



# Building a Nation of Wee Democracies

A report on the *wee democracy project* development phase: exploring the interface between the rights of the child and family life in Scotland today

Submission to the Sponsored Research Programme  
Scottish Government Education Directorate

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Report authors: Colin Morrison and Yonnie Fraser

*"Traditionally the child has been seen as a dependent, invisible and passive family member. Only recently has he or she become 'seen' and, furthermore, the movement is growing to give him or her space to be heard and respected. Dialogue, negotiation, participation have come to the forefront of the common action for children. The family becomes in turn the ideal framework for the first stage of the democratic experience for each and all of its individual members, including children. Is this only a dream or should it also be envisaged as a precise and challenging task?"<sup>1</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> Hodgkin R and Newell P (2002) 'Implementation Handbook for the Convention on the Rights of the Child' for the United Nations Children's Fund

# Acknowledgements

The wee democracy project development team are:

**Yonnie Fraser, Daniel Clapton and Colin Morrison from the TASC Agency**

**Cathy McCulloch and Joanna Boyce from the Children's Parliament**

Our sincere thanks to the families who gave us their time and commitment,  
to provide anonymity we have not named families  
but each has received a copy of this report.

Thanks also to colleagues in other agencies  
who have helped us consider the importance and complexity  
of work in this area.

# INDEX

- Fully hyperlinked for easy access

Click on index item to go to each page.

Use 'Back to index' link at bottom to return.

|    |                                      |
|----|--------------------------------------|
| 1  | Executive Summary                    |
| 6  | Introduction                         |
| 7  | Broader Context                      |
| 8  | Aims and Objectives                  |
| 9  | A Summary of the Desk Research       |
| 13 | The Wee Democracy Project Approach   |
| 17 | Reflections on Working with Families |
| 22 | The Family Sessions in Detail        |
| 48 | Discussion with Agencies             |
| 52 | Next Steps                           |
| 54 | Bibliography/Sources Reviewed        |

## Executive Summary

The Children's Parliament has an interest in the lives of children, in their wellbeing, and in the ways in which commitments made to them in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child are made real. One area of children's lives which the Children's Parliament has sought to explore when it comes to human rights is the family. With this in mind, in 2004 - 2005 the Children's Parliament applied to the SEED Sponsored Research Programme<sup>2</sup> to undertake some exploratory work which sought to examine the interface between family life and children's rights with the intention of creating a model of work with families which could be rolled out at a later time. Funding was awarded in stages.

- In 2005 limited **desk based research** allowed us to begin to explore the theory and policy base which underpins the work.
- In 2007 **work with families** was concerned with developing and piloting the tools and methodology which we would like to roll out in ongoing work with families. Four families were recruited to take part in three family sessions facilitated by a project worker.
- In 2008 **discussion with other agencies** in the field allowed us to better understand their interest in this area and to begin to build relationships with potential partners who could support a roll out of the model, both government and non-governmental agencies were involved.

### From the desk based research in 2005 we have learned:

- The key focus for family policy in Scotland, at least until the recent election of a new Government, has been on eradicating child poverty and promoting social inclusion within a more integrated service landscape. Family policy, within the context of social policy, has been concerned with promoting a fair society and mitigating the worst effects of inequalities. There are however also elements of policy which give an impression of families, or children and young people, as a problem to be solved.
- There is limited literature on the interface between children's rights and family life. We do not know if parents, carers and children find the concept of children's rights helpful or not in consideration of their family life. We do not know enough about parents' and carers' thoughts or experiences on the practical implications of raising children in a manner which is conscious and supportive of their rights. We would benefit from knowing more about whether a respect for children's rights in the family environment simply equates with 'good parenting' or whether a respect for rights necessarily impacts on styles of parenting.
- Very little is known or stated about children and young people's voice in the context of decisions made in the realm of family life.
- We do not know how families view the role of government and non governmental agencies in relation to implementing rights of the child at home.
- Ethical considerations are also crucial to work with families and so appropriate consideration must be given to consent, confidentiality and anonymity.

<sup>2</sup> The fund supports small scale research with a maximum budget of £10,000

### About the wee democracy approach:

- In keeping with the Children's Parliament commitment to adopt creative arts approaches in all its work this was extended into work with families as part of the **wee democracy project**. The theme or analogy which emerged in the teams planning was to take families on a joint exploration, on an *Arthurian Quest*.
- The sessions aimed to be thought provoking and included highly theatrical moments which would especially appeal to the children, entertain the adults and address any fears of being observed or studied.
- The theme also means that all props and supporting materials reflected the idea of *A Family Quest*; from scrolls to crowns, from family crests to a real round table, each family story was developed.
- Within this approach the Children's Parliament themes and the UNCRC articles which interface with family life could be explored.

### In terms of the model developed and piloted with families:

- The **wee democracy project** has adopted approaches to working with whole families with the intent of exploring the interface between human rights (especially children's rights) and family life.
- Our creative approaches are *a way in* to the issues at hand, not just because they make it fun but because the approach creates a different context within which we can work together.
- Our ways of working make it possible for us to embark on a fast track to feelings and gives permission to challenge in a safe environment standard sets of ideas, beliefs and ways of behaving.
- In short, the Arthurian Quest we embarked on with our participating families has allowed us, through confident and skilled facilitation, to engage at an emotional level. We have sought to create spaces within which each of our unique families can work outside their normal day to day interactions. Our light touch creates a new language which can help express both the funny and the serious.
- The legacy for families, we intend, is both a sense of having had fun together, but also the possibility of identifying new ways of being together which are mindful of and informed by every family members human rights.

### When it comes to family views on participation, in their evaluation family members identified:

- The importance of talking about and finding the meaning of 'fairness' in family life.
- That improved communication about feelings and experiences gives individuals more confidence to deal with pressures in family life.
- The benefits in openness and dialogue about disagreements or problems in the family – including seeing other people's point of view as well as them hearing and respecting your own.

- Their enjoyment in sitting down as a family and spending time together.
- That the family benefits from recognising what is going well for them.
- That building a more explicit understanding of the importance of family life is something that will be valued as children grow up and become more independent.
- The value of an external person and innovative/creative tools as a facilitator for non threatening communication about family life.
- That the notion of a family as a democracy is helpful, realistic and achievable.

The evaluation was conducted at the end of family engagement with the **wee democracy project** sessions; in the longer term it will be vital to explore the extent to which such matters are embedded in the longer term in family life.

### Discussion with other agencies

- Through interviews with key personnel the **wee democracy project** development phase provided an opportunity to begin to map out, explore and identify where implementation of the UNCRC within the context of family life is within other agencies area of interest and what the challenges are in this area of work. In summary:
- Despite some recognition of the UNCRC in the language of service providers, in policy and in legislation, for the most part when it comes to children's rights there has been little or no explicit or formal focus on children's rights in family life. It appears that the family has simply not been seen as a setting for implementation of the UNCRC or for the experience of rights. It would seem that for Government and for many agencies the family is still viewed as a private realm.
- Interviewees were keen to stress that positive work with a family can release the potential they have for managing and feeling positive about family life.
- Interviewees have also identified that children's rights can only be experienced meaningfully when we embrace the importance of everyone's rights in family and community life. For one interviewee this issue was about shifting from a perspective of rights as things that need to be enforced to a perspective where environments and relationships are built which facilitate the experience of rights.
- Interviewees recognised that in some places, amongst some agencies, there can be a view that human rights are hardly relevant to families who may be struggling with aspects of life; this can be extended into a view that children's rights are some kind of middle class interest. Interviewees challenged any notion that rights within family life are only relevant after some kind of threshold or notion of intelligence, income or level of functionality is crossed.

- When thinking about aspects of rights and family life which might be experienced as problematic or challenging interviewees identified many of the issues and areas that our participating families explored: confidentiality, privacy, making decisions, freedom, and boundaries. Interviewees also recognised the value and importance of the relationships which exist within families. They saw value in supporting families to develop the mixture of skills and values they need for family life. Interviewees also highlighted the importance of working positively with the interface between culture and rights.
- Interviewees identified a real interest amongst parents about parenting and doing the best for their child. There is a gap in terms of information and effective approaches which can introduce and embed rights into considerations of family life.

Finally, across interviews, there was a desire to refocus on the importance of family life (in all its diversity, and including children who are looked after) and to recognise that family life is the most important setting within which children can learn about and experience values and behaviours which underpin participation and citizenship.

### **The longer term**

In terms of purpose, the longer term aim of the Children's Parliament is to use learning from this exploratory study to develop the **wee democracy project** as a model of work which addresses how families in Scotland understand, are affected by and are able to exercise the rights of the child which are enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

In the longer term, by working with families and key public agencies the **wee democracy project** will support constructive discussion, debate and learning about what children's rights mean in the context of family life and will encourage continuous learning about the support children and parents need in order to implement the UNCRC at home.

Now we have completed this exploratory study The Children's Parliament will seek funding to extend our work.

**In the immediate future the Children's Parliament will be writing and submitting proposals to funding bodies for a wee democracy project pilot with the following characteristics:**

- We will work in 2 local authorities with larger numbers of families, for different periods, over a 12 month period.
- We will enhance and build on the initial materials we have developed for families as part of the exploratory study.
- We will develop and deliver a model of training/continuing professional development opportunities for professional colleagues working in the participating communities which will support them to engage with children's human rights in family life.



- We will create and facilitate fun family events for many more families in the participating communities which explore and promote the idea of families as wee democracies.
- We will write and produce written materials for professional colleagues and for families which supports understanding and action on the interface between children's human rights and family life in Scotland.
- We will develop our 'family zone' as part of our current online Children's Parliament developments.
- We will share learning with colleagues across voluntary and statutory sectors at a national level and seek to engage Government in consideration of what can be achieved when we work together to build a nation of wee democracies.

## Introduction

The Children's Parliament has an interest in the lives of children, in their wellbeing, and in the ways in which commitments made to them in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child are made real. One area of children's lives which the Children's Parliament has sought to explore when it comes to human rights is the family. With this in mind, in 2004 - 2005 the Children's Parliament applied to the SEED Sponsored Research Programme<sup>3</sup> to undertake some exploratory work which sought to examine the interface between family life and children's rights with the intention of creating a model of work with families which could be rolled out at a later time. Funding was awarded in stages.

- In 2005 limited **desk based research** allowed us to begin to explore the theory and policy base which underpins the work.
- In 2007 **work with families** was concerned with developing and piloting the tools and methodology which we would like to roll out in ongoing work with families. Four families were recruited to take part in three family sessions facilitated by a project worker.
- In 2008 **discussion with other agencies** in the field allowed us to better understand their interest in this area and to begin to build relationships with potential partners who could support a roll out of the model, both government and non-governmental agencies were involved.

In terms of purpose, the longer term aim of the Children's Parliament is to use learning from this *exploratory study* to develop the *wee democracy project* as a model of work which addresses how families in Scotland understand, are affected by and are able to exercise the rights of the child which are enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

In the longer term, by working with families and key public agencies the *wee democracy project* will support constructive discussion, debate and learning about what children's rights mean in the context of family life and will encourage continuous learning about the support children and parents need in order to implement the UNCRC at home.

Now we have completed this exploratory study The Children's Parliament will seek funding to extend our work with the long term aim of **building a nation of wee democracies**.

<sup>3</sup> The fund supports small scale research with a maximum budget of £10,000

## Broader Context

It is now 14 years since The United Nations (UN) International Year of the Family. The slogan for the year was **building the smallest democracy at the heart of society**.

The intention of the UN was to promote the idea that families *“must become the medium for promoting new values and behaviour consistent with the rights of individual family members, as established by various United Nations instruments”*.

In 1995 the Children’s Rights Office published a small booklet entitled ‘Building Small Democracies’. In it, the case was made for much more effort to be put into consideration of implementation of the UNCRC within the context of family life, the argument being that: *“Most of the analysis and debate about the implications of the Convention for children’s lives in the UK has focused on social and economic rights and on public services like health and education”*.

This was thought to be important, but it was also argued that: *“If the principles of the Convention are to have reality for all aspects of children’s lives, there must be equal consideration of children’s rights to active participation in society, and to civil and political rights. And the debate must extend into the family”*.

For the Children’s Parliament, an organisation which seeks to work with children, their families and communities to explore active citizenship and the meaning of children’s human rights some important questions stem from this claim, including: *Has progress on active participation been made equally across the public and private aspects of children’s lives? Is it possible to identify how the rights of the child have impacted on family life?*

In 2007/2008 The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child is hearing from the UK Government for the third time about how the UK is doing in terms of implementation of the UNCRC. The Scottish Government has produced a detailed response from Scotland about views on implementation of the Convention here in Scotland<sup>4</sup>. In previous UK submissions on progress the Committee has encouraged the UK Government (centrally and through devolved structures) to do more about how the Convention impacts on family life and it remains to be seen whether this area is once again discussed in the current reporting cycle.

**To support the constructive partnerships which are developing between children’s rights organisations and the Scottish Government and to understand more about the UNCRC in the context of family life the Children’s Parliament believes that we need to learn more from children and adults working together in the context of their family. The wee democracy project emerged from this thinking.**

<sup>4</sup> A Report on Implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in Scotland at <http://openscotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/07/30114126/0>

## Aims and Objectives

The Children's Parliament applied to the then Scottish Executive Education Department's Sponsored Research Programme for **seedcorn funding** to enable **initial and exploratory** work on the **wee democracy project**.

The Children's Parliament has an ongoing working relationship with social research company The TASC Agency and a partnership between the agencies was developed in order to progress the work.

**In the longer term** Children's Parliament envisages that the **wee democracy project** will work with families across Scotland, using participative, creative and action research oriented approaches to explore the interface between the rights of the child and family life in Scotland today. In the long term the **wee democracy project** will give those engaged the opportunity to:

- Clarify understanding about the notion of rights and provide information about how rights are viewed and exercised in the context of family life.
- Provide information about how families view the role of government and non-governmental agencies in relation to implementing rights of the child at home.
- Inform debates and policy in relation to implementation of the UNCRC; particularly where the rights of the child interface with family life.
- Identify what families and government and non-governmental agencies need to consider, and act upon, in order to progress implementation of the UNCRC in the context of family life.

The proposal to the Sponsored Research Programme was to undertake a **development phase** which would allow Children's Parliament to:

- Develop an understanding of the theory and policy base which underpins the work.
- Allow Children's Parliament to develop the methodology and tools for the project, enabling Children's Parliament to show how the **wee democracy project** can be delivered in the field.
- Pilot these approaches in the context of families.
- Build relationships with potential partners in any roll out of the model, both government and non-governmental agencies.

This is a report on this development phase work.

## A Summary of the Desk Research

This phase saw work in three areas; these were reported back to the sponsoring department in a detailed report in 2005. In this report we summarise the findings of the phase 1 desk research report and highlight some areas of interest in any longer term roll out or extension of the work we have called the **wee democracy project**.

A list of publications sourced as part of this work in 2005 is detailed in the bibliography at the end of this report.

### **Exploring research and literature to date about children's rights and family life**

This is a summary of some of the key issues which are raised through the literature (see bibliography) surrounding the interface between children's rights, the UNCRC and family life. While not exhaustive, the literature we reviewed (up to mid 2005) does derive from a variety of sources and gives us a good understanding of the major themes and areas for further reflection in respect of our proposed project – the **wee democracy project**.

Across the literature there is a commonly accepted understanding that notions of childhood vary between cultures and across historical periods. Family structures have also become more diverse and complex, the idea of family is more fluid. We are also more aware of some of the more negative experiences of family life, particularly in relation to issues of violence and abuse.

**In the longer term we might usefully consider further whether the wee democracy project, and notions of children's rights, can deepen and strengthen interpersonal relationships between adults and young people, whether they help us protect children, or whether they create another layer of complexity which further distances and weakens inter generational relationships.**

In the last 20 or 30 years or so childhood has also become an area of considerable research interest. Through such interest a more insightful, clear and thoughtful understanding of children, their abilities, capabilities and their development have emerged. Social scientists have taken to listening to children and observing them in their own environments. The literature often stresses the importance of recognising children as autonomous individuals who are competent and deserve the same attention and respect which is taken for granted in adulthood.

**In the longer term we identify that the wee democracy project might usefully explore with families what they view as the child's understanding of responsibility and how understandings of responsibility interface with whatever rights are negotiated.**

It is important to consider how the concept of children's rights, and the UNCRC, will affect parents and carers relationships with their children and what they mean in terms of the manner in which they parent. Much has been written about different parenting styles and the potential character traits and outcomes which emerge in terms of children who are raised by certain adults and in certain ways. For some 'good' parents, it could be the case that the parenting style which they have adopted is completely in accordance with the concept of children's rights and the UNCRC. Of course descriptions of 'good' parenting styles and 'good' ways of raising children do predate the children's rights agenda and the UNCRC.

The UNCRC requires parents and carers to respect their child's rights but also foster within them an understanding that having rights requires them to respect other people's rights, and to be responsible and conscious of this in terms of the choices and decisions they make. The literature also explores the type of family environment which parents should foster to assist in recognising and supporting their children's rights.

**In the longer term the wee democracy project might usefully explore with families the extent to which they have such relationships or characteristics, whether they would like to, and how they might be developed or supported. We could usefully explore what parenting which reflects the core principles of the UNCRC might look like.**

The literature also suggests that the opportunity to experience power and control in one's life contributes positively to health and wellbeing, suggesting that parenting in a manner which is compliant with children's rights and the UNCRC not only has manifest benefits for the children who are raised in this manner but will also help create a culture which is more socially responsible and positive in its internal interactions.

**In the longer term the wee democracy project could explore what perceived and actual benefits the exploration or experience of 'rights' brings in the lives of participating families.**

But is the UNCRC pro-family? One of the consistent criticisms levelled at the UNCRC is that it will work to undermine the family by making children nothing but demanding rights claimants. The Children's Parliament would argue that it seems unlikely that a parent or carer would ever *primarily* consider their child or children as a claimant. As an agency Children's Parliament tends toward support of alternative claims that the UNCRC is specifically concerned with non-interference in family life, and focused instead on assistance and support for families, that indeed it is pro-family.

**While the literature we have reviewed comments on the importance of giving young people the opportunity to meaningfully participate in decisions which affect their lives we conclude from reading to date that the wee democracy project, in the longer term, could provide an opportunity to further explore the following gaps:**

- There is limited literature on the interface between children's rights and family life.
- Very little has been written about how parents and carers view the concept of children's rights. We do not know enough about parents and carers thoughts or experiences on the practical implications of raising children in a manner which is conscious and supportive of their rights. We might ask whether a respect for children's rights in the family environment simply equates with 'good parenting' or whether a respect for rights necessarily impacts on styles of parenting.
- We do not know if parents/carers and children find the concept of children's rights helpful or not in consideration of their family life.
- We do not know how families view the role of government and non governmental agencies in relation to implementing rights of the child at home.

## The Policy Context

The intention of the Children's Parliament the **wee democracy project** in the longer term is to engage with key public agencies, including the Scottish Government, Local Authorities, NHS Boards and voluntary sector partners to explore and identify where implementation of the UNCRC within the context of family life is within their area of interest and what the challenges are in this area of work. The Children's Parliament also wants to work with these public agencies in order to identify what supports they currently offer to families in terms of understanding and exercising the rights of the child in family life, and what gaps and needs they have in order to be able to work effectively in this area.

To begin to understand how we might most effectively engage with the work our early desk research on the policy context mapped out the current policy interests when it comes to families in Scotland, and also identified where policy in relation to families is formulated. We recognised that family policy is a complex area, and that much family policy to date has been more *implicit* than explicit. The desk research identified that family policy, within the context of social policy, is predominantly concerned with promoting a fair society and mitigating the worst effects of inequalities. There are however also elements of policy which give an impression of families, or children and young people, *as a problem to be solved*. The key focus in Scotland, at least until the recent election of a new Government, has been on eradicating child poverty and promoting social inclusion within a more integrated service landscape. We would imagine that these priorities will have some place in the current Government's emerging social policy agenda.

Recent social policy also reflects a growing commitment to hearing children's voices in policy development, and more broadly to children's rights in contemporary Scottish society. While there is an emerging commitment the focus to date has undoubtedly been on that voice within public decision making, or private decision making (say about individual planning within education or care services) only where it is facilitated by service providers.

**We conclude that there is very little known or stated about children and young people's voice in the context of decisions made in the realm of family life, the very area of interest to the wee democracy project.**

In 1994 the UN Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs proposed that families: *"must become the medium for promoting new values and behaviour consistent with the rights of individual family members, as established by various United Nations instruments"*.<sup>5</sup> Such a view might be extended to seeing human rights, and within this children's rights, as a vehicle for addressing some of the concerns about social exclusion, the disintegration of community and family life, the poverty of aspiration, the perceived problematic behaviour of children and young people in public places or at school, which many public figures and the media show concern about.

**A longer term question for the wee democracy project might be whether engaging with families on a rights based agenda can create opportunities to learn more about the role of the family in promoting new values and behaviour which not only impacts on *internal* family relationships but also on children's external community and social relationships. The challenge for the wee democracy project in the longer term will be to locate an interest in the rights of the child in family life not as a response to a problem but as a positive, enhancing experience.**

<sup>5</sup> From 'Building Small Democracies' Children's Rights Office 1995



### Other issues in working with families

If we think about the **wee democracy project** as both social research (with a leaning toward action research) *and* as an active programme of engagement with children and families it means that the Children's Parliament must also consider ethical and epistemological (in other words what we know and how we know it) issues. This was done in some depth in the initial report on our desk based research submitted to the sponsoring Department in 2005; this short section summaries findings/thinking.

The Children's Parliament is keen to ensure that the **wee democracy project** fulfils a commitment to producing *new knowledge* in the field of interest, so providing a better knowledge base for policy development and understandings of what children's rights and democracy might mean in the context of family life. Our early desk based research has led the Children's Parliament to an interest in further exploration of feminist standpoint epistemology with its commitment to *challenge the marginalisation or invisibility of certain groups and to explore what can be learned from the person and the family's situated experiences*.

Ethical considerations are also crucial to the **wee democracy project**. The Children's Parliament understands ethics as the search for rules of conduct; desk based research has allowed us to explore the principles which will underpin the work undertaken. In particular Children's Parliament is interested in what Richard Pring calls the character of the researcher, Pring writes of the *disposition to act appropriately, of the moral and intellectual virtue of the educational researcher*; moral virtues being concerned with things like kindness or honesty, intellectual virtues concerned with truth, openness and clarity.

Finally, important other issues also need consideration; consent, confidentiality and anonymity. To summarise, a review of the literature leads the Children's Parliament to commit to seeking consent from all of those participating in this current work or any future **wee democracy project** activities, both initially and at later stages of the process. This would mean always producing written information about the purpose of the work, consent will be based on discussing and understanding what we will discuss, how we will do it and clarity about it being okay to say no to participation at any stage. In terms of reporting on this initial and later stages of wee democracy work Children's Parliament would offer anonymity to participants. Where any records of work are kept participants will be given a dedicated file name and all information from them stored as such. No information would be used in a report which has not been checked to ensure that the individual or family cannot be identified.



## The Wee Democracy Project Approach

This section of the report describes the approach taken and what families did in their **wee democracy project** sessions. Much of the emphasis of this section (and subsequent sections which describes the family sessions) is on process, as well as on what the families recorded and reported. The purpose of such detail is to emphasise the importance of skilled facilitation and the purposefulness of the creative approaches adopted. The detailed reflection and recording also enables us to check out the efficacy of such an approach for the **wee democracy project** in the longer term. In their sessions families talked about what they love and cherish about family life; but within the model they were also able to consider what changes they would like to make to family life, whilst thinking about how to do this within a framework of rights and shared responsibilities.

### The approach

At the heart of this development phase is the programme which has been designed and facilitated with families. The work is grounded in an in-depth knowledge of the rights of the child, how implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is being progressed here in Scotland, and on the issues and complexities of family life in contemporary Scottish society.

The chosen methodology also reflects sensitivity to participants in the process in order that understanding, involvement and commitment are maximised.

Finally, as highlighted earlier, in all Children's Parliament work there is a commitment to ethically and professionally sound conduct and standards. In practice this means ensuring that participants experience their involvement as worthwhile; it means engaging with families to develop a participatory process which will be challenging, fun, new and empowering.

**The development phase was concerned with both developing and piloting the tools and methodology for a roll out of the project and, because data of interest in itself might be generated, with capturing and reporting back on such information collected in the pilot work. In this sense this process reported on here has been both developmental and small scale qualitative research.**

We are conscious that we have worked with 4 families across 3 sessions; and that it is only through work with larger numbers of families that we can begin to reap more substantial learning which might impact on policy making, service delivery and aspirations about shifts in Scottish culture. This is a beginning.

For all its work The Children's Parliament has developed a holistic and thematic approach. The 6 themes which frame all Children's Parliament activity are:

- *Who we are*
- *Where we live*
- *Health and happiness*
- *Freedom*
- *Feeling safe and being cared for*
- *Having our say*

The UNCRC articles which interface with family life include rights concerned with:

- *Parental responsibility*
- *Decision making*
- *Identity*
- *Freedom of expression, thought, religion and association*
- *Privacy*
- *Physical and personal integrity*
- *Liberty*

Information about specific rights was produced for the families.

In keeping with the Children's Parliament commitment to adopt creative arts approaches in all its work this was extended into work with families as part of the wee democracy project. The theme or analogy which emerged in the teams planning was to take families on a joint exploration, on an *Arthurian Quest*.

The sessions aimed to be thought provoking and included highly theatrical moments which would especially appeal to the children, entertain the adults and address any fears of being observed or studied.

The theme also means that all props and supporting materials reflected the idea of a *Family Quest*; from scrolls to crowns, from family crests to a real round table, each family story was developed.

Within this approach the Children's parliament themes and the UNCRC articles which interface with family life could be explored.

Above all the sessions were about creating space to talk, laugh and play together.

This style of work, shared by the Children's Parliament in terms of its programme and by research partner TASC in its approach to social research, provides facilitation which has no preconceived expectations but fosters the sharing of ideas within the structure offered.

As the work is developmental, there was also a further commitment to seek participants' views on the experience, and to share any final reports with them.

## Recruiting families

The project team, from both TASC and Children's Parliament, are skilled and experienced in work with families, in play, in work on citizenship and in the design and use of creative approaches to research using an action research model. It was also intended that piloting the methodology in contact with families would allow Children's Parliament to develop a realistic approach in terms of scale and content for development and delivery of the roll out of a national **wee democracy project**.

In order to recruit families for the pilot/development work the families of children already engaged in the community programme of the Children's Parliament were approached. Although one child from each of the families has been involved in active citizenship activities there has been no direct work with parents or siblings. The children come from different socio-economic, cultural and faith backgrounds, and have different abilities. Initial written information was provided. Written information was followed up by personal contact by Children's Parliament staff and four families were recruited.

## More about the sessions

Three sessions were planned by Children's Parliament and TASC staff. Sessions, facilitated by a member of the TASC team, took place in family homes. The sessions had the following focus and outcomes.

### Session 1: The quest begins!

- 1 The first session was concerned with introducing the *Arthurian Quest* and encouraging families to talk about what they need and bring to family life.
- 2 The articles of the UNCRC which most clearly relate to family life were introduced and discussed.
- 3 Families were asked to continue to think about and record times (in their family tomes) when they make decisions together and are respectful of each other (magic moments) and times when family life doesn't run so smoothly (family dragons).
- 4 Families were left with a task – to draw some family portraits.

**For a full report on what the families did in Session 1 and for more detail and findings see - The Family Sessions In Detail: of this report.**

Between session 1 and 2 the facilitator telephoned all families and checked progress with the family tome and portraits.

### Session 2: The quest continues!

- 1 The second session began with displaying the family portraits and explored some of the 'magic moments' and 'family dragons' which had occurred in the previous week.
- 2 Particular attention was given to 'dragons' which can cause conflict in families and which are addressed in the UNCRC – privacy, having different opinions, being fair, freedom and making decisions.
- 3 Finally, as they near their Camelot the families were asked to work on a family shield.

**For a full report on what the families did in Session 2 and for more detail and findings see - The Family Sessions In Detail: of this report**

### Session 3: Knights of The Round Table

- 1 The third family session began with families sharing their Family Shield and reporting back on more magic moments and family dragons.
- 2 Their continuing quest then took them to the Round Table where the essential elements of a family democracy could be shared and discussed.
- 3 Finally families worked on their vision for Camelot; a place where every family is a wee democracy.

**For a full report on what the families did in Session 3 and for more detail and findings see - The Family Sessions In Detail: of this report.**

# Reflections on Working with Families

This section of the report:

- Summaries the key elements of the wee democracy project model
- Highlights what we have learned from reflecting on the approach
- Reports on participant's views about engaging with the wee democracy project

**To summarise the key factors in our approach:**

- The wee democracy project has adopted approaches to working with whole families with the intent of exploring the interface between human rights (especially children's rights) and family life.
- Our creative approaches are a way in to the issues at hand, not just because they make it fun but because the approach creates a different context within which we can work together.
- Our ways of working make it possible for us to embark on a fast track to feelings and gives permission to challenge in a safe environment sets of ideas, beliefs and ways of behaving.
- In short, the Arthurian Quest we embark on with our participating families has allowed us, through confident and skilled facilitation, to engage at an emotional level.
- We have sought to create spaces within which each of our unique families can work outside their normal day to day interactions. Our light touch creates a new language which can help express both the funny and the serious.
- The legacy for families, we intend, is both a sense of having had fun together, but also the possibility of identifying new ways of being together which are mindful of and informed by every family members human rights.

**Before we describe the family sessions in some detail from the work with families we have learned:**

- The use of a fantasy theme, an Arthurian Quest, allowed the facilitator to work with families to create a space within which ordinary events could be dressed up and some distance provided, so that they could be explored and discussed and even when they were difficult, enjoyed.
- The tools used in sessions were seen as providing ways of looking. Props such as the Family Tome or the Crowns gave some sense of ceremony or ritual. Once established, families found the notion of a quest as something they could easily slip into at the start of a next session; a parallel existence if you like which meant there was no need for re-explaining the purpose of the work together.
- Working with creative approaches encourages people of all ages to look at and find out about different ways of expressing how they and others feel. It is perhaps adults who have benefited most from the fantasy world created as they may have been working more outside their comfort zone.

- Skilled and confident facilitation is essential to using the approaches we have developed. On reflection we are reminded that any roll out of the approach will continue to depend on such facilitation.
- Whilst confident about the tools to be used facilitating the work in the family home is a challenge. Every family is different. Initial contact with each family requires the building of trust. In the view of the session facilitator a strength of the work was working as a lone worker with each family, allowing the worker to work unselfconsciously with all attention on the family. It was also felt that one worker, in your home, is far less threatening.
- Even though families volunteered to be part of the sessions there was some nervousness and apprehension. Early in the sessions parents felt the need to share things with the facilitator about aspects of family life that might appear later and they might feel judged on – for example that children were smacked. This reminds us that this is a delicate area to work in. It is essential in the work that all family members understand that there is no judgement being made in the facilitation.
- We have also learned that facilitation requires a balance to be struck between the level of engagement of children (of all ages) and adults. In this way the facilitator models democratic principles.
- Although the project is about the interface between children's rights and family life we have also learned that the work has no validity unless it is genuine about its care for adults too. In that sense the sessions are about (everyone's) human rights within family life.
- Families enjoyed the closeness of the 3 sessions (across 4 weeks) as it gave time for reflection, family 'homework' whilst having some pace or energy to the process.
- Finally, we have learned that talking and playing and storytelling about rights and democracy is not an abstract exercise but a means by which the day to day life of any family can be explored inclusively and safely. Our families have been comfortable with our aspirations to see families as the place where everyone is important and special, where people are listened to, encouraged, treated fairly and where everyone has their say.

### Family views on participation

When it comes to participant's views on being part of the **wee democracy project** sessions:

- The younger children (between 8 and 14 years old) highlighted that participation meant that the family talked about fairness, listening (and being heard) freedom, solving problems and inter-generational relationships. They liked the thematic or storytelling approach which made talking easier. They identified that they could say things that were important to them about family life (sometimes) for the first time and that the sessions were interesting, fun and serious.
- Older children (between 15 and 18 years old) also liked the thematic approach and recognised the quality of the facilitation, both which made talking easier. They identified that the sessions allowed people to talk about feelings, ways of behaving towards others and to explore boundaries.

- Dads also liked the theme, the props and the quality of the facilitation. They report a balance of fun and purpose. Dads liked the timing of the sessions – which happened weekly and had some time between them to reflect or do family tasks. Exploring feelings, by listening and reflecting as a family, was a strength of being involved. The tasks and discussion was facilitated sensitively and seriously but was not intrusive. The sessions felt like they reaffirmed what individuals bring to and get from each other and from family life. The sessions helped families to make family decisions.
- Mums also enjoyed the sessions; and saw involvement as a positive thing for the whole family. Sessions were described as safe spaces, where experiences of family life could be talked about without argument. Sessions felt like a place to take stock, and this included reaffirming what works well about family life. Issues explored from the Mums' perspectives included freedom, boundaries, safety and others' feelings. There was some surprise about the positive way some Dads took to the sessions. Facilitation was seen as friendly.

Each family member was individually asked to record what they thought about being part of the wee democracy project sessions. Children and adults reflect in these comments on the process, the tools or approaches used and their learning from and feelings about participation. They offered the following comments.

The Youngest Knights (14's and under)

*"We've been talking about fairness and each other and the Knights and I did the picture of the treasure chest. I liked playing with the knight's stuff". (age 8)*

*"Brilliant! We've found problems but we can fix them. The scrolls were good – we found out how we acted and we listened to what other people say and it can help. The whole thing has been good cos it's really enjoyable. We've had fun but serious times – but we were happy to do it and it was still fun and we were sitting down as a family. I liked the drawings and how my sister was slightly apart in her drawing – but she doesn't have to be. Mum thinks dad spends more time with us but only cos she works. But she is just as equal with Dad and we've still got a good relationship. It's been fun, thank you". (age 10)*

*"I think it's been very good. It lets you see what everyone's been thinking. That's been interesting and we didn't just have to answer boring questions. I felt bad – doing the dragons – saying I wanted to be in my room. But now I'm glad I did". (age 12)*

*"I've really enjoyed it. I think it's got a lot things out – usually we wouldn't say these things to each other. We would talk but not usually about these subjects. I think it's been good – to tell mum and dad I'd quite like to get more freedom. It would usually be an argument. I enjoyed doing the tasks and also seeing what the boys thought and doing stuff with them – cos we don't usually talk about this sort of thing. And more fun being knights, when people are silly they talk more". (age 12)*

*"Good fun. We did a lot of activities. It kind of made us think about our family as a democracy. The homework was quite good, it made us think and do stuff together. I liked the family portraits that was good". (age 12)*



*"It let us talk about things we don't always talk about and that's good. Like fairness and the reason for doing things. Its good doing stuff like the tasks – with my brother even, we wouldn't normally". (age 14)*

*"It's been good, I've enjoyed it. I think my brother has been better behaved too – the threat of him being put into the book as a dragon moment has worked! The knights and swords have got him involved. We've never normally found the time to discuss so many things together. Its good talking with everyone around you and everyone in the family is picking up on what you're saying". (age 14)*

#### The Young Knights (15 to 18's)

*"Yeah it's been fine. I think how it's done has been good and the knights and everything explain things better. For me, it's not been eye opening – I've not learnt anything new about anyone in the family". (age 15)*

*"It's been interesting for me. I've found out a lot about the family – what they feel. About me – about doing things better. I've taken things on board. It's been helpful. It legitimises being able to say things about each other and the theme makes it more comfortable – dressing up is funny! I know better how far I can push boundaries – and I think it's been useful for mum and dad too". (age 17)*

#### The Older Knights (Dads)

*"It's important to have the theme as you need to engage the age range – the props were good. It's the continuity too of working every week but with some time between. I would have loved as a young person to have had these discussions with my parents. You made it easy".*

*"It's been good. It's the first time as a family that we've sat down – in terms of these sorts of questions – and found out how everyone feels. To find out how well we know each other even and it just confirmed that – and that the children were ok. We've talked about lots of important things but it hasn't felt intrusive. The dragon points were good – pertinent for what came out and a really good way of looking and just confirming stuff. The theme part has been helpful – that it's built around something and done excellently".*

*"I feel very positive about this exercise; all 3 sessions. It has come at good time for our family. We have gone through a period of change and are moving into a very important stage where the family will be spread more widely. There are tangible results from this experience where a shared focus and appreciation of our individual and collective worth has been explicitly stated. This would probably have not occurred without facilitation, thank you. We can use this appreciation to hold a concept of the family which I hope we can return to in future years when the family is scattered and becomes more extended".*

*"It's made me think about things, that there is more to it. It's helped focus and polarise things – for example the holiday issue – which we resolved this week! We did all think about it and we managed to come up with something we're positive about. This whole experience helped us get to that – we might not have had it! Some of the tasks were good – nothing I would normally have done. I actually wish I'd spent more time on them. It got us sitting down as a family and overall I feel pretty positive about it. The balance of fun and keeping the young ones on board is a good way of doing it and it keeps people engaged".*



*"I think it's been useful. It has actually encouraged other conversations that might not have happened – i.e. making other people aware of one another's thoughts. And about things you might not otherwise discuss. That has been good and helpful. The timing split through the weeks gives time to reflect on what has been talked about – it lets you turn it over in your own mind. The role play is useful, I think it encourages fun and objectivity – rather than subjective - subjective/emotive. It's been a learning experience, a quasi therapeutic experience too and that is a real strength of the programme. Although I think it takes a confident family unit to engage with a stranger. I would say too, that the gifts are lovely, of course, but the real benefits are in the programme, you can be sure of that, much more than the other stuff (the gifts)".*

#### The Older Knights (Mums)

*"Although we do talk a lot as a family – I think it's been very useful. It's allowed a level keel – and no walking off. It's been interesting and come at an important time. It has allowed us to evaluate, to look at what we're going to do in a year and also to make the most of our time together. It's coincided with our son going away. It's allowed us to look at his freedom. It's given us permission to explore ideas but with a safety net. Still cautious. I love the idea of writing in the book – the Family Tome. Writing in the dragons and magic moments – it lets people write things down, see then what others feel but gives the space to think through these thoughts while keeping it light hearted. I think we could use a book for us".*

*"It's been really interesting. I think you never usually know how you function as a family. Having the opportunity to sit down and listen and find out they're happy and settled. Opportunity to discuss how we are and openly. And also I didn't think that my partner would be so open. Just really good and I'm glad we did it. You've been so easy to talk to".*

*"I think it's been really good for us. It's made us sit down and be together – its like a therapy session! I suppose it's also been quite good to hear from them (the kids) that the family is fairly open and they feel they can have their say about things. I'm not particularly comfortable about role –play but I can see it's useful. I'm slightly surprised that my partner seemed happy about doing it too!"*

*"Overall it's been fun and it's brought us together. That doesn't happen all the time. I think it's made us look at and be aware of us as a family and how we are operating. If you are putting things in a book, or drawing things, or answering your questions in one of the exercises the family is under the spotlight but then it makes you address things and issues. Otherwise you are just a family behind closed doors, just going about things in the same way and things are left to fester. It feels as if a lot has happened in the last three weeks. I feel as if I have gained more confidence and been able to deal with things. Things have come to the fore and we've dealt with them".*

# The Family Sessions in Detail

## SESSION 1: THE QUEST BEGINS!

### Purpose:

The first session was concerned with introducing the quest and encouraging families to talk about what they need and bring to family life.

The articles of the UNCRC which most clearly relate to family life were introduced and discussed.

Families were asked to continue to think about and record times when they make decisions together and are respectful of each other (magic moments) and times when family life doesn't run so smoothly (family dragons).

## WHAT THE FAMILIES DID AND WHAT WE LEARNED ABOUT CHILDREN'S RIGHTS IN FAMILY LIFE

### A - Getting started: The Knights Contract/The Quest:

The facilitator started the session by asking (usually) the youngest child if they knew any stories about Knights or King Arthur and then briefly explained that the family were now on a 'quest' like knights, and about to embark on an adventure of discovery together. The facilitator then read the formal Knights Contract: (read family name where the text reads 'Smith')

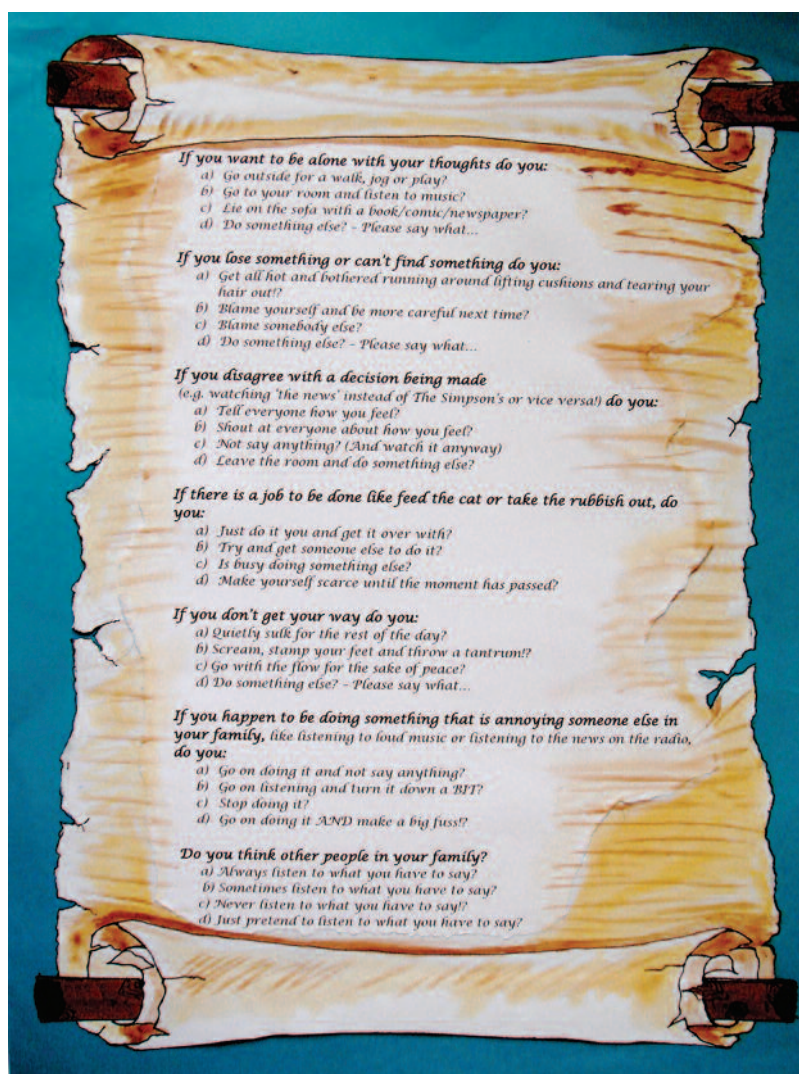
*"Welcome all Smith Knights and thank you for taking part in the Wee Democracy Quest. For this purpose, and with your permission, I will become an honorary Smith Knight. In our Quest for the Smith Round Table we will seek out the Magic Moments when the Smith Knights operate democratically. And by this I mean, making decisions together, treating and being treated fairly and feeling that all knights, younger and older, have opportunities. But just as importantly we will enjoy and document those other moments, the Smith Dragon Moments, when things in the Smith realm don't run quite as smoothly. It is very important too, that all Knights, younger and older, meet, work and listen together for all the three parts of the Quest. All Knights must complete tasks, even older knights! Knights, especially our apprentice knights, that is those knights aged between 12 and 18 must show patience with activities as we sometimes work with much younger knights. And remember that the ever present but unseen wizard Merlin bestows love and gifts".*

This contract helped 'frame' the sessions and the theme without long-winded explanation. Having established the Quest fantasy from then on the facilitator could use the Arthurian/Knight theme or refer to a family member as a knight when appropriate.

## B - An Arthurian multiple choice scroll

Each Knight was given a multiple choice questionnaire rolled and tied with ribbon. Younger children were given some assistance. The questionnaire allowed family members to individually consider and report back on how they deal with certain times in family life such as: If you want to be alone with your thoughts what do you do? What do you do if you disagree with a decision? What do you do if you don't get your way? Do others listen to what you have to say?

The questionnaires provided an opportunity to start the session in a relaxed way. This exercise, after the contract, set the tone, light hearted differences between people were recognised, and potential areas of conflict in a family were flagged up. Where tension or difference of opinion was identified the facilitator offered to take a note of it and referred to this as noting down a bit of 'a Family Dragon'. Where there were happy and positive experiences of working together these were highlighted as Magic Moments. Putting conflicts and experiences of working positively together in the realm of knights, dragons and magic was a useful tool to be returned to later.



### C - A family treasure chest: charms and jewels

With appropriate props – a chest and small jewels and charms – family members were asked to record things they need from their family (charms) and things they bring (jewels).

When it comes to the *things children need* from their family (charms) across the families the children identified:

- Joy
- Happiness
- Good Food
- Trust
- Money
- Communication; internet, phone etc
- More friends over
- Spaghetti and chocolate
- Toys
- Understanding
- People to be interested in what I say
- Support, fun
- Time to myself
- Advice on the next stage of my life
- To have more freedom with my friends
- A dress for the wedding in the summer
- I need independence
- I need space
- More sports clothes
- Support
- To be taken places
- Care
- Love

When it comes to the *things children bring* to their family (jewels) across the families the children identified:

- Cooking
- School
- Gymnastics
- Being active
- Trends
- Football
- Fun
- Organisation
- I'm younger
- Being outside
- Maths and school
- Information
- Humour
- Ideas
- Happiness
- Long boring stories
- New ideas
- The arts
- I bring funny
- Taste in music
- Commitment
- Understanding and experience
- Communication skills
- Knowledge
- Intelligence – eg computer etc
- Laughter
- Beauty

When it comes to the *things parents need from their family* (charms) across the families the adults identified:

- I want family members to be happy but balance need to do necessary things we don't like
- Love and companionship
- To have others appreciate what I enjoy
- Help me do things which the family need done
- Affection, when I'm here
- Family to be as healthy as possible
- Family members to be successful (to achieve things)
- Reassurance
- Money to keep myself well groomed
- Team work
- Affection
- Understanding
- Love
- For people to do things when asked
- Support
- Fun and laughter
- Security
- Humour
- Strength
- Other interests
- Cooperation
- Shelter and warmth
- Good food to eat
- Money to dress nicely
- Discussion
- Own time
- A sense of pride
- Laughter
- A sense of contentment
- Emotional support
- I want tolerance of my need for space for myself sometimes
- Time for myself to grow as an individual
- Encouragement to live a happy existence while not being completely selfish
- Understanding that lack of time spent with family is not through choice

When it comes to the *things parents bring* to their family (jewels) across the families the adults identified:

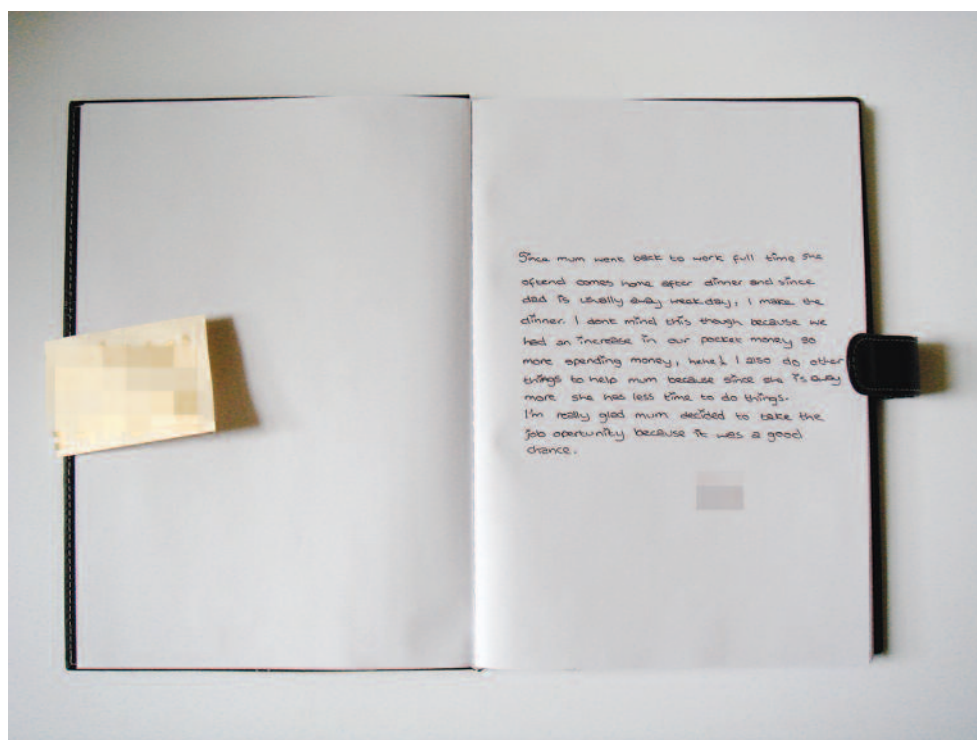
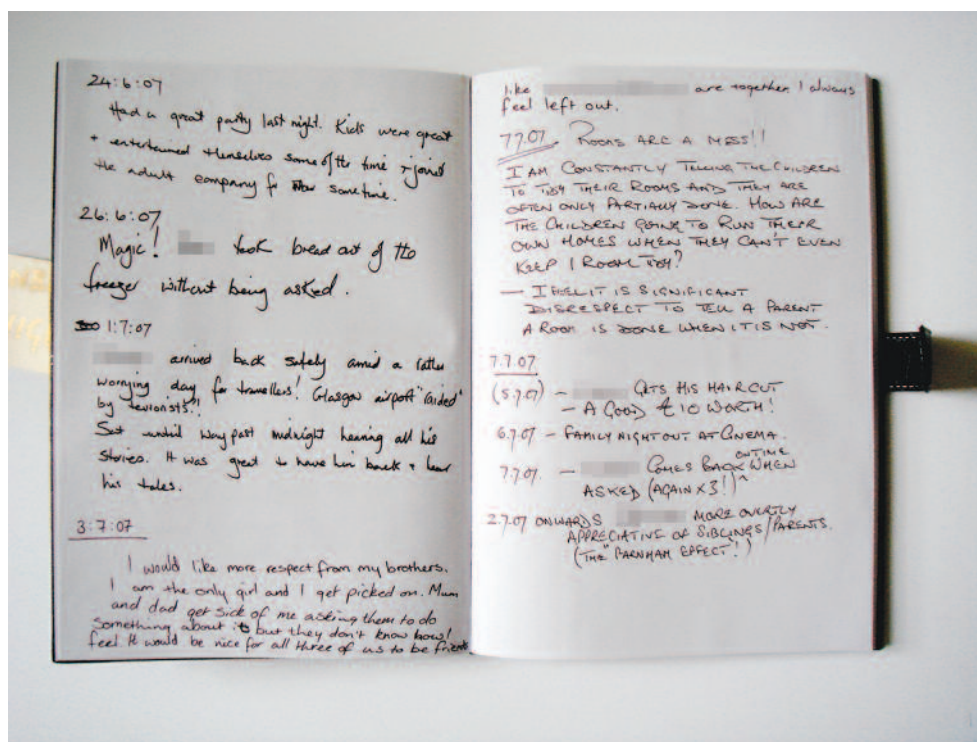
- Love and support 100 percent no matter what
- A nice caring home – welcoming
- Love and humour
- Income
- Stability
- Guidance
- Artiness, design
- Happiness
- Homeliness
- Food
- Love
- Respect
- Appreciation of what is done
- Encourage forward thinking
- Shared humour
- Security (love, safety)
- Comfort – clothing, provider, food
- Intellectual (homework etc)
- Support – financial and well being
- Solutions to variety of challenges the family have
- Do whatever it takes
- Discipline, structure
- Sense of style and appreciation of harmony and beauty
- Ability to manage a house and people in it
- Open-mindedness
- Financial support to facilitate the family life today and for the future
- Good baking
- Bring financial security to the family and general stability
- Reasonably good health
- Good sense of humour
- Willingness to appreciate other talents
- I bring a good example of studying and work ethic into the family
- Karaoke fun

While some participants found the identification of what they bring to their family harder than what they need everyone participated. People took time and enjoyed listening to what others had recorded. The exercise proved to be very good at asking family members to look at the relationship between self and family. The report back did identify some tensions, teenagers in the discussion talked a lot about personal space and privacy; parents sometimes feel a lack of appreciation; some parents need more help with their day to day responsibilities, both from partners and children. Overall however the exercise was positive and affirming.



## D - The family tome

Each family was given a book in which they were asked, in the course of the coming week, to record what they identified as Family Dragons and Magic Moments. All family members were encouraged to use the book.



## E - The shield of protection

The shield, a prop with the articles of the UNCRC which can be seen as relating most directly to family life, was shared with each family. The purpose of the shield was to connect the activities to be undertaken in the Quest sessions explicitly with the UNCRC, and to encourage some discussion based around family members' first thoughts on what the 'right' might mean to them and their family.

The shield prompted much discussion, parents and children related well to the framing of UNCRC articles in this way. The rights presented related to some of the dragons and magic moments that had already been discussed.

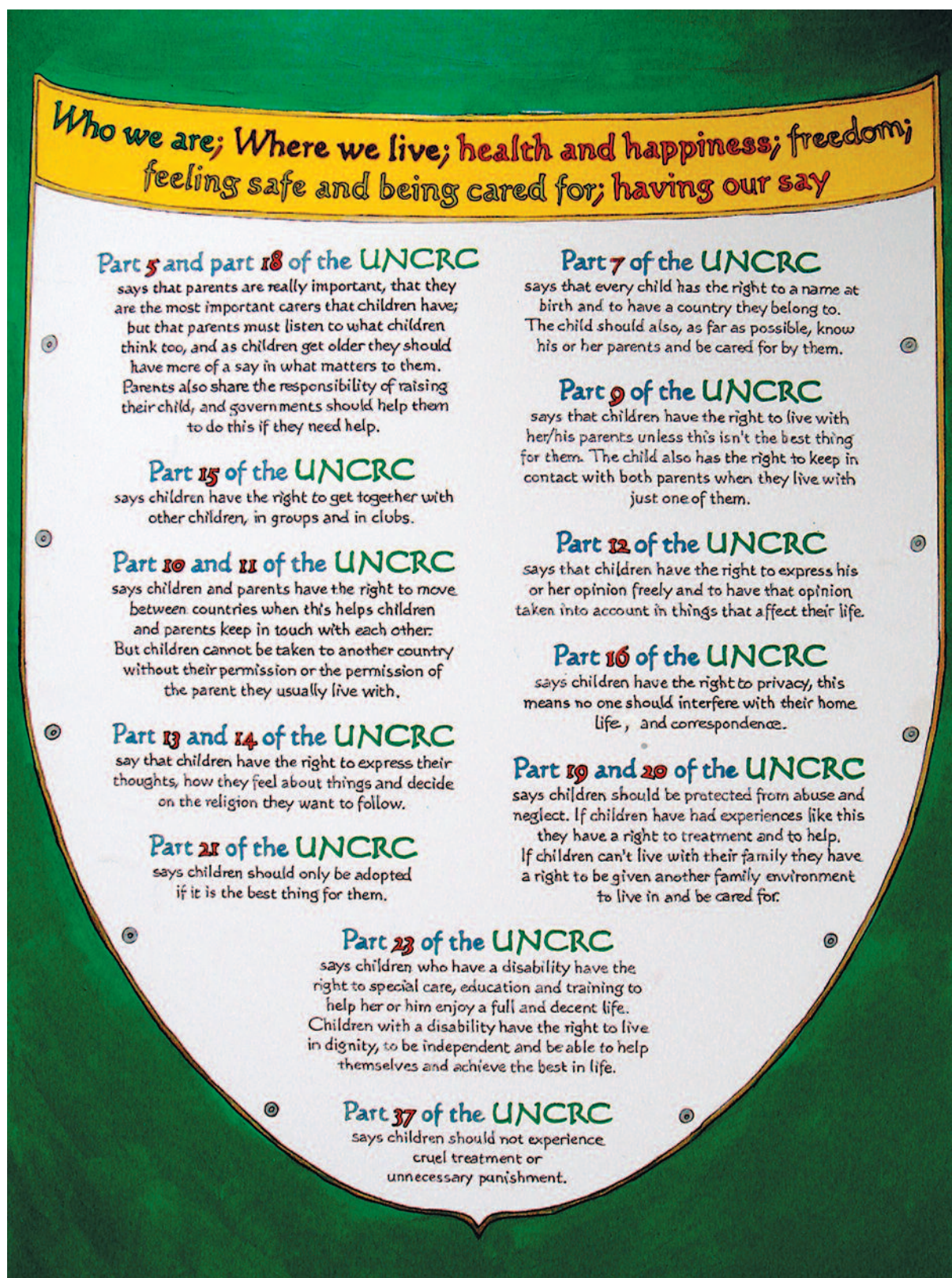
Some of the issues and areas which were raised for discussion by children/young people included:

- There are other important people in children's' lives other than parents – like teachers and friends
- That you can speak more freely at home than at school; that you might as well 'keep your mouth shut' at school
- There are aspects of what is good about religion contained in the Rights presented on the shield
- The story of Molly Campbell who now lives in Lahore with her father
- That it's important to talk to parents
- That when parents move home – do children get a proper say then?
- That praying at primary school feels like we are excluding people of a different religion
- The Young Scot card is helpful – it tells you quite a lot of stuff
- Too much freedom can get children into trouble
- Community is more important than religion

Some of the issues and areas which were raised by parents included:

- How responsibility, personal safety and freedom relate to each other
- The line between being completely responsible for children and then as you let them cross the line they begin to take hold of responsibility
- That for some parents: 'We talk more now they are older'
- That choice is always important
- That parents want privacy too
- A question about whether the term parent is a bit out of date now
- That its really important that children have meeting places
- The difficulties of taking a child from a parent – but also the long term benefit if that parent is a negative influence
- The compromise and struggle between the demands of work and home





## **F - Family portraits and gifts from Merlin**

The final request to families was that they undertake a particular task before the next meeting. In addition to recording magic moments and family dragons the family were given some 'picture frames' and some good quality arts materials as gifts (from Merlin) and asked to make a family portrait. Younger knights were asked to make sure that if anyone needed help they got it; but that portraits were to be done individually as much as possible.

The families were also given some story books and a CD with Arthurian legends (something age appropriate for every child, again from Merlin).

Finally they were reminded about using the Family Tomes to record their family dragons and magic moments in the coming week.

**Between session 1 and 2** the facilitator telephoned all families and checked progress with the family tome and portraits.



## SESSION 2: THE QUEST CONTINUES!

### Purpose:

The second session began with displaying the family portraits.

Families then explored some of the 'magic moments' and 'family dragons' which had occurred in the previous week. Particular attention was given to 'dragons' which can cause conflict in families and which are addressed in the UNCRC; privacy, having different opinions, being fair, freedom and making decisions.

Finally, as they near their Camelot the families were asked to work on a family shield.

### WHAT THE FAMILIES DID AND WHAT WE LEARNED ABOUT CHILDREN'S RIGHTS IN FAMILY LIFE:

#### A - Getting started:

As with the previous week the facilitator started the session by bringing the family into the world of the Arthurian quest. The introductory comments then were framed as such:

*"Knights! You were set tasks and in a minute we will set up a viewing gallery in our Court. We shall also be reading from the Family Tome. This is an important ritual and it will be necessary for the reader of the Family Tome to wear the Golden Crown. We will be brave knights this week! We will seek out and slay the family dragons plus do a little bit of talking and a bit of dressing up! Knights will then be given a task for the final part of the Quest... and then there will be Merlin's gift".*

From the facilitator's perspective being able to step into the 'knights kingdom' was a very simple and efficient way of moving families into the work space again and creating the parallel existence. It felt less threatening for everyone – facilitator as well. So the 'themeing' here provides a shortcut; no reminders or explanations were required because they are contained within this weeks 'quest'.



## B - The Portrait Gallery

All knights had completed the task of drawing a family portrait. It should be highlighted that this task was not intended (nor facilitated as such) as a way to draw any profound conclusions or insights from the pictures themselves. Instead it was intended to provide individuals with another tool for looking; as a personal statement for other family members to see and to emphasise the importance and equity amongst perspectives. It was also intended as an introduction to the session which hoped to encourage people to look and find different ways of expressing how they feel about situations which can arise in any family.

The exercise was enjoyed by all families, individuals were not always represented in ways they liked or always (at least initially) understood, but a listening and relaxed atmosphere was developed, with families quickly getting into the theme. The portraits were referred to as discussion on other parts of the session developed.

Some of the portraits are shown here. Some people used the arts materials given as a gift to the family. Some produced very simple line drawings. Particular pleasure came from the looking at and hearing about the children's portraits. Some portraits also represented current family dragons or personal feelings that family members wanted to share; in one portrait the unhappiness about Dad having bought a new car without consulting with Mum is shown; there is a picture of a family doing something together yet this being something they do rarely; places of sanctuary in the family home are pictured; the closeness of some relationships is expressed.







## **C - The Family Tome: we see the dragons!**

The Tome was intended as a way to remember the positive – ‘magic’ – and not so positive – ‘dragon’ – moments in the past week. Most families took to the task, but in some families some members had felt that others had dominated the task. The youngest knights were asked to read back some of the recordings made. The facilitator introduced a large dragon prop with some headings which were described as being typical of some of the dragons every family meets on their quest. Families were asked to discuss whichever of the dragons had some importance to them. The five dragons were identified as: privacy; having different opinions; being fair; freedom; making a decision. The following paragraphs summarise some of the discussion and learning from discussion of these dragons.

### ***Privacy:***

In some families this was not seen as a dragon at all – people had their own space, they knocked on doors, and privacy was agreed as something that was available and encouraged. In others there were particular issues between siblings, with younger siblings being seen as not respectful of older brothers’ or sisters’ space or possessions. In discussion parents talked about their experiences of having (or not having) privacy as a child.

Issues of privacy whilst on-line were discussed. The issue is seen by children/teenagers as being one about privacy, whereas for parents having children use the internet in more public family rooms is one of safety.

### ***Having different opinions:***

In some families there was a recognition that people do have different opinions but that this is something that is respected and doesn’t lead to what they would describe as a dragon. For other families having different opinions are a big dragon. As an example, one dragon explored by one family was a difference of opinion between parents about bed times and enforcing these. In one family there was discussion about what rules and boundaries or family needs when it comes to eating times, bed times, what TV programmes to watch and whether there were other ways than arguing to agree on how these should work.

### ***Being fair:***

For parents the need to be fair, and to be seen to be fair, was extremely important. This could be seen when giving gifts on special occasions or if one child gets to go on a school trip then other children also need a treat. For some parents who come from larger families than they themselves now have there were vivid childhood memories about the importance of fairness amongst siblings.

### ***Freedom:***

This potential dragon prompted a lot of discussion.

For younger children there was sometimes a feeling that they had little freedom to play outdoors and be with friends without adult supervision.

For children in middle childhood and adolescent years there is unhappiness when they don’t have space to be on their own or do their own thing at home; parents can perceive this desire for privacy as a distancing and loss.

For teenagers there was a strong correlation between freedom and trust; that if parents could only trust them more they might agree to them going out with friends, staying out later, travelling outwith the area. Parents saw this issue not as one of trust but one of personal safety.

For some parents decisions have been made when children were young that time to be together as a family is a priority; as children grow in to their teenage years whilst they value family time there is a conflict that this compromises their desire for their own space.

For some parents notions of *freedom* and *family* sometimes felt as if they were opposites; that at best one needed to be compromised to successfully achieve the other. For parents who work there was a sense that there is little personal freedom or space in the day or week to do things they would like to do on their own; and there are strong feelings of guilt about wanting or needing time away from the family.

In one family there was some discussion about how rules and (what are perceived as) restrictions by the children, stop any sense of spontaneity.

Finally life can seem too busy and there is a concern for some parents that by the time individual needs and demands for space or freedom are realised, little time is left for the family to be together as a family. Across families there was agreement that they need to do things together as a family – but need to work out what and how to do this whilst keeping everyone happy.

### ***Making a decision:***

Again this potential dragon prompted lots of discussion.

For parents there seemed to be constant decisions to be made, but that children and sometimes partners were not interested or helpful when it came to day to day or mundane decisions that were necessary, for example about meal times and what to eat.

For some families the dragon is one between adult partners and can include major financial decisions or being unable to reach agreement about a holiday.

For some parents it is felt that children are only engaged in family decisions which are thought not to be significant.

For some children there is a crossover between dragons about freedom and dragons about making decisions – for example about what a child can or cannot do when it comes to posters or decorating in their bedroom. These sets of dragons, where they exist, are seen as ongoing and hard to slay!

In one family the adults reported that they had already made a decision since the last meeting about making time to be together more as a couple.

These discussions were, on occasion, quite intense, but saw families listen and respect the different perspectives shared. Comments from families on the experience of participation are shared later, but briefly one parent commented to the facilitator after their discussion of family dragons: *“We would never have stayed together usually and been able to talk about this for so long, you can see we have a lot to say on the matter. Thank you for your gentle refereeing”*.

## D - An Arthurian drama

Having had some (occasionally intense) discussion about family dragons the families were asked to take something they had discussed and begin to look at it from different points of view. The intention was to check out further how issues might also be addressed positively. This part of the session was completed by two of the families, partly by one family and as the fourth family had had an extended and positive discussion around a particular dragon in the earlier work there was no time left.

For those families who undertook this part of the session the facilitator introduced the task in this way:

*"Youngest knights, have you seen all the props and things in the bag that I have brought? Youngest knights go and get them. We have pointy hats, swords, crowns.... Now we will be using these props to help us do a short play for the Court about one of your family dragons. We are not trying to slay the dragon, but only to find a different way of looking at it. Everyone does not have to be in the play if they don't want to be because we also need an audience who can say what they think is happening in our drama".*

Family members who were happy to get involved were then taken to one side and they decided which of the family dragons they could represent in a short play. They were asked to mix characters up – so that a child could play a parent etc. At this point decisions were made quickly and easily. As an example of what emerged:

### ***In one family:***

The play is about Queen wanting family time and others, particularly teenage princess opting out of it. Queen (played by the facilitator) sits sewing with King (oldest daughter) who is busy next to her sorting out all the tax from the kingdom. Youngest princess (mum) sits on the floor also sewing. Teenage princess (youngest daughter) also sits sewing disinterestedly. The King and Queen discuss kingdom and taxes and Queen talks about how lovely it is to have all the family around her. How this time is so special as all day she has been organising cooks and gardeners. Then the King announces that he is going to meet up with some guys and go on a dragon hunt. The Queen is cross because this is time together but he leaves anyway.

They carry on sewing for a little bit. Then the eldest princess announces that she is going off to be on her own and do archery practice. The Queen gets angry and says she always does this, goes off and finds something else to do. "What's the point of trying to get everyone together in this castle anyway?". The princess storms off. The Queen shouts and then she storms off. Youngest princess says "this always happens in this castle". End

In writing about the use of the approach with the family the session facilitator writes in post session recording: *"So we have a giggle and we talk about its obvious what the dragon is and who is who! We talk about dad as 'king' etc. The following discussion happens unprompted: Youngest child offers solution and suggests that: "We could do other things instead of watch TV – we could do different things, play games". Mum says: "I just want a night with the family – is it too much to ask? Well, maybe I need to compromise. Maybe we could do other things yes". Older child – "Maybe if it was a DVD and not just some stupid thing on the telly. If it was something I wanted to see I wouldn't go off to my room".*



*Dad – “It is isn’t it, its just about compromise”. Mum – “Well, we could do lots of different things and I think we need to explore that”. Facilitator (to mum): “Maybe sometimes it could be around the fact that you like to do active things and feel you miss out there?” Mum: “Yes we could do ice-skating and things that we can all do”. I thanked everyone for taking part. I asked the children how they had felt doing the play. The older child said it was fine, the younger child said it was fun. When I asked the mum she said “It was really interesting. We never discuss half of these things and it gives us an opportunity. It’s a bit like free therapy – it’s great, it makes you think”.*

***In one family:***

The play is about a Queen who is planning a quiet holiday on an island in a lake but the King announces that he and the Prince are off to fight a War and so can’t go. The Queen is disappointed and looks to the Princess for support. But the Princess announces she wants to go off with other princesses to a rave. The Queen is very upset. Where is her long dreamed of family holiday? She turns to the King once more for support but all he says is ‘My decision is final’. End.

Again, some reflection from the facilitators post session notes: *There was a very good discussion around this as everyone had something further to say. Again the sidestep into the world of the play provides more tools for discussion. In fact we never talked about ‘doing the play’ or how it felt because the family launched straight into discussion. For this family the play provided the opportunity to see other perspectives on a current family dragon. The discussion included: Dad reflecting that. “The issue here is mine I think – not the Queen’s”. Mum recognised “There are I suppose valid reasons for going separate ways” and “Maybe its about looking at description of what a holiday should be” and “The Queen also wanted time to herself – and the thing is with holidays is that people – especially like us who are working - need time to themselves, we need space too”. The family continued to talk.*

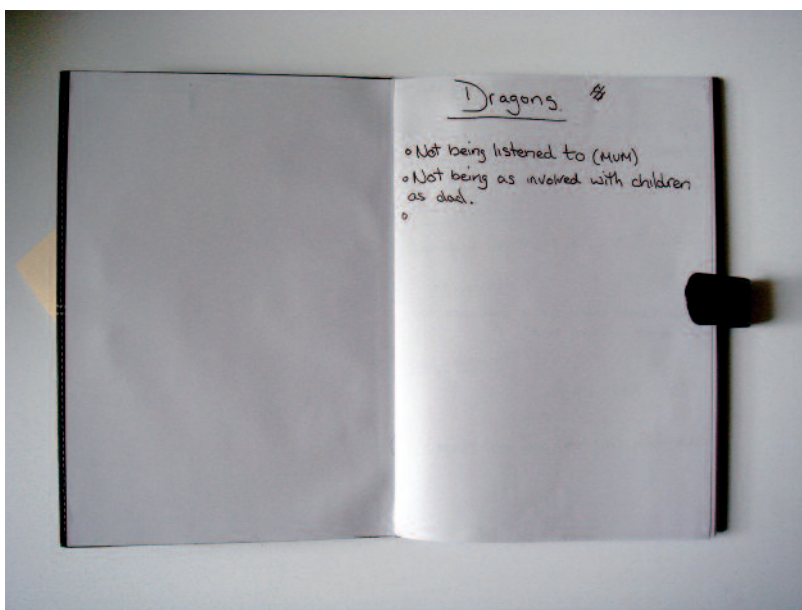
***In one family:***

The play was discussed and themes agreed but children were becoming tired and so rather than perform the family talked through what they had intended to do.

Thinking about this part of the session there was clearly a need to facilitate carefully and with skill. Whilst there was no way of knowing what would be selected by the family to explore what had been established was that the dragons explored earlier are fairly common to family life. The task was done with families who were keen to do it, cognisance was taken of energy levels and time, family members who appeared wary were given appropriate tasks of looking on. The ‘setting up’ of the task is then very important and keeping within the Arthurian theme, with props, crucial. Even afterwards families continued to refer to each other as King or Queen or Princess etc.

### E - A family task and gifts from Merlin

The families were asked to create a family shield and motto, something that they could hold before them in our next and final session as we approached the Round Table and Camelot. They were also reminded to keep writing in the Family Tome, thinking about and recording magic moments and family dragons. Where the facilitator sensed that a family member had not contributed so much to the previous weeks recordings they were charged with looking after the Tome. Everyone agreed to continue on the quest. As a gift families were given a voucher to have a family banquet together at a nearby restaurant.



## SESSION 3: KNIGHTS OF THE ROUND TABLE

### **Purpose:**

The third family session began with families sharing their Family Shield and reporting back on more magic moments and family dragons.

Their continuing quest then took them to the Round Table where the essential elements of a family democracy could be shared and discussed.

Finally families worked on their vision for Camelot; a place where every family is a wee democracy.

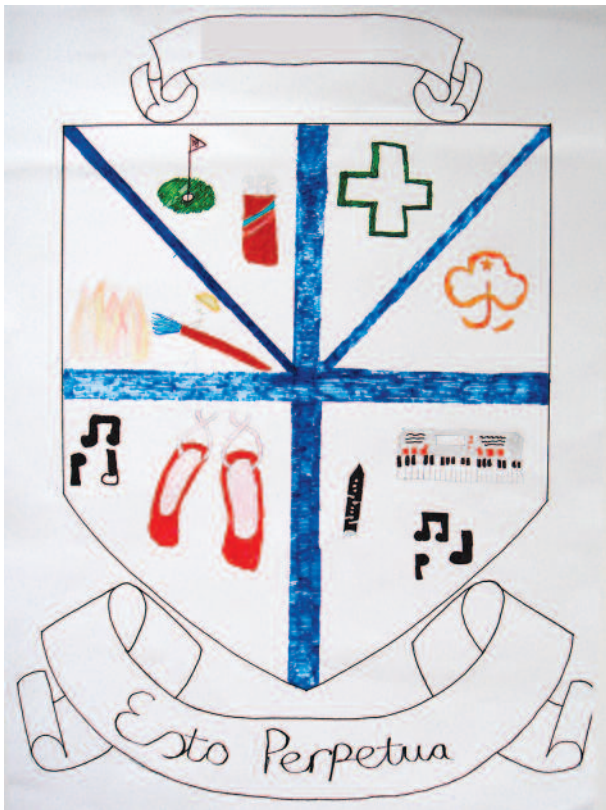
### **WHAT THE FAMILIES DID AND WHAT WE LEARNED ABOUT CHILDREN'S RIGHTS IN FAMILY LIFE:**

#### **A - Getting started**

All families had completed their task to design and produce a family shield with a coat of arms and family motto. One family working together, produced two. Some of the shields are produced overleaf. The mottos which families created were:

- Vires; Stabilitas; Versatility (Power; Stability; Versatility)
- Esto Perpetua (Let it be forever)
- Stand up for your rights!
- Be true to yourself
- Don't be sorry – be careful

From the facilitator's perspective it was evident that each family had enjoyed pooling ideas for this task. They talked through their choices and explanations of the shields with pride. One Dad commented that he had surprised himself by enjoying this task and generally working in a creative way and that he would never have attempted to draw or do creative/'arty' things in the past but having "homework" which meant sitting down with the children and doing it with them, was enjoyable and a new experience. A child commented that he "loved the homework" because it meant the family all did something together.





## B - More magic moments and family dragons

Returning again to their Family Tomes the families reported back and talked about things that had gone well and things that had caused conflict or disagreement. Across the families the following issues and experiences were discussed:

**Family dragons** recorded by the **children** and discussed in the session included:

- Mum not being listened to.
- Mum not being as involved with children as Dad
- Not listening to mum resulting in children being late for things.
- Not doing stuff when we're told.
- I would like more respect from my brothers. I am the only girl and I get picked on. Mum and dad get sick of me asking them to do something about it but they don't know how I feel. It would be nice for all three of us to be friends like my brothers are together. I always feel left out.

**Family dragons** recorded by the **adults** and discussed in the session included:

- I would like to have a recognition that my study is my space to be respected as such. If I wish to use it alone this is important to me.
- No bread left out of freezer for lunch. I had asked them to take it out. Why don't they do little things like that to help?
- Rooms are a mess!! I am constantly telling the children to tidy their rooms and they are often only partially done. How are the children going to run their own homes when they can't even keep one room tidy? I feel it is significant disrespect to tell a parent a room is done when it is not.

**Magic moments** recorded by the **adults** and discussed in the session included:

- Child getting a good report
- Child is being read a story of King Arthur by Dad and they are enjoying some time together in his room.
- We all had breakfast together which doesn't usually happen. It was good to share the morning together before the day began.
- Family night out at cinema
- Child finds his Fathers Day card he made at school for Dad – it is obvious that he has put a lot of effort into it. Dad is pleased with it.

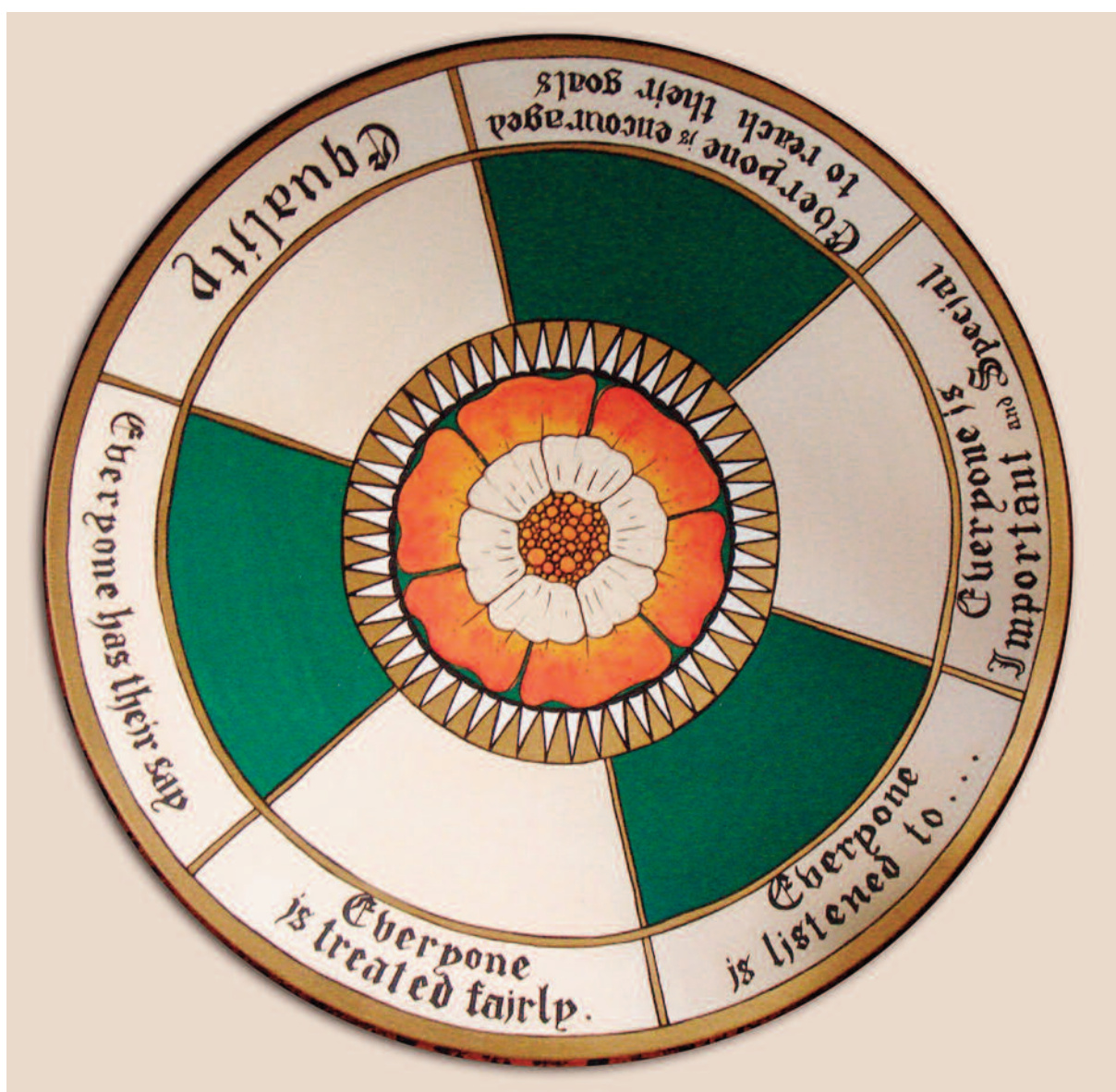
**Magic moments** recorded by the **children** and discussed in the session included:

- One family booking their holiday.
- Dancing in the Gala day.
- Helping parents in garden.
- Mum and Dad let me have more freedom by letting me walk to the beach as they would normally not let me. I was happy!
- I tried to make an ice cream but it went totally wrong and looked disgusting so I had to throw it down the sink but it was quite funny so that was a good moment.
- Today after school my brother and I played cards for about an hour. We didn't fight at all! It was really fun!!
- Decided on where to go for holiday by compromise. Mum wanted to go up East coast, Dad wanted to go to Aberfeldy or the West coast. We are now going to Aviemore where we can do the activities we can in Perthshire and are also quite near to places on the coast Mum wants to visit. Well pleased with decision and looking forward to going away.
- Discussion that I would like to have a laptop to help me study. Parents are positive, but want to continue discussion further. I see getting a laptop as: coming of age (of a sort); independence; opening opportunities.

### C - The Round Table

Sitting together, with crowns on, each family of Knights were introduced to the family Round Table. This is a large circular prop with text on it which can spin round - as seen below. The Round Table was introduced as capturing important statements which describe what families who undertake the quest seek to aspire to. The text on the Table says:

- Everyone is important and special
- Equality
- Everyone is treated fairly
- Everyone is listened to
- Everyone has their say
- Everyone is encouraged to reach their goals.





Families were asked to talk about the statements; reflecting on what each statement might mean to them individually or to their family. The theatricality of the prop worked well with families, the younger Knights liked the fact that it spins. The statements sat comfortably with the family, sometimes there was a recognition that they had discussed some of these characteristics before in their reporting and thinking through magic moments and family dragons. The Round Table served a purpose in terms of reinforcing key learning. Particular reflections on the statements, in addition to families reflecting back on previous discussion, included the following:

***Everyone is important and special:***

Across families children and adults appreciated each other as important and special. Children identified the importance of praise. New issues continued to be raised, for example in one family children highlighted that they could be punished for doing things they should not do, but asked what happens to adults? Adults identified their role as role models and saw the need to give everyone praise and support. They were also keen to restate that sometimes as adults they had the 'bigger picture' and had to make decisions. It was recognised in one family that to make people feel important and special family members need to be able to talk about their feelings.

***Equality:***

Children and young people saw equality as a real challenge in family life, especially when people want different things or when adults want to protect you when you just want to get on with what you want to do. For parents too equality is tempered by the need for protection; and for some parents by the need for children to understand parental responsibilities. Equality then feels to families like it is something which means respect for each other, an underpinning ethos, but it does not mean everybody has an equal say about everything that is decided.

***Everyone is treated fairly:***

Fairness is of course important to children, young people and to parents. Across families there was agreement that even though it doesn't always feel like it, generally everyone is treated fairly and that is as it should be.

***Everyone is listened to:***

The sense from children was that this was 'most of the time' but 'not all of the time'. For adults there was a recognition that listening takes time, energy and commitment on their part.

***Everyone has their say:***

Again, children saw a developing and improving picture in terms of having their say. For adults there was a real commitment to making this possible and a recognition that this was often not about individual decisions but about creating an atmosphere in which this was possible.

***Everyone is encouraged to reach their goals:***

Children felt encouraged as such; however there were some questions about what their parents' goals were, they hadn't thought about that before. For the adults, goals were seen as important, something to be encouraged in children, but sometimes they were to be seen within the parameters of what was achievable. Parents were also conscious that goals change, and there were different views about whether children should be allowed to change direction or be encouraged to stick with things. In discussion of goals parents in one family talked about the importance of 'potential' as a broader concept, and one which they would always encourage. For some parents there is also a compromise which is necessary in terms of the demands of family life and their own goals.



### **D - Camelot; family life as a wee democracy**

The families were introduced to the idea of Camelot in our quest as being the place that is home for their Round Table and the place where every Family of Knights lives as a wee democracy. Each wee democracy strives towards achieving the characteristics identified in the Family Round Table, they celebrate their magic moments and they slay their family dragons on the way.

The final task on the quest was to work together on a united vision for their family in the future. On a large poster with a winding road which ends in Camelot the families recorded the following:

#### ***In one family:***

the vision was 'Always be together (metaphorically) as a family'. On the road, on their poster, leading to this Camelot are the words 'supporting each other even if we're not physically together, not fall out, keeping in touch, supporting each other in good and bad times, treat everyone with respect, allow people to make their own decisions, encouraging each other to do their best whichever path they take'

#### ***In one family:***

The vision was '**To have a good quality of life and to achieve it with honesty, integrity and fun together**'. On the road, on their poster, leading to this Camelot are the words: 'Our family are on the planet and lots of people know it, tolerance, hardworking, entrepreneurial, support and encouragement, do not want to shrink into the background, love aspiration, satisfied and well rounded individuals, well mannered, respect others, happy, comfortable, relaxed, live and work in harmony, business experts, achieve wealth, status, fame...'

#### ***In one family:***

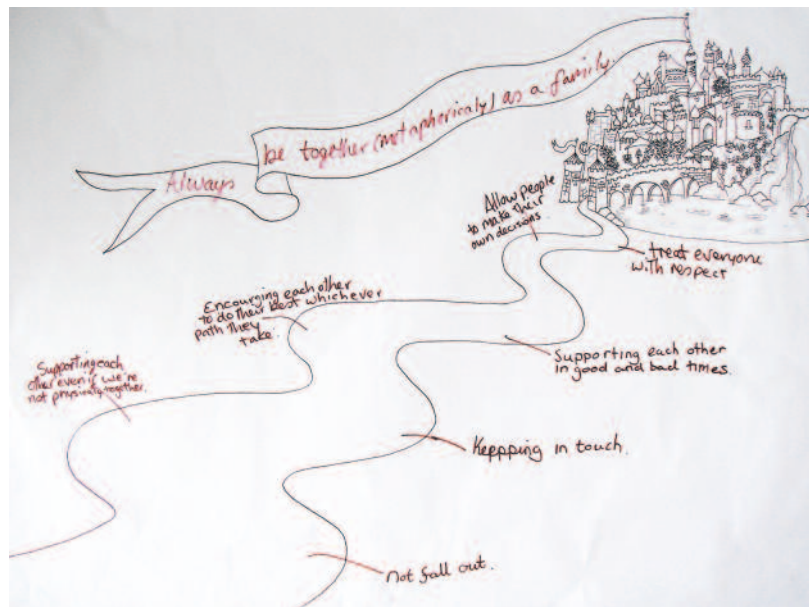
The vision was '**Have fun together and talk to each other regularly**'. On the road, on their poster, leading to this Camelot are the words: 'A satisfying and enjoyable career. Enjoy each others company. A supporting environment when needed. Live in harmony with each other. Long healthy life. Be happy. Have financial freedom to allow you to make choices in your life! Success with studies, spend time together even if its bat watching, don't fight, appreciate the difference between the 'wrong' and the 'right' thing to do! Keep going even when it gets tough, support each other through the twists and turns of life like this road!, Leverage – the support and experience available to you! Tomorrow's success should/will come from today's efforts.'

#### ***In one family:***

The vision was '**Freedom to follow desires**'. On the road, on their poster, leading to this Camelot are the words: 'Review, respect, as in spectacles to look at more clearly. To have the opportunity to engage and value each other. Good health (physical and mental). Personal happiness. Personal success. Personal achievements. Friends and relations. Together times. Regular communication between family members. Learning opportunities, self determination, supportive relationships, shared experiences and individual experiences, good communication, fun together, friends and family, influential people (i.e. people who inspire us), goals, interesting work – paid and unpaid, social openings/opportunities, good/healthy lifestyle, openness, opportunities for experiences'

## E - Thank you and goodbye

The families were congratulated on their completion of the quest. As a gift they received membership of Historic Scotland for one year – and so the chance to explore and experience some real castles and ancient monuments.



## Discussion with Agencies

Through interviews with key personnel the wee democracy development phase provided an opportunity to begin to map out, explore and identify where implementation of the UNCRC within the context of family life is within other agencies area of interest and what the challenges are in this area of work. If the UNCRC itself is not addressed explicitly we were also interested in hearing about other ways in which agencies work with families in terms of understanding and exercising the rights of the child in family life; and again whether there are challenges in this area of work. Finally we also sought to discover what gaps and/or needs there are amongst agencies in order to be able to work effectively in this area.

We recognise that with more time and resource many more national and local agencies could be involved in such discussion, but in order to begin to map out key issues we spoke to colleagues in:

- Barnardo's Scotland
- Children 1st
- Parenting Across Scotland
- Save the Children
- Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People (SCCYP)
- Scottish Children's Reporter Administration (SCRA)
- Scottish Government

What we report on here is not in any way an audit of activity but a joint exploration of the interest and issues which arise in consideration of the interface between children's rights and family life.

Firstly, interviews recognised that when it comes to the UNCRC Scotland finds itself in a much better place than may have been the case several years ago. Human rights laws, UK and European, and **the incorporation of UNCRC principles into emerging policy and legislation in Scotland** is welcome. The recent reporting of progress on implementation of the UNCRC in Scotland<sup>6</sup> is recognised as comprehensive and honest and shows both progress and work that remains to be done<sup>7</sup>. Whilst the framework for progress is in place some of what follows from interviews indicates that in practice, when it comes to families, there is both good work and some way to go<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> 'A Report on Implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in Scotland' Scottish Government August 2007 at <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/07/30114126/0>

<sup>7</sup> The Scottish Government will also be producing reports for children and young people on UNCRC implementation in Scotland early in 2008.

<sup>8</sup> The focus of this piece is not about children's rights in school or in relation to other services but interviewees did recognise important failings in these sectors when it comes to understanding, recognising and delivering on children's rights.

Despite some recognition of the UNCRC in the language of service providers, in policy and in legislation, for the most part when it comes to children's rights **there has been little or no explicit or formal focus on children's rights in family life**. In other words the focus has been on rights and participation in more public aspects of children's lives; or where it is more individualised or private, it is because they interface with services (ie about care planning).

Much of the work that does take place which is explicitly about the UNCRC then has focused on working directly with children and young people to build their understanding and capacity in terms of their rights. Where rights have interfaced with family life it has traditionally been where there is a perception of the family setting as problematic, for example in relation to protection from harm. Discussion of physical punishment of children led to polarised debate and an outcome far short of what agencies who would perceive of themselves as UNCRC focused wanted. It appears that **the family has simply not been seen as a setting for implementation of the UNCRC or for the experience of rights**; unless there is a perception of a problem; and that for Government and for many agencies **the family is still viewed as a private realm**.

Across interviews there was an interest in ensuring that whenever a service engages with a family there should be a focus on **the best interests of the child and seeing the potential in families**. For interviewees there is a core issue here which means that wherever a child's needs or experiences or behaviours are being considered we should all be striving to make the child the focus of our attention; and that as adults we should all be determined to see the child in the round and to make decisions based on the 'best interests' principle articulated in Article 3 of the UNCRC.

Interviewees were keen to stress that in their experience, in work with many families, some of whom may be struggling with aspects of life day to day, that it is possible to engage with them to reach understandings and plan around UNCRC principles. In short **positive work with a family can release the potential they have for managing and feeling positive about family life**.

As an example **the use of Family Group Conferencing has been raised**, the approach offers support to allow families to find their own solutions to problems; in a recent exploration of the approach it was thought to provide **"an ethically sound and practically effective way of working with families whose strengths and resources often remain untapped by mainstream practice"**<sup>9</sup>. At the Children's Parliament we too have a strong sense that our wee democracy project shares a view of families as a resource for their children.

Interviewees have also identified that children's rights can only be experienced meaningfully when we embrace the importance of everyone's rights in family and community life; again this is something that has been raised and discussed in our wee democracy project sessions. For interviewees there is a need to address the perception that discussion of rights can only result in conflict in family life; that for one person to have rights another must relinquish theirs. For one interviewee this issue was about shifting from a perspective of rights as things that need to be enforced – in family life or indeed in any setting – to a perspective where environments and relationships are built which facilitate the experience of rights.

<sup>9</sup> 'Examining the Use and Impact of Family Group Conferencing' University of Stirling March 2007 for the Scottish Government available at: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/03/26093721/0>



Interviewees recognised that in some places, amongst some agencies, there can be a view that **human rights are hardly relevant to families who may be struggling with aspects of life**; this can be extended into a view that **children's rights are some kind of middle class interest**. There is a concern that for the most part services working with families living in poverty can often do little more than be reactive, engage in 'damage limitation' or 'fire fighting'. Interviewees in this (albeit limited) consultation identified that rights based work is in fact imperative when engaging with families who are significant users of social work, social care and health services. In such contexts the UNCRC and other human rights conventions or legislation are seen as providing a framework for both *how* agencies interface with family life and *what* that interface should be about. Finally on this point interviewees raised a clear need to challenge any notion that rights within family life are only relevant or addressed after some kind of threshold or notion of intelligence, income or level of functionality is crossed.

When thinking about **aspects of rights and family life which might be experienced as problematic** or challenging interviewees identified many of the issues and areas that our participating families explored: confidentiality, privacy, making decisions, freedom, and boundaries. Interviewees recognised that when families have difficulties with such issues they need support to think of ways to address them positively; a framework of rights and shared social responsibilities was seen as a way to do this. Interviewees also recognised **the value and importance of the relationships which exist within families**, and whether family members can be encouraged and supported to develop the mixture of **skills and values they need for family life** which might reflect a commitment to rights: listening, negotiation, making decisions, being consistent, seeing things from the other person's point of view, reflection, respect.

In particular our interviewees highlighted the importance of working positively with **the interface between culture and rights**. As an example, there can be complexity in terms of a child's rights to education where this clashes with cultural practices about taking children out of school for work and familial commitments. There can also be challenges to UNCRC commitments to providing children and young people with access to information or learning, for example about sexual health and wellbeing. In these circumstances work with families must be respectful and can be challenging; and positive outcomes can only be achieved where relationships are built.

Interviewees identified a real interest amongst parents about **parenting and doing the best for their child**. For many, the experience of parenting can be isolating; parents can feel disempowered and anxious about getting it wrong. Across social class, geography and culture interviewees identified **a need for support and information** about parenting and the challenges which arise in family life. Often parents need reassurance and sometimes they need the chance to talk to someone without stigma or labelling as an inadequate or bad parent. For agencies providing such support or information **there is a gap in terms of information and effective approaches which can introduce and embed rights into considerations of family life**.



Finally, across interviews, there was a desire to **refocus on the importance of family life** (in all its diversity, and including children who are looked after) and to recognise that family life is the most important setting within which children can learn about and experience values and behaviours which enhance participation and citizenship. There is a shared view that agencies, services and Government are now shifting from a perspective of families as the place where it can all go wrong, to a place where, with support, families can become more confident, trusted and resilient settings in which children can learn about and experience values and behaviours which enhance participation and citizenship.

## Next Steps

In discussing their participation every family, at some point, have talked about the experience of participation as 'like therapy'. This may be because the programme does ask people to work at quite a deep level, to be reflective about 'magic moments' and 'family dragons'. The sessions, based in the family home, also allow for a level of trust to be built very quickly with the facilitator. Family members were able to communicate their feelings, ideas, hopes and disappointments. In essence people felt 'heard' by others and even where some situations were tense or difficult for people these were balanced by affirmations of the family too. For the facilitator it seemed that families were using sessions not to have moments of catharsis but to take stock. The sense that the sessions were therapeutic we understand to mean that they were beneficial and restorative, rather than healing.

We are also led to think about whether the wee democracy quest would work with and for everyone? Precisely because it is not therapeutic no, it wouldn't. We have a strong sense that the model should not be used where family dragons are in fact distressing secrets and might be overwhelming for family members. However, in the course of work with any family, where family dragons do prove to be difficult or entrenched then there is no reason why additional support for a family cannot be suggested or indeed provided.

The opportunity to work with just a few sessions with families has given us the confidence to seek to experiment with other approaches in terms of timing of sessions, duration of sessions and length of programme. It might be possible to bring families together for shared quests, or work in residential settings. It might be possible to work with families over the course of several more weeks; or to re-visit them after some time has passed since their first family quest to discuss and learn about what life is like in their fledgling wee democracy. In short, the needs and interests of each family could be factored in to planning a more personalised wee democracy programme for them.

A roll out of the **wee democracy project**, engaging with families across Scotland would:

Allow us to explore how understanding more about children's rights in the context of family life can deepen and strengthen interpersonal relationships between adults and young people.

- Allow us to explore further what other perceived and actual benefits the exploration or experience of rights brings in the lives of participating families.
- Allow us to explore with parents what parenting which reflects the principles of the UNCRC might look like.
- Allow us to continue to engage with key public agencies, including the Scottish Government, Local Authorities and NHS Boards to explore and identify where implementation of the UNCRC within the context of family life is within their area of interest and what the challenges are in this area of work. With emerging experience and findings from a wee democracy roll out we would also be in a position to work with these public agencies in order to identify what supports they currently offer to families in terms of understanding and exercising the rights of the child in family life, and what gaps and needs they have in order to be able to work effectively in this area.

- Give us an opportunity to work to locate an interest in the rights of the child in family life not as a response to a problem but as a positive, enhancing experience. We would then seek to support the 1994 proposition of the UN Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs that: “families must become the medium for promoting new values and behaviour consistent with the rights of individual family members, as established by various United Nations instruments”.<sup>10</sup>
- Such a view might be extended to seeing human rights, and within this children’s rights, as a vehicle for addressing some of the concerns about social exclusion, the disintegration of community and family life, the poverty of aspiration, the perceived problematic behaviour of children and young people in public places or at school, which many public figures and the media show concern about. A longer term question for the **wee democracy project** might be, therefore, whether engaging with families on a rights based agenda can create opportunities to learn more about the role of the family in promoting new values and behaviour which not only impacts on internal family relationships but also on children’s external community and social relationships.

**In the immediate future the Children’s Parliament will be writing and submitting proposals to funding bodies for a *wee democracy project pilot* with the following characteristics:**

- We will work in 2 local authorities with larger numbers of families, for different periods, over a 12 month period.
- We will enhance and build on the initial materials we have developed for families as part of the exploratory study.
- We will develop and deliver a model of training/continuing professional development opportunities for professional colleagues working in the participating communities which will support them to engage with children’s human rights in family life.
- We will create and facilitate fun family events for many more families in the participating communities which explore and promote the idea of families as wee democracies.
- We will write and produce written materials for professional colleagues and for families which supports understanding and action on the interface between children’s human rights and family life in Scotland.
- We will develop our ‘family zone’ as part of our current online Children’s Parliament developments.
- We will share learning with colleagues across voluntary and statutory sectors at a national level and seek to engage Government in consideration of what can be achieved when we work together to build a nation of wee democracies.

<sup>10</sup> From ‘Building Small Democracies’ Children’s Rights Office 1995

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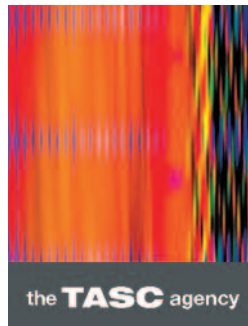
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**Cathy McCulloch**  
0131 558 9030  
[cathy@tcp.eclipse.co.uk](mailto:cathy@tcp.eclipse.co.uk)  
[www.childrensparliament.org.uk](http://www.childrensparliament.org.uk)



**Colin Morrison**  
0131 555 3527  
[colin@tascagency.eclipse.co.uk](mailto:colin@tascagency.eclipse.co.uk)  
[www.tascagency.co.uk](http://www.tascagency.co.uk)





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