home visits before and after the project.

Keep a treasure chest of photos, a memory book, and the creative work of each child.

Make space for one-to-one conversations with children.

Give children badges with words like Dignity, Kindness, Empathy and Trust to help discussion about why these are important.



Image: “Polar” our Fife group’s mascot

Creating the right space

Finding the right venue is important to get work off to a good start. Look for venues with:

1. indoor and outdoor spaces, ideally natural spaces
2. a big enough room to move, spread out into different corners for groupwork
3. a breakout room
4. suitable space for doing messy arts and crafts
5. kitchen and eating area
6. friendly, light, warm and welcoming atmosphere
7. accessible and central location, for example connected by public transport, parking for safe drop off and pick up
8. permission to (temporarily) decorate it and make it comfortable and welcoming.

“ The venue is important. When we have used the Centre for Stewardship in Falkland (for Children’s Parliament work with young children in care in Fife), it was chosen for its central location, beautiful indoor space and its ability to support children’s wellbeing with easy access to woodland, rivers, fields and farmland in which to run around, play and explore nature. ”

Children’s Parliament staff

“ We have done lots of things together. I like friends, walking in the woods with Sandra and Gabrielle (staff), talking about weird stuff. So many things I love but walking in the woods is one of my favourite things. ”

Children’s Parliament staff

What the project looks like - components of Children's Parliament sessions

Decorating the space The venue is decorated with bunting, flowers, and the children's creations to look fun and inviting.

Children knowing what the day will bring There is a detailed plan on the wall at every session.

Having food together The day begins with a big healthy breakfast and lunch is also round the table together to socialise and communicate. (https://youtu.be/buChrCtm_OU?si=6Qv6emm8ULQ5PDWP)



Establishing routines After breakfast or arrival, there is a 'feelings check-in'. The day begins and ends in the same way each time including with circle time to help children settle, feel welcome and safe, and to reflect on the day at the end.

Topic activities For example, topics such as emotional resilience introduced and discussed through exercises and working in small groups.

Creative activities Creative activities where children make something, for example a self-care kit, giving them the opportunity to deepen learning, have some fun, be creative and express themselves.

Enjoying the outdoors Regular breaks planned throughout the day, with opportunities to get outside, run around, play and explore.

Creating memories Children have time to reflect on the day by writing or drawing into their memory books or treasure chests at the end of each session.

Ownership and care	Children are encouraged to help with the decoration of the venue or to take on little tasks to help such as preparing the tables for lunch, putting floor mats out, tidying up, showing visitors or champions around. Children benefit from a role in taking care of the spaces they are in, being the ones showing visitors around and introducing them to the space and work.
The pet and the worry/wish toy	The group pet is a transition object for the children to cuddle; care for; use as a speaking prop; express feelings about something using the pet's opinions and feelings on matters. A worry/ wish toy is a place to put notes in when children feel worried and unhappy about something or good ideas or wishes for another group day.
Acknowledgment and praise	Praising the children for the work they do or for something that is hard for them. In the same way, encouraging the children to show kindness to each other; acknowledging when children help each other out. Acknowledging children and praising them when talking to their parents, carers and other adults is also important as it supports a positive perception of the child.
Creating different spaces	A cosy corner or quiet space; giving the option for a child to take a break and go outside; making a staff member available to talk to a child outwith the group setting to meet their emotional needs. No child should ever feel under pressure to join any of the activities or share something they do not feel comfortable with. If a child does not want to participate that is ok, as long as it is not disruptive for the group.
Invite visitors	Bringing guests occasionally into the space, creating connections and understanding, working alongside the children, and participating in the activities.
Planning ahead	Planning sheet / session plan where it is clear exactly what the staff roles and responsibilities are for the session. Having a briefing after setting up the space for all staff to go over the session plan before the children arrive is essential.
Debriefing after children's departure	scheduled into every session, to review individual children's participation and to deal with wellbeing and safeguarding issues; to review effectiveness of programme activities and to collate feedback.





Tip:

How we work together with respect

- Letting children know what to expect and what is expected of them - this helps children feel safe and secure.
- Creating a common understanding that children's rights underpin how we work together and treat each other.
- Having a conversation about "respect" is sometimes enough without needing to develop a list of ground rules.

"Is everyone ok to agree to work respectfully with everyone else?"

- Modelling the behaviour we are looking for is far more effective than rules.
- Working on group agreements can be creative and allows the opportunity to explore how dignity and respect is created and upheld in a space.



The rhythm of a day

Children's Parliament describes what a full day session looks like



Time for children to be welcomed is an essential part of the morning. Staff should be ready when children arrive and there should be enough time for chatting, catching up with the family or other adults that matter to the children and having some food or snacks together.

Having plenty of breaks throughout the session is also important. The issues you might want to explore together can be emotional or difficult for the children. Have quiet, safe spaces where a child who wants or needs some time to process their feelings can go, alone or with a member of the team. This is built from time spent developing individual strategies with children, thinking about how they cope best with difficult situations, or things that are trickier than or push their buttons. What do they need in these situations? How can you support them?



Parts of a session stay the same giving the children a sense of security and familiarity throughout the programme; they know what to expect when they arrive, they know they will have regular breaks and that the programme for the session is always on the wall when they arrive.

We remind children that check-in is just that, seeing how they are that day, there is no judgement of how they are feeling. Children might also want to share something that happened to them since the last session, so we plan in enough time.

When we ask the room to be quiet to give instructions or to explain something, we raise our hand, the group then one by one, raise their hand and are quiet. We wait until the entire room is silent before moving on. This ensures no loud or unexpected bangs, noises or shouting, respecting that many children tell us that they do not like it when adults raise their voices or shout.

If the beginning and end of each session is the same offering continuity for the children, activities can be quickly re-visited to suit the plan for the day.

We are mindful of how children are feeling throughout the session. We use the check-in wall or poster and remind children they can change it at any point according to how they are feeling. The "worry and wishes" toy helps if they are struggling to talk and share their ideas.



Calls to Action

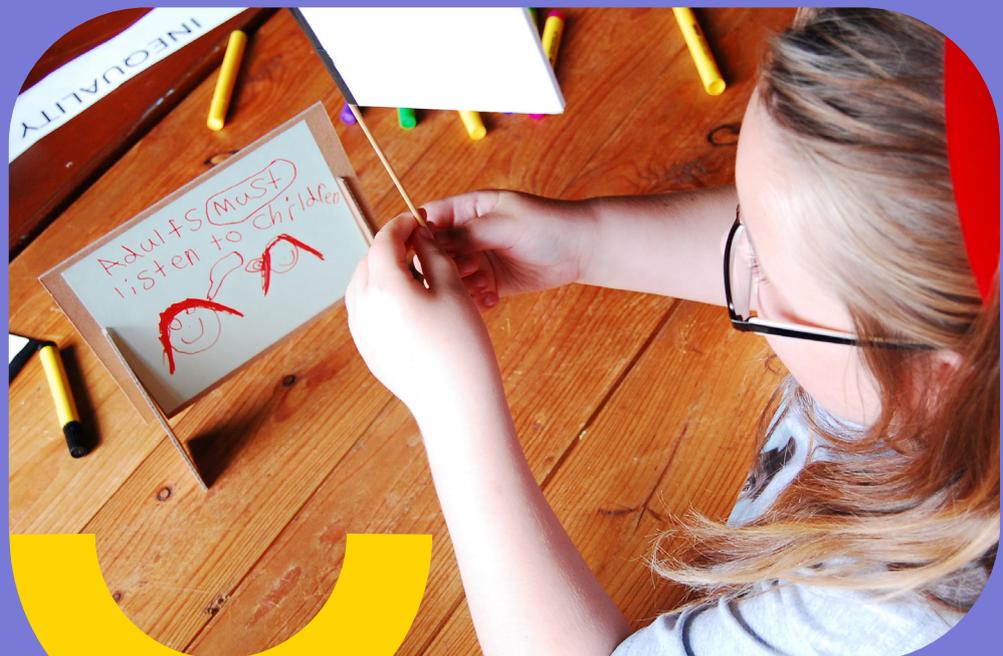
Calls to Action are the changes and actions children want to see happen, which they have articulated as a result of their participation. Calls to action link process of service design, meaningful participation, and capacity building.

A human rights approach means we are looking at what adults need to do to fulfil their obligations to protect and uphold children's rights. The focus of 'taking action' is not on actions for children to take themselves. It is predominantly about supporting and empowering children to recognise, define and call for actions to make things better. Calls to action might be about systems, structures, policies, or everyday practicalities.

Creating calls to action is a process of working with the children through what matters to them and what they would like to see change. From broad areas of concern, we look for things that people (adults who we call duty bearers for children's rights) can do immediately or set a process in action to address.

In the case of the Care Review, the children identified the key messages they wanted to explore further for the Care Review report. They used creative methods to identify their deepest wishes for children with care experience. These wishes, as well as other more personal messages, prompted further discussions around the importance of children feeling loved, living without judgment and stigma, staying in touch with people who matter, and feeling involved in decisions being made about their lives. These were recorded through the children's own writing and artwork, as well as facilitators' notes. The information gathered during these sessions fell broadly into the five foundations indicating the children's focus and priorities for what was important about their experiences in care. Children's Parliament staff drafted the More than Being in Care report, based on the available information from all the consultations related to the care system.

The final draft was reviewed and edited by children of the Seen + Heard Fife group to ensure they were happy with the content and messages contained within it.



Let the children know what will happen next

Plan how children will receive feedback on changes that have taken place as a result of their involvement. Make sure the feedback loop is closed, and let them know if there are any further stages in the process and what to do if they are not satisfied with the result.

There are many ways to provide feedback to the children, for example:

- meet them again in-person
- meet on an online call, if in-person is not possible
- send a letter or a video message
- organise an activity that explores the outcome creatively together
- invite the children to participate in a meeting or event
- ask decision-makers to take time to feedback to the children in-person.



Tip

When possible, to involve the children, discuss with them about the way they prefer to hear back.

Representing children's views, ideas and experience

The ideas, views and experiences children have shared are the basis of reporting to adults and back to the children involved. It is important that this is an authentic representation of what the children wanted to express, whether that be concerns, key messages or calls to action. To be able to report, ensure:

- words or quotes from children are recorded accurately and ethically
- creative artwork is labelled in the words of children
- participatory activities are filmed or recorded appropriately
- consent has been given and children know they can remove their consent at any point.

Discuss with the children how they would like their views to be shared. For example, this might be:

- meetings with decision-makers
- reports, newsletters, comic books
- creative presentations or exhibitions
- film, animation or audio.

Although adults might lead on drafting reports, it is important to check with the children that they are happy with the results. This avoids the risk of misinterpreting or misrepresenting children's views.

A report (or other output) for children should be **appealing, age-appropriate, accessible and accurate.**

Making a Difference: monitoring and evaluation

Children's Parliament's approach to monitoring and evaluation is to document the process, gather feedback throughout and to evidence the impact of the work. Integrated into the programme, feedback and evaluation can be embedded as part of the group sessions.

'Before and after' surveys or questionnaires do not always work with children as they often give a snapshot of the day the questionnaire was completed rather than a real story of change. Creative approaches can be more suitable, especially with younger children who may struggle to articulate their thoughts and feelings through questionnaires. Although we always explore different ideas and choices.

Suggested qualitative methods include:

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- capturing children's words and drawings as they go along
 - chatting
 - raising and noting key points at circle time
 - children's verbal, written, videoed or recorded testimony – using phones, voice notes, etc.
 - records of events
 - feedback from adults
 - capturing the changes that have happened after the children's Calls to Action

Impact is measured against the aims of the programme, and evidence gathered in a variety of ways with all principal stakeholders, including session recordings and creative outputs, interviews, case studies and evaluation forms. An evaluation report at the end of the programme can also capture any unintended or additional outcomes and share learning.

Practical examples of outcomes

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- Children have been supported to articulate their ideas, views and experiences.
 - Children have participated in decisions which affect them.
 - Health and wellbeing outcomes have improved for participating children.
 - Awareness and understanding of the needs and rights of care experienced children has increased amongst parents, carers, practitioners, managers and leaders.
 - Ability of adult duty-bearers to implement the UNCRC has increased.
 - Changes in services, policies and practice have been made through commitments locally and nationally.
 - Children's views and experiences have demonstrably informed local or national plans, policies, services and practices to improve outcomes for children with care experience.

Thank you and saying goodbye

Coming to the end of a project where adults and children have invested time and personal commitment to their relationships can be hard. Saying goodbye can be especially difficult for care experienced children and may trigger difficult emotions. Goodbyes need extra thoughtful planning and time. Plans may include special individual visits, as well as group goodbyes, celebrating the process and group and personal achievements.

Each child could receive a gift, for example:

- a personal letter that includes praise and reflects on their personal contribution within the group, personal growth etc.
- a poem
- a certificate of all their achievements
- a present that reflects on the memories that were built together as a group, like a photobook, photo cushion, or cosy blanket.

For those projects embedded in redesigning local services, there may be continued relationships where children can see the impact of their work and ongoing commitment by the adults involved.



About Children's Parliament

Established in 1996, **Children's Parliament** is dedicated to the realisation of children's human rights in Scotland. Our dream is that children grow up in a world of love, happiness and understanding. We provide children up to 14 years of age with opportunities to share their views, experience and ideas so that they can influence positive change locally and nationally.

About The Promise Scotland

The Promise Scotland is helping Scotland keep its promise to care experienced people across Scotland through leading projects to drive change and supporting organisations to make the changes they need to keep the promise. This is delivered through the **Plan 24-30** to set out what must change and associated route maps.

Acknowledgements: Thanks to Theresa Casey for developing this resource in collaboration with Children's Parliament.