

The Dads Project

Scottish children explore their perceptions of fatherhood and the role of father figures in their lives



Children's Parliament is Scotland's Centre for Excellence for children's rights and participation. Children's Parliament works with children from the early years to age 14 to ensure that their voices are included in the social and political landscape of Scotland.



www.childrensparliament.org.uk



www.facebook.com/childrensparliamentscotland



twitter.com/creative_voices

Children's Parliament
Summerhall | Edinburgh | EH9 1PL
0131 558 9030 | info@childrensparliament.org.uk
Recognised as a Scottish Charity SC026247 and
a company incorporated in Scotland No. SC170891

© Children's Parliament 2014. The book author retains sole copyright to his or her contributions to this book.

The Blurb provided layout designs and graphic elements are copyright Blurb Inc.



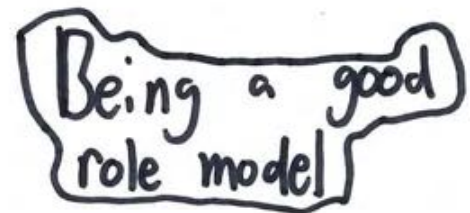
Background information

Children's Parliament is interested in children's human rights in the context of family, school and community life. We understand that when children talk about their lives, they are talking about relationships and that parents and carers are at the heart of their family experience.

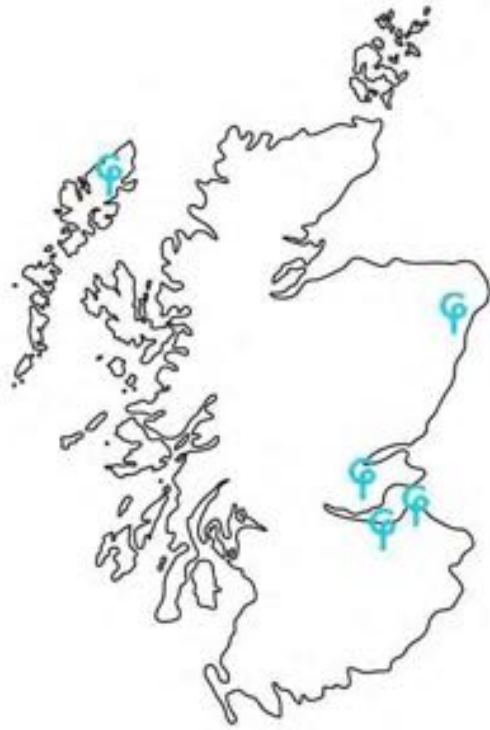
The profile of fathers and fatherhood is high on the policy agenda. The National Parenting Strategy, Getting It Right for Every Child and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child provide a framework for thinking about families and fatherhood, while keeping the child at the centre of all considerations and with the hope that children grow up safe, healthy and happy. We believe, however, that the voice of the child is missing from these developments.

In line with a growing societal interest in the role of fathers in family life, we want to engage children in an exploration of fatherhood. We see a need to celebrate fathers and their role in family life. The Dads Project puts children's voices at the centre of the dialogue about fatherhood in Scotland today.

'My dad said the best thing about being a father was that he gets to see me grow up and do good with my education.'



Being a good
role model



The Dads Project involved 50 children aged 8 to 12 from five communities around the country - the Western Isles, Aberdeen, Fife, East Lothian and Edinburgh. Between August and November 2013, children participated in a series of intensive workshops to explore fatherhood and the role of father figures in their lives through discussion, individual reflection, and a range of expressive arts. Children used a combination of drawings and digital images to create the mixed media portraits in this book in order to illustrate their relationships with their fathers.

The Dads Project provides a foundation for continued discussion on fatherhood and creates opportunities to have new conversations with parents that build on the children's enthusiasm, creativity and insight.

Earning enough
money to look
after them.

Who is Dad?

We understand that we must have a purposely broad view of who plays the role of 'dad' in a family. For many children, this will be someone they call dad, but for others it will be a granddad, their main carer's partner, or a favourite uncle.

During the workshop, children were asked to think about their families - with whom they lived, to whom they were closest and who they identified as their father figure. They plotted all of these family members on a graph that told us where they fit in their lives – physically and emotionally.

Children participating in the Dads Project identified the following people as their father figures:

Biological dads

- 30 children live with mum and dad
- 11 children live with mum only and see dad
- 3 children live with dad only

Stepdads

- 2 children live with mum and stepdad

Other male relatives

- 3 children live with mum only and identified another male relative as father figure (uncle/granddad)

'All families look different – we're different in looks and feelings.'



What are the best things about being a dad?

Children thought the 10 best things about being a dad were:

1. Having fun with your children
2. Spending time together
3. Having children
4. Just being a dad and feeling proud
5. Having someone (i.e. children) to talk to
6. Going on trips/walks together
7. Feeling young again
8. Having an excuse to watch children's movies
9. Seeing your children grow up
10. Encouraging your children and giving advice

'Our happiest time together is when me and my dad are fishing.'

What are the challenges that dads face?

Children thought the 10 main challenges for their fathers were:

1. Too much work
2. Not spending enough time with your children
3. Earning money
4. Keeping your children safe
5. Paying bills
6. Worrying about your children's future
7. Having enough money for food
8. Being far away
9. Making the right decisions
10. Being asked questions but not having time to answer

'My dad sometimes doesn't listen to me. He just lays down on the sofa and that's it. I feel upset when he doesn't listen.'

Reflections on the Dads Project

Family life is often considered to be a private space and there is a hesitancy to speak about it outwith the family. However, children enjoy sharing their experiences and felt the Dads Project was one of the first times they were able to explore the topics of family life and fatherhood. Children were very open in their discussions about fatherhood and found the experience to be very positive and valuable. While adults might feel uncomfortable opening up these discussions, it reaffirms the need to create other opportunities for children to share their experiences, opinions and ideas.

Children understand that family life and parenting can be difficult. They understand that families can have worries and struggle financially. They demonstrated a real empathy for parental roles and an understanding of the pressures their parents face. They look up to their dads and see them as role models, which was identified as both a good thing and a challenge for fathers. They know that their dads worry about them and want them to have a good future, but understand that it is sometimes difficult for fathers to give them everything the need to be safe, healthy and happy.

Although this isn't the same in every home, many children still see their dads playing quite a traditional role in the family. Mums and dads still often have clearly defined roles within the household. Dads were seen to work longer hours, perhaps away from home; to be protectors of the family; and to engage in active/outdoor activities with their children. Mums were seen to do most of the work around the home and to provide nurturing, emotional support for their children. However, children were aware that this is not always the case and identified within their own circumstances where these gender stereotypes did not fit. While the roles of mums and dads are evolving, this highlights a tendency to slip into familiar ideas of what mums, dads and families are like when discussing these ideas with children.

The most challenging thing about being a dad is time. Children are very aware of the shortage of time they have to spend with their fathers. Work obligations, living situations, and familial relationships all impact on their time with their fathers. Throughout all the workshops, children expressed a desire to spend more time with their fathers, which stresses the importance of finding the balance between all the demands placed on fathers. While recognising all the roles parents play and the responsibilities they have, children emphasised having fun with their dads as being very important to those relationships and they cherish the time they spend with their fathers.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child emphasises the importance of family life and the role that parents – men and women, birth parents and other adults who have a parenting role – have in ensuring that their child is safe, healthy and happy. In order to ensure that their rights are realised, children must have the opportunity to share their experiences, opinions and ideas so that they might have an impact on shaping policy and practice as they relate to their lives.



Spending time with your kids.



Watching us grow up



Trying to talk to them about difficult situations



My dad and me are very close. He was a football player and a boxer and in the army he won five trophies and three medals and six badges. He was in the Black Watch. He's kept a drawing I did (a copy of Kandinsky) in P1 in his locker at the airport where he works. Our favourite film to watch together is the Green Mile.

BRENDAN P7



I live with my mum and my dad lives far away in Eyemouth so I don't get to see him that often – probably once every five weeks. We like to sit on the sofa and watch the X Factor and sometimes we go to the movies. He also coaches a football team and he takes me along to the training with him – that's my favourite time because it's just me and him.

HOLLIE P6



We like walking on the beach together and the ferry is about going away on holiday. My dad likes riding his motorbike but the bike is to say that he works too much.

ALICE P7



My dad and I like going to the cinema to watch films like Fast and Furious. I forgot to put that we both like going swimming too. I've put a star pupil above his head saying he's a good dad!

JACK P7



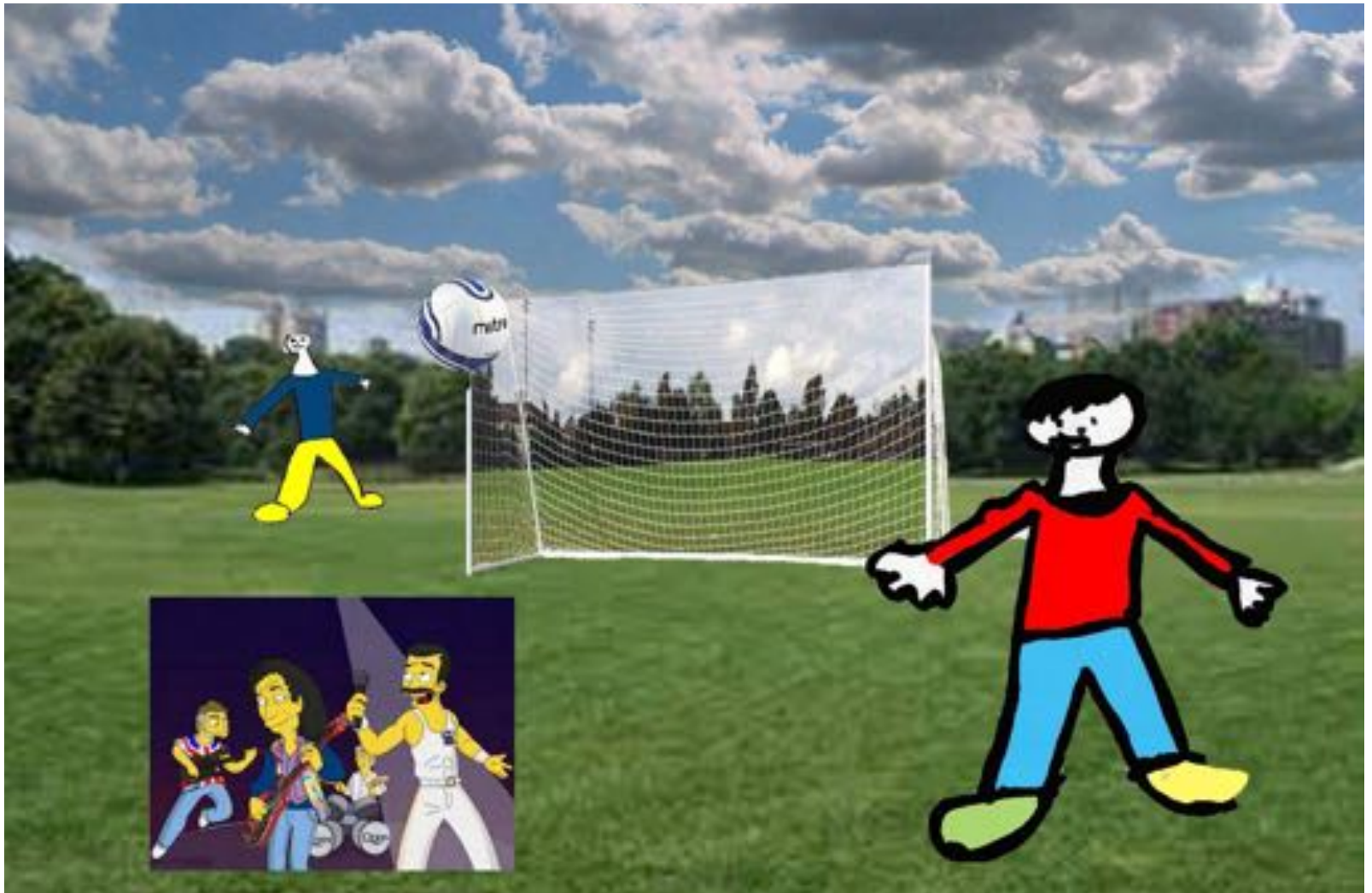
We're talking and he is taking care of me. I feel happier with my dad and we were holding hands and chattering last night and watching football. He chats with me about what he's done at work and he asks me all the time about school. He helps me with my homework and I help him with his work all the time.

HARRY P7



My dad lives far away from me and I only get to see him every second week end. I am sad that I hardly get to see him. The growing chart is in my picture because that's how he watches me grow. My favourite memory is when my dad built a toy house inside our real house and he couldn't fit it through our back door so he had to rebuild it outside.

DILLON P6



The background is the park where me and my stepdad kick a football about. The sky is the great space that is separating us because we have disagreements. We have good days and bad days – and that's why there are white clouds and grey clouds.

JORDAN P6



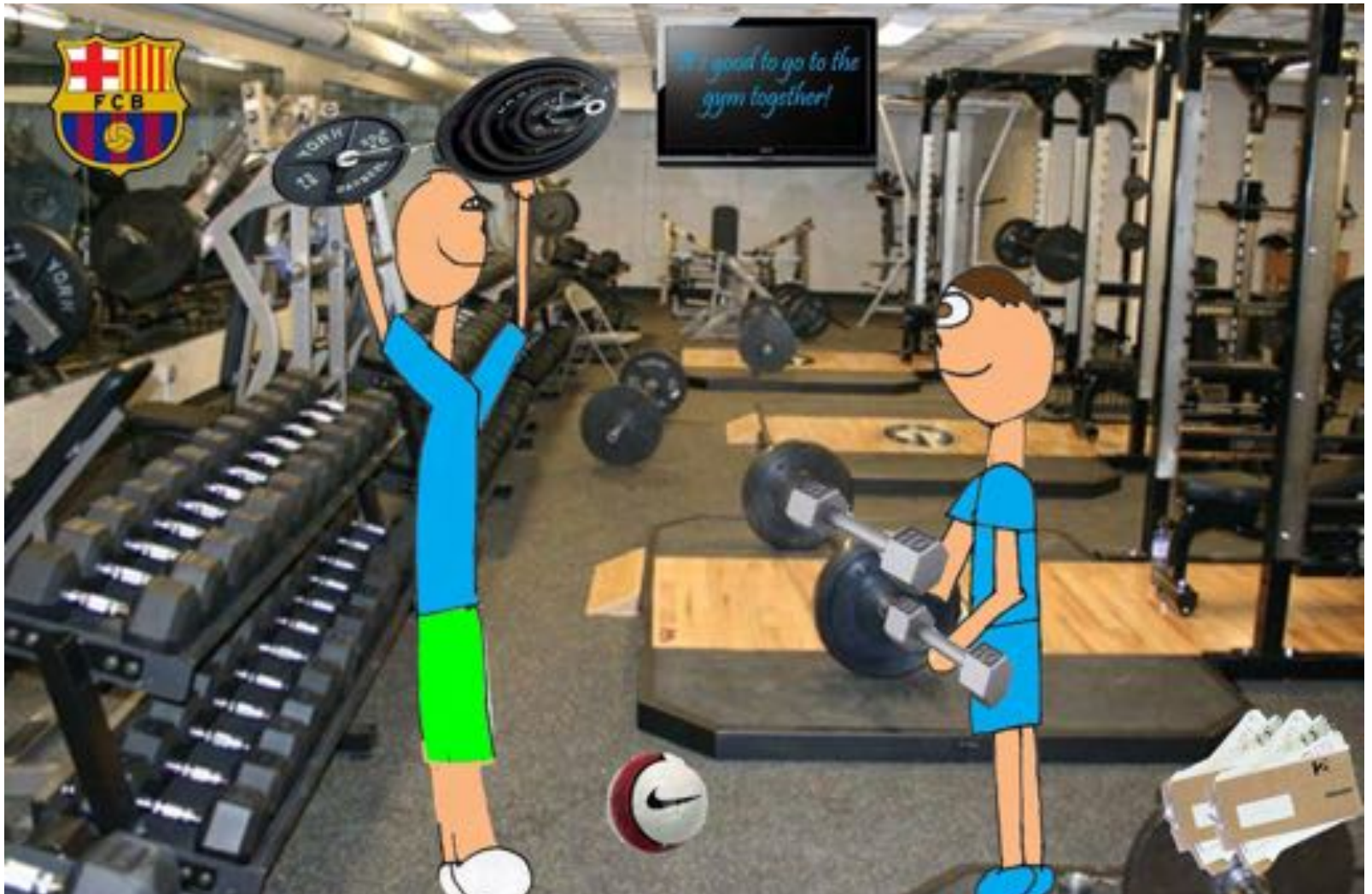
My dad and I have fun because we go fishing, play football and walk the dog together. The sun in the picture means happiness. I think the challenge for my dad is looking after me and my brother to make sure we are happy.

CHLOE P7



When I was little, my dad used to pretend to be the shark from Finding Nemo and bite my feet! We really want dogs, but my gran won't let us get one. My dad makes us cheesy pasta all the time. He doesn't get to spend a lot of time with me and that's why we're separated in my picture.

DIONNE P7



My dad and I go to the gym and play football together. We also like watching telly. Sometimes I think he worries about bills.

NICOLAS P7



My dad is standing on his boat and I am standing on the land waiting for him to come in. We both have shopping bags because when we are away he takes me to most of the shops. The wee fish is about my dad being funny.

CAITLIN P7



My dad goes to London every weekend for work. He really likes Hibs and Strictly Come Dancing and fajitas and the Jam. My dad is really funny and makes me laugh a lot.

CALLUM P7



This is me and my dad at Pittodrie stadium where we spend time at a match when he comes back from offshore. I'm allowed to listen to his favourite band Guns N' Roses, but some of the songs are rude. The watch represents time because he leaves early for work and comes back late, but he still makes time for us. We hardly ever fall out.

KIAL P6



Me and my uncle play pool a lot because he has his own pool table. He has quite a lot of trophies from car racing and that's why there's an orange car on the tv screen. I see him about three times a week and even though we have a good time he has to make sure I keep focused on the game or whatever we're doing and not moving on to the next thing too quickly.

HARVEY P7



My relationship with my dad is special. We like the same things, like sausage rolls and disco dancing. It's hard because sometimes he lives in England, which is far away so it is hard for me to get there. I can go down on holidays though. I like fizzy drinks and dad likes fizzy drinks and wine. If dad drinks wine he can't drive up to see me because you can't drink and drive. My dad cooks amazing homemade pizza for us, they are very tasty and I like doing this with dad. I like when my dad takes me to the shops and buys me lots of nice things. I like spending time with my dad and would like to spend more time with him.

DANIEL P6



My dad has been my idol since I was 4 years old. He's been baking since he was a little boy – his gran taught him. We love baking together and our favourite thing to make is cupcakes. The family is the most important thing to him and he's taught that to me. He has taught me wrong from right, how to be responsible and the best thing of all how to respect. He has been there since the start and our relationship has grown over the years. If I didn't have my dad my life wouldn't be complete. I don't know how he is going to handle me in my teenage years!

ANNIE P6



My dad and I spend a lot of time together in the sitting room and the coffee table is an art pallet because my dad likes art. The Jaguar on the wall is his favourite car and the ferry represents him going away to work. I've given him a tool belt because we build stuff together. I think me and my dad have a good relationship.

AARON P7



My dad and I watch The Railway on Channel 5 on Thursdays and we watch The Big Bang Theory every day. We both like spending time on our laptops. He taught me some basketball tricks and my favourite is when my dad takes me out on my bike. He smokes every day and I think his challenge is to stop smoking and drinking beer. My dad sometimes takes me to school, but it's rare for him to hold my bag!

DORA P5



My dad and I are swimming in Mallorca – one of the best times of my life. He works in Orkney and I see him every second Friday. He's too tired to cook so we go to Dhillon's. The boxing gloves are about me and my brother arguing.

STEVEN P6



The flowers are our favourite colours – my dad's is blue and mine is red. When I'm bored he takes us out which makes me happy. He's always there for us, but he doesn't like not being able to talk to us enough when he's offshore.

MEGAN P5



My dad and I like to go camping and make dinner - our favourite food is chicken curry. The Terminator is his favourite movie. We each like spending time together and he is hoping everyone in my family is okay.

REBECCA P5



I usually go swimming with my stepdad. We like ice cream and playing pool. My favourite memory is when I beat him at pool three times! He tries to take care of lots of things, but his favourite thing is watching me and my sister grow up and also going snowboarding.

JAKUB P5



Me and my dad are having ice cream by the tour bus he drives. Some tourists kept taking pictures and buying me more ice cream. Me and my dad have a good relationship. He is a kind and good man. Me and him have fun playing video games or going to our local arcade whenever we get to see each other.

CHARLIE P7



My dad takes the bus to pick me up from school, which is difficult for him because it takes him one hour. We love ice cream and pizza. We like to go to the park at the weekend and the buggy hidden behind the tree is my little sister's. He doesn't like changing nappies!

CARLY P5



I wish my dad could stop work at four and not at seven and then we could spend more time together. My dad and I are holding hands and watching Stargate. Arthur's Seat is where we walk on Sundays.

SUSANNAH P7



My dad was really proud of me when I caught this big fish (and he only caught a small one). The helping hand heart is about how he helps me. My dad is thinking of me and my sister fighting.

STUART P7



I think my dad worries about making sure we're safe. He works all night at Morrisons. He's good at cheering me up! I'd like to be a dad because you get to relive your childhood.

TOMMY P7



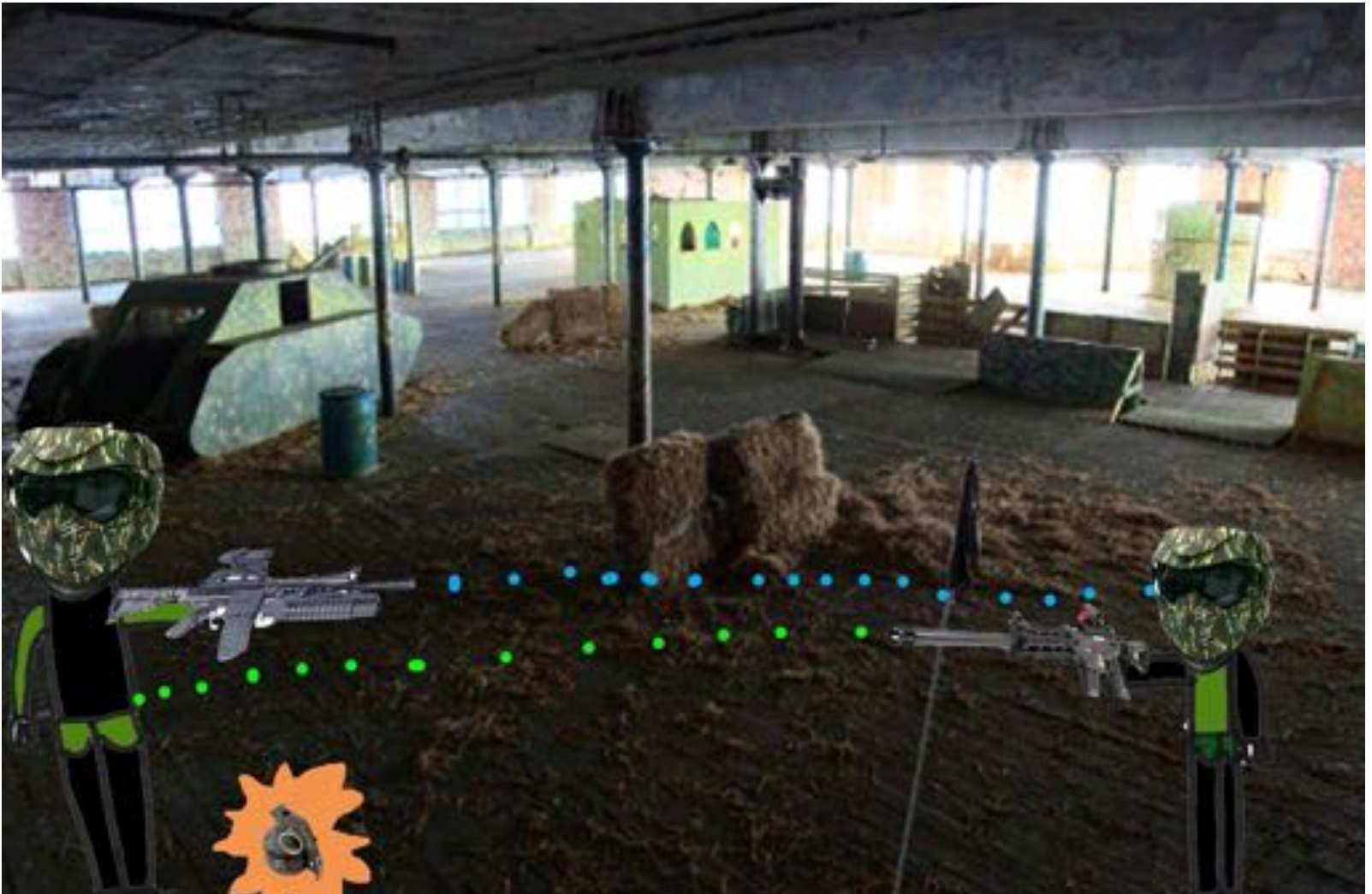
My uncle has a trampoline in his garden and I like to jump on it. We like watching the wrestling and we do maths homework together and we both find it hard.

HAMISH P5



My dad lives in Forfar and I see him every second weekend. He picks me up from school on a Friday and it takes an hour and a half to get to his place. Sometimes we ride quad bikes that belong to my granddad, who is a pigeon racer. My favourite thing is seeing who can get up the hill quickest on the bikes – I usually win! My dad plants flowers on a farm. He can be lazy when he lies on the sofa and watches the darts on his computer. In the summer we barbecue sausages and chicken kebabs in the garden.

THOMAS P6



I like to play with my dad. We go paint balling a lot, play basketball at the gym hall and go go-carting. We like watching Pacific Rim and playing the Xbox 360. But he also works a lot and has his own house painting business so I don't see him as much as I'd like. He's a hard worker. It's just me and my dad at home and I like living with him because I get to spend time with him. I think he likes being my dad and that he loves me.

OSKAR P5



My dad works for ScotRail. We sometimes go shopping together, we watch tv and we go cycling to the waterfall at Cramond beach. My dad likes beer and doesn't like paying the gas bill. He can get annoyed if I don't do what I'm told and misbehave and don't listen and my room is always a pigsty. My dad gets happy when I do what I'm told and listen really carefully. If we have some time at night we watch movies together like Peter Pan.

EILIDH P5



If you're wondering what the notes coming out of his mouth are – they're music notes because he always hums and its really annoying! We spend a lot of time in the sitting room watching football matches on tv and the Eiffel Tower is because we went on holiday to Paris and really enjoyed it. The piles and piles of paperwork is all the work he takes home and there's money in the picture because he works in a bank and comes home really late.

SCOTT P7



My dad and I run a lot and we love it. We look back at photos and he says how much he loved us and remembers when we were little. We both love the Hunger Games, Superdry, iPhones and listening to music. Me and my dad have fun together.

BECKY P7



This picture is my granddad and me. It's our journey on a dirt track and there are our bikes. It feels very good because you go up jumps and you go fast. The watch is for the time he has to be at work and can't be with me.

JAMIE P7



Me and my dad are wearing crowns and that's because we go to Edinburgh every year, but not always the castle. We watch TV together and right now we are watching Big Brother.

REBECCA P7



My dad is a postie. He helps me with my maths homework and he is very helpful. The peace sign means that he tries to stop me and my sister fighting or arguing.

ISLA P7



My dad is singing and drinking sprite and he loves candy crush!

ZOE P7



My dad and I cycle around the Meedies together. I put in the fire because I like roasting marshmallows. My dad is funny and kind and he helps me with my homework.

EMILY P6



My dad cheers me on when I go swimming. We normally go to the cinema after and we get to spend time together and I get peace and quiet from my sisters. The stop sign is about keeping us safe.

CHLOE P6



Me and my dad love minions and we are inside the game of Pokemon! The 'grrrrr' is about his anger in the past but now he's much happier.

JACK P7



In the background is a tennis court because my dad likes us to be active. We're hitting a rugby ball because he loves rugby, but he doesn't love toads and that's why there's lots of them! My brother the alien is there because dad needs to take care of us and that is a hard job.

MEGAN P6



Me and my dad really like farms. He's teaching me how to drive a tractor. We hunt deer. My dad is someone to talk to and he keeps me safe. My dad is a good man and very kind. We love to eat pizza. I love my daddy.

CHARLIE P5



I like going camping with my di and going really fast on the quad bike with him. I caught a fish and I feel happy! The bed is him trying to get us to go to bed on time.

MOLLY P5



The four fairies are all the girls my dad lives with so there's no one to watch football with! We do lots together - like swimming and bowling and camping. He likes to play music, or he thinks he likes to!

HANNAH P7



There is a falcon on my dad's head because he likes birds and there is a fish on my head because he once put a live fish on me. The cell bars are there because my dad has to work a lot in a care home. We watch Tracy Beaker on TV. There is a machete because he taught me about it.

EVAN P7



Even at the beach my dad likes to wear a tie and smart clothes. Although he works a lot he makes up for it by taking us out. We like to go to Pizza Hut quite a lot. He's fascinated by technology and his goal for us all is to have a good education and do well in life.

MEHEREEN P7



I think the biggest challenge for my dad is money and because of how little he was being paid, it stops him doing stuff with me. Things cost a lot of money and he needs to look after me. He likes taking me to football and seeing me grow up. He wants me to do good with my education.

EMMA P7



I'm always looking at clocks for the time when he comes home because we like to spend time together. Downtown Disney is where we went on holiday. It's a great place to hang out and have fun. The fishing rods are because we like to go fishing and catch our dinner.

DYLAN P7



My dad and I both love Arrow. He goes running down at the beach and he is always there for me and my brother and sister's birthdays. We both like play fighting and this winds my mum up which is funny. We both like reading Calvin and Hobbes because it brings back my dad's childhood memories. My favourite memory with my dad is when we watched all the Star Wars movies together and we talked about it before bed when we were brushing our teeth. He's found a new job now – yesterday he delivered a lawn mower!

ERIN P6

Thanks

Children, parents and staff from the following schools and organisations for their involvement and support:

Dyce Primary School, Aberdeen
Sgoil an Rubha, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar
St. Kenneth's Primary School, Fife
Prestonpans Primary School, East Lothian
North Edinburgh Childcare, Edinburgh

The Dads Project was facilitated by Chelsea Stinson and Yonnie Fraser from Children's Parliament

Useful Resources

Parenting and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) - Together

www.togetherscotland.org.uk/about-childrens-rights/childrens-rights-and-parenting/

National Parenting Strategy - Scottish Government

www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2012/10/4789

Info for Dads - Parenting Across Scotland

www.parentingacrossscotland.org/info-for-families/dads.aspx

Getting It Right for Every Child - Scottish Government

www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/People/Young-People/gettingitright

Fathers Network Scotland

www.fathersnetwork.org.uk

Being too
Far away From
them

'My dad does too
much work and I
don't always get
to see him.'

Having fun with
your children!

Always Worrying what
your child's future.

'Me and my dad walked up a hill together and he was telling me about the different trees. When we got to the top he told me to look at the view and remember it because it was special and that every time we looked at it we'd remember each other and how much we love each other.'