

## Children's rights in Scotland and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)

### Seminar 2: Children's Participation

Four events were held in 2017 to find out more about children's rights and decide what needs to be done to make Scotland a better place for children. People coming to these events learned more about the UNCRC and how to support children's rights. People who came to these events have lots of different jobs in places like children's charities, Scottish Government, schools, universities, and councils. Some children and young people also came to the events to talk to adults – and each other - about their views and opinions.

#### 5 important messages:

1. There is a set of rights for children from all over the world which is called the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child – or '**UNCRC**' for short. It says **children should have a say over many decisions**. These can be big or small, from what children eat for school dinners to decisions about planning how cities and towns should be run.
2. The '**Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014**' says that politicians and people in Scottish government should always think about children and young people when they make decisions, and ask children and young people their opinions.
3. Children say this often does not happen, which can **make children and young people feel as though their views don't matter**. That's why we all got together at our event, to talk about how children and young people have their views taken into account by those making the decisions.
4. Children and young people came to our event to tell us about important issues like bullying, kindness, their home life, and their experiences of **talking to adults about how they feel**. We believe that, if politicians and other adults listened to children and young people more, better decisions would be made and children would feel happier!
5. There are ways we can make sure that adults listen to children when they are making decisions – one way is to measure how well politicians and Scottish Government are listening to children. There is a special tool to do this, used in other countries across Europe. Another way is to **teach politicians and other adults how to listen to children and young people**, as the law says they should.

#### What is the UNCRC?

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, or the UNCRC, is a list of all the rights that children and young people all over the world should have. These rights affect all areas of children's lives like health, education, family life, and protection from violence. The UNCRC also gives some groups of children particular protection, like children with disabilities or children who have had to move to another country to escape war.

## About Seminar 2

At seminar 2, children and young people spoke about how important it is that they get to influence decisions that are being made that affect their lives – this might be about schools, local parks, life at home, or even for decisions made about buses and buildings.

## What is children's participation?

'Participation' means having the chance to say what you think should happen and to be listened to by those who are making decisions.

The UNCRC says that all children and young people have the right to have their views taken into account when decisions are being made.

These decisions can be big or small. For example, governments make lots of decisions about schools, including which children get free school meals, whether there is enough money for computers or school trips, and even how many maths lessons children need to have every week. If the government is making decisions like these, 'participation' means that they should talk with children and young people to find out what they think, and use this information to help make their decision.

## What do children and young people think about participation?

Children and young people say that when their views are listened to it makes them feel better about lots of things, in school, in hospital, in clubs and in their towns and villages. Some children say that there are plenty of adults who don't ask them what they think about things and even when they do, they often don't listen to the answer! This can make children feel as if their views do not matter and makes them less likely to want to talk about things again in the future.

## How can we tell if participation is happening?

It is important to find a way that we can measure how well governments are listening to children and young people and how they are using the information that children and young people give them. An organisation made up of lots of different countries such as France, Germany and Spain -- called the Council of Europe -- has made a tool which can be used to work out how well the governments in different countries listen to children and young people. This tool measures three different things:

- 1) Are there laws that tell the government to listen to children and young people?
- 2) Does the government remind children and young people that they have the right to be listened to?
- 3) Does the government create child-friendly places - like school councils and special meetings – where children and young people feel safe to talk about their views and know that they will be listened to?

When this tool is used to measure participation in a country, it can show the government that they need to make a lot more effort to make sure that children are listened to.

## Children’s participation in Scotland

There are different organisations in Scotland that work with children and young people to make sure they can get their voices heard and that they are listened to. The Children’s Parliament is one of these organisations. They work with children aged 8-12 so that they understand their rights and feel more confident when they are sharing their views about school, hospitals, their families, and the towns and villages they live in.

At seminar 2, children from the Children’s Parliament spoke about a project they have been working on. The project is about how bullying makes children feel. Children’s Parliament spoke about important things like human dignity, kindness, empathy and trust, and how to treat other people. Giving children an opportunity to talk about their experiences and share their ideas is very important when trying to stop bullying.

There were also young people at the seminar from two other organisations called Who Cares? Scotland and the Scottish Youth Parliament. They shared their experiences of talking to the Scottish Government about decisions that affect children and young people. They talked about how this helped the government to understand what children think and feel.

All the children and young people at the event told us how important participation was to make sure their voices are heard and how it helps improve the lives of everyone – both children and adults.

## What should happen next in Scotland?

Children’s voices, experiences and ideas are being used more and more in Scotland. This has been helped by a new law in Scotland called the “Children and Young People Act” which says that Scottish Government needs to think about how their decisions affect children and young people.

However, there are still a lot of times where decisions are made without children and young people being involved. Some groups of children are more likely to be left out, such as children with a disability or children that are living in poverty.

Many people, universities and children’s charities in Scotland want to change this, to make sure that – as the law says -- all children are given the chance to take part in decisions being made about their schools and hospitals, about buses, trains and cars, about the environment, food, and even television! What would you like to talk about?!

The events are being organised by a charity, [Together \(Scottish Alliance for Children’s Rights\)](#), and two universities, the [Centre for Research on Families and Relationships](#) at the University of Edinburgh, and the [Centre for Child Wellbeing and Protection](#) at the University of Stirling. Money for the events has been donated by [Scottish Universities Insight Institute](#).

Together (Scottish Alliance for Children’s Rights) is a charity in Edinburgh which does lots of different things to improve children’s rights in Scotland. This includes making sure more people know about children’s rights and trying to make sure that politicians and the Scottish Government listens to the opinions of children and young people when making decisions about their lives. Together has nearly 350 members across Scotland. Members include other charities, as well as teachers, social workers, youth workers and nursery workers who support children’s rights. Together works with the members to help them learn more about children’s rights. The members help Together by giving them information about different things – like schools, hospitals and even the police - which Together uses to convince the government to improve children’s rights.