

# Children's Parliament

# Seen + Heard

Fife

Project delivered April 2015 to March 2018

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**"I've changed since joining this group. I have more friends. I know others who are looked after. I'm more confident now, I'm able to talk to more people."**

**MCP, age 10**



**Children's Parliament** is Scotland's Centre of Excellence for children's participation and engagement. We work with children and adults so that together we can help ensure that, through the realisation of **children's human rights**, every child is healthy, happy and safe, at home, at school and in the community.

In **Seen + Heard Fife**, looked after children aged 9-11 from across Fife are taking part in a creative, rights-based programme. Seen

+ Heard Fife supports children to **explore their rights, develop relationships with adults and other looked after children** and **have a say in the issues that impact upon their lives**.

Seen + Heard is a unique programme for engaging with younger looked after children and Fife Council is the first local authority in Scotland to partner with Children's Parliament to deliver this approach.

A Children's Parliament project in partnership with the Fife Corporate Parent Board and funded by Fife Council.

Fife  
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Children's  
Parliament  
giving ideas a voice



Throughout the delivery of the project, key themes, issues and ideas routinely arise for the participating children about being looked after and the support they need from the adults in their lives. Below are **10 key learning points for adults who work with looked after children**.

# 1 Get to know us as individuals



The children have vastly different experiences, vulnerabilities, interests and talents. Adults working with looked after children need to be aware of how they view children and recognise what makes each individual unique.

# 2 We need to know our rights and have a say in our lives.

Children need to have an understanding of the UNCRC and how it relates to their experiences. It's important that they know that they have the right to be healthy, happy and safe and who to speak to if they think their rights are being violated. Adults need to create safe spaces for children to share their experiences generally and about of being in care specifically.

# 3 We are in care, but we are just children!

Looked after children feel that they can be viewed and treated differently from their peers because they are in care. There can be a public perception that looked after children are bad or troublemakers, and it can feel like adults don't give them a chance or believe in them. More work needs to be done to erase this stigma so that children aren't faced with prejudice because of their care status. Children need to know they are not to blame.



Animals in the Woods: MCPs draw inspiration from the Falkland Estate to play outdoor games.

# 4 It's important that the adults in our lives are consistent, so that we can build relationships with them.

Children find it difficult to change carers, schools or social workers. They often don't understand why these changes occur and can feel angry, confused or hurt, thinking that it is something that they have done to cause the change. It is important that the reasons behind changes are fully explained and the child is supported to deal with any strong emotions these changes bring up.



# 10

**Remember that children who are looked after at home need more help and support.**

"Always believe that something special is about to happen!"

MCP, age 10



**"When I'm older, I want to give money to help children because when I was younger I was in foster care and it was hard."**

- MCP, age 10

Early experiences and trauma can shape a child's sense of identity and opportunities for understanding and becoming.



**"Children's rights are important because they are essential to make a child's life livable." - MCP, age 10**

The needs of children who are looked after at home are sometimes even greater than other looked after children. They require additional support to have their needs met and to participate in opportunities because parents and carers at home might not be able to provide what their child needs. It is important that there is excellent communication between all the workers and agencies who are helping, this will ensure that there are no gaps in provision.



**9 Sometimes it's hard for our parents/carers to take us to activities outside of school.**

Looked after children need reliable transport options so that they can take part in opportunities like everyone else. When parents/carers are unable to take them, children are dependent upon their social workers to make taxi bookings or arrange for volunteer drivers. If these are not in place, looked after children are often unable to participate. It is important for them to be able to rely on services to support their participation.

evening out

**8 It's often difficult or impossible for us to talk about our thoughts and feelings.**

Looked after children can struggle to express their thoughts and feelings for a variety of reasons. Yet they might be asked to repeatedly tell their story to new adults. They might also lack the vocabulary and self-awareness to put it into words. It is important that adults recognize this struggle and support children to connect with their feelings, explore mindfulness and equip them with the emotional resilience to cope. They need to have access to services that help with their mental and emotional health.



**7 Some of us need extra support in school, especially when we move up to high school.**

Looked after children are dealing with difficult and stressful circumstances in their lives, affecting their ability to focus, complete work, engage with peers and progress in line with the outcomes expected in Curriculum for Excellence. All school staff should be trained to understand and recognise the impact this has on their learning and support them to progress in a way and at a level that is suitable for them. Additionally, many looked after children feel nervous or scared at the thought of leaving primary school. This is another big change in their lives and all schools should provide targeted transition support for looked after children.

**5 We sometimes don't have a sense of who we are.**

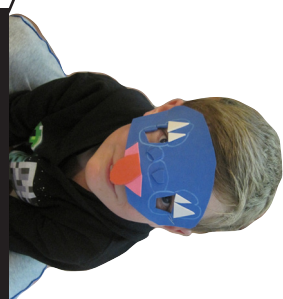
Experiences, chaotic or changing circumstances can leave children without a clear sense of who they are. Looked after children need support and opportunities to build their confidence, to tell their story and to explore who they are as individuals. With support, they can grow and develop into more resilient.

**6 We want to know other children who are looked after.**

Children feel more included and safer in a group where they do not feel different because they are in care. In Seen + Heard Fife, children are able to talk about their situation with people who understand and do not have to explain what things mean (e.g. who their social worker is or what a LAC Review is). They find it helpful to know other children who are also in care.



Our Trash and Treasure activity props.



**#seenandheardfife**



## Children's Parliament **SEEN + HEARD**

### How do children join Seen + Heard Fife?

Looked after children in Fife are nominated for the Seen + Heard Fife programme by social workers or teachers based on a set of criteria for participation. Nominations come for children in foster care, kinship care or those who are looked after at home.

Part of delivering a rights-based group programme is understanding and balancing the individual needs of participating children. By doing so, we create a positive group dynamic and a system of support for each individual child. Children's Parliament staff first meet the children individually at their schools, where initial conversations, introductions and creative work begins.

### What happens at Seen + Heard Fife?

The children take part in monthly group sessions in the beautiful setting of Falkland Centre for Stewardship, where

children engage in creative activities, communal meals, teambuilding, mindfulness, outdoor play, den-building and group discussions.

The main activity of the programme is an intensive week-long papier-mâché project in which the children create a model of themselves, representing who they want to be in 20 years' time.

As part of Seen + Heard Fife, every child learns about their rights to be healthy, happy and safe. The children develop the skills, behaviours, values and knowledge they need to be active, engaged citizens, which links with the outcomes in Curriculum for Excellence. The group also reflects on how adults can support them, identifying key individuals and services and where they can find more information and support.

### How are adults involved?

An important part of the Seen + Heard Fife programme is engagement with adults. During the group sessions, members of the Fife Corporate Parent Board and other professionals working with looked after children visit and speak with the children about their lives. At the end of the programme,

**"It is important that looked after children think they are loved. Even if they are cared for – they all have the right to be loved."** MCP, age 10

**"It's important to let people know your experiences; good ones and bad ones."** MCP, age 9

parents/carers, teachers, social workers and other professionals come together to celebrate the children's achievements.

### What happens next?

Following their first year in the Seen + Heard Fife programme, children engage in a transition group to maintain relationships, engage in further consultations and activities, and to support them as they move into secondary school. In the transition group, children continue to develop

the skills, behaviour, values and knowledge from Seen + Heard Fife; this enables them to take part in life at home, at school and in the community with more confidence.

Children from Seen + Heard Fife often go on to participate in the 2bHeard groups for care experienced young people aged 12+ in Fife.

## FIND OUT MORE

More information is available from our website:

[www.childrensparliament.org.uk](http://www.childrensparliament.org.uk)

Seen + Heard Fife blog:  
[bit.ly/SeenandHeardFife](http://bit.ly/SeenandHeardFife)

Link to 2bHeard:  
[www.2bheardfife.com/](http://www.2bheardfife.com/)



**"It's comfortable and safe here to talk about being looked after, being in care, social workers, carers because everyone here is a team and we're all in care."** MCP, age 10

**"I've changed the way I think, my decision making I mean, before, if someone was making me angry, I would push them. Since coming here, I wouldn't push them. I'm better at talking to people now."**

- MCP, age 11



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