

## Babies' stories

### Extracts from Together's State of Children's Rights Report 2024

#### About Together (Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights)

Together (Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights) is an alliance that works to improve the awareness, understanding and implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and other international human rights treaties across Scotland. We have over 600 members ranging from large international and national non-governmental organisations (NGOs) through to small volunteer-led after school clubs and interested professionals.

#### Introduction

This document compiles stories from babies and early years children who took part in our [State of Children's Rights Report 2024](#). It has been created to inform preparation for the United Nations Human Rights Council's annual full-day meeting on the rights of the child on 13<sup>th</sup> March 2025.

Our report sought to gather stories from babies, children and young people about what life is like for them. It explores their experiences at home, at nursery and school, in their communities and life in Scotland overall. Over 200 children shared their stories, of whom 13 were aged between 0-4 years. We have chosen to submit these stories given the cross-over in themes with the current consultation, and to avoid consulting again on the same issues.

Details on our methodology to gather babies' stories can be [found in the appendix to our report](#). We used a creative, observation-based approach developed in partnership with [Art at the Start](#), a project based at the University of Dundee. Further engagement work with babies and their caregivers was facilitated by [Circle](#).



Artwork created by babies during a session with Art at the Start, University of Dundee

## Babies' stories:

### Baby Ciara's story, Tayside

*"I live with my mum in our flat. My bed is beside hers so we don't have space to crawl in here, but I have my toys in a room where I can play on the floor and my mum can be on the sofa or making our food. We have bananas and toast for breakfast. I like to hold it myself in my hands. I don't like to get my face cleaned afterwards and I turn my face away.*

*This morning we are going out. I don't like putting on my outdoor suit and I scrunch my arms up so mum has to try and get my arms straight to go in the sleeves. I make some sounds to tell her I don't like this. She doesn't stop but when she's finished I get a cuddle so I feel OK again.*

*We have to keep the buggy at the bottom of all the stairs because our flat is at the top, so mum has to carry me all the way down the stairs to the buggy whenever we want to go out."*

### Baby Annie's story, age 1, Edinburgh

*"Today when I woke up it was too early for me, so I was still very sleepy. I was rubbing my eyes and trying to burrow my head into mummy's chest. I didn't want to do anything but have cuddles so would cry and stretch my arms up if mummy put me down because that made me upset. After a lot of cuddles and breast milk I was calm enough to go back to sleep. I always sleep better in someone's arms because I don't move around as much and like to burrow into their chest.*

*I woke up in a much better mood so didn't mind everyone doing their own things while I played. I really enjoy climbing things that get whoever's looking after me to react because it's funny to see people rush over to pull me down. I always laugh at their faces. I also put some music on my special music player because I can do that myself rather than asking for help. Today I chose Encanto and bopped along to the songs. When I climbed onto the sofa, I could see the garden and so started pointing and making noises because I wanted to go outside.*

*As it was sunny I had to wear a hat outside. I don't like hats but if I take it off then mummy takes me straight inside and she's done it enough times that I know I need to keep it on. We all had lunch outside. I had a croissant, cheese and tomatoes. I then wanted some of mummy's yoghurt (only hers because it looked interesting) so I let her know by pointing and waving. When she fed me some, I was really happy so I clapped and smiled. I don't understand why you would sit at the table once you've finished eating so once I've had enough, I always stand up in my highchair. Someone always helps me down so I can go play. I wasn't that distracted that I didn't see them trying to have chocolate biscuits without me though, so I came back over to get mine before going to eat it sitting at the top of the slide.*

*I did a poo in my nappy which was great because it means that I can play in the garden without a nappy. I love wiggling my bare bottom and toes in the grass. I've recently worked out how to climb onto the trampoline by myself, so I now love doing that but only when someone is watching because it's still a bit scary and high right now."*

## Jacob's story, age 2, Tayside

**Note:** Jacob is autistic – his parents want readers to know this as it helps to understand his story.

*"In the morning I usually wake up in Mama and Dada's bed. Sometimes I get up right away and go downstairs, and sometimes I snuggle and play a bit with Mama before getting out of bed. Dada is usually getting ready to go to school and Mama and I eat food and watch TV. Some mornings I get to rough and tumble with Dada before he goes, and he has kisses and snuggles for me too. I don't like when Dada leaves for school, but I'm getting used to it. On other days, Dada stays at home and so we play together in the morning.*

*I like to play with my trains and with my play food and dolls. I feed the dolls each day. I like to test what my toys can do. I am testing what happens if they fall down the stairs and slide down the banister. I am learning how the world works. I like having programmes on the TV in the background, it can help me to feel more comfortable and means I can have a snuggle and eat or drink. I like to watch singing and dancing on the TV. I sing the songs in my head. I find it hard if there are big feelings in the song and so I might find somewhere to hide.*

*I have a pile of my books in my house and I can go and get them myself. If Dada is at home then I'll pick one and take it over to read it to him. If it's a book I know really well then I know what is on the pages. I turn the pages to show him and make the noises. I like to point to letters that I know, and I like when my Mama or Dada notice too.*

*On other days I fall asleep in the living room for my nap and when I wake up I go upstairs to find Mama. Sometimes she is also taking a nap, so I snuggle up with her and we nap together or we play until we choose to get out of bed. And sometimes she is sewing pretty designs with thread. I like to sit on her lap and watch what she is doing, and I like to play with the little containers she has when sewing. Sometimes I get to play fun learning games on a phone in the afternoon. I like the numbers and letters best. I like that I know how to do these myself. I can't always do what I want, like jump off the sofa, and I don't always understand why what I want to do isn't allowed.*

*If Dada has been away at work then I always get very excited hearing his keys in the door! I run up and tell him all about my day and what I am thinking about. I show him my baby dino and we roll puff balls down the stairs handrail! Sometimes I also help if my Mama or Dada are doing jobs in the house. I like to join in. In the following story, mum and dad help narrate how Jacob, who is autistic, navigates life at home.*

*At the end of the day, Mama and Dada have dinner. I find it interesting what they eat, but I am not sure I want to try it. I only like the food that I like. I like peanut butter, cereal, rice, milk, bananas and grapes. When they're eating they usually watch boring shows with lots of talking, but I like the songs that come on at the start of them.*

*After a while Dada and I snuggle and watch stories. I like the one about a blue train racing a red car! I like to watch that one over and over. But we also watch pretty stories about gardens and zoos and they make me sleepy. When I fall asleep, Dada hugs me and brings me upstairs. Sometimes I pretend I'm still asleep because I like this part. He lays me down in my bed, but we all know I will join Mama and Dada in their bed soon, so I drift off for now."*

### Baby Mimi's story, 21 months old, Edinburgh

*"I woke up this morning attached to mummy's breast, I was happy because yesterday she was not in when I woke up as she already left somewhere, I guess work but I am a bit confused because she often works from home so it confuses me a bit..."*

*After I woke up, I immediately wanted to play but mummy was still in bed so I called her 'mummy mummy up up!'. We went downstairs, mummy was helping me on the stairs which is weird because I am sure I would manage by myself, but I let her hold my hand. Mum told me that we need to get my nappy changed but I wanted to say 'hi' to my toys and play. I allowed her to change my nappy while I was playing, but didn't want my PJs to be changed just yet so she went to the kitchen to prepare some coffee – it's only for mummy so she gives me a choice to drink water or oat milk. I like both but more often I want more breastmilk. Mummy offered me breakfast, but I was not hungry as breastmilk is enough for now, I also ate quite a lot during the night.*

*Mummy came with clothes and told me it's time to change as we need to go 'papa' to the nursery. I didn't like the shirt she picked up, so she brought another one and asked if I like it. It was my favourite one. I let her take off the PJs and put on all the clothes, I then told her that I need shoes and socks! She said that she needs to get ready too and invited me to the bathroom to wash my teeth. I hate doing it, it is difficult. Mummy is trying to help, she shows me how she is doing it, but I still don't get it, but she is patient and showing me every day... also she is trying to do it for me but I don't like it. I still don't get what she means and why it is important to do in the morning or afternoon.*

*Once we are done, Mummy is getting ready and putting her clothes on and use some weird things to put on her face. I watch her and like how she looks afterwards so I do my 'woow', she smiles and I can see she is happy. I love her."*

### Baby Nora's story, 11 months old, Edinburgh

*"I woke up early and I cried because my tummy was sore. Mummy lifted me into her bed, patted me on the back and started playing a little music to soothe me. I lay back down but my tummy started to hurt again, so I cried. Mummy rubbed my tummy and back. I let out a big fart and that made me feel a lot better so I lay back down onto mummy's pillow. I love mummy's pillow because she cuddles me in close and I love that.*

*When I woke up again, I rubbed my eyes and cried a little. Mummy asked if I wanted a cuddle so I flopped over her tummy and we had a cuddle. I really liked that, so I kissed mummy's tummy, and mummy gave me a kiss back, saying she loves my cuddles in the morning. I had a big smile on my face because I was happy.*

*Mummy offered me my water cup but I shook my head and let out a little noise to tell her I didn't want it. I reached out to get her water cup instead; I like drinking from an open cup. Mummy gave me a sip and I spilt a little down my chin. I rubbed it with the back of my hand. I like the wet feeling on my hands. I stood on the bed, and when it wobbled, Mummy held my hand as I laughed and bounced. She sang 'Hop Little Bunny,' then asked where Bunny Blossom was. I*



*looked around and I lifted my hands up either side of my head to show mummy I didn't know. Mummy told me 'look behind you', and when I did, there was Bunny Blossom! I hugged Bunny tight and let out a happy squeal.*

*Mummy carried me into the bathroom and asked if I wanted to brush my teeth. I pointed to them to say yes. She picked me up, and I put my finger in the toothpaste tube as she tried to squeeze some out. I really like doing that. Mummy sang a song to keep me brushing. When I was done, I threw my toothbrush in the sink, but Mummy brushed my teeth a little more. I shook my head when I wanted her to stop.*

*Mummy carried me down the stairs, and I got excited looking at all the family pictures, pointing and asking, 'Who's that?' Mummy told me, and I laughed. She said it was time to change my nappy, but I ran away because I don't like it. Mummy chased me, saying, 'Get here!' and I giggled. She caught me and tickled my chin, which was funny. I moaned a little when she changed my nappy because I don't like lying down, so sometimes she changes it while I stand, which is much better.*

*Mummy asked if I wanted breakfast, and I put my hand in my mouth and shook my head to say yes. She asked what I wanted and pointed to different fruits, and I chose blueberries, blackberries, and raspberries but not strawberries. I also wanted Weetabix, so Mummy knew to get it quickly. She put me in my highchair and fed me some Weetabix and also put some in my bowl so I could feed myself, though it gets messy. I laughed when some Weetabix fell on my bib. Then it happened again! It was so funny. When I was done, I put my head to the side so mummy knew I was full. Mummy asked 'do you want more?' so I shook my head to say no and I pushed my bowl onto the floor. I said 'up, up, up' because I wanted out of my highchair. Mummy cleaned my hands and then she tried to wipe my face. I shook my head and moaned because I hate my face getting wiped. Mummy said 'all done' so I stopped.*

*Mummy asked if I wanted to listen to music, so I bent my knees to dance a little to say yes. She put on a song, but I don't want this one so I made a noise. Mummy skipped to the next song. It was 'The Wiggle Dance', which I love, so I danced by bending my knees and moving my hands. I told Mummy 'up' because I love dancing in her arms. She tried dancing with me on the floor, but I pushed against her and said 'up up', so Mummy lifted me. I love dancing with mummy. She's funny. I let out a happy squeal as we danced. We spun in circles, and I laughed and smiled a lot."*

### **Comments from adults who supported the babies' participation:**

Some parents and carers face challenges in finding accommodation that best meets their babies' needs, particularly those living in local authority housing. For many they feel they cannot refuse what they are offered:

*"Robin hates the shower but Robin's mum's house only has a shower and no bath but she hadn't been able to say no when the council offered it as it met their other needs."* **(worker supporting family of one-year-old, Tayside)**

Despite these challenges, parents remain eager to create a safe and stimulating environment to help their babies learn and explore at home:

*"Angus likes the lights that switch on and off! He loves the lights! He loves all this [sensory] stuff – this is the plan for his bedroom."* **(parent of two-year-old, Tayside)**

The following is a diary from a participation worker who helped to facilitate Circle's sessions with babies and their caregivers. It gives insight to our methodology and some of the feedback from caregivers on the impact of being involved:

### Participation worker's diary

*"I planned sessions for one of our baby-weaning groups and a toddler group. Using Together's resources, I aimed to support caregivers to tune into their babies' cues – such as gestures, movement and noises– and build up to them narrating a day from their baby's perspective.*

*We spoke about their babies having rights and making choices. We discussed the different ways their babies communicate. For example, in the baby weaning group we observed babies' cues whilst offering new foods, tastes and textures. Sometimes they would turn their head away (possibly meaning I don't want any more), making positive noises (meaning I really like this), rubbing their eyes (meaning it's more my sleep time than eating time), throwing food on the floor (possibly playing, not having fine motor skills as yet, or possibly don't like it).*

*In the toddler group's first session, we observed them playing with water and sand and practised narrating things based on their cues. Parents took turns narrating for their child and responded well to their cues. This group has bonded well over the months and they also have a secure attachment with their babies. They are supportive and trusting of each other, which allows them to open up about their struggles, particularly around postnatal mental health.*



*During the second session, the parents asked if they could do messy painting, so they stripped the babies down to nappies and vests and we let the babies play with paints in whatever way they wanted. In these photos, Bob was trying to eat the paint, so his mum distracted him by doing footprints and showing him the sponges until he started to eat the sponge. I encouraged his mum to narrate for him: 'I'm so happy getting all messy I would like to eat it but my mummy won't let me, I'm happy to touch all the colours and make some pictures on the paper'.*

*After a few weekly sessions I asked the parents in the toddler group if they would like to try narrating a morning/afternoon of their baby's day. The parents weren't quite confident enough to try it yet, so I suggested we try it together in another group session. This helped the parents find confidence in narrating without being judged. Parents validated and praised each other's narration which was important in this process. Building strong, trusting relationships with parents and carers was key. Many of those we support are single parents, face physical or mental health issues, and/ or live on the breadline. They need to be listened to and cared for with sensitivity and empathy and I wanted them to know I was there to support them.*

*When I was first aware of this project, I was curious as to how it would work with parents and babies. Practising the narration technique enabled wonderful, quality conversations with parents that have helped them to learn and become more aware of their actions and responses to their babies' cues and behaviours.*

*Using the narration technique in group play allowed for much wider conversations than might otherwise have been the case. In particular it helped to unpick assumptions that parents can make about their babies. It also allowed parents to open up about their feelings about other important milestones and parenting approaches and attitudes. The narration approach empowered parents to share positive feelings of the bond they have with their babies as well as the confidence to share feelings of guilt and pressures of their parenting. Parents shared powerful feedback:*

***“I was smiling all the time, I picked the best day to do it, Mimi was in a very good mood. I almost started crying few times as it was emotional”.***

***“[I’m] going to try and print it off and put it in her wee memory box as how often do you get to look back on something like that. It was a lovely activity to really explore the perspective of her world. It filled my heart typing it out and seeing the love, understanding and trust we have in each other even in the very small and often mundane parts of our day”.***

*Going forward I feel it is important to continue with the values of this practice and I will adapt my practice to encourage more narration. It’s important for parents and carers to understand that they play a crucial role in supporting their babies’ right to be heard. These open conversations can help them respond more effectively to their babies’ cues and help them understand that their babies can and do make choices at such a young age.”*

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