

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

### Seminar 4: The next steps for children's rights in Scotland

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. The UNCRC tell the Scottish Government what has to be done **to make sure all children experience their rights**. This includes having to do things like:
  - Teaching everyone about children's rights;
  - Collecting numbers and records -- like taking the school register in the mornings to see who is in school or not;
  - Creating a big 'plan of action' to tell children what the Government is going to do to make sure they have their rights;
  - Making sure enough money is spent on children where it helps the most;
  - Making sure everyone is working together.
2. The second advice point above is all about **numbers and records**. Although might sound boring, we need numbers and records to show if children's rights are being carried out or not. This is important because if we don't know something is happening, or how often, we can't do anything about it! **There is definitely not enough numbers or records about children in Scotland!**
3. Although the **Scottish Government is in charge of making sure children experience their rights**, there are also lots of other people who should be helping such as local councils, social workers, police, teachers, doctors and nurses – even the media and big companies have a part to play.

**Scotland has lots of good tools for making sure children experience their rights, and if the tools are used properly all the time they can make a big difference.** These tools include the Scotland law for children and young people, important meetings between children and politicians in the Scottish Parliament, and there is a Commissioner - someone called Bruce Adamson – who has the job making sure children's rights happen. Politicians are finally starting to realise that children have important ideas and they should be included when politicians are deciding what to do about schools, hospitals, roads, the environment and more!

4. All these tools are good, but it would be even better if Scottish Government brought all of them together into one big '**children's rights plan of action**' which would show everyone

what the Scottish Government is going to do how it is going to do it. **Children should be asked what to put into this plan** too, including asking groups of children who may not usually be asked such as children who have a disability, are in care, are from ethnic groups, or are much younger.

## 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 4

The aim of the fourth seminar was to think about what we had learned from the first three seminars and see how this information could be used to improve children's rights in the future. Important people who work with and for children and young people were there to talk about how they think children's rights in Scotland can be made better in the future. These people included the Commissioner for Children and Young People and the Scottish Minister for Childcare and Early Years as well as experts from the University of Edinburgh and Canada. Young people from Glasgow Youth Council and Scottish Youth Parliament were also there to give their views.

## What have the other seminars taught us?

The first three seminars have taught us that great progress has been made in some areas of children's rights in Scotland over the past few years. However, there are still areas where improvement is needed.

- The first seminar was called the **UNCRC in Law**. Different experts spoke about how important it is that children and young people's rights are made into a law in Scotland that everybody would have to obey. This is called 'incorporation' of the UNCRC and it would make sure that everyone, including judges, the police, nurses, and doctors, would have to respect the rights of children and young people.
- The second seminar was called the **UNCRC in Practice** and it involved some children and young people talking about why it is so important that young people have the chance to have their voices heard when adults are making decisions that affect them.
- The third seminar was called the **UNCRC in Policy**. People from Scottish Government, Aberdeen City Council, and the Commissioner for Children and Young People's Office spoke about why it is important the rights of children and young people are always considered when policy is being made. This can include policy that directly affects the lives of children, like policy about schools or healthcare, but can also include policy on areas like transport or the environment.

## How do we keep trying to improve children's rights in Scotland?

Some of the things that the UNCRC says that countries should do to make sure that children can enjoy their rights include:

1. **Make sure everybody knows and understands children's rights:** Unless everybody in Scotland is aware of children's rights then people will not know how important it is to always consider the rights of children and young people. Everyone, including the police, teachers, judges, lawyers, the general public, and children, should all be taught about children's rights.
2. **Collect evidence about children's rights:** By collecting evidence, it is easier for us to know which areas of children's rights are improving and which aren't. For example, if numbers and records show that lots of children have to wait a long time to be treated when they are ill then we know that this is an area that we should be working to try and improve.
3. **Make an action plan:** Governments should write an action plan which tells people what the government will do to help improve children's rights over the next few years.
4. **Make sure there is enough funding for children's rights:** When people who work for Government, Local Authorities, schools or hospitals are making decisions about money, they should think about how they will affect children's rights. Children and young people should be listened to when these decisions are made so that money that is spent goes towards improving children's rights.
5. **Working together:** Everybody needs to work together to help make children's rights better in Scotland. This includes not just different government departments and charities but also the media, businesses, religious communities, and, most importantly, children and young people.

## What evidence can we use to show if children's rights have improved?

Collecting evidence is very important because it shows us in what areas children's rights are doing well and what needs to be improved. Different types of evidence need to be collected in order for people to fully understand if children's rights are being met. For example:

- **Numerical evidence**, such as the number of children that are living in poverty or the number of children who have been stopped by police, tells us how serious a problem might be. It is necessary for this evidence to be collected regularly, like once a year, so that we can see if the problems get better or worse. It is also important that the evidence is collected from different groups of children, like those living in different areas, so we can see if things like where the child lives makes a difference to their experiences.
- **Stories from children and young people** show how children feel about different issues and which areas they think are most important to work on.

One example of where collecting evidence has helped to raise an important children's rights issue is in the case of physical punishment against children, or 'smacking'. A survey among children in Scotland found that half of all children report being 'smacked' by their parents or guardians. By using numbers and records, we can also see that boys are 'smacked' more than girls, and children from families that are living in poverty are smacked more often than other children of the same age. This data is useful as it shows us that 'smacking' children is still a problem in Scotland and something must be done about it.

## What sort of things can everybody do to make children's rights better in Scotland?

Everybody has a role to play in improving children's rights in Scotland. Here are some of the things that **people at the seminar** said they would do to further children's rights:

- I will make sure that children and young people's voices are heard and their rights are met
- I will raise awareness of the UNCRC with children, parents, carers and professionals that I work with
- I will increase child's rights training for people working with children
- I will find ways to work together and support each other to make sure children's rights are being improved

And here's some of the things they wanted **other people**, like people in government, to do:

- **Local Authorities will** make money available so that the UNCRC can be put into practice.
- **Teachers will** make children's rights known to both children and parents/carers.
- **Scottish Government will**
  - establish a child's rights action plan
  - incorporate the UNCRC into law
  - make sure that children and young people are involved in decision making

## What should be done next?

The things we have learnt from all four seminars has been incredibly useful in helping us understand what the current state of children's rights is in Scotland. It is also important that we use this information going forwards as we work on improving children's rights.

At the final seminar, a lot of people, including the Children's Commissioner, child's rights experts, and young people, spoke about how the government should come up with an action plan for children's rights that everyone can read, including children and young people. This action plan will include promises from Scottish Government on what they will do to help make sure all children living in Scotland know about their rights, and the changes it will make so that all children and young people can enjoy all of their rights, all of the time.

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 360 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.

