



Better lives for Scotland's children and young people



Children in Scotland's manifesto for the 2007 election



Every child. Every childhood.

There are two million good reasons to take this manifesto seriously.

They include 17-hour-old Alasdair in Angus, 17-month-old Gupta in Glasgow and 17-year-old Sarah in Stornoway. After all, two million of Scotland's five million residents are children and young people.

All of their lives will be touched in significant ways by what the next Scottish Parliament does (or fails to do). This reality places a considerable responsibility in the hands of the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Executive. It also gives these adults an extraordinary opportunity to make a positive impact on the future of Scotland.

We reject the fashionable cynicism about government's willingness or ability to serve the public interest. Similarly, we reject the 'nanny state' either as a goal or as a fear. As an organisation bringing together more than 400 voluntary, professional and statutory groups across Scotland (who, in turn, represent tens of thousands of individuals), we know that families, communities and the larger society, environment and economy are the most important influences on the well-being of children and young people. But, we also know that all of these key influences are themselves powerfully influenced by laws, policies, regulations, programmes and governmental funding.

Scotland is a long-established nation with a new governmental structure. Children in Scotland is committed to helping the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Executive make the most of the opportunity offered by this important election. We created this manifesto as one tangible expression of our best advice to our nation's political parties and policymakers.

In fact, there are three million more good reasons to read, consider and act upon this call for 'Better lives for Scotland's children and young people'. These include every adult in Scotland. Whether our own individual and collective futures are bright or bleak will be the consequence of how well we prepare the next generation to take our places. They are depending on us right now, just as we will depend on them later.

We owe it to them, to ourselves and to our nation to turn this manifesto from words on paper into deeds in the world.



Hon. Lord Reed
Convener

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Lord Reed'.



Dr. Bronwen Cohen, OBE
Chief Executive

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Bronwen Cohen'.

MY SCHOOL, MY FUTURE

Children in Scotland would like to thank the children who took part in the art competition facilitated by our member organisation Save the Children. The winning entry (pictured right) reflecting what children and young people want for their future in Scotland was the Shettleston Group.



Better lives for Scotland's children and young people

Listening, evaluating and sharing

For the past several months, Children in Scotland has been listening to a wide range of our members, advisors and directors about how to shape and focus our manifesto to the nation's political parties and policymakers. We have also been evaluating an equally broad spectrum of information and advice. This document, and our series of briefing papers about each of our eight priority areas, is one way of sharing the results of this process.

The unified voice of the whole children's sector has more political influence than a cacophony of specialised pleadings. As a national umbrella organisation with a membership that extends across all sectors and every children's service, Children in Scotland is uniquely positioned to champion the interests and well-being of all children and young people.

What we have learned is that five key principles/commitments should guide Scotland's political parties and policymakers in relation to children and young people. No-one can anticipate every issue, challenge or opportunity with which the next Scottish Parliament will be faced. Therefore, we recommend the following five lenses as a valuable tool for focusing attention on how the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Parliament should view all issues affecting children and young people.

- **Rights from the start**

The Scottish, UK and European Parliaments must become even more stalwart supporters of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The voices and views of children and young people must be heard and heeded in more significant and systematic ways. Similarly, the opportunities available for children and young people to participate meaningfully in making major decisions that affect their own lives must be strengthened. Politicians, policymakers and public officials should learn to view the choices before them from the perspective of children and young people.

Most important, government actions must be rooted in the reality that all children and young people are worthwhile individuals with significant rights, pressing needs and valuable contributions to make. They are not merely potential people. Many young people have lives that are challenging and complex right now. Therefore, children and young people should not be seen or treated primarily as clients, consumers or cases – that is, as mere recipients at the end of a service delivery pipeline. A children's rights perspective informs this entire manifesto.



- **Never too early, never too late**

The next Scottish Parliament must more fully embrace strategies focused on nurturing young children and preventing harm during their early years. We are keenly aware of how much suffering could be eliminated, and how many hundreds of millions of pounds could be saved, were the government more serious about doing everything feasible to get children's lives off to the best possible starts.

Similarly, it is wrong (in moral, economic and practical terms) to 'write off' older children and young people who are troubled or in trouble. In virtually all cases, there are interventions that can improve the current situation and future prospects of struggling young people. These must be properly resourced and implemented. Getting children off to a good start must not be undermined by a failure to assist them all the way to adulthood.

- **Better lives for children and young people, not just better services**

A happy, healthy and fulfilling life for children and young people requires far more than the combination of professional services and government programmes. Parental nurturing, guidance and protection; robust health; stable homelife; a safe and vibrant community; regular play and learning opportunities; a non-toxic environment, and being treated with kindness and respect all are components of the kind of happy childhood and enjoyable youth that Scotland's next generation deserves.

A focus on the whole lives of children and young people means that a broad set of issues – from housing policy to environmental regulations to employment laws – are as important as traditional children and youth issues. It also means that major legislation and policies should be subjected to an analysis of their likely impacts on Scotland's children and young people.

- **Raising the floor, not lowering the ceiling**

Priority must be accorded to the well-being of all children and young people throughout Scotland. Accordingly, the idea that government should narrowly target its resources and assistance should be rejected. In an ageing society with declining birth rates, every child matters more than ever before. Thus, every child must be given the opportunity to reach her/his potential.

Of course, government must make special efforts to reduce the long-term harm to children and young people that can be caused by poverty or exclusion. Thus, we call on all political parties and candidates to emphasise inclusiveness in the context of the universal provision of those resources, services, support and opportunities that will result in better lives for Scotland's next generation.

- **Integrated services, integrated workforce**

Seeing children whole and dealing with young people holistically requires professions, agencies and policymakers to move beyond traditional boundaries. When practitioners from different disciplines fail to communicate effectively and work collaboratively, children and young people are the ones who pay the price.

Truly integrated children's services and youth work only can be accomplished when the people designing, controlling and delivering those services are able to find common ground. The Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Executive must make strong efforts that result in integrated services and a joined-up workforce becoming the norm.

Keep up the good work already underway

There is broad agreement that the Parliament and Executive have achieved a great deal through legislation, policies and programmes benefiting children and young people. Scotland can be proud of the passage of such key laws as the Mental Health Act, the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act and the Commissioner for Children and Young People (Scotland) Act.

These efforts must be re-doubled to ensure that they continue to yield better results in the lives of children and young people throughout Scotland. Good laws and policies must be followed up by equally good implementation and evaluation. Pursuing new ideas and policies must not be done at the expense of consolidating the good work already underway and supporting the continuation of proven successes.

Fill in the important gaps in legislation and policy

Scotland's devolved government must continue to demonstrate why greater control within Scotland leads to better lives for children and young people. There are still important gaps to be filled by the next government, from updating and improving the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 to delivering on the promises to 'Get it right for every child' and to implement 'A curriculum for excellence'.

The following list states our aspirations and expectations for the actions that the Scottish Executive and the Scottish Parliament will take during the third term. For each of the eight priority areas listed, Children in Scotland has prepared a more detailed briefing paper. These are available free of charge from www.childreninscotland.org.uk or by calling 0131 228 8484.



1. Ensuring universal access to high quality, affordable services for young children

- Better leave-provisions and flexible working practices for mothers, fathers and other carers.
- Entitlement to integrated whole-day services for three and four-year-olds by 2009, free to low-income parents and with progressively reduced costs to all parents.
- Entitlement extended to all two-year-olds before 2011.
- A ten-year early years strategy for Scotland agreed and well underway that is consistent with Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) international guidance (as set out in 'Starting strong', 2001).
- Completed review of current training and qualification structures and implementation of new structures.
- Agreed timetable and significant progress toward 50 per cent of all staff working in early years services qualified to degree level or equivalent by 2010.
- Number of men in early years services increased to 20 per cent by 2010.

2. Implementing a comprehensive support system for parenting

- A fully-implemented parenting strategy for Scotland.
- Universal services offered routinely and systematically to parents, and to grandparents who provide regular care for their grandchildren.
- Comprehensive support framework in place for parents of children requiring additional support.

3. Eliminating poverty for households with young or vulnerable children

- A comprehensive action plan to tackle severe and persistent child poverty agreed and well underway.
- Central heating programme extended to families on low income with a disabled child or a child under the age of five.
- Warm Deal energy efficiency grants extended to low-income families.
- Improved energy efficiency of the 10,000 households, with children, rated as "least efficient".

4. Launching a national play, leisure and children's spaces strategy

- A play policy for Scotland that includes:
 - legal duties to address play needs of children and young people in future planning guidance
 - a minimum requirement for outside play space in all early years settings
 - children's and young people's participation in planning for play/leisure
 - improved indoor and outdoor spaces and leisure activities for young people throughout Scotland.

5. Making child health a national priority

- Child health made a national priority, focusing on obesity, mental health, safety (injury prevention), environmental health and sexual health.
- Child health included in the national inspection process led by a child healthcare commission.
- Ring-fenced funds for child-specific research.
- Drugs and alcohol policy become the responsibility of one minister.
- A comprehensive network of support services for drug and alcohol-misusing parents, as well as for drug and alcohol-affected children and young people.

6. Increasing healthy eating throughout childhood

- Continued promotion of healthy eating in families.
- Entitlement to a free, nutritious school meal extended to all primary school children and to all three and four-year-olds attending pre-school services.
- Entitlement to free school meals extended to all families receiving the maximum working tax credit and families receiving more than the family element of child tax credit.

7. Aiding and easing the transition to adulthood

- Increased financing and development of services supporting young people affected by or involved in violent behaviour.
- Expanded support for anti-bullying activities and initiatives.
- An agreed action plan underway for better supporting young people who are not currently in education, employment or training.
- Removal of the 'benefits trap' facing 16 to 17-year-olds.
- Removal of disparities in financial support between training and educational schemes.
- Removal of an age-specific minimum wage.

8. Improving co-ordination among the Scottish, UK and European Parliaments

- Staged impact assessments made part of the policy development process at all levels of government.
- A revised, robust legislative and policy framework for addressing children's and young people's issues and needs within the Scottish Parliament that guides co-operation amongst the three parliaments – with provision for varied implementation approaches within Scotland.
- A parliamentary unit established to facilitate children and young people's involvement in the legislative enquiry process.
- A European commissioner for children and young people.



From rhetoric to reality

Scotland's two million children and young people will not vote in the 2007 national elections. That is a controversial fact. Many advocates and young people themselves believe that lowering the voting age from 18 to 16 would be the right thing to do.

Hundreds of thousands of new voters aged 16 and 17 would certainly capture the attention of Scotland's political parties and politicians. It is entirely predictable that the needs, interests and preferences of young people would be accorded higher priority by candidates.

Nonetheless, Scotland's adult population will, once again, determine the political fortunes of our nation's children and young people. In particular, four groups of Scottish adults have the potential to greatly influence what the political parties promise to do if elected, who will be elected, and whether the promises made during the election will be kept by the next Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Executive. These four groups are:

- parents, grandparents and other carers
- adults whose work is connected to children and young people
- members of the media (print and non-print)
- political party leaders and advisers.

The majority of voters are parents, grandparents or carers. Were they to vote the interests of their own children and grandchildren first and foremost, they would be an irresistible force in Scottish elections. Similarly, hundreds of thousands of Scottish adults are employed in the children's services workforce, do volunteer work with children and young people or are in businesses directly reliant upon young consumers. Were they to vote the interests of the children and young people in their own work-lives, they too would become a major force in Scottish politics.

This manifesto is one way to encourage Scottish adults to better use their voting power to help create 'Better lives for Scotland's children and young people'. Please discuss it, pass it around and let candidates know that you care about the issues raised here. Tell candidates that you expect them to achieve the results recommended here.

In the meantime, Children in Scotland will be sharing this manifesto with every political party, every candidate for elective office in Scotland and every key person in the media. We will ask candidates to build these recommendations into their own campaigns. We also will ask parties to respond for the record. Before the 2007 elections, we will publish and widely publicise some of the comments and commitments that we receive from these political parties and individual candidates.

When you vote, please make sure you are voting for 'Better lives for Scotland's children and young people'.

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This manifesto can be downloaded free from the Children in Scotland website.

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working for children and their families

Children in Scotland is the national agency for voluntary, statutory and professional organisations and individuals working with children and their families in Scotland.

Children in Scotland exists to identify and promote the interests of children, young people and their families and to enable them to contribute to the development of policies and services which are of the highest possible quality and able to meet the needs of a diverse society. It does this with, through and for its members.

To find out more about membership, call 0131 228 8484 or visit www.childreninscotland.org.uk

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