

Children's Parliament **Seen + Heard**

A creative, rights-based project for
looked after children in Fife
Project Report 2015/2016



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Introduction

In the **Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014**, the Scottish Government has promised to: Get it right for looked after children. With the Act came a duty for local authorities & public bodies to coordinate the planning, design and delivery of services for children and young people with a focus on improving wellbeing outcomes.

We already know that outcomes for looked after children are considerably worse than their peers. Reports from Scottish Government have told us that:

Looked after children continue to have lower attainment than non-looked after children; are less likely to go into positive destinations after they leave school; have poorer school attendance than the average; and are much more likely to be excluded from school than the average pupil.

Research on the physical and mental health of children and young people who are looked after and accommodated has shown that in most respects this group is doing less well than their peers and these children have extensive health care needs.

There are multiple and complex reasons why children and young people become looked after, including neglect, abuse, parental substance misuse, involvement in the youth justice system or due to complex disabilities requiring specific care.

About the Fife Corporate Parent Board

All parts of the Council have a statutory duty to cooperate and work together to promote the welfare of looked after children (LAC), young people and care leavers. To support this, Fife has an established a Corporate Parent Board (CPB).

Fife's CPB was established in 2008 and includes representation from key services and agencies from across the Community Planning Partnership working together to promote the wellbeing of looked after children, young people and care leavers, and to improve their life outcomes. This partnership approach seeks to achieve the best possible positive outcomes for some of the most vulnerable children and young people in Fife.

Fife CPB's Improvement Plan states: We will ensure that that LAC/care leavers have a range of opportunities to influence the services they receive. The Board has already embarked on a range of activities to improve participation and engagement but has found it challenging to develop innovative ways in which to engage with younger children. At any one point in time Fife looks after around 330 children aged between 5 and 11 years old, the vast majority of whom live in either foster care or kinship care.

The role of the CPB includes being ambitious for all of the looked after children, young people and care leavers in Fife; setting strategic objectives for children's services; being aware of progress made by all agencies in achieving better outcomes through a process of self-evaluation; championing their rights and ensuring that resources are allocated accordingly. Above all it is about asking the question: Is this good enough for my own child?

Given the established relationship between Fife Council and Children's Parliament and previous work undertaken with children on behalf of Fife Council, the Fife CPB viewed this as an excellent opportunity to address the identified need to engage with young LAC children through collaborative and creative working with Children's Parliament.

About Children's Parliament

Children's Parliament is Scotland's Centre of Excellence for children's participation & engagement. Children's Parliament works for a future where all children in Scotland are actively engaged in shaping our world so that everyone is healthy, happy and safe. We believe all children should live and grow with dignity and be valued for what they can offer the world. We provide children with opportunities to share their experiences, thoughts and feelings so that they can influence life at home, in school and in the community through change at a local and national level.

The Children's Parliament Approach

Children's Parliament uses a creative, rights-based approach in all its work with children. This approach is based on the development of open and honest relationships with children, on valuing their worth and their views and on a commitment to creating a space within which they feel safe, challenged and trusted. This means valuing the process of participation as a means of learning and gaining skills, as well as valuing the products of that process. The work in this programme is based on:

- Including all referred children
 - Working with small groups, with a high ratio of adults to children
 - Making enough time to allow ideas to unfold and deepen
 - Adapting activities and pace to the needs of individual children and groups
 - Using a range of creative arts as a way of exploring and expressing ideas and feelings
 - Creating structure and boundaries and then allowing freedom within these.
-

About the Seen + Heard Project

Seen + Heard was a year-long pilot project in 2015/16. Children's Parliament received funding for the project from Fife Council, which was fully backed by Fife Corporate Parent Board. Seen + Heard was a new creative arts project, which enabled looked after children from across Fife to explore their rights, have a say in matters that affect them and speak directly to the Corporate Parent Board (CPB). The project complements the work of the CPB whose priority is to engage with looked after children and young people. The project provided an innovative opportunity to test and develop an approach of engaging with younger children to obtain their views on the services they receive, which in return, will fully inform future service improvement activity. Evaluation of the project will influence future strategy and planning in respect of engaging with looked after children.

Who We Worked With

This project targeted looked after children who fit the following criteria:

- Children in a Fife geographical placement (own or purchased)
- Children who would be in P6-S1
- Children who wished to participate in and would respond to a group using creative arts and focused group work

Seen + Heard Group

Over the course of the year we worked with 6 girls & 5 boys: 2 children were in kinship care; 1 child was in transition from foster back to parent; 8 children were in foster care – 5 of whom had permanence orders in place or going through when referred.

Youth Ambassadors

This project also engaged with 3 care experienced young people who acted as Youth Ambassadors for the group. These young people were nominated from the 2BHeard groups in Fife, they helped facilitate groups, led & got involved in activities, shared their experiences and knowledge of support and services.

Intended Outcomes

1. Improved health and wellbeing outcomes for looked after children (with a view that improvements will positively impact on outcomes as the children move into adulthood).
2. Improved participation of looked after children in a range of matters and decisions that affect them.
3. Improved engagement of key adults in the lives of looked after children so that they understand their needs and rights in a manner expressed directly by looked after children.

Methodology

There were three key parts to the delivery of this work.

Part 1

The initial work started with referrals from social workers and highlighted ten potential children from across Fife. We met with the children individually at their schools where initial conversations, evaluations and creative work began.

Following this, there were seven group days when the children met to explore and reflect on children's rights, support and services and key adults who can support them. Through the application of creative and participatory groupwork, children were supported through a series of games, activities and creative artwork devised to help build relationships and give them confidence to share their ideas and opinions. The workshops explored the following themes:

- Who I Am
- Where I Live
- Health and Happiness
- Feeling Safe and Being Cared For
- Freedom
- Having Your Say

Part 2

An intensive papier-mâché week in February supported children to imagine themselves 20 years in the future. The children created individual papier-mâché models of themselves to capture and reflect

- their current and future needs
- their hopes and dreams for the future
- their strengths and talents

Part 3

A Key Stakeholders Day and a Celebration Day actively engaged parents/carers, social workers, teachers, local authority managers and policy makers in dialogue with children about matters that affect looked after children.

"This project made me feel: happy and proud, good and GREAT. I feel proud of all the work I have done and special for being picked to be a part of this. It has taught me more about CPB – I didn't know about them before. I would love to have been able to continue with this group instead of it ending."

- Participant feedback for Seen + Heard project



Key Messages from Children

1. It's important that children feel loved, safe and protected when they are in care.
2. It's important that children know that it's not their fault they are in care.
3. Looked after children are individuals, not just 'looked after kids'. They want to be seen as 'normal' children.
4. It's important that looked after children know their rights.
5. It's important that looked after children know what services are available to them.
6. It's important for looked after children to share their experiences with people – both good ones and bad ones.
7. Looked after children have views and should be listened to, just like any other child. It shouldn't matter that they are in care.
8. Looked after children should be supported in their learning and their life.
9. It is important for looked after children to be able to rely on services and support.
10. Transport is vital in enabling children to participate.

Children's Parliament Themes

Throughout the project, the children explored themes. By using these themes to help guide discussions, children were able to reflect on and think critically about their lives, both as children growing up in Scotland and as children in care.

The important messages from the children about each theme are fully included in an appendix at the back of the report.

Key Highlights from each theme:

Who We Are

- "Adults should help children figure out who they really are."
- "You need someone to inspire you by saying "come on, you can do it.""

Where We Live

- "Children need to be able to talk to adults in the community – teachers, head teachers, shop keepers, bus drivers – training for them to tell them how to talk to children if they need it."
- "Teachers need to help you learn, they need to be kind and helpful."

Health and Happiness

- "Having a healthy mind is important to your physical health"
- "Play-Fun-Outdoors-Explore-Happiness = HEALTHY"

Feeling Safe and Being Cared For

- The group felt it was important for every child to feel loved.
- The children recognised that as they grow up, the things they need in order to feel safe and cared for change with their needs.

Freedom

- "Getting to know who you really are."
- "You need support to do your hobbies."

Having a Say

- "We need to be able to talk to carers and social workers and for them to really listen."
- "It's important to be heard and to have fun with adults."



"I've changed since joining this group. I have more friends. I know others who are looked after. I'm more confident – I'm really self-conscious and don't normally like to talk to people but now I'm able to talk to more people."

- Participant feedback
for Seen + Heard

Evaluation

Outcome 1: Improved health and wellbeing outcomes for looked after children

Children (& Youth Ambassadors) reported clear improvements in a number of key areas:

- Increased confidence and self-esteem, reporting that they felt much more positive about themselves, their abilities and skills and their futures.
- Increased confidence in sharing their ideas and views with new people/adults.
- Increased confidence in working independently and in a team.
- More focused approach to tasks, even if they were difficult. Children were more able to concentrate and had more confidence to try new things and take risks.
- More aware of their feelings and emotions and how to effectively manage them.
- Were better at making and maintaining friendships, bonding and better at working cooperatively and co-operating with others.

5/7 children reported they felt 100% healthy, safe & happy at the Children's Parliament group.

The remaining 2 children felt it was more like **90%** for them due to circumstances either at home, at school or in the community.

Children said:

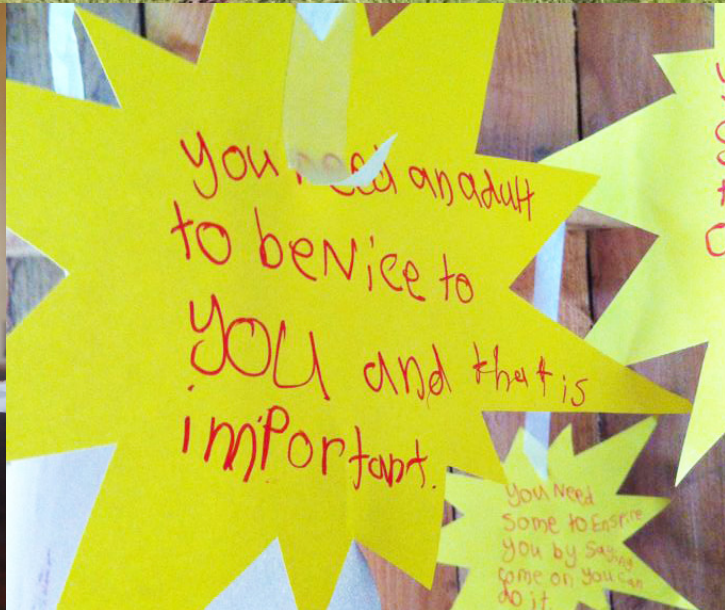
- "I have been challenged here. Not in a bad way. I find saying some things hard – it's easier here."
- "I've changed since joining this group. I have more friends. I know others who are looked after. I'm more confident – I'm really self-conscious and don't normally like to talk to people but now I'm able to talk to more people."
- "I like CP for making friends – it's easy here to make friends, more than at my new school because it is a smaller group."
- "I enjoyed CP because I made friends along the way and believe in myself, it helped me express myself and make me think in a different way."
- "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."
- "I will take away mindfulness and what we learned about team work."

Youth Ambassadors said:

- "It's good to see groups like this happening now. It would have been beneficial to older CEYP if there were groups like this earlier."

Carers said:

- "The gentle, calm and friendly atmosphere at the beginning of each session certainly seemed to relax the children. The feeling of wellbeing allowed the children to express themselves more easily during discussion times."
- "The programme gave my child an opportunity to open up and speak about her feelings, emotions and needs. Hearing the stories of other children and sharing ideas with them was a great experience for her."
- "I feel her having the memory box and book was a really good thing for her to look back on in the future with fond memories."



Professionals said:

- "I have loved being a part of this fantastic project. Seeing and hearing the children become more confident in themselves and more knowledgeable about their rights has been a highlight. Really super proud of our Youth Ambassadors as well, the understanding and empathy they brought to this piece of work was wonderful."
 - "She has made great strides in making and developing friendships and she has benefitted from sharing her experiences with other children who are also looked after away from home."
 - "It seems to have helped the children grow in confidence. The work done on identity and expression of feelings is crucial for this cohort. They are learning to participate in groups, listen to others and express their own views."
-

Outcome 2: Improved participation of looked after children in a range of matters and decisions that affect them.

Children (and Youth Ambassadors) reported clear improvements in a number of key areas:

- Actively involved and achieving in a safe environment where they reported they felt included, challenged, respected and nurtured – learning to make healthier and safer choices and were more responsible.
- Improvements in their behaviour, being helpful and co-operating with others, reporting that they felt much more positive about taking part, their abilities and skills.
- More willing to talk and share experiences about being in care and were more able to recognise and understand their potential role to contribute in relationships, their school and in the community.

Children were directly involved in having their say about:

- Reviewing the 'Having Your Say' forms, which allow children to share their views about their accommodation, and providing Fife Council with feedback about how they might be improved.
- Looking at the Listen Up Pledge, a document that outlines Fife's promises to children and young people in care, and making changes to ensure that is age-appropriate and understood by younger children.
- UN Committee – The UN Taskforce on the Rights of the Child visited Fife Seen + Heard group to listen to the children about the rights of looked after children. Key points discussed were adult respect for children's views and involvement, the quality of care they experience and the stigma and discrimination experienced by looked after children.
- Feeling excluded – the majority of the group felt included in life at home, at school and in the community, but 2 out of 7 reported that they had felt excluded, especially at school and sometimes in the community or at home. The children explained this had been their experience in the past, but they did not feel excluded at the present time.

**5/7 children
reported that they felt
100% confident now to
share their views and ideas with
other people**

2 children reported they wouldn't feel comfortable or confident sharing ideas and views with everyone. However, both reported an increase in confidence in sharing their views and ideas within the group and on a 1:1

Children said:

- "I know that I have a right to speak and I feel more confident in sharing how I feel."
- "It's comfortable for us to talk about being in care here because we are all in care."
- "I will talk about this group."
- "I will be able to identify my rights in everyday life and use them if I need them."

Youth Ambassadors said:

- "It's good to see that children & young people are being empowered now and taught about their rights now, This will help so many of them get the best out of their care experience."
- "It's important for younger groups to help them understand what's happening in their lives and express themselves/put into words what is going on for them."
- "I think this should be offered to younger LAC (Looked After Children). This would allow them a better understanding of what is happening for them and allow them the ability to know and exercise their rights and voice from a younger age."

Carers said:

- "She is prepared to stand up for herself more. And she will recognise when someone is in need of help and will always try to behave in a responsible way."
- "He has more confidence and has come through it with a greater understanding of himself."

Professionals said:

- "My young person has expressed a desire to continue with similar activities such as the 2BHeard group in his local area."

Outcome 3. Improved engagement of key adults in the lives of looked after children so that they understand their needs and rights in a manner expressed directly by looked-after children.

Children (& Youth Ambassadors) reported clear improvements in a number of key areas:

- Developing better relationships with peers and adults and as a result reported feeling more secure, included and respected.
- Increased awareness of the Corporate Parent Board and its role in their lives
- Developing relationships with the Corporate Parent Board members who engaged with the group
- 42% of CPB engaged directly with children with 30% visiting more than once and a further 12% visiting once
- For some of these children, experiences with the services represented in the Corporate Parent Board might not have been positive and these visits might help reframe those relationships and build trust between the children and those with corporate parenting duties. For instance, after meeting the police officers during their visit, one girl said, *"People think that they are bad because they catch people but they are just like me! They are just people! Next time people say that I'm going to tell them that they were nice to me!"*
- More able to recognise and understand their potential role to contribute in relationships, their school and in the community.



**100% of
the children felt
that their views
are important to
adults making
decisions**

Children said:

- "[It's important that] everyone works together. We all have great ideas and adults as well."
- "I really enjoyed meeting new people and talking to them all."
- "It's important to have an adult to speak to."
- "It has taught me more about CPB – I didn't know about them before."
- "I would love to have been able to continue with this group instead of it ending."

Youth Ambassadors said:

- "I want to know that the CPB will have taken the C & Y/P's views from today seriously."

Carers said:

- "She is more confident, especially in taking part in discussions."

Professionals said:

- "My young person appears to recognise the importance of sharing his views. This has been apparent in regards to discussion around contact."
- "This has helped me to consider what we have to do differently and build on the good things we do already."
- "Kept me in touch with young looked after children and helps to ground me in practice as much of my work doesn't now involve contact with service users/young people. It helps to focus the Corporate Parent Board on issues for children."
- "Highlighted that we need to do more work of this nature and expand activity re: participation/ consultation/rights with younger children."
- "Ideally could have been more Corporate Parent Board members engaging."



- Participant feedback
for Seen + Heard

End Note

Seen + Heard is an opportunity for Children's Parliament and Fife Council to support, engage with and invest in some of the most vulnerable children in Fife. This project enables looked after children to learn about their rights, to build their confidence and to share their views on matters that affect their lives. The value of a rights-based project that supports the personal development of individual children and the exploration of the views, experiences, feelings, ideas, goals and hopes of looked after children is evident in the positive evaluation of this work.

While the **Seen + Heard** Project evidences the significant positive impact on outcomes for looked after children and demonstrates a model of good practice for engaging with children on matters that affect them, it has also highlighted the need to support adults (carers, social workers, teachers, corporate parents and government officials) to consistently and meaningfully engage with children. This engagement can feel unfamiliar, time-consuming or out with a remit, but **Seen + Heard** has demonstrated the need for professionals to connect directly with looked after children so that they can influence the decisions and policies that impact upon their lives.

It has also become clear that the participating children are eager to maintain their connection to the **Seen + Heard** group and to wider participative opportunities in Fife. We hope that their participation in the **Seen + Heard** Project will establish participation as a habit of a lifetime and Children's Parliament is keen to support these children to explore their interests and talents and to continue to use their voices to influence change in their lives and their communities.

We are delighted that Fife Council has committed to supporting the **Seen + Heard** Project for an additional two years so that more looked after children can experience this creative, rights-based project. The next two years will see a growth in the project, expanding to two groups of 10 children in 2016/17, and the development of a Transition Group that will support the continued engagement of last year's participants. Additionally, we will focus on increasing the engagement of corporate parents and other key adults so that looked after children's engagement in decision-making processes can become more firmly embedded within Fife Council and other services.

We hope the rigour and commitment with which we and our partners engaged in the **Seen + Heard** Project will provide an inspiring legacy of replication across Scotland.

Chelsea Stinson
Children's Voices Programme Manager
Children's Parliament

Appendix 1: Full messages from the children

Who We Are

- Adults should help children figure out who they really are
 - You need someone to inspire you by saying "come on, you can do it."
 - Looked after children should have all their rights Want to be seen as 'normal' children
 - Want to be seen as 'normal' children
 - You need to love yourself
 - Looked after children are important and special
 - Help younger children understand what's going on in their lives and express themselves/ put into words what's going on for them
 - We need to be treated as important
 - We need to be able to dream
-

Where We Live

Home

- Foster Carers make you happy and safe, you need an adult to be supportive
- Bills are a worry to people at home.
- Treat us like you want to be treated
- Family makes me feel warm and healthy, happy and safe.
- Pets make you happy and safe
- You need a good education to get a job when you are older
- If you feel scared your family is there for you so you feel happy
- You need friends
- Children need to be loved
- A cuddle makes you happy and safe
- Getting pocket money to go places and buy things
- Your house placement needs to be 'proper', you need people to look up to – adults who are kind to you, give you what you want & don't take advantage of you
- You shouldn't have a messy house and you should have a good bedroom
- You should have privacy when you need it
- Help children see their mums, dads, brothers and sisters

Community

- The shops and the parks need to be better looked after
- Councils should provide safe areas for children to hang around and areas for teenagers to go
- To be able to talk to adults in the community – teachers, head teachers, shop keepers, bus drivers – training for them to tell them how to talk to children if they need it
- Key adults to tell you what is available – like leisure passes for free swimming
- Have groups and activities to make friends for children AND teenagers

School

- I love my school
 - School can be boring
 - No bossy teachers
 - Teachers to help you learn, they need to be kind and helpful
 - Helps you learn the skills you need to go far in life
-

Health and Happiness

- Feeling happy keeps you healthy and feeling healthy keeps you happy
 - Dancing keeps you physically healthy but it can help you feel happy, confident and sociable.
 - Nature, peaceful places and outdoor life
 - Even if you have health or mental problems you STILL have your rights
 - Eating the right food and doing exercise makes a happy, healthy and fit child
 - Friends are important because if you don't have any friends you might feel lonely
 - Playing and listening to music
 - Playing football and other sports
 - Relaxing in a beautiful place keeps you healthy
 - Pets
 - Having a healthy mind is important to your physical health
 - Play-Fun-Outdoors-Explore-Happiness = HEALTHY
-

Feeling Safe and Being Cared For

In order to feel safe and cared for the children felt that the following were of key importance for all children:

- Throughout childhood, having your basic needs met is important to feeling safe and cared for. These things include a warm house, support from parents/carers and at school/in the community, keeping healthy, privacy and education. The children also felt that it was very important throughout childhood that children were given opportunities to explore, learn through play and be creative.
- What came across as most important was how vital LOVE is to all the children. The group felt it was important for every child to feel loved.
- The children recognised that as they grow up, the things they need in order to feel safe and cared for change with their needs. Below are the things the children identified as most important to keeping them safe and cared for at different ages.

Babies

- rules, nappies, routines
- Lots of sleep
- A loving and colourful world
- Toys and teddies
- Warm clothes
- Hugs
- Midwife, health visitor, parents, neighbours, community support
- Buggy
- Learn to talk
- Warm house and cosy blanket
- Pets

Toddlers

- Toys to play with, the right to play and fun
- The right to explore
- A proper bed
- Nursery
- Toddlers should be taught how to keep safe – in case they hurt themselves
- Love
- Finger painting
- Should be going to get check ups – right to be healthy

- Warm house
- They have the right to healthy food and medical treatment if they need it
- Shouldn't be on the bottle any more
- Should be able to walk – because their parents should have taught them

Early Primary

- Need education
- The council should make sure that the streets are clean and safe for children
- Friends and responsible adults should understand you!!!
- If you are in school and you don't have a home – a responsible adult should help you or take you in.
- Pets keep you happy
- School uniform
- Everyone needs a home, including adults
- Love
- Friends
- Food
- Clubs – scouts, cubs, beavers...

9-10 yr olds:

- Cool Family
- Freedom
- Love
- Internet
- Clubs
- Ball to play with
- Walking
- Children's Parliament
- School
- Helpers
- Nurses
- Music
- TV
- Warm house
- Activities

15 yr old

- In all years in high school, all pupils need extra support to make the right choices in education and out of school
- Don't smoke as it isn't safe for your lungs
- Someone – an adult – has to be there to help you
- Teenagers need healthy food and clean water
- Dancing
- They need their own space
- A safe house and privacy
- Learning how to deal with peer pressure
- Support to do hobbies and clubs
- Don't play chicken on the road
- Schools should teach teenagers how to deal with stress – exams, assessments, peer pressure...and sexual education
- Phones and other devices

17-18 yr old

- Healthy food
- Individuality
- They don't need to be cared for as much
- Extra support in school
- Need house
- Don't drink and drive
- They need friends
- They need healthy food and exercise
- Sexual abuse – how to stay safe from it
- Need a job
- Time to laugh
- Need confidence
- Need support and extra support
- Books to study
- Need a family
- Facebook
- To be cared for
- Education
- Sexual education, relationships/boyfriends/girlfriends and staying safe

21+

- They can get a job
 - They can have a family – if they do, they might want help to look after them
 - They can get their own house
 - Healthy food
-

Freedom

- As you get older, you can take care of yourself more and you don't need adults to do everything
 - You need your own space
 - You should have privacy when you need it
 - Getting to know who you really are
 - You need support to do your hobbies
 - Spending time outside
 - Being creative
-

Having Your Say

- We need to be able to talk to carers and social workers and for them to really listen
- It's important to be heard and to have fun with adults
- We have good ideas
- Sometimes children are scared to speak out
- Confidence
- Being challenged to think about your ideas and express yourself
- We need happiness, imagination and creativity

Appendix 2: Messages from members of the Corporate Parent Board

- The CPB needs to support more groups like this one.
- Sometimes it's good to be quiet and still.
- I will use what I have learned to help other Y/P in the future know their rights.
- A fun morning with young people
- That we should listen to children's views
- How many more Y/P would benefit from a group like this
- When adults make decisions about young people that their views should be considered
- Moving forward: we will talk about how we can help more children who are looked after to enjoy things like this
- For me to spend time with young people
- Young people have got good ideas when we listen to them and have fun together
- That children and young people need safe spaces to express themselves, meet new friends and be children/young people.
- Share what I have learned with people I work with
- The fact that projects like this just WORK
- It's difficult to make and keep new friends when you change schools – groups like this help with friendships
- Young people need space and time to think and share
- Happy feelings and thoughts from the stories about the group and activities
- How great the papier mâché models are
- It's. Really. Important. To know. Who. You are.
- I will remember how much the group has grown in confidence and how thoughtful, honest and positive everyone was during this whole experience
- Loved being part of the visitors, meeting fab young people who have terrific potential
- Keen to develop SDS with group
- How much we can achieve in a short period of time
- The recognition that everyone is different
- C & YP's views are IMPORTANT & NEED to be supported by ADULTS
- It is good to see young people from different places and backgrounds get on so well, listen to each other and achieve so much
- I have loved watching and listening to the children become more confident & aware of their rights
- It was very jolly – good fun
- I liked to see the ambitions of the children. I want to help the children achieve what they want.
- Consider what we have to do differently and build on the good things we do already
- I have made some new friends.
- We work well as a team
- How hard it is to still your mind
- "Everyone should feel loved and respected. Every child has rights."
- That the children are very good at making models. Very clever.
- Meeting new people. Have fun


A photograph of a child with short brown hair, seen from behind, looking out of a large window. The window looks out onto a forest with many bare trees and a wooden bench in the foreground. The text is overlaid on the top half of the image.

**'Working with Children's
Parliament is expressive,
fun, caring and creative...
It helps you believe in
yourself!'**



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