

# "LIVING IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN JUST SURVIVING."

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**Listening to what children think about food insecurity**  
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October 2016



# LISTENING TO WHAT CHILDREN THINK ABOUT FOOD INSECURITY

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## Introduction

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Nourish Scotland was asked by the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland to listen to what children think about food insecurity. In this report we use the phrase food insecurity and by this we mean not just the immediate experience of a shortage of food but the broader spectrum of experiences. These experiences range from hunger to uncertainty and including social, financial, geographical, and nutritional considerations, often collectively referred to as household food insecurity:

*'The inability to acquire or consume an adequate quality or sufficient quantity of food in socially acceptable ways, or the uncertainty that one will be able to do so.'*<sup>1</sup>

In the conversations with children we did not directly use the phrase food insecurity, but developed activities from which children could understand what it meant to be food insecure. We also built capacity on the concept of a right to food, and the role of politicians.

The research was undertaken with support and guidance from Home-Start UK Scotland and children's consultant Dr Chelsea Marshall.

This report outlines what children told us. Throughout the activity sessions children showed a complex understanding of food needs, barriers to accessing food, and solutions to food insecurity.

- ✦ Children were confident in identifying the foods that children need, and recognised the importance of a healthy and balanced diet including the consequences of not having access to enough of those foods.
- ✦ Children were perceptive to how financial restraints could be a barrier to children being able to eat the foods they need and how that may make parents and children feel, including that children may feel that they should do something. Children understood that money would make a big difference to the amount and type of food eaten, what meal times are like and where families get food from.

- ✦ Children had well developed ideas around coping mechanisms and solutions to food insecurity, recognising the responsibilities of a range of people including politicians. Solutions included making healthy food more affordable, redistributing money, and supporting charitable solutions – though not all children felt that food banks were a fair solution, with one child expressing this as 'living is more important than surviving.' When asked, all children agreed that children have a right to food, but they also recognised the barriers to realising this. Children often suggested rights-based solutions though they did not always identify them as such.

This research was prompted by the rapid increase of food insecurity in Scotland and the absence of children's voices in discussions on the causes and solutions to poverty.

We know that more than one in five children in Scotland are living in relative poverty and that a third of people depending on food banks are children. There is also increasing evidence that food insecurity can have a significant negative impact on children's physical and psychological wellbeing, educational attainment and long-term quality of life.<sup>1</sup>

What is not well researched, and is the focus of this research, is what children in Scotland think about food insecurity. Children and children in poverty experience multiple barriers to participation in decision-making, but unless we listen to children's experiences and concerns and meaningfully involve them in developing solutions we cannot address food insecurity in a way that respects, protects and fulfils children's rights.

<sup>1</sup> See page 4, existing research on food insecurity and children

## Existing research on food insecurity and children

Being in poverty is isolating, and the intersection of childhood and poverty means that experiences and concerns often remain unheard.<sup>2</sup>

Without a comprehensive quantitative understanding of how many people are food insecure and qualitative understanding of the causes, opportunities for intervention, and dignified solutions, it is very difficult to make policy decisions informed by people's direct experiences.

There is currently no population wide monitoring of food insecurity in Scotland or the rest of the UK, though the exponential rise of food banks and other emergency food aid providers has highlighted a very real challenge. Just one of the many food bank providers, the Trussell Trust, reported in 2015/16 that it handed out 133,726 three-day food parcels in Scotland. This is a significant increase on the 5,726 parcels in 2011/12. The Trussell Trust estimate that a third of their parcels go to children.<sup>3</sup>

An analysis of incomes against the Minimum Income Standard, the amount needed for a basic basket of goods and services, suggests that 27% of incomes in the UK are too low.<sup>4</sup>

The UK Government figures for relative poverty are not linked to the cost of living, but are calculated as 60% of the median income – after housing costs, 22% of children in Scotland live in households with an income below this – exposing them to considerable risk of food insecurity.<sup>5</sup> Households with children are more likely to be in relative poverty than those without.

There has been limited qualitative research considering children's views on and experiences of food insecurity in the UK, and none specifically in Scotland.<sup>6</sup> The majority of research in this area has been undertaken in the US and Canada where household food insecurity is at similar levels to that currently in the UK.

### Key findings of that research are:

- + Children who have experienced hunger are more likely to have poorer physical health.<sup>7</sup> Food poverty impacts on developmental outcomes, including diminished academic, behavioural and social functioning as well as negative mental health outcomes.<sup>8</sup> Child hunger has also been linked with depression and suicidal thoughts in late adolescence and early adulthood.<sup>9</sup>
- + Simultaneously, research indicates that very few children actually experience reduced food intake or disrupted eating patterns because adults try to protect children from the effects of it.<sup>10</sup> An emerging hypothesis is that poor physical and psychological wellbeing may be a contributing factor in children's anxiety both about their carers' ability to feed them and the impact this has on their carers.<sup>11</sup>
- + Children are aware of food insecurity in their families and internalise responsibility for managing food resources to alleviate pressure on their carers.<sup>12</sup> Children have little control over their food environment – and their sense of safety largely depends on the reliability of adults to meet their needs. Children may feel unhappy about reduced food quantity and quality, but may feel most distressed when they lose confidence that their carers will be able to find a way to feed them.<sup>13</sup>

Non-nutritional aspects of household food insecurity may therefore be as important, or possibly more so, than nutritional aspects for children.<sup>14</sup>

The findings of previous research are reflected in this research too; children not only raised concerns with the physical health implications of children not having enough of the food they need, but also of the psychological consequences, most strikingly of 'feeling poor'.

Likewise, they believed that children may feel like they could and should take some responsibility in helping adults in these situations.

However, and most significantly, this research highlights that children's solutions to food insecurity stretch beyond the household, with children having strong ideas around policy interventions.

## Methodology

Through four semi-structured sessions, we listened to 32 children across Renfrewshire, Dundee and Glasgow through three Home-Start local groups, and in Edinburgh through a primary school. The children were mostly between 7-9 years old, with some as young as 5 and others up to 11 years old, with a near even gender split and ethnic diversity.<sup>ii</sup>

Due to varying structures of the partner organisations, some children knew and were accustomed to spending time together, while others met for the first time at the sessions.

Children expressed themselves in semi-structured activity sessions, discussing the themes:

- ✦ what food children need to grow big and strong
- ✦ what barriers there are to getting enough of the foods children need
- ✦ whose responsibility it is to make sure children get the food they need and what could they do

Each session contained four activities throughout which these themes were woven. Key principles of the activity sessions were that they created an opportunity for children to express themselves and to feel safe, listened to and respected.

Activities were structured to allow children to discuss the themes generally or in relation to fictional families. We did not ask children directly about their experiences of food insecurity – but sometimes children told us about them as a reference point for how other children might feel or think. Where appropriate we have included those comments below.

The four activities were:



<sup>ii</sup> See appendix

# CHILDREN'S PERCEPTION OF FOOD NEEDS

## What food do children need to grow big and strong?

Throughout the activities children had a confident understanding of what food children need to grow big and strong. During the sorting activity children consistently selected images of fruit and vegetables, and were in broad agreement that foods such as cake and sweets should not be included in this category. The level of discussions and further debate around foods identified as not essential, but would not prevent growing big and strong such as pizza and chicken nuggets demonstrated a nuanced understanding of the ways in which individual food items cannot be considered in isolation of a balanced diet.

These discussions demonstrated that messaging about 'healthy' and 'unhealthy' foods, are being heard clearly by children. At the same time, children noted that these guidelines do not always inform their own or other children's eating, because they may not have decision-making power in their homes or prefer to eat other foods, despite being 'unhealthy'.

Children's identification of foods associated with growing big and strong was **largely aligned with food that was healthy** – for example, children always identified fruit and vegetables as being healthy, and across all sessions children mentioned the '5 a day' policy.

Children also **talked about milk and eggs generally being healthy:**

*"Because it has proteins and vitamin c... and carbohydrates."*

But children **tended to think differently about cheese, especially processed cheese:**

*"Pizza is not healthy! Because of the cheese!"*

*"They've got too much cheese and only little bits of cheese are healthy."*

Children's reasoning for **why foods were healthy** usually centred around them being or being made of fruit and vegetables:

*"I dunno, I just knew, because it's a vegetable."*

*"It's called tomato soup, so it must have tomatoes in it, so it must be healthy."*

Across all groups children were **mindful of too much sugar being unhealthy**, sometimes with precise awareness of the sugar content of food.

*"Per 100g of ice cream, 28.5g is pure sugar."*

Caution of sugar also extended to foods that children thought were healthy:

*"I think vegetables are healthier than fruit because fruit has more sugar in it."*



Children **often made reference to eating a balanced and varied diet:**

*"If you eat too much of the healthy, sometimes it can get a little bit unhealthy for you... If you eat too much of, like pears, it can make you ill."*

*"I think you should eat half of your plate healthy and a quarter in the middle, no about three quarters in the middle, basically a tiny percent unhealthy and the rest in the middle."*

*"Because you don't **need** to eat cookies and all that every day!"*

# What might happen if children couldn't eat the foods they need?

Alongside understanding of what children need to grow big and strong, children were very aware of the consequences of not eating these foods. This came through strongest during the sorting activity though it was a theme children made references to across all activities.

Children discussed a wide range of effects, from low energy and cavities to severe ill-health, loss of teeth and, most frequently of all, death.

Children in every group **highlighted the risk of death:**

*"They won't grow healthy and strong. And probably they'll die."*

A number of children talked about **behavioural and emotional challenges:**

*"It's really hard to concentrate."*

*"They'll be sad."*

*"When you're hungry all you can think about is food."*

Many children were **aware of the impact over time, including intergenerational impacts:**

*"So that they can grow up to be healthy adults, if you do well when you're young it will help you when you're older."*

*"It grows you big and strong, if babies eat them when they're still babies, it makes them grow much faster."*

*"Because when they're older their children would take that up."*

In addition to talking about the consequence of not eating the foods children need, one child also talked about **exercise being important:**

*"So that they get really fit it's important that they get a lot of exercise too."*

Children mentioned a range **physical health challenges:**

*"If you're eating junk food every day it can make you ill and give you ulcers, and there's no room for healthy stuff."*

*"They may get heart or liver disease."*

*"My dad said you get cancer and headaches if you eat too much unhealthy foods."*

*"They start feeling weak."*

Many children particularly emphasised **dental challenges:**

*"If you eat all this stuff and you don't brush your teeth you can get cavities."*

*"If you eat too many sweets your teeth will grow yellow."*

*"They'll just fall off because of black things."*

*They feel upset that their parents are stressed so they feel stressed.*

*Frustrated because they don't have enough money to buy proper food.*

*A bit worried because they don't know what's going to happen and their parents are a bit sad.*

## Where do children get food?

In the houses and mapping activity, children thought about where families with different incomes might get food from, what food is in the cupboards, and what meal times are like.

Children felt that both families would usually get food from shops, but that the types of shops they used and what they bought may

be different. Children attributed restaurants, cookery books, appliances, eating together, and growing your own food to the wealthier house, and eating little and with less variety, relying on family and friends, and travelling a long distance to shops to the less wealthy house.

### A family that can easily afford what they need

#### Where do they get their food?

*"Maybe a Sainsbury's, or something like that."*

*"They might go to Costa for coffee and sweet shops."*

*"A big restaurant."*

*"They might grow a lot of their food."*

*"When they first got the house they might have spent quite a bit of money to build a special room like a greenhouse but inside."*

#### How do they get there?

*"They drive."*

#### What are meal times like?

*"Everything you need and some treats."*

*"They watch TV programmes about food, for example Masterchef, they*

*learn how to make foods. They go to places to learn about making food, buy cookery books."*

*"Maybe they have a six-foot-long table with food on it... And they have three candles."*

*"They have a living room and so many tables, lots of food... and they talk about things."*

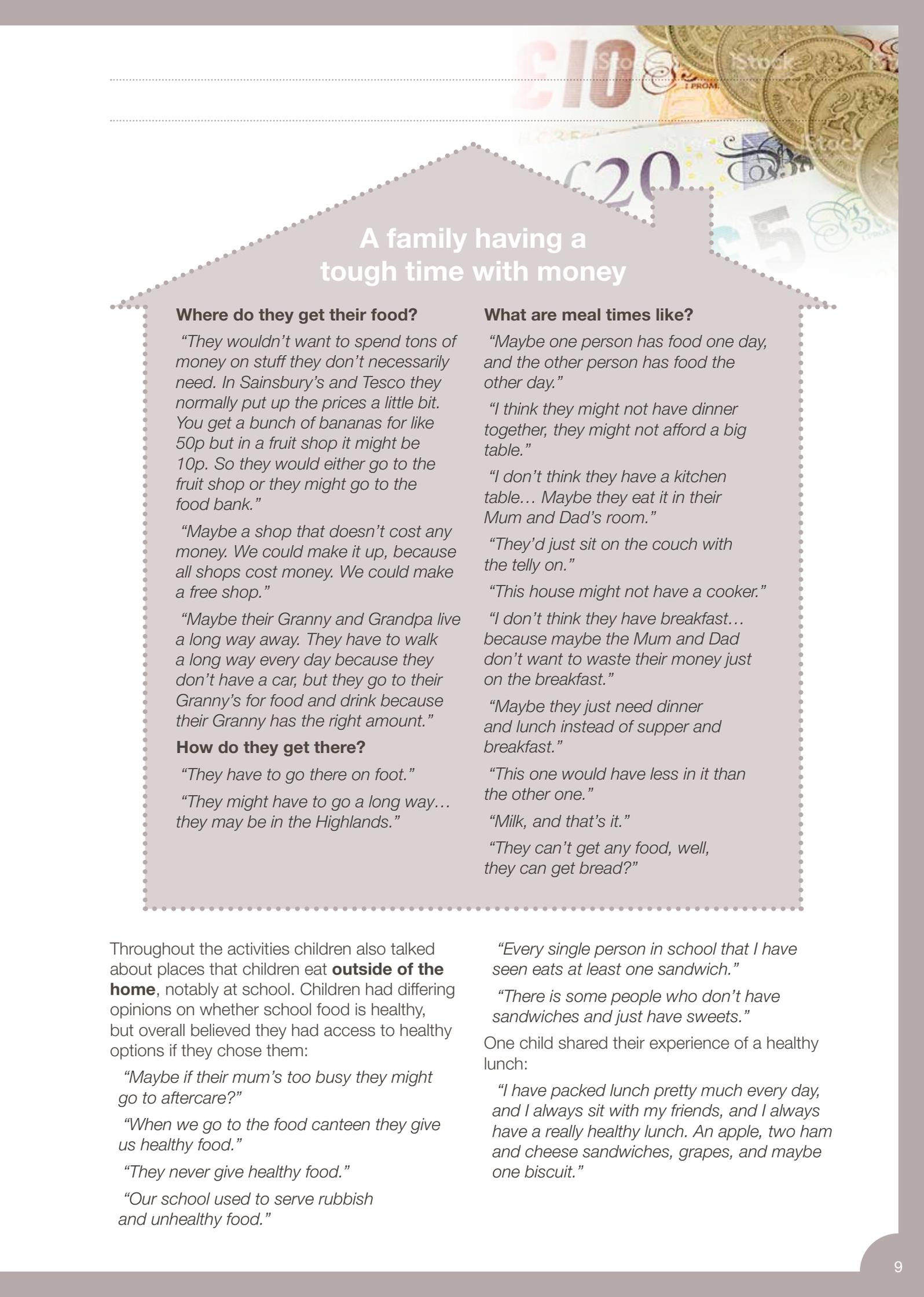
*"The first one might have a thing where they press a button and it goes around. And the other one might have just a normal one – a wooden spoon."*

*"Their friends might come over."*

*"They have family time."*

*"They have beef! The first house has beef." Because they have more money than the other house, and they have a big fridge to put it in."*





## A family having a tough time with money

### Where do they get their food?

*"They wouldn't want to spend tons of money on stuff they don't necessarily need. In Sainsbury's and Tesco they normally put up the prices a little bit. You get a bunch of bananas for like 50p but in a fruit shop it might be 10p. So they would either go to the fruit shop or they might go to the food bank."*

*"Maybe a shop that doesn't cost any money. We could make it up, because all shops cost money. We could make a free shop."*

*"Maybe their Granny and Grandpa live a long way away. They have to walk a long way every day because they don't have a car, but they go to their Granny's for food and drink because their Granny has the right amount."*

### How do they get there?

*"They have to go there on foot."*

*"They might have to go a long way... they may be in the Highlands."*

### What are meal times like?

*"Maybe one person has food one day, and the other person has food the other day."*

*"I think they might not have dinner together, they might not afford a big table."*

*"I don't think they have a kitchen table... Maybe they eat it in their Mum and Dad's room."*

*"They'd just sit on the couch with the telly on."*

*"This house might not have a cooker."*

*"I don't think they have breakfast... because maybe the Mum and Dad don't want to waste their money just on the breakfast."*

*"Maybe they just need dinner and lunch instead of supper and breakfast."*

*"This one would have less in it than the other one."*

*"Milk, and that's it."*

*"They can't get any food, well, they can get bread?"*

Throughout the activities children also talked about places that children eat **outside of the home**, notably at school. Children had differing opinions on whether school food is healthy, but overall believed they had access to healthy options if they chose them:

*"Maybe if their mum's too busy they might go to aftercare?"*

*"When we go to the food canteen they give us healthy food."*

*"They never give healthy food."*

*"Our school used to serve rubbish and unhealthy food."*

*"Every single person in school that I have seen eats at least one sandwich."*

*"There is some people who don't have sandwiches and just have sweets."*

One child shared their experience of a healthy lunch:

*"I have packed lunch pretty much every day, and I always sit with my friends, and I always have a really healthy lunch. An apple, two ham and cheese sandwiches, grapes, and maybe one biscuit."*

# CHILDREN'S PERCEPTION OF BARRIERS TO FOOD

In the activity sessions, children were able to identify very clearly that there were many barriers which affected how much food children had and had clear views on what this would mean for both children and parents.

## Why don't all children have the food they need?

Children across **all of the sessions identified money as the most significant reason** why some children may not have the food they need. This was discussed at length during the agree/disagree activity, but often raised as a theme in other activities too.

Some children **made the link between not having enough money and using food banks:**

*"Some people don't have enough money to buy food and some people have to go to food banks and some people can't go to the food bank because their families are too ill."*

Some children **highlighted refugees and disabled children** as people who may be more likely to face this issue.

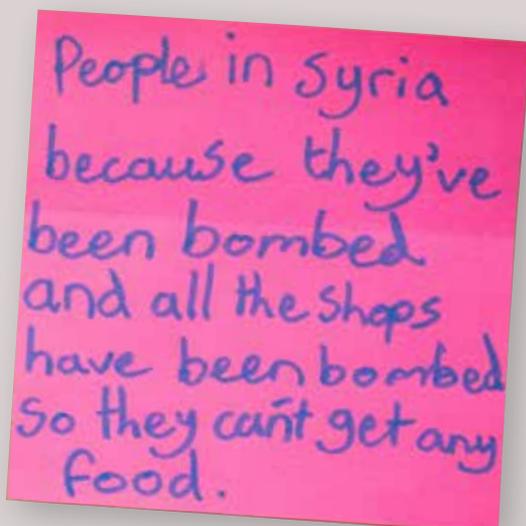
A number of children identified food insecurity as a **global problem:**

*"Some people in other countries, in hot countries, don't have enough food."*

One child identified **children in Syria** as particularly vulnerable:

*"People in Syria, because they've been bombed and all the shops have been bombed, so they can't get any food."*

The awareness of food insecurity outside of Scotland appeared to be informed largely by charity advertisements on television and charitable organisations seeking donations door to door. Many children were likely to initially associate not having enough food with children living in other countries over children living in Scotland, unless asked to think specifically about children in Scotland.



People in Syria because they've been bombed and all the shops have been bombed so they can't get any food.



## How might adults and children feel in that situation?

Children were clear that there were social and emotional consequences to food insecurity for both parents and children. The following are responses to a story in the houses and mapping activity about a family experiencing financial trouble. Children were asked how the

family members would feel if one of the parents had lost their job and, as a consequence, 'hasn't been buying the same food, and sometimes they don't get much to eat unless they're at school'.



# CHILDREN'S SOLUTIONS TO FOOD INSECURITY

## Whose responsibility is it to make sure children have the food they need?

Throughout the activities children held a strong belief that eating healthily is often a matter of personal choice and responsibility, with some responsibility allocated to parents, family members and schools who provide children with food options in many circumstances.

However, there was a striking difference between children's responses when asked about responsibility where there are financial constraints to being able to afford healthy options. Children understood that there are multiple factors involved in determining the availability and accessibility of food.

"Big sisters and big brothers"

"I'd probably say yourself because if you have a choice"

"Teachers have to make sure you're healthy, let's say the supervisor is outside and you're having popcorn, a chocolate bar and some Maltesers, then they would say maybe you should keep some of that for after school"

"People at school"

"I think yourself is in charge of most that you eat.  
I know at home you sometimes don't choose what you're having but I think if you have lots of unhealthy things and you make the choice of saying can I have this tonight? Can I have soup? Tomato soup or something"

"Parents"

"God"

"Politicians"

"The President of America"

"Grannies and granddads"

## What could families do?

Throughout the activities, children showed a high awareness of what it means to experience food insecurity. Children came up with various solutions to issues around food insecurity in the home and in the community. Children only sometimes instigated discussion of food banks as an option for a family in financial difficulty. However, when prompted, their awareness and understanding of the role of food banks as a potential coping mechanism for a family in difficulty demonstrates the speed at which food banks have become institutionalised in Scotland. Not all children felt that food banks were a fair solution. All children agreed that children have a right to food, but acknowledged that there are many barriers to making rights a reality.

Many children talked about solutions **from within family units**, which focused heavily on using limited resources wisely and efficiently, but also included discussion around the security and adequacy of incomes:

*“They’ll have to budget.”*

*“They should spend it on food and cheap, cheap clothes from a charity shop.”*

*“They could get some help from gran.”*

*“What my Mum does is that she buys all the stuff a few days before, she has to remember what we’ll have for dinner, so she’ll buy all the stuff and has it in the fridge and just makes it.”*

*“They can both get a new job, a job that they’re really good at, a job that they graduated in.”*

Most children talked about solutions **from the community or specific professionals who could provide money, food, or support**:

*“They might just go to their next door neighbours and ask them for some money.”*

*“Maybe they could eat at a friend’s house.”*

*“Maybe the teacher, maybe at lunch time give them some extra food to take home.”*

*“Maybe they can just give them some money so that they can buy some extra food.”*

*“They can phone the lawyer, if they have a lawyer.”*

*“They can wait for Santa?”*

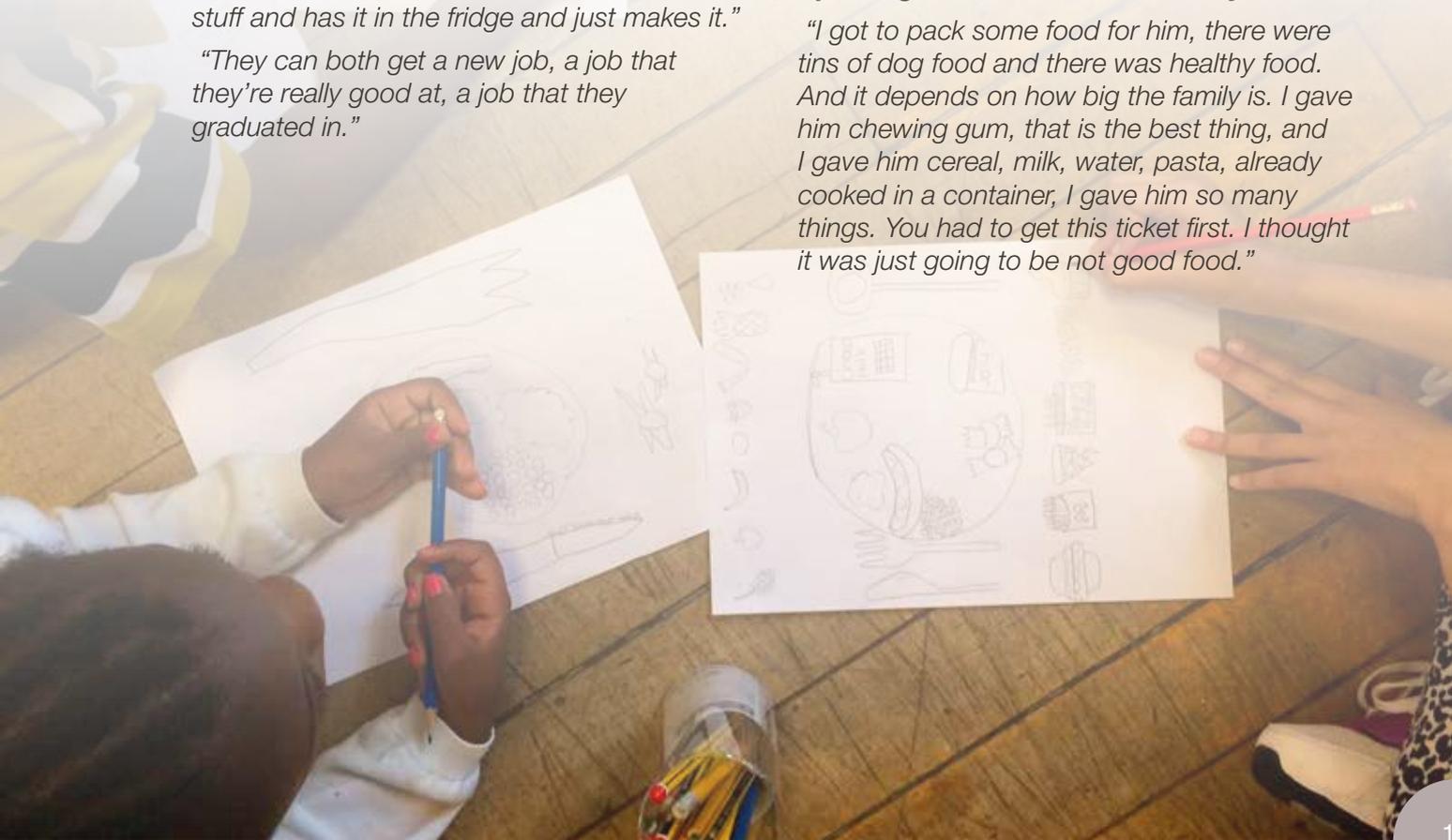
Children were very perceptive about **the role of food banks**, including that they may be too far away or oversubscribed:

*“If they went there then they could have more food. They could go there every single day for breakfast, and then they could use their money on other things.”*

*“They might have to go somewhere with more food banks so they can get more food. Like more food than they usually get when there’s only one food bank.”*

One child shared an experience of volunteering at a food bank through their school and **expecting the food to be unhealthy**:

*“I got to pack some food for him, there were tins of dog food and there was healthy food. And it depends on how big the family is. I gave him chewing gum, that is the best thing, and I gave him cereal, milk, water, pasta, already cooked in a container, I gave him so many things. You had to get this ticket first. I thought it was just going to be not good food.”*



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## What could politicians do?

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Most children understood that certain adults had a role of ensuring that children and families were being supported, and though not all were immediately familiar with the term 'politician', they had strong opinions about the role of a politician during the Minister game. Children were **clear that politicians should** make sure all children have enough food:

*"They usually help people, like children who need food."*

*"Because they should."*

*"Because it's important."*

*"Because children can get ill and politicians should care."*

*"Because they care about children."*

*"They're meant to look after us, they shouldn't just be sitting there not caring and eating all the food."*

And children generally **agreed that this required taking some action**, with a number of children emphasising that outcomes of action should be that everyone has enough healthy food that is not too far away in distance to reach:

*"Some new rules so people won't just be that way, poor and homeless, and so we don't just ignore them."*

*"Make sure everyone has enough food and water."*

Some actions which children suggested **specifically related to the cost of healthy food**:

*"Maybe in the shops they should make fruit and veg cheaper."*

*"Or they can make sweets higher so that nobody can buy them."*

*"If you can make the veggies and the good things you're meant to eat lower, then people can know that they can buy them."*

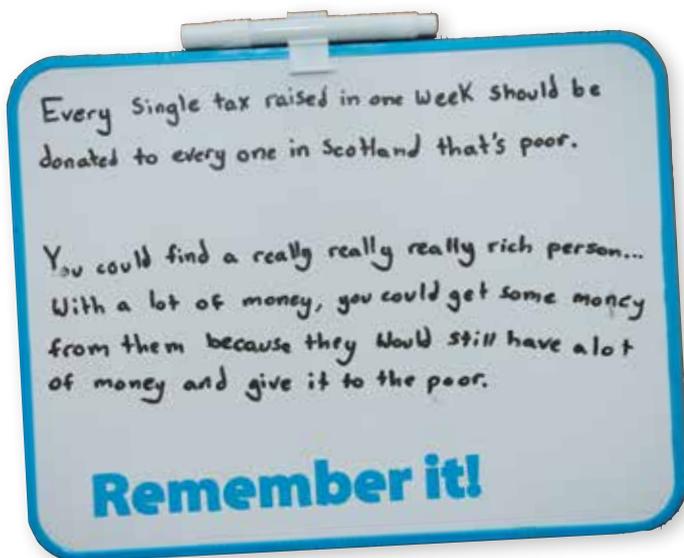
Other suggestions related **to health and social policy more generally**:

*"They could make a new law that you have to eat fruit, they could say that everybody needs to have 5 a day. Maybe can say you have to."*

*"We can make some rules for the parents who don't really care about fruit... Maybe they could say, you're banned from the sweets and unhealthy things for like a month or so and that would get them into eating fruit and when this is over, they can't eat the sweets because they're too used to the fruit."*



Some children suggested actions related to **redistributing money**:



Though not all children agreed on **how far these measures should go**:

*"I think you should try and persuade them but you don't force them because it's their money and they've worked hard. Even if they won the lottery, it's their money, and it's just chance, but you shouldn't say you have to give it to the poor because it's their money."*

Many of the children focused on the role of **charitable responses**, though emphasised the need for these to be healthy and not too far away, including suggesting delivery as an option:

*"Saying we want you to go to a food bank, helping you if you need to travel a lot, and asking if you have any healthy food."*

*"I think we should try and encourage people to give money to other people, if people are poor and they don't have enough to get what they need."*

*"Well, I think we should make a little charity thing and then people can help and children in poverty get, it's sort of like a food bank thing, but with food and clothes and water and everything that someone would need. You could maybe encourage people to help the charity and get more things for it."*

*"They can sometimes buy some food and deliver it to people."*

One child **emphasised the unfairness of relying on others for food**, they explained that by living they meant having food, a house, clothes, and being able to go places:

*"Living is more important than just surviving."*

Children often made suggestions of rights-based actions, but did not identify them as such. When asked specifically about **whether every child has the right to food** during the agree/disagree game children unanimously agreed, though recognised the challenges:

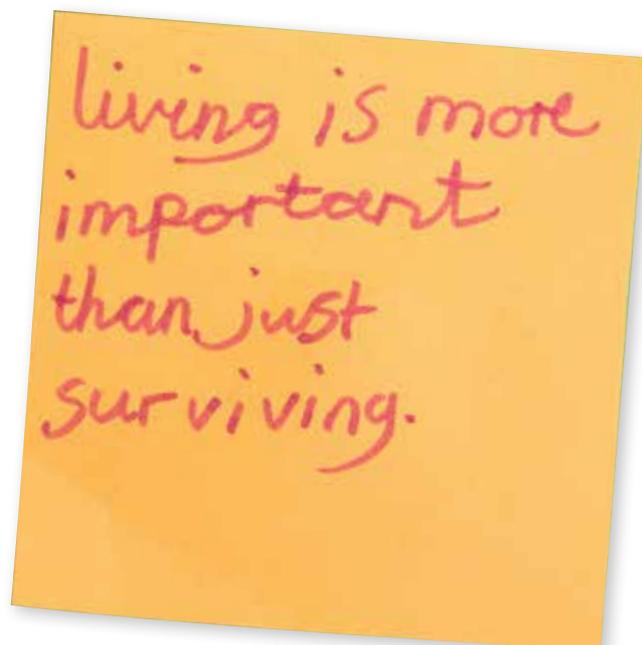
*"People don't agree. They actually do have the right but people don't agree to have the right, so they don't respect their rights."*

*"I agree because if you are a doctor, you are meant to do everything you can to save someone, whether you're helping a robber, someone who's a terrorist... You're always meant to do the same thing. And people need to live."*

Children also talked about ways of **making sure actions are working**:

*"You could say 'if we help you, you have to promise you write to us' and say, like if you have kids, yeah our kids are safer and more healthy, and they've eaten more and more happy, and they've got more foods."*

*"They never run out of food, they always have loads and loads and loads of food. They always organise it before, planning each meal out. For breakfast, they organise it the night before... they always have everything planned out."*



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## How could politicians be better at listening to children?

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During the Minister activity children offered views on how children's views could be heard by decision-makers. Children were keen to be involved, and offered views on including other marginalised people too – particularly people in poverty and disabled people.

Children were aware that issues around food insecurity affected all children, or 'normal people' but they also highlighted **particular groups of children who should be involved:**

*"People who don't have enough money."*

*"The ones who are born homeless."*

*"Children who don't get enough vegetables and healthy food."*

*"The younger children, because the older children have had enough time being alive."*

*"... if a kid's disabled, not think 'oh, they're disabled, they're not as important'. They should treat everyone as an equal."*

Children had lots of ideas for **practical ways of including children** in dialogue around food insecurity, including by listening carefully and building respectful relationships. Some ways to do this were to:

*"... listen to everything that every child says to her and take it all in and write it down and do all she can."*

*"... listen to people's ideas and see if they can get all of them because there might be all different ideas and maybe they could use them all and combine them into one big idea."*

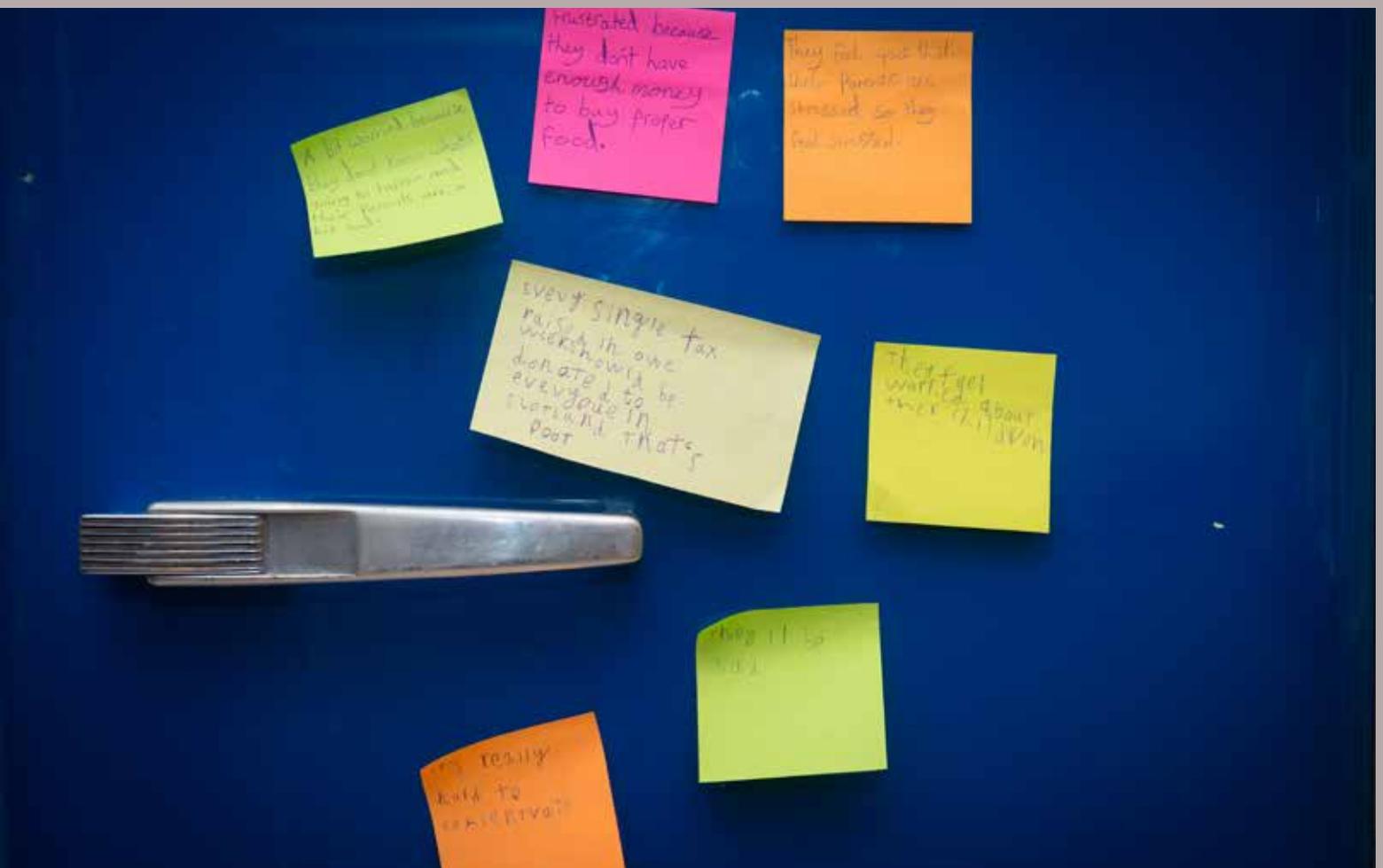
*"... speak to them nicely because they're having a very hard time without any food."*

*"... look at them when you're talking to them."*

*"... [not] stamp your feet too loud when you're walking."*

*"... stay focused."*





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## Conclusion

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This small scale research activity has provided great insight into how children understand the causes of and solutions to food insecurity.

This research demonstrates that children from quite a young age have a detailed understanding of what food children need to grow big and strong and this largely aligns with food that is healthy. Children were familiar with key policy initiatives focused on encouraging healthy eating habits, notably on eating five portions of fruit and vegetables a day. They were in favour of eating a varied and balanced diet, and they were particularly mindful of the immediate and long-term risks of eating too much sugar.

Despite a strong understanding of the types and range of food required for children to live a healthy life, now and in the future, children were aware that not all children were able to access or benefit from eating nutritious food. They explained that not all children can or do eat the foods that they need, while expressing strong concern about the physical, emotional and behavioural consequences associated with a poor diet.

Although many children gave significance to personal responsibility in food choices, they were clear that the primary reason for a lack of access to nutritious and appropriate food was a lack of money. They were sensitive to the challenges both for children and for their parents of there not being enough money in the home to buy the foods they associated with children growing big and strong. They described immediate consequences for children's health and well-being, such as lack of energy, lack of concentration, problems arising from tooth decay, general ill-health and the potential for starvation.

Children felt that the pressures in a household that did not have enough money to afford a range of nutritious food would impact on the amount of food available, what meal times were like – including social pressures such as eating together, and where the families got food from. Children felt that parents would experience stress, anxiety, sadness and frustration, and that children would feel worried, sad, fearful, and poor knowing the challenges parents faced. Children also thought that children may feel as if they could do something to help.

Children recognised the responsibilities of numerous adults, including politicians to solving food insecurity and associated challenges. The ideas children suggested ranged from controlling the prices of healthy and unhealthy foods, redistributing money including through taxation, and supporting charitable solutions. Not all children felt that food banks were a fair solution, with one child discussing the importance of living over just surviving, involving having food, a house, clothes and being able to go places.

A number of the solutions children suggested were rooted in children's rights – whilst they did not identify them as such initially, all children agreed that children have the right to food, but that there were a number of barriers to realising those rights.

Children wanted to be involved in shaping the solutions to food insecurity, they were perceptive, articulate, and had lots of ideas for how decision-makers could be better at listening to their voices as well as the voices of marginalised people – with particular emphasis on not ignoring people in poverty and disabled people.

This research has highlighted that children as young as five years of age have a nuanced understanding of food insecurity. This is perhaps not surprising given the growing incidence of food insecurity and the visibility of emergency food aid provision – both in Scotland and globally, presented to children in various mediums from food bank drives in schools, to supermarket collections, to humanitarian aid advertisements on television.

This research affirms previous findings on children's perceptive knowledge and awareness of both nutritional and non-nutritional aspects of food insecurity, notably on the physical and social-emotional implications of food insecurity.

The greatest insight of this research is of children's desire and ability to solve the challenges they see in the world around them. This raises a number of questions about the adequacy of provision for the inclusion of children in public decision-making more generally. Further valuable research in this area would be to support co-designing forums with children for their effective participation.

A key final reflection for readers is how in our communities and organisations we could create spaces for listening to children and acting on what they tell us.



## Appendix – Methodology

Children for three of the groups were recruited from Home-Start groups in Renfrewshire, Glasgow and Dundee. Children in the other group were recruited through a school in Edinburgh. The Edinburgh session operated as a pilot, and the host school was a UNICEF UK registered rights respecting school, potentially heightening the awareness of food insecurity as a children's rights issue. In the authors'

opinion, children in the Home-Start groups were equally knowledgeable about children's rights. Quotes used throughout this report represent contributions from across the sessions.

The primary criterion for inclusion was being between 7-9 years old, facilitators requested gender balance and ethnic diversity from host settings in selecting children for the research.

### Of the 32 children:

Age	5 years	6 years	7 years	8 years	9 years	10 years	11 years
No. of children	3	5	7	2	4	5	6

Of the 32 children, 19 were girls and 13 were boys.

Of the 32 children, 10 were from a Black or minority ethnic background.

Of the 32 children, 3 had a disability.

The facilitators collected no information on the socio-economic circumstances of children's families. The cross-section of families receiving support from Home-Start is not indicative of any socio-economic group. The Edinburgh school is an affluent area though has a broader catchment area.

Informed consent was obtained both from children and parents through comprehensive consent forms, a sample is available on request. Facilitators introduced each session

by briefing children on what would happen, their right to anonymity unless a disclosure highlighted a considerable risk to themselves or the safety of others, and their ability to leave at any time if they wanted to.

Families were given a gift voucher as a thank you in recognition of offering their time to take part in the research. Families will be given a copy of this report and the opportunity to share further questions and insights with facilitators.

### Footnotes

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<sup>2</sup> T Ridge, *Living with poverty: a review of the literature on children's and families' experiences of poverty* (University of Bath on behalf of Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), 2009)

<sup>3</sup> Trussell Trust, *Latest Stats 2015/16* (Trussell Trust, 2016)

<sup>4</sup> D Hirsch, *Minimum Income Standard UK* (JRF, 2015)

<sup>5</sup> Scottish Government, *Poverty and Income Inequality in Scotland: 2014/15* (Scottish Government, 2016)

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<sup>14</sup> M Fram et al., 'The Measurement of Food Insecurity among Children: Review of literature and concept note,' Innocenti Working Papers no. 2015-08, UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, Florence



Telephone: 0131 345 5350

Young people's freephone: 0800 019 1179

Email: [info@cypcs.org.uk](mailto:info@cypcs.org.uk)

Text: 07702 335 720

 [facebook.com/cypcs](https://facebook.com/cypcs)

 [@cypcs](https://twitter.com/cypcs)

Write: Rosebery House

9 Haymarket Terrace

Edinburgh

EH12 5EZ

[www.cypcs.org.uk](http://www.cypcs.org.uk)



Home-Start UK

Hayweight House

23 Lauriston Street

Edinburgh

EH3 9DQ

T 0131 281 0871

E [scotland@home-start.org.uk](mailto:scotland@home-start.org.uk)

W [www.home-start.org.uk](http://www.home-start.org.uk)



Nourish Scotland

Summerhall

Edinburgh

EH9 1PL

T 0131 226 1497

E [info@nourishscotland.org.uk](mailto:info@nourishscotland.org.uk)

W [www.nourishscotland.org](http://www.nourishscotland.org)