

Annual Report

2022-2023

**"Attending the
Young Advisors Group
gives you new skills and ways of
thinking. It equips you with ways
that help you in all walks of life."**

Farrell, Young Advisor



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WHO ARE WE?

WE WORK TO MAKE SURE THE LAWS THAT AFFECT YOUR LIVES ARE FAIR.

WE HELP YOU UNDERSTAND HOW VALUABLE AND IMPORTANT YOUR RIGHTS ARE.

WE MAKE SURE ADULTS IN SCOTLAND KNOW MORE ABOUT YOUR RIGHTS SO THEY CAN SEE WHERE THEY SHOULD MAKE CHANGES.

WE PUT YOU AT THE HEART OF OUR WORK AND WILL LISTEN AND LEARN FROM YOU.

WE WORK WITH YOUNG ADVISORS ON THE RIGHTS ISSUES THAT CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE TOLD US MATTER MOST.



WHO IS THE COMMISSIONER?

In May 2017, Bruce Adamson was given the job of Children and Young People's Commissioner for six years. He is Scotland's third Commissioner since the role was created by the Scottish Parliament in 2003. This is his final report as Commissioner.

The Commissioner is someone with authority and powers to promote and protect the human rights of all children and young people in Scotland. That is everyone under 18 and everyone up to 21 who is care experienced.

Every year we report to you about our work. This report covers from April 2022 until the end of March 2023. You can read the full report we sent to Parliament on [our website](#).

BRUCE ADAMSON SAYS...

This is my last report as Children and Young People's Commissioner and it has been the best job in the world. I want to say a big thank you to all the children and young people who have helped me do the job. I know the Young Advisors will continue to fiercely champion children's rights, with the office by their side, and I want to thank every Young Advisor who has been involved over the last six years. I want to thank all the staff at the Commissioner's office – both past and present – who have supported me.

YOUNG ADVISORS GROUP



"Mental Health is one of the most pressing issues facing young people in Scotland today. I have had the chance to contribute to a project that will benefit all young people in Scotland and help those when they most need it." Marcus

"Being a Young Advisor gives you so many opportunities; I've been fortunate to talk to someone in the UN about Scotland's progression in young people's human rights, work on multiple issue groups, interview for staff recruitment, even online international work, and so much more!" Imaan

Our Young Advisors guide, influence, and support our work. They are aged between 13 and 17, come from different backgrounds and live all over Scotland. Here are just a few of the things they have done this year...

- Used the Commissioner's powers to start an investigation into school counselling.
- When the office was responding to policies from the Scottish Government, they shared their opinions, views, and experiences to help us form our responses.
- Blogged on our website on rights issues that mattered to them.
- Helped plan and host our 18th birthday celebrations.
- Were involved in choosing new members of staff.
- Helped design a brand new Child Rights Defenders tartan.

WHAT HAVE WE BEEN DOING?

"It has never been more pressing to ensure that children's rights are granted stronger protection in law. How much longer do children have to wait for the Scottish Government to make their rights real?"

Bruce Adamson, Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland

PUTTING CHILDREN'S RIGHTS INTO LAW – INCORPORATION OF THE UNCRC

We have been fighting alongside children and young people to get your human rights made part of our law. It gives you much more protection, and means that when your rights are not respected, you can challenge this in court.

These human rights are listed in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). In 2021, the Scottish Parliament voted for it to become part of our law. But the highest court in the land, the Supreme Court, said the Scottish Government needed to make some changes. The Scottish Government STILL has not made these changes, and children are still waiting. We have been pushing the Scottish Government to finish the job and make rights real in law.

HITTING THE ROAD!

Listening to you is essential. Last year, when we were allowed to travel after Covid restrictions, we kicked off our Participation Roadshow. We visited children and young people across Scotland, and we carried on doing that this year. We heard about child poverty, issues around the right to health, and problems facing young asylum-seekers. We visited schools, nurseries, and youth clubs from the Western Isles to Orkney to Dumfries. We have visited Scout troops and Squirrel dreys, and Bruce also promoted Rights Challenge Badge – designed by the office with Scouts Scotland – at the annual Blair Atholl Jamboree in Perthshire, in July.



HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO US!

We celebrated our 18th birthday this year and that means the office has been championing children's rights for a whole childhood. Bruce had great fun celebrating with children and staff at a nursery in Linlithgow, West Lothian, and we threw a party at the Scottish Parliament, which was hosted by Lewis and Paige, two of our Young Advisors. Bruce – and Professor Kathleen Marshall and Tam Baillie, who both used to be the Children's Commissioner – recorded a three-part podcast. They answered questions from children, and young people created the music for it. Here's to the next 18 years!



"We've created an event tonight where you can visit different areas and meet some of the children and other young people working with us. You can also see some of the office's work over the 18 years."

"You can meet young people from Big Noise, who have created a piece of music especially for our birthday and we've been working with Scouts Scotland on something super special... so go for a nosy!"

Paige, Young Advisor who co-hosted 18th birthday party at Scottish Parliament



CLIMATE JUSTICE

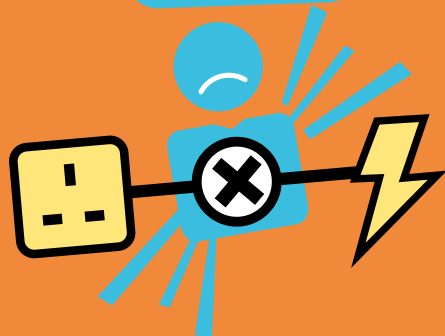
The UN is looking at how children's rights are affected by climate change so we asked very young children what the environment means to them by sharing one word, sound or picture. They told us that they were sad, upset and angry about the impact on plants, people, and the environment and we used their input to report back to the UN.

**"Tiny bees",
"I feel amazing" and
"I feel a tear coming
out of my eye when I am
happy", some comments
from children on how the
environment makes
them feel.**



POVERTY IS A HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUE

The UK and Scottish Governments must tackle poverty because it affects every part of a child's life. This year, we told the Scottish Government to do much more, like giving all children free school meals and giving more money to families who need it. We teamed up with the Children's Commissioners from Northern Ireland and Wales to push the UK Government to do more to help families and tackle the cost-of-living crisis. We have been worried about the impact of rising energy costs on families and have worked hard to press for Ofgem (who regulates the energy companies) to step in and make changes and for the UK Government to do all it can to make sure that children and young people are not living in unheated homes with no way to cook food or wash clothes.



EDUCATION

We worked on issues around education, such as:

- Reviewing exams and assessments, and extending free school meals.
- Responding to the Scottish Government with our Young Advisors when they asked if school uniform should be compulsory.
- Setting up a meeting between the Scottish Government and two unaccompanied asylum-seeking children to look at the rules around access to education funding. They should have the same right to funding as other children in Scotland.

Our Young Advisors reported that uniform rules were not always consistently applied. Girls reported that they felt they were subject to more rules than boys. They also felt it was unfair that boys are not allowed to wear shorts in hot weather.

ASYLUM-SEEKERS' HUMAN RIGHTS

It does not matter if a child is born in Scotland or moved here because their family thought life would be safer – if they are in Scotland, they have the same rights as all other children. We worked with charities and other organisations to make sure women and babies who are seeking asylum were moved from cramped and unsafe housing, and we told authorities that they should not be housed in totally unsuitable hotels either.

We told the UK Government that they should not use harmful and inaccurate ways of working out child refugees' ages and we told the Scottish Government that children who have been forced to move to the UK should not be treated like criminals, but should be cared for. All these examples have violated children's rights.

**"This Bill treats refugee and asylum-seeking children and young people as undesirable lawbreakers, drains on local resources, and with less entitlement to human rights than other children.
This is simply wrong.
They are children. They are not illegal.
Their rights must not be diminished."**



INTERNATIONAL WORK

The office is a member of the European Network of Ombudspersons for Children (ENOC). The group works together to make sure children's rights are upheld all across Europe. ENOC helps young people from the continent who are passionate about defending children's rights to be part of the European Network of Young Advisers (ENYA), like our Young Advisors Faye and Sophie.

Other international work has included:

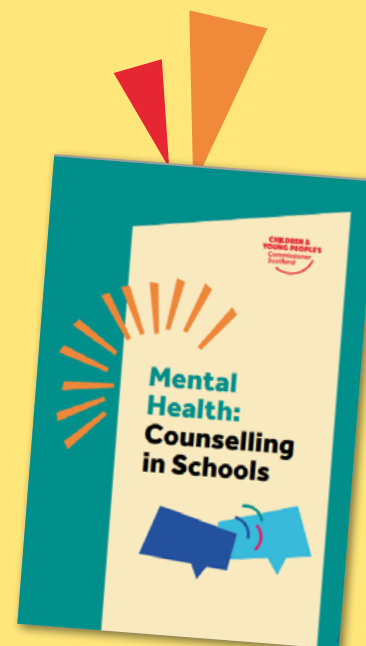
- Working with the children's commissioners of Northern Ireland and Wales to report to the UN what the UK and devolved governments are doing well and doing badly in children's rights.
- Supporting Young Advisors to take part in a Europe-wide project on climate justice.
- Four children and young people from Scotland joined Commissioner Bruce to speak to the UN as part of their examination of how the UK is doing on children's rights as part of #TeamScotlandUN.
- Commissioner Bruce speaking at the UN's Universal Periodic Review (UPR) to tell them about the delay in UNCRC incorporation, children in Scotland being sent to prison, and issues around mental health and poverty.



INVESTIGATIONS

If we think people who make decisions, like councils or the government, are not respecting your human rights, we can use our legal powers to investigate and demand changes.

This year was special because our Mental Health Investigation was the first time anywhere that a Children's Commissioner handed over these powers to young people to use. Our Mental Health Investigators decided to examine school counselling. They worked planned the investigation, decided what evidence was needed from local authorities, considered that evidence, and made recommendations.



LAWS AND POLICIES

We use our knowledge to make sure laws and policies that are being created or changed consider children's rights. We have submitted evidence to the Scottish Parliament, Scottish Government, and international bodies like the UN, and we have raised concerns about lots of human rights issues.

COMMUNICATING ABOUT RIGHTS

It is important that children, young people, and adults know and understand children's human rights. We highlight rights issues through our website and social media, the press, television and radio, and podcasts. Commissioner Bruce has also spoken at conferences to raise awareness of rights. We always include young people's voices in our media work whenever we can.

We have contributed to the media on issues like:

- UNCRC incorporation
- Poverty
- Racism
- Education, exams and assessments
- Digital rights
- The rights of refugees and asylum-seekers, and
- The rights of children in the justice system



GETTING ADVICE

In 2022/23, people contacted us about exams and appeals, support for learning and mental health. There is not enough help available and the pandemic has made this worse. We will keep highlighting our concerns to the Scottish Government.

You can contact us if you need advice about your human rights. Email inbox@cypcs.org.uk or call 0770 233 5720 (texts will be charged at your standard network rate) and we will get back to you.

WHAT'S HAPPENING NEXT YEAR?

It is a very exciting year for us as we welcome a brand new Commissioner. We are sad to say goodbye to Bruce but looking forward to welcoming Nicola Killean when she starts later in the year. We will continue to work with our Young Advisors and focus on poverty, mental health, and climate justice. And, of course, we will keep demanding children's rights are made a part of law.

We will keep fighting to make sure your rights are protected, respected, and fulfilled.

"Being a Young Advisor means so much to me. I feel like I am helping children and young people to have better lives and I can't wait to see what the next year is going to bring!"

Lewis, Young Advisor

THANKS

A HUGE THANKS TO ALL THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WHO HAVE HELPED US WITH OUR WORK THIS YEAR, ESPECIALLY TO OUR YOUNG ADVISORS. WE ARE SO LUCKY TO HAVE YOU ALL WORKING ALONGSIDE US. A SPECIAL THANKS TO BRUCE AS HE LEAVES OFFICE. HE IS A TRUE HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER, AND WE WISH HIM ALL THE VERY BEST FOR THE FUTURE.



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