

Voluntary Sector Children's Services Forum (VSCSF)

“Working together, sharing our knowledge skills and resources to support children, families and communities to reach their full potential.”

Wednesday 25 March 2026

10am – 12pm

Via MS Teams

Present:

Eloise Wilson (Chairperson)
Laura Jamieson (Minute Taker)
Joe Edge

CVS Falkirk & District
CVS Falkirk & District
CVS Falkirk & District

Alison McClymont

Scottish Action for Mental Health
(SAMH)

Annabel Russell
Beverley Isdale
Claire Davis
Debbie Hamilton
Fin Russell
Fiona Lowe
Heather Black

Go! Youth Trust
First 4 Kids
GO Kids
One Parent Families Scotland (OPFS)
Impact Arts
Quarriers (Falkirk Children's Rights)
Falkirk and Clackmannanshire Carers
Centre

Jo McCorrison

Falkirk and Clackmannanshire Carers
Centre

Judy Morrison
Kyle O'Brien

Wellbeing Scotland
Central Scotland Regional Equality
Council (CSREC)

Lauren McGregor
Melissa Ryan

Committed to Ending Abuse (CEA)
Self Directed Support (SDS) Forth
Valley

Safia Ali
Samantha Marsh

RISE Forth Valley
Why Not? Trust

Apologies:

Barry Jordan
Derek Allison
Julie Stewart
Sharlene Ramage

LGBT Youth Scotland
Falkirk Foundation
Cyrenians
Falkirk and Clackmannanshire Carers
Centre

Guest Speakers:

Aqeel Ahmed

Scottish Government (Children's
Rights Unit)

Dr Shelly Coyne

Scottish Government (Children's
Rights Unit)

1. Welcome and Introductions

Eloise introduced herself, welcomed all attendees to the meeting and introduced the guest speakers. Members then briefly introduced themselves to the rest of the attendees.

2. Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held in January 2025 were sent to members for approval by email, and are now available to view on the [CVS Falkirk & District](#) website (linked for your convenience), along with the presentations delivered.

3. Scottish Government's Approach to Children's Rights and UNCRC: Aqeel Ahmed and Dr Shelly Coyne, Children's Rights Unit at Scottish Government

Before the speakers began, Eloise spoke about the meeting's focus on [UNCRC](#), the forum's previous focus on the topic (particularly around the work done by Children in Scotland), and how useful it is to have the [Children's Rights Unit](#) in attendance to share information and insight.

Both speakers then spoke briefly about their role within the team:

- Shelly gave an overview of the Empowering Young People team (which focuses on participation and how to get decision makers to listen to children and young people), along with her work on raising awareness of UNCRC in Scotland, and Article 12.
- Aqeel spoke about the Embedding Children's Rights and Public Services team (which supports public bodies by ensuring they understand the UNCRC and their role, and what children's rights are; they work closely with local authorities and other non-departmental bodies, plus the third sector, given that a lot of children's services are delivered by the third sector), and the Rights Reporting and Monitoring team, which is responsible for reporting on Scotland's UNCRC progress.

They then led attendees in an exercise to think creatively about how to implement the UNCRC (Implementation) (Scotland) Act 2024, and "Where we are in the UNCRC story?" In response, members were able to give their feedback about where they think Scotland's children services are in the journey, highlighting concerns around infrastructure, awareness of children's rights outside these services, and different perceptions.

Shelly expanded on this through the five principles outlined by the Welsh Commissioner, describing UNCRC in Scotland as, "*Putting children's rights at the core of decision making in our working practices, planning, reporting, and delivery of services.*"

She also highlighted [a new booklet for parents](#) on children's rights under the Act, and the [Parent Club page](#) dedicated to helping parents discuss rights with their children.

Aqeel and Shelly then delivered an in-depth presentation, including useful resources, which is available to view or download via the [CVS Falkirk & District](#) website. Key points are noted below:

- Background and detail on how the UNCRC (Implementation) (Scotland) Act came into law in July 2024.
 - The Act essentially introduces a compatibility duty for those providing public services to children, and enshrines UNCRC in law.
 - While the UK is a party to the UNCRC, it cannot be enacted in court in the rest of the UK; however, the Act means it can in Scotland.
- Scottish Government has created two statutory guidance documents which break down the complexities of the Act, aiming to make it accessible to everyone delivering public services (including the third sector).
- The Act requires listed public authorities to report on their progress, and provide a child-friendly version of these reports.
- The first progress reports are due for submission on Tuesday 31 March 2026, and are due to be published in the summer.

Shelly spoke more about Scottish Government's commitment to ensuring the heart of decision-making in Scotland is impacted by the voice of children and young people, including through the Scottish Youth Parliament, and the annual meetings with children and young people held by both the Cabinet and the Executive Team.

Questions included:

- Is there guidance, resources or an engagement tool for reaching and working with those in the third sector who are performing legal duties and public services to children, but are not aware that they are affected by the Act?
 - Aqeel noted that a long-term cultural shift is needed, which is what Scottish Government is aiming for – as a result, there is guidance in taking a children's human rights approach included in the presentation, along with the 2025 skills and knowledge framework.
 - Shelly suggested that groups look into [Together Scotland \(Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights\)](#) (website linked for your convenience), which works mainly with the third sector, providing support and advice; they also publish a [“State of Children's Rights in Scotland” report](#), with lots of case studies examples for the sector.
- The third sector often works closely with statutory bodies, either in partnership or as funders; what protections are in place if the third sector group or organisation identifies that children's rights are not being upheld by that body, but needs to maintain and manage their relationship?

- Aqeel advised that the sector and the statutory body should always ensure that they are in agreement regarding children's rights at the start of any work. However, if there are any concerns, groups are welcome to contact their team, or Scottish Government's lead for UNCRC with local authorities, Rebecca Spillane.

ACTION: Aqeel to send Eloise and Laura details of the judgement that all court decisions involving children should be child-friendly.

4. Make It Your Own Project: Fin Russell, Impact Arts

Impact Arts is a arts charity based in Glasgow, running various creative projects in partnership with local authorities, in communities across Scotland (though mainly in the Central Belt at this time). These projects are designed to be bespoke to the needs of the community – Fin gave examples of different projects they have facilitated, including a parental employability programme for lone parents and ethnic minority parents, employability projects for young people, and creativity projects to combat social isolation amongst older people.

Impact Arts currently has two projects running in Falkirk District:

- ArtWise Falkirk

Through [ArtWise](#), Impact Arts offers free therapeutic family art sessions for parents with their small children, *“helping parents and children thrive and stay connected”*. The Falkirk sessions take place on Fridays at the OPFS Family Centre, 68-70 Forgie Crescent, Maddiston, FK2 0LZ.

- Make It Your Own

Fin coordinates the new [Make It Your Own](#) project in Falkirk District, which is funded by Falkirk Council and designed to support people 16 years old and over at risk of homelessness. Through these sessions (taking place at the 1st Falkirk Scout Hall on Tuesdays), participants are taught creative upskilling and crafting, and given a £150 voucher to furnish their home (whether temporary accommodation or not) through these skills.

The project aims *“to give participants the skills and knowledge to build an emotional connection with the space, and to have these skills to make it feel like a home, far beyond the course”*.

Both projects are free for participants, with refreshments provided and travel expenses reimbursed. Fin noted that the groups provide a social connection, with space and time for participants to feel they have received *“the bespoke support they deserve”*, and that while the projects involve adults, the Impact Arts team has found that these benefit children and young people too, and the whole family environment, long term.

Questions included:

- Is there an age requirement to take part?
 - No, as long as the participant meets the requirements for the group (ie. parent of a young child for ArtWise, or someone at risk of homelessness for Make It Your Own); Fin advised members to use their judgement as service providers regarding a person's risk of homelessness.
 - The Make It Your Own project is only open to those 16 years old and over due to safeguarding protocols.
- Are the groups only open to people living in Falkirk District?
 - Due to Falkirk Council funding, yes, but if they live just over the boundary, a conversation can be had.
- Are Make It Your Own groups open to young people trying to sustain a tenancy?
 - As long as they are aged 16 years old and over, Fin's understanding is yes, as their risk of homelessness and Falkirk District residency is the most important factors.
- Regarding referral processes, availability to meet members' groups, and group times:
 - Referrals: whatever suits the forum member, or person being supported; this could be an informal email to Fin, or use of the [online form](#). People can also self-refer through these methods.
 - Meetings: As the project coordinator, it would be Fin speaking to members' groups; members are encouraged to contact Fin directly to organise a bespoke talk that suits their group.
 - Timings: Impact Arts is funded to run four 10 week blocks until the end of 2026 (March – May, May – July, July – September, September – early December).

Fin finished by expressing his thanks as someone new to working in the area, as everyone he has spoken to has been “very kind and supportive”, which he believes is indicative of the third sector, and Forth Valley as a whole.

ACTION: Eloise to connect Fin with Cyrenians and Transform Forth Valley.
ACTION: Laura to collate questions from the chat for Fin.

5. “The Village: Support for Children and Families”: Samantha Marsh, Why Not Trust

Samantha began by giving information on the Why Not Trust and [its Village project](#), and the support it offers care experienced families with a child under 5 years old (or expecting a child). The project aims to empower and help parents build social networks and trusted relationships with others who understand care experience.

The Village is currently coming up on its third birthday, having supported around 245 parents across Scotland, and saved them approximately £17,000 (August 2024 – May 2025).

As part of her presentation, Samantha showed an animated video explaining The Village, which is available to view in the presentation slides available to view or download via the [CVS Falkirk & District](#) website. Key points are noted below:

- The Village was “created by parents, for parents, meeting people where they’re at: formed, shaped and informed by parents and their experiences.
- There is no referral process or assessments involved, and everything is completely confidential (unless there is a safeguarding concern).
- The project is designed to provide a “scaffolding of support”, and with that in place, help parents engage in more networks and services.
- The Village is predominantly an online community, mainly using Whatsapp groups, phone calls, and voice notes. Parents can engage as much as they like, or suits their lives.
- The overall aim is to link parents back in with their own networks and services.

Samantha noted that, according to feedback, 100% of parents supported know “there is always someone at The Village they can turn to for support”.

A member asked if there was a referral partnership with the NHS, especially for pre- and postnatal parents. Samantha confirmed that there is no formal referral process, though they do link in with the NHS (including health visitors and family nurses). Parents and families (including single parents and carers) can get involved at any stage of the child’s first five years, and they aim to be as open and inclusive as possible.

ACTION: Eloise to connect Samantha with the Falkirk Champs.

6. AOCB

- RISE Forth Valley: thanks to funding from the National Lottery Community Fund Scotland’s refreshed Young Start, RISE will be starting its new Youth Club young carers project, open to those across Forth Valley. They are working with the Falkirk and Clackmannanshire Carers Centre to raise awareness, but Safia asked members to highlight to those they thought would benefit.
- Self Directed Support Forth Valley: following on from their work with Stirling’s Children with Disabilities team, around how packages can be utilised by the family, and the disabled young person themselves, Melissa and the team are developing a leaflet which clearly states how they should be able to use their packages. Melissa also encouraged members to put any families going through social work reviews in touch with the Self Directed Support team.

- CVS Falkirk & District: Laura and Eloise highlighted the deadline for this year's [Volunteer Awards nominations](#), along with requests for [Celebrating Volunteering Certificates](#). Both close at 12pm on Tuesday 31 March 2026, and are open to volunteers and groups operating throughout the Falkirk District area, no matter their organisation size.

**Date of Next Meeting:
Wednesday 17 June 2026,
10am – 12pm, via MS Teams**