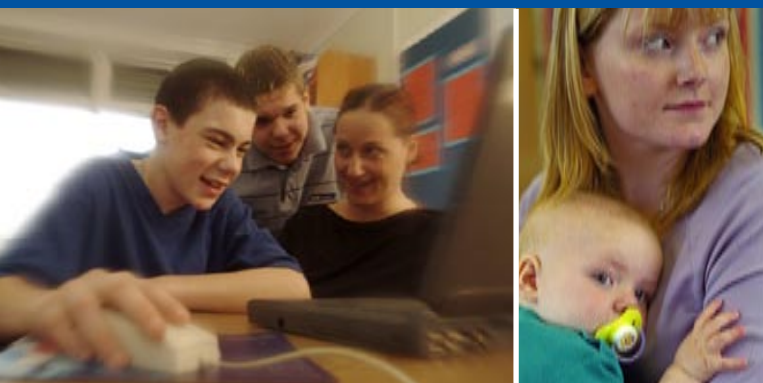


Investing in Scotland's future



the children's charity



Ten priorities for Scotland's children and young people



Addressing the needs, and protecting the future, of Scotland's children and young people must be a priority for all of Scotland's political parties. It is also the driving force behind the work of NCH Scotland, one of the country's leading children's charities.

Factfile Scotland 2006–07, NCH Scotland's annual 'report card' on Scotland's children and young people, showed that a significant gap continues to exist between young Scots from different backgrounds. There is a Scotland of opportunity based on educational attainment that is providing a bright future for many of our young people, yet there is also another Scotland where social issues have created a poverty of opportunity that is robbing individuals and communities of any sense of optimism.



The challenge for the new Scottish Executive and Scottish Parliament after May's Scottish Parliamentary elections will be developing and implementing policies that can significantly reduce this opportunity gap. To meet this challenge, NCH Scotland calls on Scotland's political parties to adopt and fulfil the key pledges to Scotland's children and young people outlined below.

Priority 1: Reducing child poverty and social exclusion

Key facts

- The number of children living in low income households has fallen by 100,000, but there are still currently an estimated 240,000 children in Scotland living in poverty.
- More than 80 per cent of parents with a disabled child are unemployed, and disabled children are twice as likely to live in poverty.

Pledge

The Scottish Executive and the Scottish Parliament will work with the UK Government to ensure eliminating child poverty remains an absolute priority.

The Scottish Executive and the Scottish Parliament will work with the UK Government to ensure UK welfare reform secures real and significant improvement to the lives of those on low incomes, and to the lives of the unemployed. Action is also needed to further increase childcare support for the poorest families, and for single parents.

Priority 2: Promoting children and young people's rights

Key facts

- Article 2 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child ('the UNCRC') outlines the right of children to be protected from discrimination.
- The UK has a reservation to the UNCRC in relation to asylum and immigration, which means that children who are asylum seekers or refugees, and subject to immigration control, are excluded from the provisions of the UNCRC. As a result, these children are being detained for the purpose of immigration control, which is contrary to various international standards on the treatment of children and prisoners set by the UNCRC and by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.
- Children and young people are often subject to negative stereotyping by sections of the media and by policy makers.
- It is illegal to physically assault an adult, but not a child.

Pledge

The Scottish Executive and the Scottish Parliament will work with the UK Government to remove the UK's reservation to the UNCRC on asylum and immigration, and to incorporate the UNCRC into the laws of Scotland, Northern Ireland, Wales and England. The Scottish Executive and the Scottish Parliament will also work with the UK Government to end the detention of asylum-seeking and refugee children.

The Scottish Executive and the Scottish Parliament will take the lead in promoting a positive view of children and young people to combat the negative stereotyping that exists at present.

The Scottish Executive and the Scottish Parliament will legislate to end the physical chastisement of children, and to ensure that children enjoy the same protection in law from assault, and/or from the threat of assault, as adults.



Priority 3: Improving children and young people's health and well-being

Key facts

- Smoking rates have halved in 15-year-old boys from 30 per cent to 15 per cent since 1996, while they have fallen from 30 per cent to 24 per cent among girls.
- Although fewer children are smoking, more are obese and under-age drinking is an increasing and significant problem.
- Ten per cent of young people have mental health problems.
- An estimated half of all school pupils in Scotland have been bullied at school, and 23 per cent of all calls to ChildLine are about bullying.

Pledge

The Scottish Executive and the Scottish Parliament will continue to introduce policies to improve children and young people's health and well-being, with priority being given to vulnerable and difficult to reach children and young people. This will be done by promoting healthy eating in schools, including free school meals for every child, introducing more physical education in schools and increasing investment in sports and in leisure facilities for children and young people in local communities, as well as linked to schools. The Scottish Executive and the Scottish Parliament will also work with the UK Government and other key agencies to introduce and implement a comprehensive ban on junk food advertising.

The Scottish Executive and the Scottish Parliament will take action to address under-age drinking, and more specifically the growing binge drinking culture.

Other priority areas will include further action to raise children and young people's awareness about mental health and well-being, and about sexual health and well-being.

The Scottish Executive and the Scottish Parliament will also ensure that children and young people's views are taken into account in, and their needs placed at the very centre of, the design and delivery of health and well-being services. Children and young people accessing these services will also be treated with dignity and respect.

The Scottish Executive and Scottish Parliament will give greater priority to addressing bullying in schools, and to identifying effective interventions for tackling bullying.

Priority 4: Supporting families and parents, and safeguarding children

Key facts

- The number of children referred to the Children's Reporter has doubled over the last 10 years, reaching record levels.
- Most referrals were made on 'care and protection grounds', with a total of 40,931 children referred on this basis in 2005–06, up 9 per cent on the previous year.
- The number of children referred because of 'lack of parental care' was, for the first time, greater than those referred on offence grounds.
- Many referrals to the Children's Reporter were due to parental drug and alcohol abuse. An estimated 40,000 to 60,000 children in Scotland are affected by parental drug use.
- Vital services that help many of Scotland's most vulnerable children, young people and their families are overstretched and face increasing problems in providing the support that is needed.
- Carers Scotland estimates that there are currently 17,000 young carers in Scotland with caring responsibilities for a family member, partner or friend, and that less than 3,000 of these young people receive support from young carers' support projects.

Pledge

The Scottish Executive and the Scottish Parliament will introduce secure, long-term funding for family support services and children's services, including parenting support, in order to strengthen family relationships, and to provide vulnerable children with the best start in life.

Increased levels of intensive support focusing on early intervention and on prevention will be made available to parents abusing drugs or alcohol to help them to address this abuse, and to reduce the number of children referred for statutory services.

The Scottish Executive and the Scottish Parliament will ensure that young carers receive an acceptable level of guaranteed respite care, and will improve support for young carers in education and in accessing other key services such as health and transport.

Priority 5: Tackling youth homelessness

Key facts

- In 2005/06, a total of 12,544 homeless applications were received from people aged 24 and under, some 31 per cent of all homeless applications.
- Young people can become homeless for a number of reasons, including being the victims of child abuse, pressures arising from being part of a reconstituted family, mental health issues or their own or their parents' alcohol or drug addiction.
- There is a lack of supported accommodation, which often means that vulnerable young people are prematurely forced into independent living, and into accommodation that is unsuitable for their needs.
- Young people rely on benefits to sustain themselves in supported accommodation, and they risk losing these benefits by entering employment or further education. This can make it very difficult to motivate homeless young people to seek work or to access further education, which, in turn, keeps them in a poverty trap.

Pledge

The Scottish Executive and the Scottish Parliament will ensure sufficient supported accommodation is made available to homeless young people.

The Scottish Executive and the Scottish Parliament will work with the UK Government to ensure the benefits system is less discriminatory against young people, and becomes more flexible in giving homeless young people, particularly those aged 16 to 18, the means to secure some stability in their lives. The Scottish Executive and the Scottish Parliament will highlight the need to set benefits at a sufficient level to allow homeless young people entering employment or further education to remain, where necessary, in more supported environments appropriate to their personal development.

Priority 6: Increasing opportunities in education, employment and training

Key facts

- Children brought up in areas of social deprivation or in care have the lowest levels of educational attainment.
- In 2005–06, more school leavers from publicly funded schools entered full-time further or higher education (up from 53% to 54%).
- An estimated 35,000 16 to 19 year olds are not in education, employment or training (NEET), around 13.5 per cent of this age group.
- Scotland has the third highest rate of youth unemployment in Europe after France and the Slovak Republic.

Pledge

The Scottish Executive and the Scottish Parliament will do more to improve attainment levels among children brought up in areas of social deprivation or in care, and will work with the UK Government to tackle youth unemployment.

The Scottish Executive and the Scottish Parliament will increase its existing support for community-based interventions such as Youthbuilds to help all young people to secure opportunities in employment, education or training.

Priority 7: Improving outcomes for looked-after children

Key facts

- The proportion of looked-after children in Scotland is the highest since 1982.
- A total of 12,966 children under 18 were looked after by local authorities in 2006, an increase of 6 per cent since 2005, while an additional 2,213 children under 18 were looked after on short-term respite placements, a rise of 10 per cent from 2005.
- 50 per cent of young people leaving care during 2005–06 beyond minimum school leaving age had no qualifications.
- The majority leaving care were unemployed.

Pledges

The Scottish Executive and the Scottish Parliament will continue to give priority to safeguarding and promoting the well-being of looked-after children. To help improve outcomes for looked-after children, urgent action will be taken to increase opportunities for looked-after children in employment, education and training to ensure that greater numbers of looked-after children fulfil their potential.

Further action will also be taken to ensure young people have an appropriate care package to meet their needs upon leaving care, including suitable accommodation, improved access to key services such as healthcare provision, and increased support to access education, training or employment.

Priority 8: Increasing opportunities for young people with disabilities

Key facts

- Scottish households with one or more disabled persons are twice as likely to live in poverty than households with no disabled people.
- The extensive provision of services for children with disabilities aged 5–18 is not matched in later years. Young people aged 18–25 receive little, if any, support.

Pledge

The Scottish Executive and the Scottish Parliament will work with the UK Government to launch a public information campaign about disability to improve awareness of the issue, and to improve disabled young people's access to services.

The Scottish Executive and Scottish Parliament will increase funding to support initiatives that increase social contact between disabled and non-disabled young people, and support disabled young people in the transition from childhood to adulthood.

The Scottish Executive and the Scottish Parliament will also work with employers to increase the level of training and employment opportunities available to disabled young people.

Priority 9: Reducing youth offending and crime

Key facts

- Since 2004-05, 17,624 children were referred to the Children's Reporter on offence grounds, an increase of less than 1 per cent.
- 43 per cent of all crimes and offences in Scotland are carried out by young people under the age of 21.
- A disproportionate amount of the youth crime and anti-social behaviour in communities across Scotland was committed by a tiny minority of persistent offenders (0.3% of all children aged 8–16 in Scotland).
- The third most common reason for referrals to the Children's Reporter was because children had been the victims of offences.
- Twenty-four per cent of the young people who responded to the recent policy consultation by Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People voted for 'safer streets' as a key policy objective. This confirms that it is not just adults who are concerned about anti-social behaviour and offending within local communities.

Pledge

The Scottish Executive and the Scottish Parliament will increase the level of early intervention support available to those most at risk of offending or of re-offending, and improve the level of throughcare and transitional support available for young people released from custody.

Priority 10: Promoting young people's leisure and cultural interests

Key facts

- A third of 11–25 year olds have done voluntary work in the last six months.
- A further third considered the possibility of doing voluntary work, which shows there is considerable untapped potential in getting young people involved in worthwhile activities.
- 'Having more to do' was one of the priority areas identified by young people in the recent consultation by Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People, aimed at identifying young people's key issues (26.5% of the 16,000 young people voted for this issue).

Pledge

The Scottish Executive and the Scottish Parliament will build upon the proposed national youth work strategy, and introduce a national youth strategy. This will address issues such as children and young people's rights, the availability of affordable leisure and cultural opportunities, participation and citizenship, and health and equalities issues.

The Scottish Executive and the Scottish Parliament will work with local authorities to ensure that sports and leisure facilities are accessible and not too expensive for children and young people. More will also be done to make such facilities more welcoming to young people.

The Scottish Executive and the Scottish Parliament will take action to sustain more green areas for children and young people to play in, and will support the development of play areas, particularly in areas of social deprivation.



Contact details

Further details about NCH Scotland's *Investing in Scotland's future: Ten priorities for Scotland's children and young people* can be obtained by email from Andrew Girvan, Director of Children's Services, NCH Scotland (andrew.girvan@nch.org.uk), or from Robert McGeachy, Head of Policy, NCH Scotland (robert.mcgeachy@nch.org.uk), or by telephone on 0141 550 9010.

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