



PUTTING CHILDREN FIRST

A manifesto to keep every child in your community safe, loved and well.

By promising to put children first and delivering the following three pledges by 2027, local councillors can support every family in Scotland to get the practical, emotional and financial support they need to keep their child safe and loved at home:

- ♥ Develop highly visible, easy to access, family resource and wellbeing spaces in every local community to offer families non-stigmatising, immediate emotional, practical, and financial support, delivered in partnership with the third sector.
- ♥ Ensure that every GP, health visitor, and teacher can refer children and their families to support that strengthens their health and wellbeing without a waiting list.
- ♥ Eliminate poverty as an excuse for taking children into care, by putting the development and delivery of local child poverty action reports at the top of your council's agenda.

Keeping every child safe and loved in their own family

When children grow up safe and loved in their own family they build good relationships, are generally healthy, become resilient, fulfil their potential, contribute to strong communities and are set to nurture the next generation of children.

Children do well when their family does well, but every family in your community will have faced unprecedented challenges over the last couple of years. For families who were already facing adversity, trauma and financial hardship, the impact of coronavirus and the cost of living crisis have only compounded the pressures that make it harder for them to keep their children safe.

Every child has a right to the support their family needs to keep them safe and loved in their own home. However, many of the families Children 1st work with say that this support is hard to find, has long waiting lists, or simply doesn't exist.

As one parent says:

"It takes a lot to ask for help, and then there is none."

In the absence of early preventative and protective family support the challenges families face become crises. Specialist services become overwhelmed, and local authorities fail to live up to The Promise made by COSLA and the Scottish Government that wherever it is safe to do so children will stay with their families and families will be actively supported to stay together.

That's why we're asking council candidates to promise to put children first, by pledging to:

Develop easy to access family wellbeing spaces in every community

Many families tell Children 1st that where services and support do exist they can be confusing, hard to reach and engage with, siloed and disjointed. Children and families may face barriers to accessing services, for example because they need to be referred to a service by a particular frontline professional, or because the service has set criteria for who it can work with.

Working alongside families, local authority partners, and other third sector organisations in local communities, Children 1st offer families easy ways to access practical, emotional and financial support that meets their individual needs and prevents the issues they face from escalating. Often Children 1st services don't look like family wellbeing services, because by providing holiday activities, food pantries or money advice that meets families' immediate needs, Children 1st family wellbeing workers build the trust that encourages families to open up and seek the more intensive support that prevents them from reaching crisis point.

Such services are still too few and far between. By 2027 every family should be able to walk into a local family wellbeing space to access joined up support that addresses their challenges early, reduces their worries, and supports every member of their family to be safe, well and thriving.

Ensure every GP, health visitor, and teacher can refer families to intensive family wellbeing support

Children and families say that where they need more intensive support, there is little between universal services and highly specialised acute services, like CAMHS. They end up lost between the gaps in provision, or parked on excessive waiting lists, with no alternative and no way of knowing how to support their child in the meantime. For many children the roots of their anxiety lie in their wider family's experiences and acute services that focus purely on supporting the child cannot therefore alleviate the causes of their distress.

In communities across Scotland, Children 1st family wellbeing teams are bridging this gap between universal and acute services for children and families and successfully diverting children away from services like CAMHS. This is helping children to avoid long waiting lists and resolving their challenges whilst strengthening family relationships. Rolling out approaches like this, in every local authority in Scotland, would ensure that children get support before they reach crisis point and relieve the pressure on already stretched clinical and acute services.

Eliminating poverty as an excuse for taking children into care

Between 2015 and 2021 child poverty rose in every Scottish local authority, according to research by the End Child Poverty Coalition (which Children 1st are members of). Across the country levels of child poverty range from one in six children in Shetland to one in three children in Glasgow. Children growing up in poverty are disproportionately represented on the child protection register and in 2020 the Child Welfare and Inequalities [Project Final Report Research](#) showed that children growing up in poverty are more likely to be removed from their families and placed into the care system.

It is shameful that in 21st century Scotland poverty is still a prevailing reason for taking children into care. Poverty is at the heart of the stress and overwhelm experienced by many families. By putting the development and delivery of local child poverty action reports at the top of the council agenda and committing to the actions set out by the End Child Poverty Coalition, councillors can eliminate poverty as an excuse for removing children from their families.

About Children 1st

Children 1st is a charity working across Scotland to keep children safe, loved and well. Children do well when their families do well, so the charity offers children and their families practical, emotional and financial support to prevent, protect and support them to recover from harm. Children 1st offer this support in local communities across Scotland and through national services like Children 1st Parentline, which offers any family immediate support at the touch of a button.

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