

**Falkirk
Children's
Services
Partnership**

Children's Rights Report (2017-2020)



Introduction & Foreword

Welcome to the first Children's Rights Report in Falkirk. This report has been written and compiled to highlight the activity and progress that has taken place to further embed a right's respecting approach to our service delivery during the reporting period from 2017 until 2020 throughout Falkirk Children's Services Planning Partnership.

During this reporting period we all faced unprecedented challenges when the Covid 19 Pandemic had a significant impact on the delivery of services locally and nationally which saw agencies focusing their priorities and interventions on our most vulnerable children.

We are proud of the work that took place across the partnership to create and promote awareness and rights of children and young people. Looking forward we want to build upon this and work alongside our young people to encourage their inclusion to contributing towards informing future service delivery and to ensure that their rights are upheld and their voices heard.

Your Rights Explained

Human Rights are a moral or human entitlement that we all have in order to live a safe, happy, and healthy life.

All children and young people from birth have Rights. These Rights are protected by law and are universal to all. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is the basis for all our work with children and young people.

The Convention has 54 Articles that cover all aspects of a child's life. All of these are equally important and are interlinked. Articles 43 - 54 explain how adults and governments must work together to make sure all children can enjoy their rights.

There are four articles in the UNCRC that are seen as special. They are known as the "General Principles", and they help us to interpret all the other articles:

- Article 2 - Rights should be applied without discrimination
- Article 3 - Best Interests of the child
- Article 6 - Right to Life, Survival, and development
- Article 12 - Right to express a view and have that view taken into account.

These Rights are:

Universal (they apply to everyone)

Inalienable (they cannot be taken away)

Indivisible (they are all equally important)

Interdependent (breach of one impacts on them all)

Unconditional (they are not dependent on a responsibility or performing an act to get them).

We will refer to these Rights throughout the report and tell you how we work together in the best interests of the child to ensure that these are upheld.



Getting It Right for Every Child

Article 3

[the best interests of the child must be a top priority in all decisions and actions that affect children.]

Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) is the Scottish Government's national strategy to ensure that each and every child has access to the right support at the right time for as long as it is needed, so that each child and young person can reach their full potential. GIRFEC is a strengths-based approach which is founded on the underpinning principle of promoting the rights of the child by placing them and their family at the heart of decision making with full choice and participation in the decisions that affect them.

The GIRFEC approach is well embedded through close multi agency working within Falkirk Children's Services Planning Partnership which is represented by several agencies from Health, Police, Education, and the Voluntary Sector. Collectively we have a shared responsibility to work closely across the partnership to promote the best outcomes for children and young people locally.

For most children and their families, their needs will be met through universal services; for those that need additional support in Falkirk we benefit from having a well-established multi agency way of working founded on relationship-based practice and we promote an early intervention approach whenever possible.

Throughout this report you will see examples of how agencies in the partnership work together to provide good practice and support children and young people's rights.

When it is assessed that children, young people and their families may benefit from additional support we arrange a Team Around the Child Meeting to bring the professionals together, so that collectively we can develop a Child's Plan. This helps us to ensure that any identified unmet needs can be addressed in a timely and proportionate way.

UNCRC Articles and the GIRFEC Well-being indicators

Reference Scottish Government



Safe - growing up in an environment where a child or young person feels secure, nurtured, listened to and enabled to develop to their full potential. This includes freedom from abuse or neglect.

Healthy - having the highest attainable standards of physical and mental health, access to suitable healthcare, and support in learning to make healthy and safe choices.

Achieving - being supported and guided in learning and in the development of skills, confidence and self-esteem, at home, in school and in the community.

Nurtured - growing, developing and being cared for in an environment which provides the physical and emotional security, compassion and warmth necessary for healthy growth and to develop resilience and a positive identity.

Active - having opportunities to take part in activities such as play, recreation and sport, which contribute to healthy growth and development, at home, in school and in the community.

Respected - being involved in and having their voices heard in decisions that affect their life, with support where appropriate.

Responsible - having opportunities and encouragement to play, active and responsible roles at home, in school and in the community and where necessary, having appropriate guidance and supervision.

Included - having help to overcome inequalities and being accepted as part of their family, school and community.

This approach asks us to:

- consider each child as an individual with their own needs, risks, and rights
- engage and involve the child or young person as far as practical in discussions and decisions which affect his or her future
- seek out and consider the voice of the child or young person
- plan and review activity to improve outcomes, based on well-being.

Family Group Decision Making

Article 9

[Keeping families together - children should not be separated from their parents unless they are not being properly looked after - for example if a parent hurts or does not take care of a child.]

In Falkirk we have a well-established and embedded Family Group Decision Making model which is delivered in partnership with Barnardo's. This is a rights-based service that seeks to empower children and families to have a voice and be involved as much as possible in the decisions that affect them. We achieve this by placing a clear emphasis on supporting children and families to have their voices heard. We encourage active participation in decision making on matters affecting their family by placing the child at the heart of discussion and planning.

It draws on strengths and resources from within the wider family group to develop Family Plans which are focused on ensuring that children remain safe and at home within their families wherever possible and that the rights of children and families are upheld.

Falkirk Pathways coordinators from Barnardo's offer children, young people and their family members individual time to prepare for their family meeting and provides space to consider what views and offers they wish to share as their contribution to the Family Plan. The service regularly offers an advocate to any family member who feels they may need support within the private time to have their views heard.

The service was designed and set up to promote and aide communication within families so that their children can receive the best care possible. It does this by promoting a child-centred approach where the child or young person is supported to actively contribute their views on how to build on and plan their future.

By adopting a rights-based approach we want to empower children, young people, and their families to have a voice and to be involved in decisions that affect them. This approach supports them to have their voices heard and take ownership of decision making in matters affecting their family. It draws on strengths and resources from the wider family group with a clear focus on ensuring that children remain safe and at home within their families.

Relationships First

'Relationships First' was developed in Falkirk with the intention of enabling young people who are care experienced to challenge current systems and practice that would better, and more frequently, enable our workforce to engage in positive relationships that enable care leavers to flourish.

Developed during 2018 the project focused on strengthening the knowledge and skills of the paid and voluntary workforce, so that they were more able to meet the needs and aspirations of care experienced young people.

Collaborating with 'Designed by Society', Relationships First designed and developed proto-types that would put love and relationships at the heart of our service provision.

The 'Design Crew' consisted of care experienced young people alongside staff in roles from a range of services including library assistant, foster carer, housing officer, commissioning & procurement officer, residential supervisor, estate caretaker, education resource officer, additional support needs learning advisor, web design officer, teacher, early years officer and corporate policy officer. They worked together, meeting regularly for over 2 years, to help them each understand and find ways to address relational barriers faced by Corporate Parents when supporting young people as they leave care, appreciating individual lived experiences.

We took steps to learn from our children and young people by listening and learning from them. Our young people were able make suggestions as to how the workforce can make changes to their practice, they suggested what systems needs to change that will allow the partnership to be more responsive and more connected to each other as well as to our children and young people. This included our young people spending time together being supported in sharing their experiences. They said that they felt let down by the 'care system'. Relationships First looked at what this meant for each of them.

The general experiences included:

- they did not feel listened to
- no-one showed them how to have a 'good relationship'
- the system was full of 'unwritten rules' that prevented them from having meaningful relationships
- others did not understand that some of their behaviours were caused by their traumatic experiences

The 'Design Crew' highlighted the 3 most important areas where they identified our Council could achieve change: -

1. Behaviour: better supporting the ways people relate to one another.
2. Systems change: the system Falkirk Council is part of becoming more human.
3. Barriers: addressing the range of everyday barriers people experience.

We are in the early stages of bringing the three design prototypes to life that the young people felt would influence practice, systems, and culture change to:

- "Hug in a Mug" - Policy and practice development. We want to ensure that the services we deliver are sustainable, kind, and compassionate so that young people feel loved and safe.
- "Share the Care" - Policy and practice development. This concept explores what a future Falkirk Council could look like. One where the conditions and resources that allows all Corporate Parents to be agile, flexible, and responsive to care leavers are championed.
- "Heart on Sleeve Network" - This will be a community / movement by people, who adopt and will spread relational-based practices; alongside individual and innovative ways to work with care leavers and other care experienced young people.



Life Long Links

Lifelong Links works to establish connections for children and young people who are looked after away from home, by tapping into support networks from the outset of a child or young person's care journey. Establishing lifelong links provides children and young people with stability and support throughout the entirety of their time in care. This includes tools which can search for and find family members - these could be known or unknown to the child or even the adults who care about the child.

This model has been adopted in Falkirk to help children and young people to reconnect with the people who mean the most to them and maintain relationships.

Closer to Home

Falkirk Council Children's Services have developed a 5-year strategy which aims to deliver better outcomes for our children and young people who are most at risk of being accommodated or are care experienced. Closer to Home focuses on transformational change and has developed approaches which supports children and young people and their families with the intention of shifting the balance of care.

There are several established projects which are fundamental to the success of Closer to Home. These include:

- Family Support Services
- Foster Carer Recruitment
- Supported Accommodation - Options for care leavers
- Procuring for the Future
- Family First Approach
- Permanence and Care Excellence
- Best Practice in Child Protection Systems

The Closer to Home strategy aims to have:

- less than 10% of children who are looked after away from home in residential placements and
- for children looked after away from home to say in or as close as possible to the Falkirk area.

We want to avoid children coming into care in the first instance, through the provision of early and effective preventative supports. For some children this is not possible and foster care whenever possible is the best alternative option. This is only possible if we increase our local foster care placements. By working together, we have improved targeting of foster carer recruitment. This will help us to avoid use of residential care and offer a wider range of choice to meet the needs of individual children and young people.

By working with our colleagues in Housing Services and in consultation with The Champions Board and care experienced young people we have increased our housing options for young people leaving care in a planned and coordinated way. We have invested in supported housing options and worked with partners to make sure young people have credible educational, training and employment opportunities to sustain positive outcomes. We are increasing consultation with young people to identify areas for improvement and to provide earlier warnings of potential difficulties so we can respond proactively, while working towards the national framework principles of the 'holistic whole family support'.

Rights Respecting School Award

Article 29

[Education must develop every child's personality, talents, and abilities to the full.]

The Rights Respecting Schools Award was created by UNICEF and puts children's rights at the hearts of schools in the UK by creating a safe learning environment.

By doing this it is aimed that children will be able to learn in a safe environment where they are respected and can flourish in the classroom. Currently, over 1.6 million children throughout the UK attend a Rights Respecting School, of which there are around 5,000 in total. The advantages of attending such schools are that children are more likely to feel valued by knowing about their rights and being able to experience them, while also recognising the rights of their peers. The values embedded within children's rights encourages them to lead happy and healthy lives and to become socially responsible and active citizens.

Falkirk Children's Services Partnership is committed to the incorporation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) as it moves through the parliamentary process to become law. The articles of the UNCRC underpins the Rights Respecting Schools Award and, as such, participation in this award allows schools to showcase their dedication to the rights of children and young people.

During the reporting period we had 22 Primary Schools and 4 Secondary Schools who were actively participating in the scheme.

Young people who took part in this told us

“you are able to have your own opinion and knowing there is no right or wrong answer”

The children were asked why it was important as a rights respecting school to help others learn about their rights.

They said it was

“important that everyone knew about children's rights so children knew they had them and adults could help them”



Children's Rights & Advocacy support

Article 12

[Every Child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously.]

In Falkirk we have a strong partnership approach with the Quarriers Service, Who Cares and Barnardo's Service who all work to promote and represent the voices and views of our children and young people by ensuring that they have access to individual advice and advocacy support when they need it.

Quarriers Falkirk Children's Rights Service Promotes, Protects and Upholds Children's Rights in Falkirk. Quarriers are a charity organisation working alongside children and young people up to the age of 18 who are care experienced or those with additional support needs, however, we will not turn any child or young person away.

By empowering children and young people to participate in the decisions that affect their life, our service promotes, protects, and upholds their rights ensuring their voice is heard and at the heart of decisions that affect them.

Who Cares Service

The Who Cares Service is a National Organisation that supports our care experienced young people to have their voices heard by providing a range of advocacy support services in Falkirk.

Falkirk Champions Board

Falkirk Champions (Champs) Board enables and empowers our care experienced young people to have a voice and influence on policy and practice across the Falkirk Children's Services Partnership.

From 2017 until 2019 Falkirk Champs were very much in a development stage, establishing themselves as a group and clarifying their aims and shaping their identity. They gained support from senior officers within the council and started to design a development plan both for the individuals within the group and the group itself with a focus on building skills and confidence alongside a sense of belonging. They were keen to develop the priorities for the group members so they could work towards making changes in the wider system. As a group they completed their Duke of Edinburgh Award and spent a week sailing with the Oceans Trust, both experiences helped build a solid foundation of teamwork and trust which they have built on ever since.

There was an opportunity to work with the Leaving Care Team who provide services to all care experienced young people from aged 16 years, on the Care Leaver Covenant and this was successfully signed in 2019. They also delivered a workshop on being care experienced to the Young Scot conference and have played an active role in Who Care Scotland events.

They also held a launch event with the First Minister of Scotland Nicola Sturgeon attending as well as the silent film they made being played at the Bo'ness Hippodrome.

Developments of note are:

- The role of the young people in developing the specification and criteria for supported accommodation.
- Young People on the Board supported the Care Leavers Housing Options Protocol and referral pathway.
- Young people have influenced priorities for development and how to maximise capacity and positive impact e.g., in relation to accessing leisure opportunities as part of improving mental health and wellbeing.
- Membership of the Champions Board has extended to include a wider group of corporate parents which is more representative.
- created and acted in a silent movie which was premiered at the Silent Film Festival at Hippodrome Bo'ness;
- hosted an event to sign the Care Leavers Covenant; show cased art work "Colours of Care" depicting care experiences;
- created and produced songs on the theme of care; and given interviews to local media and presentations at conferences/events.

Lockdown Lowdown

In February 2020 as part of a national survey we asked young people in Falkirk what mattered most to them, their responses were linked to the SHANARRI wellbeing indicators. Active, achieving, included and nurtured were the indicators they mostly identified with.

The Key Themes that children and young people told us mattered most to them were;

- 64% said Mental Health & Wellbeing
- 58% said Their Future
- 44% Exams & Coursework
- 35% Physical Health & Wellbeing
- 27 % Social Relationships
- 27 % School, College & University

Integrated Children's Services Plan

Our shared vision in Falkirk is the same as the Scottish Government;

“Children in Falkirk will grow up loved, safe and respected so they can realise their full potential.”

Collectively, as corporate parents, we have a duty and responsibility to work across the Children's Services Planning Partnership to ensure our children have the best outcomes possible.

Our Integrated Children's Services Plan is developed by Falkirk's Children and Young People's Strategic Leadership Group which directs the strategic planning, development and, where applicable, delivery of children and young people's services.

The Children and Young People's Strategic Leadership Group is made up of the following partners:

- NHS Forth Valley
- Third/Voluntary sector
- Falkirk's Health and Social Care Partnership
- Forth Valley College (Falkirk Campus)
- Skills Development Scotland
- Police Scotland
- Falkirk Council

- Falkirk Council Children's Services
- Falkirk Council Transformation, Communities & Corporate Services
- Falkirk Council Place Services

In 2017 -2020 Our Integrated Children's Services Plan identified priority themes based on key areas for action for children, young people, and their families:

- Addressing the impact of Poverty on children and young people
- Our children will develop into resilient, confident, and successful adults
- Inclusion - children and young People live, learn, and thrive in Falkirk
- Implement the 6 corporate parenting duties in the Children & Young People (Scotland) Act - Part 9
- Improve Mental Health and Wellbeing

Next Steps - Our Plan for 2020 - 2023

As a partnership we have ambitious aims for the future participation and engagement of our children and young people in Falkirk. We want to ensure that they have opportunities to share their thoughts and ideas in ways that work for them and that they are fully represented and active in how their contributions help to inform future planning.