

Derry City and Strabane District Council Child Friendly Community

Youth Summary

May 2025

Prepared by Derry City and Strabane District Council, based on input from Children and Young People across the City and District.



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Introduction

This summary includes a number of reflections from 10 targeted group work sessions that were held with key groups of children and young people across the Derry City and Strabane District Area, as well as the feedback from baseline surveys. The main aim of the summary is to prepare children and young people for the assessment day so that they have a good sense of the programme in Derry City and Strabane District, to understand the progress made with children's rights and to allow the opportunity to ask questions and make recommendations.

Specific groups of young people were targeted to explore the Child Friendly Derry City and Strabane District (UNICEF) project from a children's rights perspective, ensuring that their voice was at the centre of the evaluation process.

The targeted 10 groups represent a range of different organisations and forums, North West Ministry of Youth, Rosemount Youth Committee, BUD Youth Committee, Strabane Leadership Group, Foyleside Events Committee, Pilots Row, Caw Youth Centre, Ballyarnett Area Project, Waterside Youth Group and Shantallow Youth Centre. All groups were given the opportunity to ask important questions in relation to the delivery of the Child Friendly Derry City and Strabane District Programme and the implementation of a children's rights approach. Discussions were tailored to meet the specific needs of each group.

All groups were given the background to understand the UNICEF CFC journey and the progress with Child Rights to date, and for them to comment on whether or not they feel that they are benefitting from the programme in Derry City and Strabane District.

Space

How were safe spaces provided to allow children and young people to express their views?

The targeted groups were aged 12-25, and one single summary session was completed with each group, facilitated by a professionally qualified Youth Worker, who has been part of the Derry City and Strabane District CFC journey. Based on the level of need in each group it was decided by the Youth Worker whether they would complete the 2 hour session plan including an exploration of each badge area, with a number of activities including;

1. Overview of the UNICEF CFC Journey to date
2. What CYP said at the start and midpoint of the journey
3. The UNICEF CFC Badges activity
4. Reflection Questions

This session gave time to explore the 6 badge areas of work undertaken by the Child Friendly Derry City and Strabane District Programme;

1. Cooperation and Leadership
2. Culture
3. Communication
4. Equal and Included
5. Healthy
6. Education and Learning

Giving space to children and young people to share their thoughts,
The other option was the 45 minute session plan including the following reflection areas;



1. Is your community doing enough to tell children and young people about their rights?
2. Do you think your city or community has made progress and advanced children's opportunities to grow up happy, healthy and safe? In which areas of children's lives do you think this has happened?



3. What challenges do you think there are? How do you think that your city/ community could do better to make sure that rights are enjoyed by all children & young people?

4. What dreams do you have for the future of children's rights in your city/ community – what do we still need to focus on and improve?



5. Can you think of any examples of times children and young people's voices have been really influential over decisions taken locally?
6. If you were throwing a children's rights party for your community, what would you be celebrating the most?

This gave children and young people time to reflect on and discuss
In order to give more seldom heard voices the opportunity to give their input to the evaluation, an online survey was circulated through local youth centres and community and voluntary sector groups. The survey utilised the Community Scoreboard and as a baseline, will be compared with the findings from the same survey at the Discovery stage of the Derry City and Strabane District journey.

VOICE

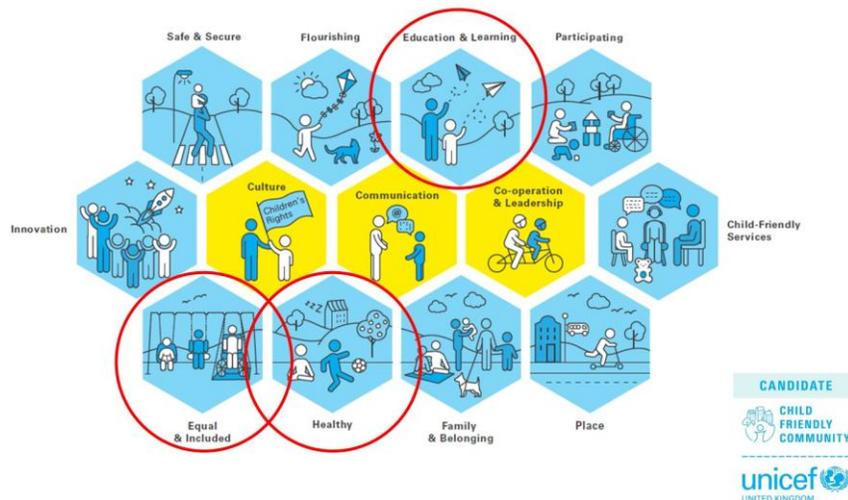
How were children and young people provided with appropriate information and facilitated to express their views?

Children and young people were engaged in a one off group work session to support them in their understanding of the Derry City and Strabane District UNICEF CFC journey and the progress with Child Rights to date, and for them to comment on whether or not they feel that they are benefitting from the programme in Derry city and Strabane District Council Area. The young people taking part were made aware of how their feedback in this session would be used through the informed consent process (appendix 3). They were fully aware that it would be used as part of the Youth Summary of the District's UNICEF CFC Programme.

The session explored the UNICEF Journey to date, including the timeline, highlighting that we are now at the Recognition stage, and that another aim of this session is to prepare them should they want to present to the UNICEF Recognition Panel who will decide whether or not Derry City and Strabane District are recognized as a Child Friendly Community.

The badges were also shared with the groups outlining the 3 mandatory badge areas that the District were working in, Culture, Communication and Cooperation and Leadership, and the 3 badges at the discovery phase of the journey, Education and Learning, Equal and Included and Healthy.

3 MANDATORY AND 3 OPTIONAL BADGES



The groups were then shown quotes from children and young people from 2019 and 2023, the following were related the core badges, Culture, Cooperation and Leadership and Communication

Situation back in 2019



DISCOVERY

“Disrespected and always moved on”

“Blame teenagers without finding out the reasons”

“seeing us in big groups, and judging us on that”.

“can’t vote - and don’t get a chance to voice their opinions on what goes on in the community or where the money is spent - down to family members or elected reps”

“Told to move on...not welcome”

“Adults make assumptions without asking – no one bothers to ask”.

“should be much more child friendly information”

“Tarring us all with the same brush”.

“still don’t know half the stuff that’s going on If you do find the information you are looking for it is geared towards adults”.

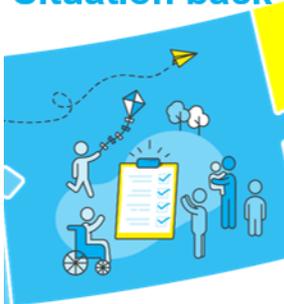
“they should be teaching of human rights at school “

“don’t know where to go to access information about - information is centred towards adults only...we rely on adults to tell us what is going on”.

“We can make decisions on some things but not others”.

“All decisions that are made about us are through adults. We don’t get a say in what happens to us. It shouldn’t be that way”.

Situation back in 2023



DELIVERY
2-4 years

“Music being taken away from Ebrington”

“feels like this pushes the school’s own religious agenda and not representative of everyone’s views”. RSE

“Bus passes and school meals should be free not means tested”

“adults make the choices for our future”- yp in foster care

“More awareness building and education of the adults who are working directly with young people, so they are aware of these rights”

“All children have the right to no discrimination, no matter where they live, their religion or what they look like.”

“Young people who are disabled experience poor mental health” their needs are not being met due to long waiting times.”

“how can we make sure we’re getting these rights if we don’t know them”.

“I believe we should as a society shed be more show more consideration of mental health of kids from the ages of 11-18”

The following quotes from 2019 and 2023 were related to the chosen badges Education and Learning, Equal and Included and Healthy. The young people discussed these statements and used the discussion to form opinions on what has changed since the start of the UNICEF CFC journey and what still needs to happen.

Situation back in 2019



DISCOVERY

"lack of opportunities despite a range of international and local companies offering employment."

"Skate park; we don't have one and would like one"

"Access to a 'listening ear' service or a mental health hub would be useful and well used"

"Mental Health Services were lacking across the district that the services currently in place weren't fit for purpose"

"focusing too much on GCSE/ AL exams"

"distrust in the police service and that the police targeted them, they did not feel safe"

"Welcomed, warm and safe". "School amazing in local area"

"There is not enough to help young people understand how alcohol and drugs influences your life".

"Welcomed, warm and safe". "School amazing in local area"

"Not enough equipment/ activities in parks for older kids".

"Teachers don't understand, sometimes they expect too much...too much pressure"

"not enough support in the post primary classrooms for people who struggle"

"Told it is just because of exams and it will pass rather than being helped to overcome it".

"No accessibility for people with disabilities, not enough opportunities for the disabled... not inclusive" - parks

"we are lucky to have these" -open green space that can be used as a safe place to think"

Situation back in 2023



DELIVERY 2-4 years

"Bus passes and school meals should be free not means tested"

"Music being taken away from Ebrington"

"feels like this pushes the school's own religious agenda and not representative of everyone's views". RSE

"adults make the choices for our future"- yp in foster care

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"All children have the right to no discrimination, no matter where they live, their religion or what they look like."

"Young people who are disabled experience poor mental health" their needs are not being met due to long waiting times."

"how can we make sure we're getting these rights if we don't know them".

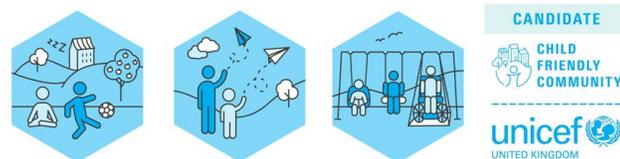
"I believe we should as a society shed be more show more consideration of mental health of kids from the ages of 11-18"

The groups were then given an overview of the work carried out in each badge area including the 'we will' statements. They then carried out an activity sharing their thoughts on the work carried out in each badge area, and what they feel still needs to happen.



We will.....

- Work with people in the community so they know how to respect Children's Rights and can help them feel welcome.
- Create more opportunities for children and young people to have a say and meet people who make decisions about things that affect them.
- Provide opportunities and training so everyone knows about child rights, can read child friendly updates, and can see positive news stories about children.
- Offer information and support so young people know how to look after their mental health, the impact of alcohol and drugs, and have safe places to go when they feel sad or worried.



We will.....

- Make changes and put checks in place so children of all abilities are treated fairly, have equal enjoyment of their rights, feel valued and have places to play and enjoy in their free time.
- Work with learning spaces to encourage them to promote health and wellbeing, offer children the chance to make decisions and help develop their personality and talents.
- Provide information and support so children can enjoy their rights. If their rights are not respected, they can make a complaint and the complaint will be taken seriously.

In terms of **Culture**, children and young people reported that they were aware that the following was happening and felt that these were areas that Derry City and Strabane District were doing well in;

Making Child Rights a Priority

- staff and decision makers being training in child rights

Putting Child Rights into Action

- ◆ Informed consent is the norm—young people now get clear info on what they're signing up for – they had experience this themselves.

Listening to Young Voices

-  Young people having the chance to join youth voice forums like North West Ministry of Youth

-  EA Youth Work staff now co-design programmes with young people.

-  Young people are making real decisions—like sitting on EA's small grants panel and leading youth initiatives!

In terms of **Cooperation and Leadership**, children and young people reported that they were aware that the following was happening and felt that these were areas that Derry City and Strabane District were doing well in;

Political & Leadership Engagement

 Local politicians meeting regularly with youth voice

 Derry Councillors fought against youth service cuts in 2023!

Young People Taking the Lead!

◆ UNICEF Youth Advisory Board + NW Ministry of Youth = More youth representation!

◆ **The NW Ministry of Youth** (launched in 2019) was co-designed by young people.

 **Leaders trained** in child rights (with UNICEF UK)!

 **Our Guildhall, Our Space** – The Mayor’s youth initiative.

 **Your Say Child Rights (2023)** – Over 170 youth engaged with policymakers.

They were not aware of a lot of other work that had been going in the city and district, including the Political Champions Initiative and how Council now discusses child rights as a regular topic (Health & Community Committee). They also were not aware that child rights are now a MUST-DISCUSS topic at the Western Area Outcomes Group (WAOG) or that Councillors are speaking up for young people, Tackling child poverty & childcare issues.

In terms of **Communication**, children and young people reported that they were aware that the following was happening and felt that these were areas that Derry City and Strabane District were doing well in;

Youth Justice Agency (YJA) – Young People’s Voices in Reports

 Youth views now included in YJA’s Performance Impact Report.

 Positive stories shared while protecting dignity.

EA Youth Service Podcasts

 Created podcasts to share their stories.

Autism Social Cafés run by WHSCT

 Safe, inclusive spaces focused on children’s rights.

Sensory Rooms – Safe Spaces for Well-Being

 Trauma-informed sensory rooms created by EA Youth Service.

Communication Boards in Parks

 PECS boards being installed, designed with young people.

In terms of **Healthy**, children and young people reported that they were aware that the following was happening and felt that these were areas that Derry City and Strabane District were doing well in;

Youth Wellness Web (WHST)

 Mental health hub created BY youth.

Emotional Wellbeing Teams in Schools (WHST)

 In-school support based on wellbeing.

 Communication materials redesigned by young people.

Youth Services Support for Mental Health Wellbeing

 Schools are now giving more attention to mental health with counsellors and safe spaces for conversations.

They were not aware of the CAMHS Co-Located Worker offering trauma-informed care for young people in justice system.

In terms of **Equal and Included**, children and young people reported that they were aware that the following was happening and felt that these were areas that Derry City and Strabane District were doing well in;

Making Playgrounds More Inclusive

 5 parks completed, 7 ready, 5 under construction.

Youth-Led Policy Review

 New child-friendly complaints guide from EA review.

 Updated, trauma-informed anti-bullying policy.

Training Young Leaders & Building Skills

 Games with Aims led by young volunteers.

They were not aware of the Good Relations & Language Inclusion work through the Dual Language Child Rights Defender Programme and the videos created in Irish, Ulster Scots, BSL, and ISL. Some also felt that although there was good work done with new parks, some existing parks and pitches are closed for health and safety reasons, because they are damaged and there is no funding to fix them.

In terms of **Education and Learning**, children and young people reported that they were aware that the following was happening and felt that these were areas that Derry City and Strabane District were doing well in;

School Refusers Program – A Fresh Start

✅ Alternative learning spaces in youth centres.

🌱 **Lenamore Youth Centre – Learning Through Nature**

🌿 Gardening project turned into a vibrant green space.

🏠 **Outdoor Learning – School Without Walls**

🚀 Adventure-based, interactive learning.

❤️ **ACES & Circle of Courage – Supporting Young People**

💙 Builds resilience, belonging, and personal growth.

They were not aware of the new courses at NWRC & Ulster University for youth-support professionals.



Reflection Questions

Is Derry City and Strabane District doing enough to tell young people about their rights?

Yes, but there's still more to do!

🗣️ Lots of staff are trained in children's rights, including how to listen and involve young people

📖 We do learn about our rights in classes like Learning for Life and Work (LLW), and sometimes during special days or assemblies at school.

😬 But the way the information is shared can be hard to connect with. It feels too general, and we might forget it after a while. It makes more sense when youth workers explain it in a more real, down-to-earth way.

🧠❤️ We think there should be more ongoing discussions about our rights, especially around mental health, physical health, and getting support when we need it. That's why we joined the Health and Well-being Ambassadors program – we want to be a part of the conversation!

🚫🗣️ Some young people still don't know their rights, like the right to be heard, to feel safe, and to get support without being judged. For example, the long waiting lists for mental health services like CAMHS make it harder for us to get the help we need.

🎨📱👥 Schools, youth clubs, and the wider community could work together more creatively to share our rights, especially youth-led campaigns, social media posts, or workshops that come from people our age.

📅🏠🏡 We need to make sure everyone has the chance to learn regularly about their rights. This should happen in schools, youth clubs, and at home.

   There are safe spaces like sensory rooms and autism Cafes, but is there enough? – issues young people may have that are everyday tasks – eg, hair cuts.

   We feel safer in places like the BUD Club, where we can talk about our rights openly, and there are programs to support us.

Has Derry City and Strabane District made progress and advances children's opportunities to grow up happy, healthy, and safe? In which areas of children's lives do you think this has happened?

There has been some progress, but we still have work to do.

Here's what has gotten better:

  **Mental Health Support:** Schools are now giving more attention to mental health with counsellors and safe spaces for conversations.

   **More Activities:** There are more clubs, sports, and youth groups now, helping young people stay active, connected, and confident.

  **Healthier Food Options:** School meals and local programs are better, with healthier food choices.

   **Safer Communities:** Local councils are making neighbourhoods safer with more streetlights and hangout spaces like youth centres.

   **Youth Voice:** There's a bigger focus on making sure young people have a say in decisions, like school councils and youth forums.

   **Informed consent:** they feel that they are given more information now but would like to see this more in schools.

What Challenges do you think there are? How do you think that your city/community could do better to make sure that rights are enjoyed by all children and young people?

  **Mental health support isn't enough** – waiting lists are long, and not all schools have enough counsellors.

   **Poverty is a big issue** – not all young people have the same chances, like access to healthy food or extracurricular activities.

 **Online Safety:** Social media can cause stress, bullying, and pressure to act or look a certain way.

 **Not Enough Youth Spaces:** We need more places to hang out, like youth zones and parks.

 **Children with additional needs or language barriers** might still face challenges being fully included. – in schools with language barriers this is a barrier to learning also

What needs to improve?

 **Better Mental Health Services:** Every school should have a counsellor, and there should be more safe spaces where we can talk about how we feel.

 **Support for Families:** We need more support for families struggling with money, housing, or food – and low-cost clubs or activities for all young people.

 **Youth Involvement in Decisions:** We should be part of the process when decisions are being made in schools, councils, or communities.

 **More Education on Rights:** Teach children and young people about their rights, not just those in forums or programmes, and how to stand up for them. Hold adults accountable when our rights aren't respected.

 **Improved Public Spaces:** We need safer parks, better lighting, and more places where young people can hang out safely.

 **More Opportunities for Employment:** We need better job opportunities, apprenticeships, and training programs, especially for those with disabilities or from marginalized backgrounds.

 **Complaints processes,** while improved, still rely on young people feeling confident and supported to use them and feeling like something will actually be done about it.

 **Accessible advertising** for all children and young people on social media – not just Facebook as most don't use it.

What Dreams for the Future of Children's Rights in Derry City and Strabane District ?

Here's what we dream of:

 More mental health support in schools and communities.

 Equal opportunities for every child, no matter their background or abilities.

 Youth voices being taken seriously and being part of decisions that affect us.

 Safe and welcoming spaces for all kids and young people to express themselves.

 Better understanding and respect for children's rights – ensuring everyone knows what they are and how to stand up for them.

 More accessible youth clubs, leisure facilities, and public spaces where we can hang out, play, and feel safe.

How have young people's choices influenced local decisions in Derry City and Strabane District?

Young people in the district are already making meaningful contributions to their communities. Through projects, forums, and local initiatives, they've taken active roles in shaping decisions that affect their lives:

Youth-Led Projects and Partnerships

- The **Health and Well-being Ambassadors Project** is a standout example. Young people identify local needs and work with youth workers to deliver impactful initiatives.
- Youth forums have collaborated with organisations like the **Millennium Forum**, giving feedback on accessibility and influencing changes such as improved inclusive toilets.
- They co-developed a **Youth Toolkit** for the Mayor's Youth Initiative to promote inclusion.

Youth Councils and Forums

- Local youth councils give young people real influence, including how budgets are allocated for parks, safety, and mental health.

- Youth forums have helped shape policies on well-being, education, and bullying.

School Campaigns

- Students have campaigned for better mental health support, eco-practices, gender-neutral toilets, and quiet rooms.
- In some schools, young people even helped design new well-being spaces and selected mental health programs.

Environmental and Climate Action

- Young people have taken part in **climate strikes**, clean-ups, and sustainability projects.

Cross-Community and Peacebuilding Work

- Young people have been central in peacebuilding efforts that bring diverse communities together.
- Their ideas have influenced youth programs centred on **respect, inclusion, and mental health**.

Arts and Culture

- Youth input helped shape creative spaces and events during Derry's year as **UK City of Culture**.
- Some young people now help plan community events like **Winter Wonderland** and **food drives**.

Political Representation

- Projects like the **Northwest Ministry of Youth** give young people a voice at the political level.
 - They co-designed a **Youth Survey** and developed a **Manifesto for Change**, covering issues like education, health, equality, and environment.
 - Youth members have presented directly to council committees.

Everyday Influence in Youth Clubs

- In youth clubs, young people choose learning topics, trips, and help plan summer schemes.
- One participant highlighted starting a **young women's group** after identifying a local need.
- Others voiced concerns (e.g., about toilet use), leading to respectful behaviour changes.

- The **right to play** and **equality** are rights they'd most like to celebrate — ensuring all children are treated fairly and included.

Challenges Noted

- While young people are often **consulted**, they don't always hear back about how their input was used or what was changed.
- Some groups were unaware of their influence until examples were explained (e.g., the **school trousers campaign**).

If Derry City and Strabane District threw a Children's Rights Party...

It would celebrate **all children**, especially those not involved in youth clubs, to help everyone connect and learn about their rights. The focus would be on **play, inclusion, and equality** — bringing children together in fun, meaningful ways while amplifying youth voices in shaping their own futures;

What's Improved:

  **Rights Awareness:** Young people better understand their rights, especially through youth workers and informed consent.

   **Youth Voice:** Forums like the NW Ministry of Youth and school councils give young people real influence in decisions.

   **Mental Health Support:** More counsellors, safe spaces, and youth-led projects like the Youth Wellness Web.

   **Inclusive Spaces:** New inclusive parks, autism cafés, sensory rooms, and communication boards help all young people feel welcome.

   **Learning Opportunities:** Alternative education, outdoor learning, and youth-led projects are helping more young people thrive.

   **Political Support:** Politicians are engaging with youth and prioritising child rights in council decisions.

What Still Needs Work:

🕒 🗣️ 🚫 **Mental Health Access:** Long waiting lists and inconsistent support across schools.

🚫 ♿ 🌐 **Inclusion Gaps:** Some children (e.g. with disabilities or language barriers) still feel left out.

🔄 🔔 📧 **Youth Feedback Loops:** Young people want to know how their input changes things.

? 🧑 🆘 **Awareness:** Not all young people know their rights or how to access support.

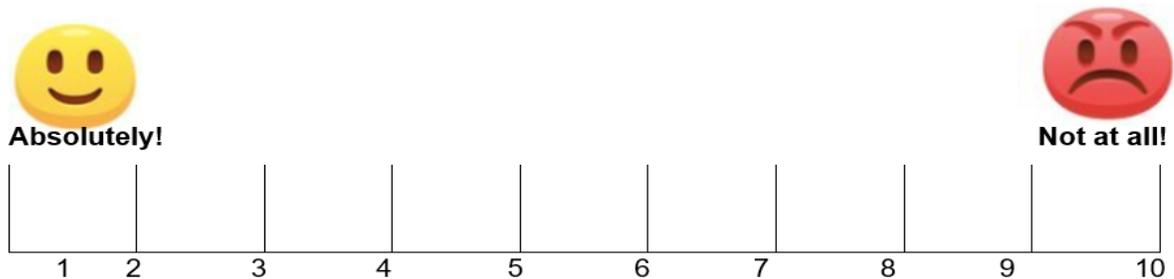
🏡 🧑 🌐 **Spaces & Activities:** More youth zones, safe parks, and affordable activities are needed.

📱 🚫 🧑 **Social Media Engagement:** Communications should shift to platforms young people actually use.



Community Scoreboards

During the discovery phase of the Derry City and Strabane District CFC journey, 48 children and young people completed community scoreboards, eight questions were asked and the responses to the questions are outlined below, Scores were between 1 and 10, with 1 meaning full agreement and 10 meaning complete disagreement with the statement.



In regards to the statement;

All children and young people have a say about decisions that affect them and are supported to do that:

Between **2020** and **2025**, there has been a significant improvement in how heard young people feel, with the average score rising from **6.5 to 4.15**. In **2020**, many young people expressed frustration that their voices were often ignored, particularly in formal decision-making and for those in care, where adults made choices on their behalf without consultation. By **2025**, young people reported feeling more supported and listened to, especially within youth centres, Wellbeing Ambassador Group, where staff actively encourage participation. While concerns remain about not being heard in wider society, particularly school, and unequal access to opportunities, there is a stronger sense of voice, growing confidence, and more positive experiences in youth-led spaces.

In regards to the statement;

All children and young people can access child-friendly information about the council, their rights and entitlements:

In **2020**, the average score was **7.3**, with young people expressing that they often didn't know where to go to access information about their lives in a way they could understand. Information was described as being geared toward adults, leaving many young people reliant on adults to explain things. There were calls for more child-

friendly communication and for human rights education in schools, with some noting that older people seemed to have more voice and access to information. By **2025**, the average score increased to **4.23**, reflecting a clear improvement in young people's experiences of accessing information. Some now report learning about their rights through coursework, youth clubs, and visible resources like posters in council buildings. Some young people reported that teachers and youth workers make topics more child friendly by using alternatives methods, the Well Being Ambassador Group was another space that is child friendly in it's communication. Online information and council websites were also described as useful and accessible. However, not all young people share this experience — several still expressed uncertainty about where to find information, or said they had never seen it or didn't understand it. There are also concerns that schools and youth spaces may avoid sensitive topics. While resources have improved and become more available, the feedback suggests that more work is needed to ensure equal awareness and accessibility for all young people.

In regards to the statement;

All children and young people have fair access to health, education, transport and other services and have a good experience of these, whatever their needs: In **2020**, the average score was **4.6**, with young people generally feeling that health and education services were accessible, but expressing the need for improvements, particularly in mental health support and waiting times. A notable issue was transport, which was described as unreliable and sporadic, especially for young people trying to travel independently or socialize in the evenings. Limited options led to expensive solutions, such as taxis, which could be unreliable. Additionally, there was a sense that buses did not accommodate evening social needs, although some had positive experiences with transport services.

By **2025**, the average score had increased to **3.69**, reflecting some improvement in support systems, especially through youth clubs and community settings, which were noted for offering better resources and well-being support. While some young people appreciated the free bus services for school and the good transport links within the urban areas, transport issues continued to be a challenge, particularly in rural areas. The frustration around expensive and infrequent taxis remained, with some young people calling for free transport for those under 18. In health and education, young people raised concerns about being taken seriously, especially in the context of mental health issues, delayed diagnoses, and misunderstandings of neurodivergence, particularly for those with high-functioning autism. There were also calls for better staff training in schools to accommodate mobility challenges. Overall, while there has been some progress in community-based support, transport and health services still present significant challenges in terms of accessibility, affordability, and awareness.

In regards to the statement;

All children and young people are included and protected from discrimination:

In **2020**, the average score was **4**, with some young people feeling included in schools and clubs, where they were able to address concerns with adults. However, there were clear barriers to inclusion, such as playparks not being accessible for children with disabilities and costs limiting some children's participation, which could also expose them to discrimination.

By **2025**, the average score slightly dropped to **4.48**, indicating that inclusion remains a mixed experience. Many young people reported feeling included and protected in youth clubs, which provided supportive environments, but others faced discrimination in broader community settings. Instances of being stigmatized for appearance, age, or background were shared, including being followed in stores or treated unfairly. Racism, violence against women, and bullying were also mentioned as ongoing issues, particularly in public spaces and schools, however some reported that youth clubs are a safe space. Despite some positive efforts within youth clubs, many respondents highlighted that discrimination still occurs, particularly against minority groups or those with different backgrounds. Overall, while there have been some strides in creating inclusive spaces, discrimination remains a concern, and more action is needed to tackle these issues across various community settings. While inclusivity is a priority in some areas, it's clear that discrimination remains a significant issue for many young people.

In regards to the statement;

All children and young people feel able to approach trusted and supportive adults and benefit from having a supportive relationship with friends, family and people within their community:

In **2020**, the average score was **3.4**, with a mix of experiences regarding support. Some young people felt that there was stigma around asking for help, particularly for those with disabilities or from different countries, as they felt excluded from activities like games or sessions at local parks. However, others felt supported and knew where to seek help outside of school, with services like counsellors and confidential services being highlighted as positive. Many emphasized that the ability to talk to trusted adults relied on strong relationships, which can take time to develop. While some young people did not feel comfortable approaching family members for help, there was a general sense that children are protected from discrimination most of the time.

By **2025**, the average score slightly dropped to **3.92**, indicating a slightly more negative view of support. Many young people reported feeling supported by family, sports clubs, teachers, youth workers, who were praised for being helpful and supportive during difficult times. However, similar to the previous year, difficulty in approaching new people and finding trusted adults was still an issue. While support

was available, not all young people felt comfortable reaching out, and some struggled to find trustworthy people to confide in. The challenge of maintaining positive relationships was noted, with some young people feeling unsafe or unable to speak up about their issues.

In regards to the statement;

All children and young people are free and supported to enjoy playing, developing their talents and exploring the world around them:

In **2020**, the average score was **6**. Young people noted some positive examples of spaces that encouraged playing, developing, and exploring, such as the Nerve Centre, Our Space, and sports activities. However, there was a lack of awareness about these opportunities due to poor advertising. Rural areas like Strabane were particularly highlighted, with young people expressing the need for outreach services in these areas. There was also a concern that children with disabilities were not fully able to enjoy their rights to play and develop, as many opportunities were either inaccessible or limited. Additionally, the pressure of schoolwork and the judgment of certain hobbies or talents were identified as barriers to development.

By **2025**, the average score improved to **3.71**. The youth centres and clubs in urban areas, particularly, were seen as valuable spaces where young people could express themselves and develop their talents, with many highlighting the supportive environment provided. Many highlighted that parents support them and encourage their talents. However, access to spaces outside of youth clubs remained an issue, particularly for teenagers who felt there were few places to go or engage without facing judgment. Financial constraints were a recurring theme, with several young people feeling that the costs of developing certain talents, like in art or other creative fields, were prohibitive. The lack of resources and school budgets were cited as restricting opportunities for full self-expression, particularly in education. While some felt supported by their families and youth groups, others still felt that their creative expression wasn't nurtured enough, and the demands of schoolwork added stress. While youth centres and clubs have provided greater support for expression and development in 2025, financial limitations, lack of awareness of other opportunities, and the challenges of schoolwork continue to hinder young people's full engagement in exploring their talents and interests.

In regards to the statement;

All children and young people enjoy a clean and safe environment at home, in school and in the local community:

In **2020**, children shared a mixed experience of their community environment. While some felt that people were generally willing to help, others pointed to issues that made their surroundings feel less safe and welcoming. Concerns like broken glass on the streets and the presence of intimidating groups contributed to a sense

of unease in public spaces. The overall impression was one of limited safety and comfort, reflected in the relatively low average score of **6.5**.

By **2025**, the picture had evolved, with the average score rising to **4.17**, indicating some improvement in how young people perceive their communities. However, feedback remained mixed. Some young people noted improvements, such as cleaner streets and access to safe places like youth clubs. Others, particularly in areas like Creggan and rural communities, highlighted ongoing challenges. These included litter, poor maintenance, and concerns about safety—especially around issues like public drinking, street lighting and vape shops selling to underage customers. More broadly, young people spoke about deeper concerns such as inequality, a lack of equal access to opportunities, bullying, and family difficulties. While there was appreciation for existing support structures, there was also a clear call for more consistent access to safe spaces and support networks across all communities.

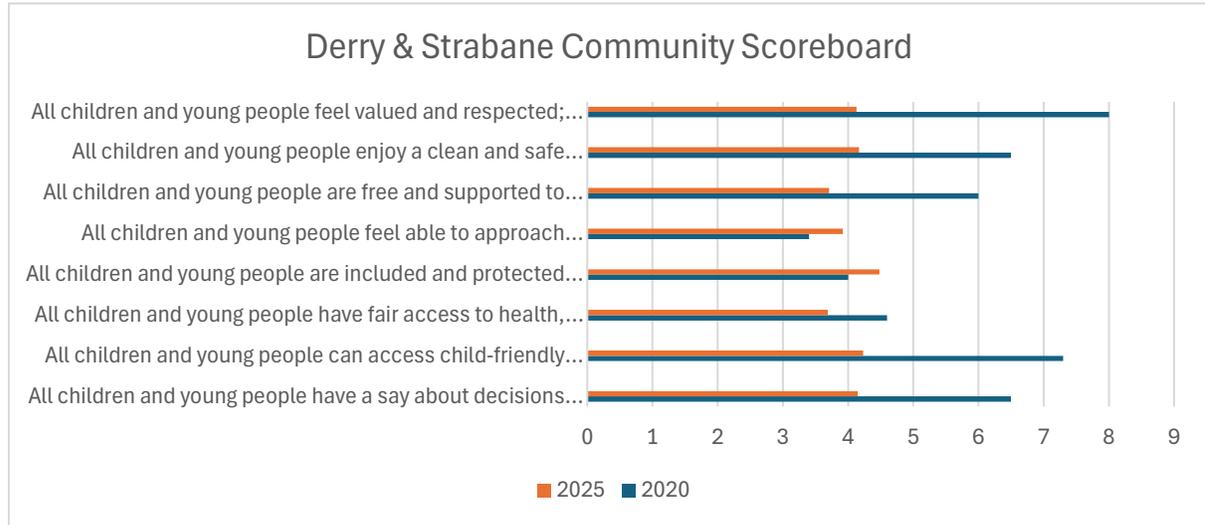
In regards to the statement;

All children and young people feel valued and respected; able to enjoy public spaces and meet other children freely:

In **2020**, with an average score of **8**, young people described feeling unwelcome in many public spaces. They were often moved on from parks, streets, and shopping centres, and felt unfairly blamed or judged simply for gathering. Many said there were few safe or suitable places for teenagers to meet, and that respect from adults was limited and often depended on how they behaved.

By **2025**, the average score had risen to **4.13**, suggesting improved experiences—but challenges remain. While some young people now feel valued in their communities and enjoy access to youth clubs and safe parks, many still face being stereotyped and asked to leave public areas without reason. Safety concerns are still present, especially in certain neighbourhoods, and access to welcoming spaces isn't equal for all. However, there is a clear desire for change: young people are calling for more inclusive, respectful spaces where they can meet freely, feel safe, and be treated with fairness and understanding.

Summary of Changes (2020 → 2025)



Having a Say in Decisions

 **Improvement:** Score improved from 6.5 to 4.15.

 **Change:** Young people feel more heard and supported, especially in youth-led spaces. Formal settings (e.g. schools, care) still lag behind in enabling participation.

Access to Child-Friendly Information

 **Improvement:** Score improved from 7.3 to 4.23.

 **Change:** Better access through schools, youth clubs, and council materials. However, some still struggle to find or understand relevant information.

Fair Access to Services (Health, Education, Transport)

 **Improvement:** Score improved from 4.6 to 3.69.

 **Change:** Community-based supports have strengthened, but rural transport and mental health services remain problematic.

Inclusion and Protection from Discrimination

 **Slight Decline:** Score worsened from 4 to 4.48.

 **Change:** While youth clubs are inclusive, young people still face discrimination in public settings, with concerns about racism, bullying, and inequality.

Trusted Relationships and Support

 **Slight Decline:** Score worsened from 3.4 to 3.92.

🗨️ **Change:** More young people feel supported by adults and peers, but barriers around trust, stigma, and access to safe relationships remain.

🎨🎭🌟 **Play, Talent Development, and Exploration**

📈 **Improvement:** Score improved from 6 to 3.71.

🕒 **Change:** Youth clubs now better support self-expression, but financial barriers and school pressures still limit opportunities, especially in rural areas.

🔧🏠🚫 **Clean and Safe Environments**

📈 **Improvement:** Score improved from 6.5 to 4.17.

🚫 **Change:** Conditions have improved in some areas, but concerns remain about safety, public drinking, and cleanliness—especially in Creggan and rural regions.

👏🏠🛒 **Feeling Valued in Public Spaces**

📈 **Significant Improvement:** Score improved from 8 to 4.13.

😊 **Change:** Young people feel more respected and welcome in some spaces, but stereotyping and exclusion still happen, especially in parks and shopping areas.

Between 2020 and 2025, **most areas show meaningful improvement**, particularly in how young people feel heard, informed, and welcomed in public spaces. **Youth clubs and community-based supports** are central to these gains. However, **persistent inequalities**, especially in rural access, discrimination, and mental health support, still need focused attention.

Audience

Were the views of the children and young people communicated to someone with the responsibility to act on them?

Findings from all group work sessions was fed back from EA Youth Service and Community and Voluntary Sector Youth Workers to the Children and Young Peoples Coordinator who put this summary document together to be shared with, Derry and Strabane District Council, Western Health and Social Care Trust, EA youth Service and the Youth Justice Agency, who have a responsibility to hear the views and ensure that that are acted upon, whether this be through their own organisations Senior Leadership, as a partnership or whether they need to be taken to local or regional Government.

As part of the group work session, young people were given the opportunity to develop questions for DCSDC Elected members that would be put to them by North West Ministry of Youth, who met with 9 of the elected members in the Council Chamber on Monday 28th April 2025.



The group opened with a general Child Rights Statement, which came from one the sessions delivered by EA Youth Service.

Young people feel that there is a lot more taking place now around child rights, they themselves want to know more about them so they can help educate others. But think that it is up to the adults to help them push the information into places that don't usually work with children and young people like shopping centres etc so they know what their rights are and not always thinking that young people are bad people when they are shopping etc.

As an elected member did you all take part in the Child rights training, and what are your thoughts on this statement?

"I took part in the training and it allowed them to see how child rights impacted on the work that they do. She also stated that she was aware that not all young people take part in this type of activity and that she would do everything in her power to ensure that child rights are upheld through my work in Council and in the Community."



Why are school logo hoodies not allowed to be worn in school as part of the uniform? We are planning on a starting a campaign what advice would you give us?

Elected member 1

"I do not know the reasoning as to why schools do not allow them, however my advise to you is to join your school council and start the campaign from there."

Elected Member 2

"My advise is to ensure hat you have a good rationale before you start to lobby, work together with your school council to agree to agree on the rationale."

Elected Member 3

"Get multiple schools involves and organise yourselves, with support from your local Elected Members – start a petition."

What happened to the plans for an outdoor skatepark open 24/7 in Derry or Strabane?

Elected member 1

"A space has been identified for Strabane, in Melvin Park and plans are underway to start development. With public transport links between he rural areas and Strabane young people will be able to access it easily, and this should benefit and raise the argument for the Derry Skate Park."

Elected Member 2

“Plans are still in place for the Derry Skate Park, however there were issues with the proposed sites, due to resident objections, however a new site has been identified and plans are still very much moving forward.”

Why are school meals so expensive, why aren't free school meals for every one of every income? - Why is there a lack of vegetarian options?

Elected members alluded to the fact that this was not something that local Council did have control over, however commented that they could answer from the party's perspective regionally.

Elected member 1

“This sits within the assembly and my party (Sinn Fein) have been pushing for the holiday hunger programme and funding.”

Elected member 2

“Free school meals have ben advocated by Council, and my party (People before Profit) have been pushing for the enactment of the Child Poverty Campaign. Also the anti-poverty strategy for Derry City and Strabane is in it's consultation stages and will be in place until 2035.”

Elected member 3

“Community sector through the Consensual grant model with Council were able to provide a local school with the funding to provide free school meal for all for a week, however there needs to be a long term plan.”

Elected member 4

“Following on from this, it was clear that attendance rose in schools when there was free meals for all, however it is not enough o our priority for out Government. Those making the decisions at a regional level have other priorities.”

Elected member 5

“the issue here is bureaucracy and funding and there re 3 government departments to blame, Education, Health and Communities, who need to pool their resources to make this a priority.”

It seems that youth centres are closed a lot these days. What funding will be available for voluntary youth provision 2025-26? Will there be an equal amount for all? Why does Strabane not have a Youth Centre? What is your party doing to support this?

Elected member 1

"I will keep making my voice heard in terms of the Strane Youth Centre, which is currently in the pipeline."

Elected member 2

"EA have plans for a centre and there is potential to link with the schools in the area."

EA Youth Service Rep

"There is currently no money in capital projects, however the Youth Resources Centre in Strabane is available 5 nights per week and the Derg Valley centre is now open 4 nights per week, youth provision is available in the area."

Elected member 3

"In response to the question regarding youth service funding, I agree that youth centres seem to be closed more than they are open at present, and children are frustrated that there is little notice of closures, I have been engaging with the youth service and working to get this resolved. EA have now lifted their recruitment freeze which should result in less closures. However the issue still remains that they are not able to retain youth workers, we need to fight for fair pay for youth workers and fill the skills gap."

Can you support with transport issues, school buses in some areas are cramped and not safe, with many having to stand or sit on the bus steps, whilst other areas have half empty buses? I don't feel safe on the bus.

Elected member 1

"This is a health and safety issue – doesn't sound like safe travel and you should have an adult raise it. What response did you get from your teachers?"

NW Ministry Member 1

"It has been raised with form teachers but doesn't seem to go any further it needs to be raised at a higher level."

Elected Member 2

“This is something we can support with, I will make contact with the school to raise the issue and ask for a meeting, we can act on this quickly as it is a safety issue.”

Elected member 3

“I too will make contact with the school, firstly in writing and then follow up with a call as this is a child safety. We will feed back to the group as soon as we have any update.”

The session ended with Elected Members stating that they really got a lot from the session, but that they would like more time to go into topics in more detail. The young people from North West Ministry agreed and it was suggested that they meet bi-monthly with an agreed topic chosen by the North West Ministry of Youth.

This session has resulted in the views of young people being acted upon by decision makers and Elected Members, who have agreed to feedback to the young people with any update.

Influence

How will young people views be taken seriously and acted upon, where appropriate?

The views expressed through the group sessions by children and young people were firstly listened to by Youth Workers from EA Youth Service and the Community and Voluntary Sector, these views were then fed back to the Children and Young People's Coordinator to collate the views and present them in this summary document. This document will be presented to Derry City and Strabane District Council, Western Health and Social Care Trust, EA Youth Service and Youth Justice Agency.

The summary will be shared with all children and young people who took part in the group sessions and the community scoreboards, as well as a child friendly infographic outlining the key things they are currently happy with and the areas that they feel we need to do more work in.

These views will be used in the development of the 3 year Sustainability Plan, which will outline priority areas that Derry City and Strabane District will work in to ensure that Child Rights are respected and upheld and that a Child Rights Based Approach is embedded in everything that we do.

These views and recommendations will be presented to the UNICEF Child Friendly Community Recognition Assessment Panel who will decide whether or not Derry City and Strabane District are a Child Friendly Community.

Conclusion & Recommendations

Here is an overall summary of young people's views on a Child Friendly Derry and Strabane District.

Make sure that their voices are always heard, and that adults take real action based on their ideas. Together, we can create a future where everyone has the support, opportunities, and rights they deserve.

Over the last few years, they've seen some real progress. They **feel more heard**, there are **more safe and inclusive spaces for them**, and some **leaders are finally listening**. Projects led by young people are making a big difference, and things like **outdoor learning and youth councils are giving them more of a voice**.

Between 2020 and 2025, young people in Derry City and Strabane have seen **meaningful progress in how their voices are heard**, how their **rights are recognised**, and how their **communities support their wellbeing**. **Mental health awareness, access to youth spaces, and opportunities to participate** in decision-making have **all improved**.

But there's still a long way to go.

Make Mental Health Support Easier to Get

Too many are waiting too long or not getting the help we need in school. Mental health support should be quicker, easier, and available everywhere.

Make Sure No One Gets Left Out

Some of them—especially if they have disabilities or speak a different language—still feel excluded. Everyone should feel welcome and included, no matter who they are or where they live.

Tell Us What Changes Because of Us

When they share their ideas, they want to know what actually happens next. Let them see the difference our voices make.

Teach Us More About Our Rights

Not all of them know what their rights are or how to get support. They need clearer, more youth-friendly information—especially in schools.

Give Us More Safe and Fun Spaces

They need more places where we can hang out, be creative, and feel safe—especially if they don't have much money or live far from towns.

   **Talk to Us Where We Actually Are**

Use the apps and platforms they use every day. If you want to reach them, meet them where they are online.

They are ready to be part of the change. Keep listening, keep improving—and make sure they're involved every step of the way.

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Child Friendly Infographic

Appendix 2 - Informed Consent