CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE'S Commissioner Scotland

Our Plan 2024-28

“ Beaches can have gross garbage in it if you’re swimming.” ”

“ It’s hard to access mental health support. ”

“ Mum and Dad are struggling to pay bills. Everything is so expensive. ”

“ Adults need to step back and see why our behaviour isn’t great. There’s always an underlying thing. ”

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From the Young Advisors

We are a group of young people who support and shape the Commissioner's work and we're passionate about rights. We have been involved in this Plan from the beginning from hearing about Nicola's very first ideas of what she would like to do to listen to children and young people. We helped shape the resources to support children and young people to answer questions about the issues that mattered to them as well as how the Commissioner should work. That resource – called Your Rights, Our Plan – was launched on World Children's Day at two online assemblies, and one Young Advisor co-hosted the assembly with Nicola. Hosting the live assembly was nerve-wracking but fun. It was a big conversation about rights and it was great to see people from all across Scotland telling us what they thought. The other assembly for primary aged children was co-hosted by an amazing P6 pupil from Bun-sgoil Taobh na Pàirce so parts of this assembly were in Gaelic too.

"We have been involved in this Plan from the beginning."

We got together as a group to discuss our views and completed the consultation questions too – of course we had to be involved in that! And three of us helped run the roundtable meeting for adults that was held in Glasgow. It was a great opportunity to be involved in another important part of the project and us leading the session set a good precedent for the day. It was really interesting to hear the similarities and links between different organisations all working for children and young people.

It was also useful to hear all the support there too. There was a real determination in the room to put children's rights at the forefront of people's minds. We also heard a lot of excitement about incorporation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and about how it will work.

One of the big themes at the roundtable was participation, and our participation as a group was just one of the ways that children and young people's voices have made a big impact in this Plan. The new Plan matters because it is a compilation of ideas and views from children and adults, and it is very exciting to see it come to fruition. Our group has just expanded with more young human rights defenders joining us and we can't wait to all work together to make progress. We are excited to see how much we as Young Advisors and Nicola and the team can achieve over the next four years.

About the Children and Young People's Commissioner

Nicola Killean is the Children and Young People's Commissioner for Scotland. She became the Commissioner in August 2023 and has a six-year term.

The Commissioner works with her team to promote and protect the rights of children and young people in Scotland.

That is:

- Everyone under 18, and
- Everyone up to 21 who is in care or care experienced

The law that created the Commissioner's role says that the Commissioner must:

- Promote awareness and understanding of children's rights.
- Involve children and young people in the office's work.
- Make sure laws, policies and practice affecting children and young people's lives are fair and respect their rights.
- Promote and carry out research to progress children's rights.
- Share examples of adults working well to fulfil children's rights so others can learn from it.

The Commissioner also has legal powers which we can use in some situations where we are concerned that human rights promises to children and young people are not being kept. We use these powers of investigation and litigation (taking action in court) when we think we can make a bigger change. Our office's role is to hold people in power to account and take action when children's rights are breached.

Our values of leadership, participation, independence, bravery and respect guide us. They were developed from the office's work with children and young people across Scotland.

From the Commissioner

It is my privilege to be the Children and Young People's Commissioner for Scotland.

This is a special time for Scotland. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) has been incorporated into Scots law, all of the UNCRC Act's powers will commence in July 2024. Implementation of the Act won't just change our law, it will also lead to culture change, particularly when it comes to children whose rights are already most at risk. Children's rights will no longer be an afterthought, they must be embedded at the start of law, policy, and practice.

But there are children in Scotland who are unable to enjoy all their rights, and we are determined not to accept this.

I am delighted to share my office's new Strategic Plan which will guide our work, over the next four years. It has been built around children and young people's views. It sets out my commitment and duties to work towards a country that provides everything all children are entitled to and to hold to account those responsible for delivering that.

When I became Commissioner in August 2023 my immediate priority, and my duty as Commissioner, was to listen to children and young people to inform my approach.

We are lucky to have an incredible team of Young Advisors who helped shape our work around the Strategic Plan. On World Children's Day, we launched our consultation for this plan, building on previous engagement where children had outlined important issues. I listened to children and young people with different backgrounds and experiences, in their own communities and online. I want to thank everyone who shared their time and energy.

They told us about the gaps they experience in accessing and enjoying their rights. They shared their concerns about their experiences now and their worries for the future. We consulted stakeholders and they told us clearly not to avoid the hard challenges. We have a lot of work to do.

We will work with purpose and provide leadership to protect and promote the rights of children and young people.

Children have asked me to be persistent and said 'do not give up'.

I'll do this by challenging and championing people and organisations to ensure Scotland's children and young people do enjoy their rights. We'll help identify where access to justice needs to be improved when the rights of children and young people are breached. The work will be both broad, and it will be targeted.

This is a time for us to be ambitious and demanding for a Scotland where every child can enjoy their rights. It's also a difficult time – the cost-of-living crisis, the pandemic aftermath, and global events have all had a damaging effect on children's rights. But we look forward to collaborating with those who work with, for, and on behalf of children to tackle these challenges. We'll work towards a Scotland that places children's rights at its heart with children and young people guiding our work every step of the way.

> **"Children have asked me to be persistent and said 'do not give up'."**

Nicola Killean

Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland

Our strategic aims for 2024-28

Leadership

Children and young people will be meaningfully involved in decision-making and duty bearers held accountable for realising children's rights.

Protect

Laws, policies and practice will fulfil children's rights, and where rights breaches happen children will have improved access to justice.

What we want to achieve

Promote

An ambitious and positive culture of children's rights, where awareness and understanding of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child contribute to improvements for children.

Our strategic objectives

Leadership

We will:

- Undertake **action research** with children and young people to make visible to decision-makers how children are experiencing their rights in Scotland.
- Champion and challenge leaders to improve national and local practice which **involves children and young people** in decision-making and reform.
- Hold duty bearers **accountable** for decision–making and delivery of commitments to children and young people.
- Highlight **barriers and gaps** in knowledge, resources, or ways of working which affect the realisation of children's rights.
- Commit to continuous improvement to maximise impact and keep under **review resource requirements** to fulfil statutory duties and use of powers.

Protect

We will:

- **Review and influence law, policy and practice** in relation to children's rights, learning from and influencing international human rights mechanisms where it adds value.
- Use our **legal powers** to challenge systemic breaches of children's rights.
- Actively seek opportunities to **collaborate with others** to address deep-rooted challenges for children whose rights are most at risk.
- Address **discrimination** throughout our activity on priority issues. .

What we will do

Promote

We will:

- Raise awareness and understanding of how to take a **children's rights approach** in decision-making and improving services.
- Create resources with children and young people that support a **broad understanding** of children's rights and how they should be experienced.
- Provide **targeted engagement** for children and young people whose rights are most at risk.
- Commit to continuous improvement in making our communications **accessible and inclusive**.

Assessing our impact

Leadership

- Through regular engagement, children and young people will track progress with us.
- Our research will be accessible and used by decision-makers to inform their work and influence improvements.
- Our tracking will improve public transparency of where duty bearers are not delivering on existing commitments, holding them accountable to act.
- Through highlighting barriers and gaps in embedding children's rights, improvement activity will be actioned.

Protect

- Inviting feedback, listening to sector stakeholders, and seeking evidence that our child rights expertise has influenced law, policy and practice, we will better understand progress and impact.
- Learning from children's rights breaches leads to changes in law, policy or practice and (if appropriate) work can be done to provide redress and access to justice.
- Our collaborations with stakeholders and groups of children whose rights are most at risk will inform and influence duty bearers to make progress on deep-rooted challenges.
- We will increase understanding of changes required to address forms of discrimination experienced by children and young people.

How we will know our work is making a difference

Promote

- Meaningful collaboration with children and duty bearers will increase understanding of good practice and increase child rights-based decision-making.
- Resources created with children and young people to articulate ways in which their rights are experienced within a range of settings will be used and helpful to others.
- Engagement with children whose rights are most at risk is meaningful and creates positive change.
- Our information and resources are available for people with a range of accessibility requirements.

Our ways of working

We will:

- Ensure children's human rights are the foundation of our work.
- Involve children and young people throughout all our work, seeking to engage and empower under-represented groups and listen to diverse views.
- Work alongside a group of Young Advisors to support and shape the work of the office, holding us to account for meeting our objectives.
- Prioritise work to support children and young people whose rights are most at risk.
- Promote access to justice for breaches of children's rights.
- Act independently as an Independent Children's Rights Institution (ICRI), in line with the Paris Principles, the Venice Principles and UNCRC General Comment No 2, to protect and promote children's rights in Scotland.
- Work with clear direction on our priority issues, while leaving enough flexibility to respond to those that emerge.
- Deliver a mix of short-term and longer-term projects to either respond to opportunities to influence change or focus on system wide issues.
- Hold collaborative child-friendly spaces to encourage progress on key issues.

As a public body, we will:

- Fulfil our corporate parenting duty to protect and promote the human rights of care experienced children and young people. We will use our unique role to address issues which are adversely affecting care experienced children and young people up to the age of 21, and their views will inform our work on priority issues.
- Commit to continuous improvement in governance, providing assurance that our operations and activities are the most effective and economical use of public funds.
- Work in a manner that is accountable with honesty, integrity, fairness and transparency.
- Live our values, empowering our staff team to deliver within a supportive culture which builds resilience.
- Support a culture of equality, diversity and inclusion in the organisation through ongoing training and development.
- Review the extent to which the views of children and young people with protected characteristics are being included by decision-makers and seek to address gaps.

How children and young people were involved in our plan

Our Strategic Plan is based on children and young people's experiences, insights, and opinions. We offered different ways to engage with us and help us develop our plan.

To create this plan, we have:

- Reviewed over 130 pieces of evidence and research on children and young people's views.
- Analysed responses from over 5000 children and young people to our survey.
- Engaged with around 7000 children in our online assemblies.
- Involved 375 children and young people in our direct engagement sessions.

What children and young people told us both before the consultation in the review of evidence and during our engagement gives us the foundation to build our Strategic Plan on their clear priorities. This helps us direct our resources accordingly.

How children and young people took part

Be Involved

Direct engagement

We worked directly with groups of children and young people in their own communities, schools and groups as well as online.

Targeted creative partnerships

We commissioned some organisations to work with targeted groups of children and young people to respond to the consultation in creative ways. The outputs have included videos, music, podcasts.

Online assemblies

Along with young presenters, we hosted two online assemblies with e-Sgoil which over 7000 children and young people took part in.

Smart Survey

We created a six-question Smart Survey for groups of children and young people to discuss their views and complete.

Evidence review

We reviewed over 130 pieces of research from 2018 onwards to collate the issues that children and young people have been consistently raising.

This informed what we then asked in our Smart Survey.

Resource pack

We created a resource pack to support understanding about the issues, and about the functions of the office and how we work.

This pack included videos, slide presentations, activities, and discussion prompts..

Young Advisors Group

Our Young Advisors Group was embedded in the process from the beginning. This included informing the methodology, creating resources, taking part in in-person sessions and co-facilitating stakeholder roundtables.

Priority issues

Our evidence review shows that **poverty, education, mental health, climate change** and **discrimination** are all priorities. The golden thread through these issues is the call from children and young people to be **more involved in decision-making.**

We asked children and young people what is most important to them now, and what will matter in the future. Their priorities are our priorities.

The issues they consistently raised as the top priorities for right now are **poverty, education,** and **mental health.** We will start this strategic plan period by focusing on these areas.

We will work on:

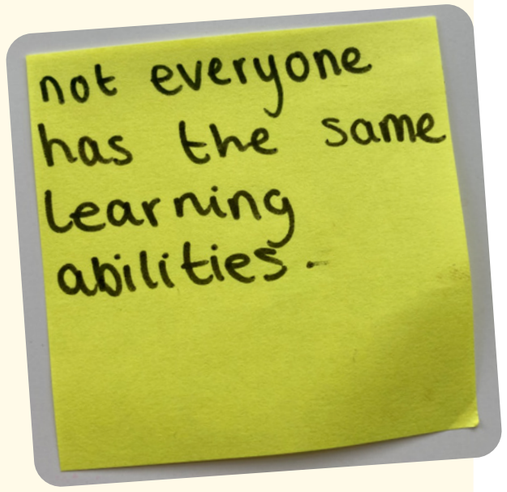
Poverty

High levels of child poverty and its lifelong impact on children, young people, families and communities continues to be a major concern for the office. We will pay particular attention to the decisions made by duty bearers and whether they are informed by what matters most to children and young people growing up in poverty. We will provide challenge where vital supports are missing and children's rights are most at risk.

“ Some families are struggling, all they want is the best. ”

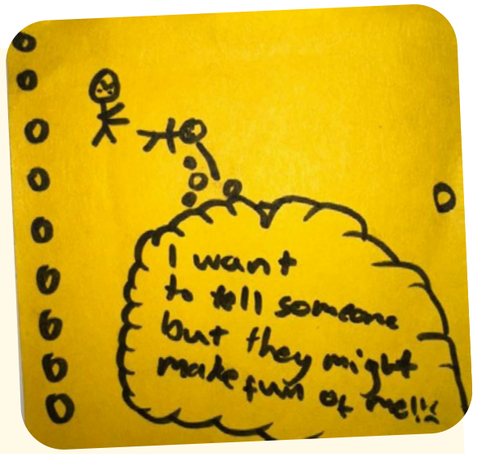
Education

Education provision in Scotland does not meet the needs of all children and young people. There is a unique opportunity for the current education reform agenda to address inadequacies, particularly the difficulties children with additional support needs face accessing support. We will focus on putting children and young people's views, needs and rights at the heart of the education reform agenda and decision-making.



Mental Health

Children and young people continue to be concerned that mental health support is not available until they reach crisis point. They want school, community, third sector and health support to be connected and responsive so they can access it in a way that works for them. We will focus on what duty bearers must do to address these concerns and whether existing commitments are being fulfilled.



“ I get worried about the animals and the heat of the planet. ”

We will also work on:

Climate change and discrimination

Both issues continue to be important to children and young people. Those we consulted recognised that we must prioritise but challenged us to continue to keep their concerns about climate change visible in our work and to thread concerns about discrimination throughout our work.

The priority themes are interconnected, and children's rights are interdependent. Children and young people don't experience their lives through narrow issue-based categories. We will continue to take a broad view of children and young people's lives in Scotland.

Emerging and future issues will continue to be kept under consideration.

“ My school doesn't have flashing lights for deaf people, only alarms for hearing. ”

What children and young people told us

"I love playing outside with my gran and pops!"

"I would work on discrimination in school because I see it happening every day."

"Everyone learns differently and classes need to change to support that."

"Good mental health...you won't feel overwhelmed, you'll feel lighter. Family and friends are very important."

"I worry about climate change and how everyone says to do something but they don't let us."

As part of the consultation, we also asked children and young people what skills and qualities they wanted their Commissioner to have.

Children and young people told us their Commissioner should...

- Be smart and knowledgeable about children's rights
- Be an amazing communicator and good at listening
- Be kind and patient
- Be a good leader and have confidence

They value....

- **Honesty** – "It wouldn't be the same if she lied."
- **Understanding** – "You must understand our lives to be able to help us."
- **Persistence** – "She can't just give up."

"We would find a way to bring prices down so that is affordable to live. We would find places for people to stay who are homeless."

"Work on speaking about mental health, like it's not scary, or like, embarrassing."

Your Rights, Our Plan

"We would make a safe space in school which everyone can access in case they are struggling with anxiety, stress, mental health challenges, or additional support needs."

"Focus on talking to children, visiting schools and clubs."

"Would like to teach children about their rights so they know their voices can be heard."

"It would be good for young people to know how the UNCRC affects us."

"If the world had no bullying, people would feel happy."

Consultation with adults

We held three roundtables to ask experts from organisations who work with, and for children and young people to explore how our role and unique powers can complement and add value. Over 60 organisations contributed their views. We also consulted with parents of babies and parents of disabled children in our direct engagement sessions.

Governance

The Commissioner's Office

The Children and Young People's Commissioner is:

- an independent Parliamentary officeholder.
- the Accountable Officer and employer of their staff.
- independent of the Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament in the operation of the office's statutory functions.
- a Public Body with accountabilities that are wide ranging and include finance and governance, efficiency and economical activities, transparency in all activities, data protection, freedom of information and the environment.

The Commissioner is supported by a specialist team with skills in participation, law, research, information, communications, strategy, and corporate services.

Who we report to

Scottish Parliament Corporate Body

We are accountable to the Scottish Parliament Corporate Body (SPCB) which provides our yearly budget. The SPCB provide us with a strategic framework in governance and operational expectations via a memorandum of understanding for our office.

Children and Young People

The Commissioner ultimately works for children and young people and embeds feedback from them into her work. Our Young Advisors group holds the office to account for meeting our objectives through regular reviews of our work.

Advisory Audit Board

We are accountable to our Advisory Audit Board. Their remit is to review and approve our Annual Report and Accounts. The reports and recommendations from external and internal audit are also reported to our Advisory Audit Board.

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE'S Commissioner Scotland

Auditor General for Scotland

Concerns about our governance can be reported by the Auditor General for Scotland. Our Annual Report and Accounts are Audited via an appointed external auditor. In 2023-24 our office appointed an internal auditor.

United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child

We submit periodical reports as part of giving evidence to the Committee on the Rights of the Child in order to inform their examination of the Scottish Government's progress on children's rights.

Equality outcomes

The Equality Act 2010 introduced a duty on public sector organisations, including the Commissioner's office, to produce a set of equality outcomes. We will report progress towards our current equality outcomes, set as part of this Strategic Plan, through our Annual Reports each year. Our equality outcomes are:

1 Address discrimination though our activity on priority issues.

The Public Sector Equality Duty requires us to advance equality of opportunity for children who share protected characteristics. Children and young people have told us they feel strongly about issues of discrimination, and we will pay particular attention to this throughout our work.

2 Commit to continuous improvement in making our communications accessible and inclusive.

We've reviewed both our digital communications and our website and have found areas where we could make our communications more accessible. Improvement activity will prioritise our website, as a primary point of access to our work.

3 Support a culture of equality, diversity and inclusion in the organisation through ongoing training and development.

We value the importance of upskilling all our staff to ensure that we improve our knowledge and understanding of a broad range of equality issues.

4 Review the extent to which the views of children and young people with protected characteristics are being included by decision-makers and seek to address gaps.

We know from our work that the needs of children and young people with protected characteristics are not always considered by decision-makers. We will make this more visible in order to effect change.

Costs and budget

Over the course of this Strategic Plan we will be working to ensure that we have the right resources to fulfil our duties. The incorporation of the UNCRC into domestic law and the potential for expanded responsibilities for our office through the forthcoming Human Rights Bill will place additional demands on our office. The impact of this on costs will be an ongoing consideration for our office.

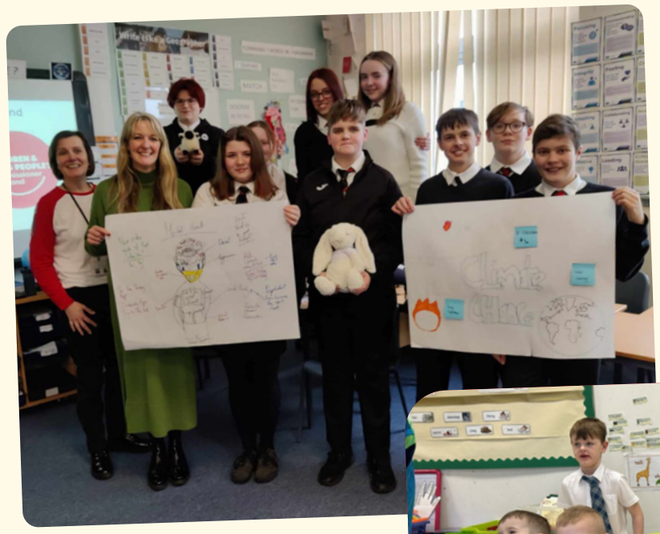
We therefore present our costs recognising there is some unpredictability. This budget is the minimum required to deliver our current statutory functions.

	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28
	Revised Budget Bid	**Indicative Budget**	**Indicative Budget**	**Indicative Budget**
Staff Costs	1,329,639	1,393,188	1,447,133	1,496,575
Staff Related Costs	64,145	66,069	68,051	70,093
Professional Fees	43,633	44,942	46,290	47,679
Running and Project Costs	241,457	248,701	256,162	263,847
Sub-total	**1,678,874**	**1,752,900**	**1,817,637**	**1,878,194**
Capital Expenditure	5,000	5,150	5,305	5,464
Totals	**1,683,874**	**1,758,050**	**1,822,941**	**1,883,658**

How we will report our progress

Throughout the lifecycle of our Strategic Plan, we will report on progress through:

- Our Annual Report and Accounts.
- Parliament Committee scrutiny sessions.
- Publication on our website of quarterly Governance meetings and monthly Senior Management Team meetings where Annual Delivery Plans will be reviewed.
- Regular publication of reports and wider communications, including outputs from our Young Advisors.



Our big thanks

We want to thank every child and every young person who contributed their insights and opinions to help us to shape this plan. We appreciate your time and energy, your thoughtfulness, and your wisdom.

To all the adults who supported them to take part, recognising the value in making sure that they were able to contribute meaningfully – thank you.

Thanks to all the adult stakeholders who informed our Plan at our roundtables, to all the schools and other organisations who supported us to work with groups directly and to all the creative partners who facilitated sessions on our behalf.

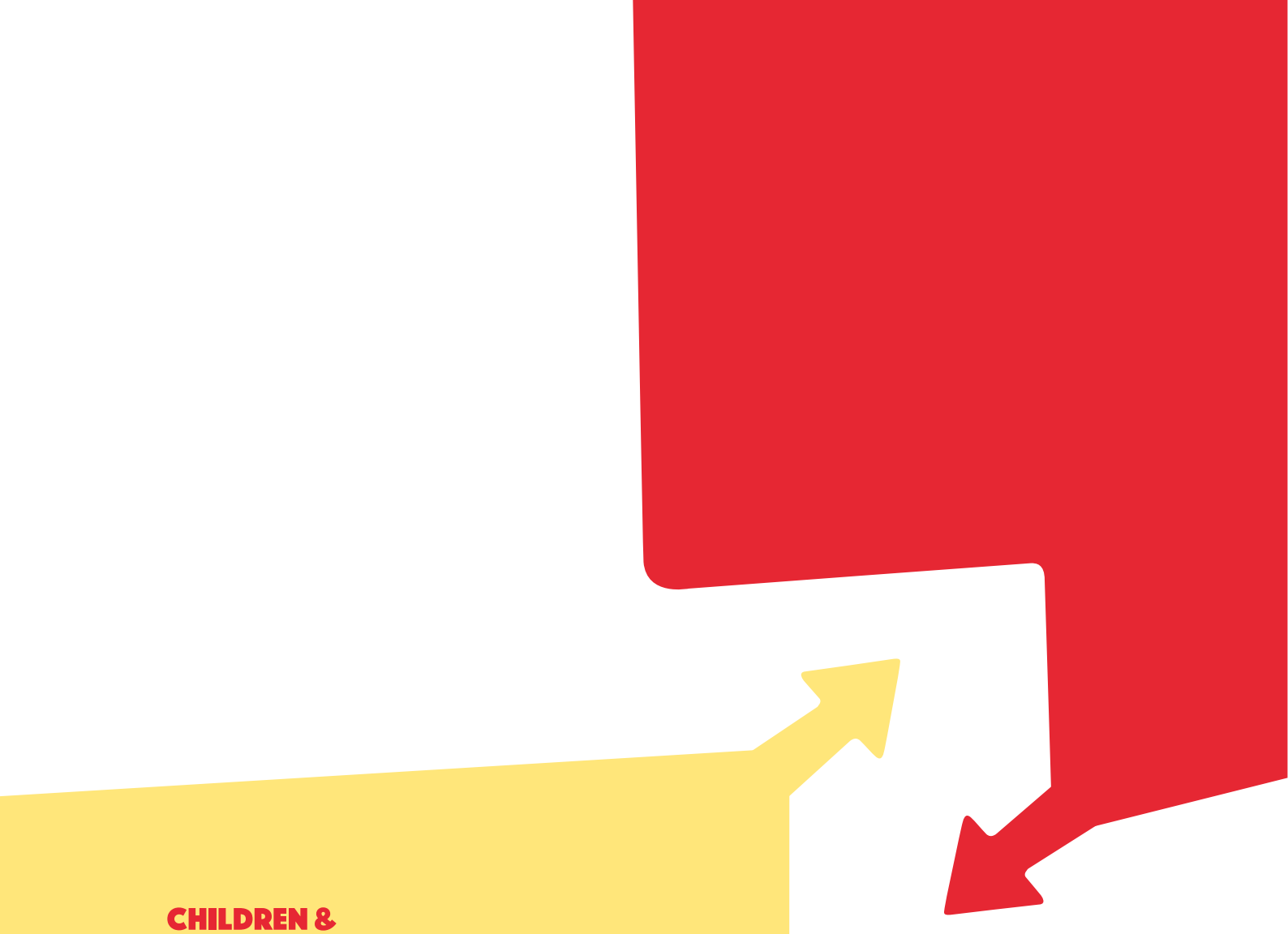
Thank you!

“ There is no respect, so this is why I don’t come into school because there’s no respect in school . ”

“ Discrimination makes me so sad, I sometimes want to cry myself to sleep at night. ”

“ I would work on making rights more well known and spoken about. ”

“ I would focus on mental health services for young people. I would do this by having more funding for mental health in schools, peer groups, and more support concerning exam stress. ”



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