

# **Growing up In Scotland Today**

**Church of Scotland**

**Church and Society Council**

Church and Society Council  
Church of Scotland  
121 George Street, Edinburgh, EH2 4YN  
Phone: 0131 225 5722  
[www.churchofscotland.org.uk](http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk)  
Charity Number: SC011353



May 2009

## GROWING UP in SCOTLAND TODAY<sup>1</sup>

*"The true measure of a nation's standing is how well it attends to its children – their health and safety, their material security, their education and socialization, and their sense of being loved, valued, and included in the families and societies into which they are born".*

1.1 In 2007, UNICEF published a "Report Card" on the Wellbeing of Children in Rich Countries, which showed the UK bottom of a league table of "economically advanced nations" based on a range of criteria covering material well-being, health and safety, education, family and peer relationships, behaviour and risks, and subjective well-being. Only in health and safety was the UK outwith the bottom five countries.

1.2 That report – headed with the quotation above – was the trigger for the Church and Society Council to establish a working group to look at "Growing Up in Scotland". In addition to members of the Council, the Group has been able to draw on expertise from other denominations, from other parts of the Church's work, from children's charities, and from young people themselves. We have opened up discussions on what's good about growing up in Scotland today, and what's bad; and we have explored what the Church and Government (UK, Scottish and local) can do to help.

### 2 Context

2.1 This section of the report sets out some key challenges and opportunities faced by children and young people growing up in Scotland. A description of some of the key issues is followed by an analysis of some of the underlying factors that affect children growing up in Scotland.

Over the past couple of years there have been a number of reports that provide useful background information and much of the content of this section is drawn from those reports, namely:

- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child: A Report on Implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in Scotland 1999 – 2007 (Scottish Executive, 2007)
- The NGO Alternative Report (Scotland) to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights, 2008)
- UK Children's Commissioners' Report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2008)
- Report Card 7, Child Poverty in Perspective: An Overview of Child Well-being in Rich Countries (UNICEF, 2007)
- Index of Wellbeing for Children in Scotland (Barnardo's, 2007)

---

<sup>1</sup> A summarised version of this report was prepared and published to be launched on the occasion of the Moderator's visit to the Scottish Parliament. With the Council Secretary he met with all the party leaders including the First Minister and had a reception hosted by Karen Whitefield MSP, Convenor of the Parliament's Education and Lifelong Learning Committee. Five young people representing a spectrum of churches and experience spoke about their personal experiences of growing up in Scotland today. Adam Ingram MSP, Minister for Children and Early Years responded to the report and the young people's stories at this event.

- Factfile 2008-09 (Action for Children in Scotland, 2008)
- The Good Childhood Inquiry (The Children's Society, 2009)

## 2.2 Key issues

### 2.2.1 Demographics and key statistics

There are over one million children under the age of 18 living in Scotland, which accounts for approximately 20% of the total population.

### 2.2.2 By age, the population figures show that there are:

- 275,200 children under the age of 4
- 273,440 between the ages of 5-9
- 302,694 between the ages of 10-14
- 329, 573 between the ages of 15-19<sup>2</sup>

2.2.3 Scotland's birth rate has been steadily rising over the past five years with 57,781 births recorded in 2007 (the highest since 1997). 49% of births in 2007 were to unmarried parents.<sup>3</sup>

2.2.4 It is estimated that 1 in 40 children may have a learning disability and that 1 in 250 children will have moderate to profound disabilities that require significant additional support. The number of children with severe and complex disabilities is increasing.<sup>4</sup>

2.2.5 The 2001 census found that 2.32% of the population in Scotland are from a minority (non-white) ethnic group<sup>5</sup>; official figures show that the number of people living in Scotland who were born abroad grew to 255,000 in 2007 from 204,000 in 2004. The most common overseas country of birth in 2007 was Poland followed by Germany, Republic of Ireland, India and the USA. In 2007, 4 out of 5 births in Scotland were to Scots-born mothers.<sup>6</sup>

## 2.3 Good things about growing up in Scotland

2.3.1 Many of the issues covered in this section are 'problems' that need to be addressed but it is important to recognise that there are many good things about growing up in Scotland. Throughout the country, there are many examples where young people make positive contributions to their communities in relation to social, cultural and environmental matters. The Young Scot awards are now in their 4th year, recognising

---

<sup>2</sup> General Register Office for Scotland (GROS), *Mid-2007 population estimates Scotland*, July 2008

<sup>3</sup> GROS, *Scotland's population 2007: The Registrar General's annual review of demographic trends*, August 2008

<sup>4</sup> Scottish Executive, *Changing childhoods? The same as you? National Implementation Group: Report of the Children's Sub-Group*, April 2006

<sup>5</sup> Scottish Executive, *Scotland's Census 2001*, February 2003

<sup>6</sup> GROS, *Scotland's Population 2007 - The Registrar General's Annual Review of Demographic Trend*, August 2008

and celebrating the outstanding achievements of Scotland's Young People through 13 awards, from sports to cultural diversity, democracy and citizenship and volunteering.

2.3.2 The UK Children's Commissioners' report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child highlights several other factors that are good about being a child in Scotland, including:

- a strong sense of national identity, openness to immigrants and tolerance of difference
- a cultural expectation of greater autonomy for children at key stages of their life
- a juvenile justice approach, through the children's hearings system, that is focused on the child's best interests rather than punishment
- communities that have embraced asylum seeking families in their midst.

These issues will be examined in more detail later in the report.

*We conducted conversations with children (at the Children's Assembly), teenagers (via the Youth Assembly) and adults (at the C&S Council conference) around four questions: What's good about growing up in Scotland today? What's bad about growing up in Scotland today? What can the Church do to help? What can the Government do to help? Some of the most striking quotes from the conversations are scattered through the report.*

**What's good about growing up in Scotland today?**

Children's responses included:

- |                                 |  |                  |
|---------------------------------|--|------------------|
| (a) Lots of opportunities       | (b) Good education   | (c) Lots of snow |
| (d) Wildlife, scenery and views | (e) Lots of good youth clubs and facilities for young people |                  |
| (f) The people                  | (g) Health care  | (h) Fun places   |

Young people's responses included:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| (a) I've felt more involved in political processes since devolution | (b) Acceptance of difference                      |
| (c) School – a lot of encouragement                                 | (d) Activism                                      |
| (e) Young Scot cards  | (f) Good projects with asylum seeker young people |

Adult responses included:

- |  |  |           |
|--|--|-----------|
| (a) Space, trees, beaches                                  | (b) Choices and wider opportunities              | (c) Peace |
| (d) Awareness of other cultures, and global responsibility | (e) Technology and gadgets                       |           |
| (f) More openness between parents and children             | (f) Children treated as individuals, with rights |           |
| (h) Range of available opportunities                       |  |           |

## 2.4 Health and well-being

2.4.1 Just as the UK ranked last out of 21 industrialised countries in the UNICEF report; so Scotland was ranked next to last out of 24 OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries in the Barnardo's Index of Wellbeing for Children report.

### 2.4.2 Child Poverty:

2.4.2.1 Despite being part of the 5th richest economy in the world, there are extremely high levels of child poverty. The most recent official statistics show that there are 210,000 children in Scotland living in poverty. Save the Children estimates that 90,000

children in Scotland are living in severe poverty<sup>7</sup> with no indication that that figure has reduced in recent years<sup>8</sup>.

2.4.2.2 The impact of growing up in poverty is extreme – not just on the experience of growing up but also for children and young people’s future life chances.

2.4.2.3 Children growing up in poverty are twice as likely to die in childhood compared to children in the most affluent areas<sup>9</sup>. In the most deprived areas in 2006 the rate of teenage pregnancies in the under 16 age group was more than four times the rate in the least deprived areas (15.3 and 3.7 respectively).<sup>10</sup>

2.4.2.4 Five year olds in deprived areas are three times more likely to have severe tooth decay<sup>11</sup>. Dental disease in childhood is a significant marker for later poor health and is associated with deprivation and disadvantage.

2.4.2.5 Recent NHS Scotland figures show that a child born in Calton, Glasgow, one of the most deprived areas in Scotland, can only expect to live to 54; is three times as likely to suffer heart disease; and four times more likely to be hospitalised than a child in the city's prosperous western suburbs. A girl born in poverty in Scotland today can expect to die 11 years earlier than a girl born in a better off family. A boy can expect to die 17 years earlier.<sup>12</sup>

2.4.2.6 It is not just physical health that is affected: 30% of children growing up in poverty end up with some sort of emotional disorder compared to 5% from better off households.<sup>13</sup>

2.4.2.7 Children who go to school in a deprived area are four times more likely to leave school without any qualifications. 25% of 16-19 year olds from deprived areas are leaving school and not in any form of education, employment or training. That compares

---

<sup>7</sup> The definition of poverty used here is those with incomes 60% below the UK median.

<sup>8</sup> The Government do not have a definition for severe poverty. Save the Children defines severe poverty as children living in families surviving on an average of £7,000 a year after housing costs (for a couple with one child). [www.savethechildren.org.uk/scotland](http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/scotland)

<sup>9</sup> Information Services Division, *Childhood hospital admissions and mortality*, March 2008

<sup>10</sup> Information Services Division, *Teenage Pregnancy*, <http://www.isdscotland.org/isd/2071.html>

<sup>11</sup> Scotland's National Dental Health Inspections Programme, *NDIP Survey 2003*, [http://www.dundee.ac.uk/dhsru/publications/ndip/DIP2003\\_det\\_partb.htm](http://www.dundee.ac.uk/dhsru/publications/ndip/DIP2003_det_partb.htm)

<sup>12</sup> NHS Scotland, *Healthy Life Expectancy in Scotland*, March 2004

<sup>13</sup> Office for National Statistics, *The Mental Health of Children and Young People 2004*, 2005. The definition of emotional disorder in this research covers emotional problems involving depression, anxiety and obsessions.

to 10% for the whole of Scotland.<sup>14</sup> Nearly a third of all homeless households in Scotland are households with children; lone parent households make up nearly a quarter of all homeless households.<sup>15</sup>

#### 2.4.3 Sexual health:

2.4.3.1 Rates of teenage pregnancies in Scotland remained relatively stable between 1998 and 2006, but have shown a slight increase since 2001.<sup>16</sup> This is despite a number of Government initiatives including the Respect and Responsibility strategy. The SACR report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child raises a number of concerns about the quality and availability of sexual health education, with a particular concern about some of the most marginalised groups of children and young people; those with learning difficulties; looked-after young people; LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) young people and those from minority ethnic backgrounds.<sup>17</sup>

#### 2.4.4 Mental health:

2.4.4.1 It is estimated that 1 in 10 children aged 5 to 16 have a clinically recognised mental disorder. There have been a number of national initiatives, such as the 'See me...' campaign and Heads Up Scotland, that have sought to address mental health issues affecting young people. The UK Children's Commissioners' Report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child found that children and adolescent mental health services are still under resourced and many children and young people requiring specialist treatment such as those who self-harm or who have experienced abuse do not receive this.<sup>18</sup>

2.4.4.2 A recent study by the Suicidal Behaviour Research Group based at Stirling University indicated that almost 14% of 15 - 16 year olds in Central Scotland reported having self-harmed; with around 70% of these instances of self-harm taking place within a year of the study<sup>19</sup>. Research has suggested that there is an increase in the levels of self harming and that it tends to be more prevalent amongst girls. The Children's Commissioner has noted that access to treatment and support for children and young

---

<sup>14</sup> National Statistics, *Annual Population Survey in Scotland 2007: A Compendium of Labour Market Statistics*, June 2008

<sup>15</sup> Scottish Government, *Operation of the homeless persons legislation in Scotland: 2007-08*, September 2008

<sup>16</sup> Information Services Division, *Teenage Pregnancy*,  
<http://www.isdscotland.org/isd/2071.html>

<sup>17</sup> Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights, *The NGO Alternative Report (Scotland) to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child 2008*, 2008

<sup>18</sup> UK Children's Commissioners, *UK Children's Commissioners' Report to UN Committee on the Rights of the Child*, June 2008

<sup>19</sup> Rory C. O'Connor and Susan Rasmussen, *Self-harm in adolescents: self-report survey in schools in Scotland*, *The British Journal of Psychiatry* (2009) 194: 68-72

people who self harm is sporadic.<sup>20</sup> Suicide rates amongst young men in Scotland are twice that of England and Wales<sup>21</sup>

2.4.4.3 Many young people report experiences of bullying, which accounts for 27% of calls to Childline and was highlighted by many MSPs in a recent Scottish Parliament debate<sup>22</sup>. A report by Beatbullying, the UK's leading anti-bullying charity, found that 1 in 4 young people in the UK who practise a religion have been bullied due to their faith or wearing of religious symbols. In this research, many young people went on to explain that this led them to self harm, drink alcohol or take drugs as a consequence<sup>23</sup>.

2.4.4.4 This is an area in which the Church's work could be developed further. The expertise developed by Crossreach through the Sunflower Garden Project represents a significant initiative on which we hope it will be possible to build.

2.4.4.5 We endorse the view of the National Youth Assembly which in 2008 agreed to

- 1. Encourage the Church of Scotland to help combat stigma by raising awareness surrounding mental health problems in local congregations and encourage them to form informal support networks.*
- 2. Urge the Church of Scotland to ensure that everyone, and in particular key figures in congregations, are aware of the issues surrounding and resources available to people with mental health difficulties and encourage these to be used.*
- 3. Suggest that the Church of Scotland provide training and information on mental health issues for those who provide pastoral support, but recognise that there are boundaries and situations where reference to a medical professional is necessary.*
- 4. Encourage pastoral support to be available to the families of those suffering from mental health problems, as well as the individuals themselves, while respecting the need for confidentiality.*
- 5. Recognise that, although Ministers and others with a pastoral role should be trained and resourced in understanding mental health issues, it would worthwhile to note that they are not mental health experts and should not be expected to be.*

2.4.5 Substance misuse

2.4.5.1 It is estimated that 60,000 children in Scotland are affected by parental drug use and 100,000 affected by parental alcohol abuse,<sup>24</sup> although it is recognised that these are likely to be under-estimates.<sup>25</sup> Substance abuse impacts on children in a number of ways – physically, emotionally and materially. One of the major difficulties in providing

---

<sup>20</sup> Ibid

<sup>21</sup> Suicide rate in young men in Scotland is twice that in England and Wales, Christie *BMJ*.2001; 323: 888)

<sup>22</sup> Debate on UN Convention on Rights of the Child, Official Report, 6 November 2008.

<sup>23</sup> Beatbullying, *Interfaith Bullying*, November 2008

<sup>24</sup> Scottish Government, *Hidden Harm - Next Steps: Supporting Children? Working with Parents*, May 2006

<sup>25</sup> Susan McVie and Lucy Holmes, *Family Functioning and Substance Use at Ages 12 to 17*, Edinburgh Study of Youth Transitions and Crime no 9, 2005

support to children and young people affected this way is the hidden nature of this issue and that young people are not often known to services.

2.4.5.2 In relation to behaviour of young people themselves, research undertaken by the Scottish School Adolescent Lifestyle and Substance Abuse survey (2006) found that:

- 57% of 13 year olds had had an alcoholic drink. Over half of those who had a drink had been drunk at least once.
- 84% of 15 year olds had had an alcoholic drink. 71% of boys and 75% of girls who had a drink had been drunk at least once.<sup>26</sup>

2.4.5.3 The most common age to try drugs for the first time is 16 although 1 in 12 people were younger than 14 when they first did so. In a recent study, 35% of 16 – 19 year olds admitted to taking drugs within the year of the study. This figure compares to 28% of 20 – 24 year olds over the same period.<sup>27</sup>

## 2.5 Leisure & recreation

### Teenage Girls Magazines Report Summary

A survey of five popular magazines for teenage girls, *Sugar*, *Bliss*, *Mizz*, *Shout* and *TeenVogue* was undertaken. The popular stereotype is that media aimed at young people has a negative influence, for example in exacerbating eating disorder problems by promoting models who are too thin. However, a variety of steps have been taken by the different magazines to combat the problem of negative body image. One magazine uses only teenage readers with a variety of body-shapes to model clothes and make-up, whilst another publishes a story of a model's battle with anorexia. The primary purpose of each magazine is entertainment, but these magazines also have an important information-giving role. The questions sent to the problem pages show that the magazines are a trusted source of advice and information on a wide range of topics that affect a teenager's life. Through problem pages, which always publish sources of further advice, information and support, and carefully chosen 'real-life' stories, the magazines enable young readers to explore issues which may affect their lives without preaching or overtly 'teaching'. Life-issues which repeatedly occur across the magazines include mental illness (especially self-harm, eating disorders and depression), family problems, drug and alcohol abuse, bullying and internet misuse.

2.5.1 The lack of things to do or places to go are two of the most common concerns expressed by children and young people. 82% of 7-14 year olds have said that they would rather play outside in gardens and parks than stay in the house and play computer games but the lack of opportunities and a risk-averse culture sees many children

---

<sup>26</sup> These figures are based on information disclosed by young people themselves in the Scottish School Adolescent Lifestyle and Substance Abuse survey (2006) survey

<sup>27</sup> Scottish Government, *Drugs Misuse in Scotland: Findings from the 2006 Crime and Victimisation Survey*, 2007

restricted to their homes<sup>28</sup>. Conversely, this culture has contributed to children often being unable to assess risk and danger<sup>29</sup>. One third of children say that they never play outside. One of the big problems in this area is the reduction and restriction in the number of play areas as a result of land being sold to developers. It is not always the case that new developments give adequate consideration to children's play areas.

2.5.2 The recent Byron Review<sup>30</sup> considered the issues arising from children's use of new technologies. The report concluded that "while new technologies bring incredible opportunities to children and young people, parent's general lack of confidence and awareness is leaving children vulnerable to risks within their digital worlds".

2.5.3 Despite a number of local councils providing free access to leisure facilities to under 12s, many children's access to leisure facilities is often restricted by prohibitive costs and the lack of affordable transport to actually get to the leisure facilities. It is increasingly common to see leisure and retail facilities that have restrictions on young people using their facilities.

2.5.4 However, this is not to say that Scotland's children and young people are devoid of opportunities for participation in leisure activities. The Scout Association has released census figures showing the highest membership for over 20 years, with both girls and boys participating in membership. Over recent years, several new strands of sports have seen a rapid uptake, such as girls football, where there are nearly 50,000 girls participating in primary and secondary schools across Scotland.<sup>31</sup> Skateboarding and the resultant popularity of skateparks is another popular form of recreation, with Skateboard Scotland listing 53 purpose-built skateparks across Scotland,<sup>32</sup> encouraging activity outdoors whilst also encouraging the social aspect to sport.

A Plea from a Church Youth Worker

So often people are ostracised from leisure and recreation facilities and activities through a lack of money or childcare provision. Why can't the Church help out? Why can't the Church help provide good quality childcare so adults can enjoy some time together? Why can't the Church help provide leisure and recreation opportunities, either by helping fund those less fortunate or by providing the service itself? The Church has a wealth of structures, talents, ideas and most importantly people in its service. Imagine the witness to our communities round the country if we selflessly provided a service, in whatever form, that means they can enjoy more time together as families/groups of friends. There are many good examples of this happening already around the country, and obviously each

<sup>28</sup> British Market Research Bureau, *Playday survey*, 2006

<sup>29</sup> Play England, *Risk and play: A Literature Review*, July 2008

<sup>30</sup> Department for Children, Schools and families, *Safer Children in a Digital World*, March 2008

<sup>31</sup> Scottish Football Association Annual Review 2008,

[http://www.scottishfa.co.uk/scottish\\_football.cfm?curpageid=1014](http://www.scottishfa.co.uk/scottish_football.cfm?curpageid=1014)

<sup>32</sup> Skateboard Scotland, <http://www.skateboardscotland.com>

community has different needs. But this is an avenue of service and outreach the Church needs to invest more in.

## 2.6 Crime & antisocial behaviour

2.6.1 Most offenders under the age of 16 in Scotland are dealt with by the children's hearings system. In 2007/08 there were 14,506 referrals to the children's reporter on offence grounds. Evidence has shown that there is a core group of 1300 – 1400 young people who are responsible for a disproportionate level of crime and anti-social behaviour. At the same time, it is worth noting that 19,212 children were referred to the reporter in 2007/08 because they were victims of Schedule 1 offences (offences against children, including cruelty, sexual offences, bodily injury and indecent behaviour against children).<sup>33</sup>

2.6.2 There is much concern in society about levels of violence amongst young people. In some communities there is a prevalent gang culture that has a huge impact on children and young people, both as perpetrators of violence and as victims. This is a problem for both boys and girls; with one study reporting that 1 in 3 11- 15 year old girls had been involved in a physical fight in the previous year.<sup>34</sup>

2.6.3 In a UK survey on young people's views on gun and knife crime, 29% of the young people said they had been affected by gun and knife crime and 36% of respondents were worried about gangs in their area.<sup>35</sup> Although young offenders make up a small percentage of the whole population and of the prison population, figures suggest that amongst young offenders there is an increasing trend of knives and other offensive weapons being part of the culture.<sup>36</sup>

2.6.4 Concern and reporting about anti-social behaviour has resulted in a widely held fear of young people by many members of the community. Whilst it is undoubtedly the case that most anti-social behaviour is caused by over 18s<sup>37</sup> there tends to be a disproportionate response aimed at under 18s and a demonisation of young people in the media. A MORI newspaper analysis indicated that media portrayals of young people were disproportionately negative in tone; with 71% media accounts in this category compared to 14% of articles portraying young people in a positive light.<sup>38</sup>

---

<sup>33</sup> Scottish Children's Reporter's Administration, *Annual Report 2007/08*, November 2008

<sup>34</sup> The Guardian, *British girls amongst most violent in the world*, 23 January 2006, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2006/jan/23/pupilbehaviour.schools>

<sup>35</sup> Action for Children, *'Step inside our shoes' Young people's views on gun and knife crime*, 2008.

<sup>36</sup> <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/Apps2/Business/PQA/default.aspx?pq=S3W-18700>

<sup>37</sup> Fabian Zuleeg et al, *Use of Antisocial Behaviour Orders in Scotland*, Scottish Government, 2007

<sup>38</sup> Ipsos MORI, *Media Image of Young People*, 13 October 2004

### What's bad about growing up in Scotland today?

Children's responses included:

- |                             |              |                    |                               |
|-----------------------------|--------------|--------------------|-------------------------------|
| (a) Increasing gang culture | (b) Bullying | (c) Global warming | (d) Bagpipes                  |
| (e) Fighting and battles    | (f) Weather  | (g) Gangs          | (h) Less kids going to Church |

Young people's responses included:

- |   |                              |
|---|------------------------------|
| (a) Teaching to test, particularly serious in high performing schools               | (c) Teenage drinking culture |
| (b) Mental health difficulties – not much awareness                                 |                              |
| (d) Drugs culture – can become a part of your life when you're at a formative stage |                              |

Adult responses included:

- |                                  |   |                       |
|----------------------------------|---|-----------------------|
| (a) Insecurity in families       | (b) Uncertainty about values and boundaries | (c) Exam pressures    |
| (d) Assumed necessity of alcohol | (e) Pressure to have sex at a young age     | (f) Too materialistic |
| (g) Fear of violence             | (h) Loss of social skills and interaction   |                       |

## 2.7 Vulnerable and marginalised groups of children and young people

### 2.7.1 Children who are looked after:

2.7.1.1 The SACR report describes looked after and accommodated children (those who in some sense are in the care of a local authority rather than a parent or parents) and young people as one of the most marginalised and socially excluded groups in Scotland. In 2006 there were 1,638 children looked after in residential settings and 3,731 children looked after by foster carers. Looked after children consistently have lower educational outcomes and are more likely to be excluded from school than the rest of the population. The mental health problems of looked after children are significantly greater than those of the rest of the population, with 45% of children aged 5 – 17 looked after by local authorities found to have a mental disorder.<sup>39</sup> Other statistics show that looked after children are more likely to become offenders and be homeless in later life.<sup>40</sup>

2.7.1.2 A Scottish Executive review of provision in 2006 sought to address the situation in which "some people regard looked after children and young people as a group who both have, and cause, problems". That review also recognised that "the longstanding patterns of particular disadvantage experienced by looked after children require specific and targeted intervention".<sup>41</sup> Yet in 2008, the Minister for Early Years and Children has said that "the way in which we have treated children in public care is a national disgrace". Challenging public perceptions and challenging public services to do better are both, as the Minister has said, crucial to turning this disgraceful situation round.

2.7.1.3 Concerns about the age of leaving care have been raised by the Scottish Commissioner for Children and Young People. Young people often report pressure to

<sup>39</sup> Meltzer et al, *The mental health of young people looked after by local authorities in Scotland*, The Stationery Office, 2003

<sup>40</sup> SACR, *The NGO Alternative Report (Scotland) to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child*, 2008

<sup>41</sup> Scottish Executive, *Extraordinary Lives: Creating A Positive Future For Looked After Children and Young People in Scotland*, September 2006

leave care at the age of 16 despite legislative and policy provision that strongly advises that young people should be encouraged and supported to stay in care until 18 years of age when their welfare requires it.<sup>42</sup>

2.7.1.4 Grandparents or other extended family members may not always be the answer for families in difficulty. Recent controversies over adoption and fostering by unmarried and same-sex couples may have deflected attention in the Church from the urgent need for more, committed people to offer these specialized forms of support for children whose families are no longer able to give them what they need. We see a role for the Church in encouraging and supporting people to offer this help for children in real need and commend adoption, fostering and befriending to members and congregations.

2.7.2 Children with disabilities:

2.7.2.1 The UK Children's Commissioners' report states that, despite a number of measures in recent years, disabled children experience significant barriers to their rights and are disproportionately affected by other issues such as poverty and access to play. It is estimated that disabled children are three times more likely to be abused than other children. Evidence in 2007 found that 93% of children with learning disabilities in Scotland have been bullied.<sup>43</sup>

2.7.2.2 There is evidence that services for disabled children are often poorly funded and poorly co-ordinated. Particular problems are faced in the transition between child and adult services that result in a lack of continuity of support. Often access to specialist health care and support is based on where the child lives or the ability of the parent or carer to advocate effectively on their child's behalf.<sup>44</sup>

2.7.3 Refugee and asylum seeking children:

2.7.3.1 One of the biggest concerns raised in the recent reports to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has been the situation facing refugee and asylum seeking children. It is estimated that there are 10,000 asylum seekers and refugees in Scotland, the majority of whom live in Glasgow. There has been widespread condemnation within Scottish society around some of the UK wide policies such as detention of children, dawn raids and removal processes. The churches have been a leading voice in this campaign. Support for children during the asylum processes is often seen as inadequate, particularly given that many are dealing with traumatic experiences.<sup>45</sup>

2.7.3.2 Families are denied access to basic services and benefits. Asylum seeker parents are not allowed to work and are only entitled to 70% of social security benefits. Many asylum seeking families face destitution. Unaccompanied children seeking asylum are

---

<sup>42</sup> Scottish Commissioner for Children and Young People, *Sweet 16? The Age of Leaving Care in Scotland*, March 2008

<sup>43</sup> Enable Scotland, *Speak Up, The Bullying of Children with Learning Disabilities*, 2007

<sup>44</sup> Kirsten Stalker, *Foundations: Young Disabled People moving into adulthood in Scotland*, Joseph Rowantree Foundation, November 2002

<sup>45</sup> P Hopkins and M Hill, *This is a good place to live and think about the future... The needs and experiences of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in Scotland*, Scottish Refugee Council, March 2006

particularly vulnerable and there are major concerns about the processing of their claims and the support that is available for them.<sup>46</sup>

2.7.3.3 A sign of the effectiveness of campaigning on this issue was seen when Jim Murphy announced a pilot aimed at ending the incarceration of young people at Dungavel detention centre. He said, "This is a trial based on concerns raised, in particular by the churches in Scotland."

2.7.3.4 We are proud to be part of a country where our young people have bravely spoken up for their school friends who are victims of dawn raids, and to be part of a Church whose pressure to end the detention of children and families seeking refuge here has prompted the Secretary of State to look for alternatives. We welcome, too, the commitment of the Scottish Government to ensuring that these vulnerable children have access to the public services (health, education, housing, etc) which they need.

2.7.4 Trafficked children:

2.7.4.1 There is limited official data that records the number of children who have been trafficked into Scotland but qualitative evidence shows that it does happen and that, even when identified, these children are not adequately supported and protected by local authorities.<sup>47</sup>

2.8 Child Protection

2.8.1 As at March 2008, 2,437 children in Scotland were on the child protection registers, a decrease of 6% on the previous year. There were a similar number of boys and girls and just over 80% of those children were under 11 years old. The number of registrations on to child protection registers as a result of emotional abuse were up by 12%, for sexual abuse were down by 30%, for physical neglect were down by 17%, and for physical injury were down by 8%. More than 80% of referrals to the children's reporter were on care and protection grounds.<sup>48</sup>

2.8.2 In 2006, Childline Scotland counselled more than 29,000 children and young people. 27% of the calls were about bullying, 11% were in relation to physical abuse, and 9% in relation to sexual abuse. Figures from Childline Scotland in February 2009 showed that calls to the service about sexual abuse have gone up by nearly 50% in three years, with ChildLine in Scotland counselling 2,849 youngsters about the issue last year, more than at any other time in the service's 18 year history.<sup>49</sup>

3 Underlying factors

3.1 The picture outlined in the previous section sets out some of the main issues affecting children and young people. It is also important to consider some of the underlying social

---

<sup>46</sup> Ibid

<sup>47</sup> Save the Children, *A Hidden Trade: Child trafficking research in Scotland 2005/6, 2007*

<sup>48</sup> Scottish Government. *Child Protection statistics 2007/08*, September 2008

<sup>49</sup> Press Association, February 2009.

and cultural factors that provide the context for the situation facing children growing up in Scotland today. There is no doubt that the experience of growing up in Scotland in the 21st century is markedly different from previous generations. In order to consider the appropriate responses for the Church and for Government, some of these underlying factors will need to be addressed.

3.2 A review of any day's media in Scotland would demonstrate the extremes of how children are viewed in our society. Children are often portrayed as a 'problem' where they are the cause of antisocial behaviour and disruption to communities; a recent Barnardo's report found that 41% of adults thought children were increasingly dangerous both to each other and to others<sup>50</sup>. Yet Victim Support point out that less than 1.5% of young people commit crime.<sup>51</sup>

3.3 The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has also expressed concern at "the general climate of intolerance and negative public attitudes towards children, especially adolescents, which appears to exist in the (UK), including in the media, and may be often the underlying cause of further infringements of their rights". Many of our young people feel that adults routinely treat them with a mixture of fear, suspicion and hostility, and it is not hard to see how such attitudes can become self-fulfilling. Churches have a role in countering this culture – we are aware of good examples where this is happening; and Governments must also resist a temptation to look for easy votes in reinforcing such stereotypes. For both, this goes well beyond "hug a hoodie", but it is a challenge we can respond to in partnership with young people.

3.4 A practical proposal that the Church and Society Council would like to take forward is bringing young people from the Church together with journalists and press officers to challenge stereotypes and break down barriers by introducing a human face and tell positive stories.

3.5 On the other hand, deeply disturbing stories of child neglect and abuse understandably prompt demands to ensure that this cannot happen. This can lead to pressure on social workers and others to remove children from parental homes where there seems to be a risk of abuse, yet good decision-making in such circumstances is unlikely to come from a knee-jerk response to media headlines; nor will it come without investment of skilled and caring time. This is a complex area that demands a case by case response, specific to the child's context and with the child's best interests firmly at the centre.

3.6 For too many children, family life is blighted by a drug problem affecting one or both parents. Here again, the best interests of the children can be a guiding principle but do not provide an easy answer. The recognition of the increasing role of grandparents and

---

<sup>50</sup> Barnardo's Scotland, *Scottish Crime and Victimization Survey*, 2008.

<sup>51</sup> Victim Support Scotland, *Parents and Carers of Young Victims of Youth Crime*, [http://www.crimeandyoungpeople.net/c\\_parentsandcarers.htm](http://www.crimeandyoungpeople.net/c_parentsandcarers.htm)

others through the Scottish Government's support for kinship care is certainly a significant step in the right direction; the Church may also have a role in supporting kinship carers through pastoral care and practical help.

3.7 There is also a perception that there are areas in which the state has taken over the role of the parent, often to the detriment of the child and his/her development. For example the debate that followed a mother of three pregnant daughters all under sixteen, who said that it was the school's responsibility to teach her children sex education<sup>52</sup>. It is these kinds of attitudes that mean for some, the cumulative effect of policies on healthy eating, child protection, physical punishment and sex education has been to diminish parental responsibilities through their replacement by Government action. Clearly, it is very difficult to achieve the correct balance between helping parents and taking over or diminishing their role.

3.8 Cultural attitudes towards children in Scotland often work against the realisation of a situation where children generally feel valued, respected and loved by society. Often, the best interests of children are not always paramount. An example from within the Christian community would be in some churches where the priorities of the property committee and the youth club are in conflict. In wider society an example would be the message sent out to all young people about how they are viewed by signs on shop doorways saying 'only two teenagers at a time'.

3.9 Family breakdown, changing workforce patterns and the resultant impact on childcare arrangements provide an extremely challenging set of pressures on parents. In many families grandparents and extended family members play an increasingly important role in the care of children. The Good Childhood Inquiry suggested that while grandparents do more to help develop a baby's vocabulary, they may struggle to provide the other educational and social experiences infants need. Many other families are geographically separated from this potential source of additional support and do not always find support from other people within their communities. It is estimated that 13,500 children in Scotland a year are affected by the imprisonment of a parent, but it is recognised that this is likely to be an underestimate.<sup>53</sup>

3.10 In addition to the changing nature of family arrangements, there is little doubt that children and young people are today facing pressures and challenges that didn't exist for previous generations. The availability and prevalence of illegal drugs and permissive attitudes towards sexual behaviour are some examples of issues that didn't exist for many children growing up 60 years ago. New technologies offer up great opportunities but also pose new threats. The internet, the pervasiveness of media and modern 'celebrity'

---

<sup>52</sup> [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/talking\\_point/4574991.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/talking_point/4574991.stm)

<sup>53</sup> Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People, *Not Seen. Not Heard. Not Guilty. The rights and status of the children of prisoners in Scotland*, (2008). An Action for Prisoners' Families Parliamentary Briefing December 2007 noted that more children in any one year were affected by imprisonment of a parent than were affected by parents divorcing.

culture bring additional pressures on young people in relation to their looks, their actions, their social interactions and their aspirations. At the same time, children and young people have more access to information and knowledge than any other previous generation and there are a range of examples where modern media can act as a positive influence.

3.11 The Scottish education system still has a strong international reputation and it is one area where Scotland continues to rank highly in international comparisons. However, the most recent OECD Programme for International Student Assessment showed that Scotland's international ranking had dropped since 2003. A specially commissioned report from the OECD looking at performance of Scotland's schools highlighted serious challenges including closing the opportunity gap and reducing the number of young people leaving schools with minimal or no qualifications. There are other countries which are more successful in educating children from disadvantaged backgrounds it reported, saying, "Who you are in Scotland is far more important than what school you attend, and at present Scottish schools are not strong enough to ensure who you are does not count."<sup>54</sup>

3.12 The time spent in school has a huge potential to influence and shape children's lives. There has been a notable shift in the style and emphasis of the education system in recent years. Although bullying and school exclusions remain as areas of concern, there have been many positive developments. There are increasing examples of schools that give priority to listening to and respecting children's opinions about their lessons and the running of the school, particularly in primary schools.

3.13 Despite this increasing willingness to listen to children in school and other settings, questions remain as to how much children's views are acted upon. The meaningful involvement of children and young people in decisions that affect them is a key indicator of the willingness of any organisation to give proper recognition to children as key participants in activities rather than recipients of a service.

3.14 The challenge to society as a whole is how to ensure a change in attitudes towards children and young people that provides a context and environment that gives value and respect to the lives of every child. Each of the factors considered above applies to Church settings as much as it does to the rest of our communities. The challenge for the Church is to consider whether it should be practising and demonstrating an alternative approach to children and young people.

#### 4. The Response

4.1 Government response: Overview of Government policy.

4.1.1 Whilst the Scottish Government has responsibility for many of the issues affecting children and young people, the UK Government still has a key role in relation to issues such as child poverty and immigration. Local Government has a key role in the delivery

---

<sup>54</sup> OECD, *Review of the Quality and Equity of Education Outcomes in Scotland*, December 2007.

of services for children and young people and, as a result of the concordat between local authorities and the Scottish Government, has an increasingly greater role in the development of national and local policy. This section considers the response by the UK Government, Scottish Government and local authorities.

4.1.2 Since the opening of the Scottish parliament in 1999, there has been a significant amount of policy and legislative activity in Scotland aimed at improving the lives of children and young people. However, as evidenced in section 1, many challenges remain to improving children's experience of growing up in Scotland.

4.1.3 The Scottish Government have set out their ministerial vision for Scotland's Children as:

"In order to become successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens: all children and young people need to be safe, nurtured, active, healthy, achieving, included, respected and responsible<sup>55</sup>".

4.1.4 This vision provides the basis for all Scottish Government action and policy in relation to children and young people.

4.1.5 There have been efforts to address the lack of joint working in the delivery of public services for children and young people. The issues identified in the Scottish Executive's For Scotland's Children report (2003) have led to increased support for local authorities to join up children's services and this approach has been further developed through the Getting it Right for Every Child programme. The Child Protection system reform programme completed in 2006 has established a system based around a children's charter<sup>56</sup> and a framework of national standards<sup>57</sup>. There has been improved regulation and inspection of services and a commitment to developing professionals who work with children and young people. Legislation and policy has also been implemented across the country to ensure the suitability of anyone who may take on a childcare responsibility in either a paid or a voluntary capacity.

4.1.6 However, there have been concerns that the levels of bureaucracy, delay and some confusion as to what is required in this process (especially with regard to separate disclosure for people who have more than one role) may be disincentives to volunteering.

4.1.7 We welcome the recent recommendation based on data from the Scottish Household survey that "To overcome barriers people face to volunteering (the Scottish Government should) simplify the Disclosure Scotland process - for example, removing the need to apply for a separate disclosure check for every voluntary position applied for,

---

<sup>55</sup> Scottish Government, *Vision of Scotland's Ministers for all Scottish children*, March 2007

<sup>56</sup> Scottish Government, *Protecting Children and Young People: The Charter*, March 2004

<sup>57</sup> Scottish Government, *Protecting Children and Young People: Framework for Standards*, March 2004

but, rather, place a time limit on when a single disclosure check (that is valid for any voluntary position applied for) requires to be updated."<sup>58</sup>

4.1.8 A recent survey by the Mission and Discipleship council found 6,348 volunteers working with young people in Church of Scotland congregations, an average of 9.7 per congregation. The Church has made a significant investment in ensuring that we have a safeguarding structure which not only complies with the law but seeks to be an exemplar of good practice. Alongside that is the challenge of recruiting, training and supporting volunteers in working with children and young people, to ensure that there remains a range of activities in which young people can safely participate.

4.1.9 For the Government, too, there is the challenge of building a system which goes beyond ticking boxes to effective protection of children while not deterring genuine and able people from volunteering. As the Children's Commissioner has said "Fear among adults of contact with children and young people has created an unhealthy climate that limits opportunities for play and hampers healthy development".

4.1.10 Within education, there has been a programme of improving schools following the Standards in Scotland's Schools, etc Act 2000, including a major review of the curriculum (Curriculum for Excellence). A new system to assist children with additional support needs has been introduced. In the early years, there is now a guarantee of half time nursery provision for every 3 and 4 year old. These developments have been monitored and broadly welcomed by the Council's Education Committee.

4.1.11 One initiative which has proved extremely successful is the development of nurture rooms in a pilot project in some Scottish primary schools. Nurture rooms offer pupils a secure base with input and support from two adults, focused, small group support for part of the week, and opportunities to develop the skills necessary for good learning. This child-focused support will usually last a maximum of four terms, and seeks to improve children's ability to engage in learning.

4.1.12 Children and young people have featured prominently in many of the Government's policies to improve health. The Health-Promoting Schools initiative and Hungry for Success have now been followed by the commitment to roll out free nutritious school meals to all primary one to three children. The Church has supported the "Free School Meals" campaign led by the Child Poverty Action Group and welcomes this as a significant step forward.

4.1.13 The sexual health strategy, the national programme for improving mental health and well-being, and the report of the ministerial task force on health inequalities all include action and recommendations relating to children and young people.

---

<sup>58</sup> Scottish Government, *Report analysing Scottish Household Survey Data from 2005 and 2006 with respect to volunteering*, January 2008

4.1.14 Other initiatives include reform of the adoption and fostering systems and provision for children who are looked after, including young people who are leaving care; the implementation of a national youth work strategy; and measures to address antisocial behaviour by children and young people.

4.1.15 Both the UK and Scottish Governments have pledged to end child poverty by 2020 (and halve the numbers in child poverty by 2010). It is evident that the Governments are going to struggle to meet their interim target but the commitment was reinforced in autumn 2008 when the Prime Minister announced his intention to incorporate the 2020 target into legislation.

4.1.16 However, a major focus of the Government strategy has been to encourage and support parents into work and introduce new forms of welfare assistance such as tax credits. One of the implications of this approach is further welfare reform that will withdraw entitlement to some benefits for parents if they are not in employment when their child reaches a certain age. In responding to a recent consultation on welfare reform, the Church has resisted this, on the grounds that:

"Responsibility in parenting means making decisions and acting in the best interests of one's child or children; it cannot be automatically assumed that in all circumstances this means seeking paid work. There is increasing recognition of the importance and value of supporting families, and a commitment to family life should be rewarded, not penalised as an impediment to the apparent economic imperative of an 80% employment rate."<sup>59</sup>

4.1.17 The post of Commissioner for Children and Young People has been created to promote and safeguard the rights of children and young people across Scotland. The first Commissioner, Kathleen Marshall, took office in 2004 and has responsibility to:

- generate widespread awareness and understanding of the rights of children and young people
- consider and review the adequacy and effectiveness of any law, policy and practice as it relates to the rights of children and young people
- promote best practice by service providers
- commission and undertake research on matters relating to the rights of children and young people

4.1.18 The creation of the Commissioner post was widely welcomed by children's charities as an indication of a growing commitment to children's rights by the Scottish Parliament. It is an institution that has already demonstrated its value in drawing attention to breaches of children's rights, ensuring children's voices are heard, and authoritatively challenging Government where it does not go far enough.

4.1.19 It is not possible in this paper to go into detail on all of the legislation and policy that has been introduced over the past 10 years, but it is clear from this overview that a

---

<sup>59</sup> Church of Scotland response to "*No one written off: Reforming welfare to reward responsibility*", October 2008

lot of Government time, energy and money have been invested in children and young people. This does however raise a major question about why outcomes have not significantly improved; the challenge remains to ensure the policy frameworks deliver what they say they will. The need to do better is widely recognised across the political spectrum and evidenced by the name of reports such as, "Looked after children and young people: we can and must do better"<sup>60</sup>, "Getting it right for every child."<sup>61</sup>

**What can Government do to help?**

Children's responses included:

- (a) Help children to recycle, reduce and re-use      (b) Make Christian youth groups

Young people's responses included:

- (a) Engage young people in politics; raise awareness of other ways to be involved beyond voting

Adult responses included:

- (a) More resources for positive things      (b) Listen to young people      (c) Build an inclusive, fair Scotland  
(d) Extend educational/social opportunity      (e) Improve education for all      (f) Common sense re protection  
(g) Stop drugs among children      (h) Build self-esteem

#### 4.2 Recommendations by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child

4.2.1 In 2008, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child considered the extent to which the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is being implemented in the UK. The Committee's concluding observations highlight some of the areas where Governments could make improvements.<sup>62</sup>

4.2.2 At a structural level, the Committee has called on the Governments to bring all legislation in line with the Convention and co-ordinate its implementation, highlighting the need to co-ordinate with local authorities as well. There was a recommendation that the Government "should allocate the maximum extent of available resources for the implementation of child rights, with a special focus on eradicating poverty and reducing inequalities"<sup>63</sup>. One of the main barriers to implementation of the Convention is the lack of awareness about its provisions amongst adults and children.

4.2.3 The issue of negative public attitudes towards children was noted by the UN Committee and 'urgent measures' were recommended to address this concern. In addition, the Committee was concerned about the failure to promote and implement the principle of respect for the views of the child.

---

<sup>60</sup> Looked after children and young people: we can and must do better, Scottish Executive, January 2007

<sup>61</sup> Scottish Government, *Getting it right for every child*, September 2008

<sup>62</sup> United Nations, *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, October 2008, <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/docs/AdvanceVersions/CRC.C.GBR.CO.4.pdf>

<sup>63</sup> Ibid

4.2.4 Some of the other specific issues where the Committee made recommendations were:

- to reconsider the use of ASBOs for children, and other antisocial behaviour measures such as the mosquito device (a high pitched noise inaudible to adults, used to deter children from congregating eg outside supermarkets)
- to prohibit all corporal punishment in the family and promote positive and non-violent forms of discipline
- provide greater assistance for parents and particularly those who face crisis due to poverty
- effective implementation of legislation and services designed to support children with disabilities and develop a national strategy for the inclusion of children with disabilities in society
- additional resources to meet the needs of children with mental health problems
- intensify efforts to ensure young people have access to appropriate sexual health services and sexual health education
- identify root causes of adolescent substance use and take preventative action
- tackle educational inequalities and ensure a truly inclusive education system
- tackle bullying and violence in schools
- guarantee the right of all children, including those with disabilities, to engage in appropriate play and recreational activities
- take action on a number of issues affecting asylum seeking children such as detention, training of staff, guardians for unaccompanied asylum seeking children, and adequate safeguards for children returning to their country of origin
- find out more about sexual exploitation and abuse of children in order to prepare adequate responses
- implement international obligations in respect of trafficked children
- raise the age of criminal responsibility (currently eight, the lowest in Europe)

4.2.5 It will be another five years before the UK faces up to international scrutiny on its performance in relation to children and there is clearly a lot of scope for improvement. The Scottish Government has committed to implementation of the Convention and has begun the process of assessing how best they respond to the Concluding Observations.

4.2.6 Whilst the commitments are welcomed, it is still not clear how additional resources are going to be allocated to children and young people's issues. Until the gap between the policy and practice is addressed it is unlikely that Scotland's children will see an improvement to their outcomes. Meanwhile we welcome the attention given by the Scottish Parliament and Government to these issues and the Scottish Government's response to the Concluding Observations (due to be finalised in March 2009).

### 4.3 Towards a Theology of Growing Up

4.3.1 What has been sketched above as a picture of growing up in Scotland today is not distinctive to the Church in its perspective, and would be shared by many other groups involved in working with children and families. Do we bring anything distinctive to this discussion as a Church?

4.3.2 Crucially, we bring considerable ongoing experience of working with children and young people. For all the emphasis (inside and outside the Church) on recent decline, the numbers and depth of engagement – in traditional and innovative ways – remain on a very large scale. Nor is it accurate to caricature the Church as engaging solely with middle class young people. Hopefully, the experience of the successes and failures of that work inform not only this report but also much more of our thinking. But we are not unique in that.

4.3.3 We come to this as people of faith – the faith that inspires and challenges our practice. So, in the context already sketched, we explore some pointers from our faith as a contribution to discussion within and beyond the Church.

#### 4.3.4 The Child in the Midst

4.3.4.1 There is a dramatic moment in the gospels when Jesus interrupts a lively debate among the disciples along the lines of "who is the greatest?" Imagine the embarrassed silence when he asks what they've been talking about! Then Jesus puts a child in their midst, and makes them focus, not on themselves, but on the child; paradoxically, he is telling them to stop bickering and grow up.

4.3.4.2 This turning upside down should not have been a surprise to people raised on Old Testament stories like those of Samuel (who heard God's call as a young boy) and David (in whom, as a weak wee boy, God dramatically showed his power); nor to those to whom the promise was given: "a little child shall lead them".

4.3.4.3 Children are neither peripheral nor preliminary; they are central. From the time of the promise to Abraham, they are a sign of hope for the future, but they are also central now. In them, we are to recognise, and welcome, Christ.

4.3.4.4 In *Honouring Children: the Human Rights of the Child in Christian Perspective*, Kathleen Marshall and Paul Parvis conclude a review of Biblical passages involving children:

"We can see that the image of children in the Gospels is not a particularly sentimental one. It is not primarily a picture of innocence or simplicity or gentleness or even humility. What is stressed is, rather, powerlessness and vulnerability, but also insight, hope and promise."

4.3.4.5 The Kilbrandon report of 1967 emphasised that 'The Children's Panel' was to be about what was best for **that** child. The Children (Scotland) Act of 1995 said, "Every child has the right to be treated as an individual...Children have a right to express their views about any issues or decision affecting them or worrying them. " Still today, the primary concern of any hearing is 'what is best for this child?'<sup>64</sup>

---

<sup>64</sup> Scottish Government, *Scotland's Children's Panels: Annual Report 2007*, November 2007

#### 4.3.5 The Child in the Family

4.3.5.1 Churches have traditionally stressed a particular form of family as the primary context for growing up. Christian tradition has put an emphasis, rooted in the Ten Commandments, on parental authority and obedience by children. But "Parental authority is not primary. It does not exist for itself. It exists in order to enable the obligation to nurture and to care"<sup>65</sup>. Indeed parents are cautioned in Ephesians 6:2 "Do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord".

4.3.5.2 With pragmatic, as much as Biblical, justification, Churches have argued that it is in the care of adults committed to each other in marriage that children are most likely to thrive. Of course, patterns of family life, and of relationships within that, change through the Biblical period, between then and now, and - most obviously to us - in recent years. Much of that we welcome, while recognising the pressures on family life today. Increasingly, Churches are exploring a variety of ways in which families can be supported, and we highlight what we believe are good examples of this elsewhere in this report.

4.3.5.3 While churches have idealised family life<sup>66</sup>; and while it may be the view of many in the Christian Community that the 'conventional family' is the 'best one'; this must not restrict the reality that there is a great deal of love and support in other forms of family life.

4.3.5.4 It cannot be ignored that 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 6 boys are subjected to some form of sexual abuse and that in more than 75% of cases the abuse is committed by an adult the child knows and trusts, often a family member.<sup>67</sup> Around 100,000 children in Scotland live with domestic violence.<sup>68</sup>

4.3.5.5 The story of God's dealings with his people clearly does not limit his care to those who live in what we might describe as "conventional families". God's love also works in what we would see as unconventional or dysfunctional families.

4.3.5.6 That too should guide our view of public policy. Our consistent support for "family friendly" policies cannot, for example, mean penalising children of single or unmarried parents. On the contrary, if we see them as disadvantaged thereby, they need more, not less, support. It is because of our commitment to supporting families that we seriously question policies that seek to force single parents into work at an early stage, or wider policies which devalue the importance of rearing children in favour of "economic activity".

---

<sup>65</sup> Marshall and Parvis, *Honouring Children*, St.Andrews Press, March 2004

<sup>66</sup> Ibid

<sup>67</sup> STV news, *Adult survivors of Child Abuse*, 29 January 2009,  
<http://news.stv.tv/scotland/71030-adult-survivors-of-child-abuse/>

<sup>68</sup> *For Scotland's Children*, Scottish Executive, 2001.

4.3.5.7 Sadly, the increasing prevalence of family break-up has tended to be met with a polarised debate between those who want law and policy to take us back to an idealised bygone age and those who argue for acceptance of a new reality while supporting those affected. A faith-based response must go deeper: asking why more and more families are breaking up and dealing not only with the victims of break-up but with its causes. Churches must also acknowledge and address a generation gap in attitudes towards marriage. The 2009 British Social Attitudes Survey found that 84% of those aged 65 and over agree that 'marriage is still the best kind of relationship', compared with 38% people aged 18-34.<sup>69</sup>

4.3.5.8 Support for parents and families is an area in which there is scope for Churches and Government to work together, in ways which might help to balance the respective roles of state and parents and enhance both. We are aware of examples of good practice among Churches around the country (the Star Project in Paisley (see case study box); 'New Opportunities' in Motherwell, the St Andrew's Family Support Service in Dundee, Richmond's Hope in Craigmillar; all funded by the Parish Development Fund) and would hope that more can be done to spread models for this kind of work. Although much of our Church's work is targeted at particular generations, there is scope for bringing people together across these boundaries. We note and support the call from the 2008 Youth Assembly which urged the Church in Scotland "to work towards bridging gaps between social groups, especially young and old, both within and outwith the Church ... (believing) that we should celebrate the differences of each group as each has an equal role to play while recognising that different groups have different needs".

4.3.5.9 For Government, "family friendly policies" are not straightforward. We welcome initiatives to extend flexible working, maternity and paternity leave, etc; but these are accompanied by proposals, through the reform of the benefits system, to force single parents into work. As indicated above, we believe that economic objectives towards full employment should not undermine the value of parental – and other caring – roles. There is a role for the law and for Government policy in valuing and supporting parental roles, and in enhancing and sustaining stable families. While we understand the reluctance to endorse any one model of family life in ways that appear to write off other patterns, that should not prevent positive work, with parents, to support family life.

---

<sup>69</sup> National Centre for Social Research, *British Social Attitudes Survey*, January 2009

### Supporting Young Families in Dundee

In January 2005, with vision and an enormous leap of faith, St Andrew's Church in Dundee opened its doors weekly for two hours to single parents under twenty-one and their children. In partnership with the Early Years and Childcare Team of Dundee City Council, we provided a free healthy lunch for all followed by an hour of activities which were designed to encourage the mums to interact positively with their children, and give them "time out" via activities such as cooking, crafts, aerobics etc.

- The work is very much led by what the mums ask for and includes parenting support, emotional and social support, assistance with housing and financial issues, addressing drug and alcohol misuse, 'back into education' programmes, training, and jobseeking.
- Peer education has been of tremendous value to the young girls, and they have written and produced a five-minute play about their lives from school until now – a fascinating and moving insight into the poverty and isolation the girls face.
- The project is now a registered charity and opens two days a week for four hours. A crèche is provided Monday and Tuesday afternoons to allow parents to attend literacy, numeracy, and IT classes. They are seeking funding to employ two crèche workers for Friday mornings, allowing Sue, the Team Leader, to address moral and spiritual issues now being raised by the girls, eg "Why do you believe in God?" or "What is this Easter thing all about?"

This project is funded and supported by the Parish Development Fund. This information is taken from an article in the PDF newsletter, "PDF 01".

#### 4.3.6 The Child in relationships: Sexuality

4.3.6.1 Such a response must also consider questions of relationships and sexuality. Again, debate has been polarised and sometimes detached from reality; neither the giving of biological and other health information nor the withholding of it will of itself overcome the pressures on young people to experiment sexually before they are "ready". If we value sexual activity as the expression of a committed loving relationship, we need to find ways of commending this to our children, talking with them and equipping them to realise this for themselves.

4.3.6.2 While recognising this as a difficult area, we would encourage the Church at local and national level to deepen its involvement in working with young people – as appropriate to their age – and parents on matters of relationships and sexuality. Some crucial characteristics of helpful material are that they are; (a) designed for a youth work context; (b) imaginative; (c) ethical and relationships-based; (d) facilitative of open discussion, by treating young people – and their diversity – with respect; (e) encouraging of parental involvement; (f) open to a spiritual dimension and; (g) strongly emphasising the need for training of leaders. This is an area that the Council intends to explore further.

4.3.6.3 Recent public debate has focussed on the Scottish Law Commission's proposal to decriminalise consensual sexual relationships between young teenagers of similar ages; a campaign presented this as an erosion of the principle of the age of consent (which was itself the outcome of campaigning by Christian organisations). The Government agreed,

not only proposing to retain the law but – in the interests of equality – to apply it to the actions of both girls and boys (currently only the boy commits an offence). While having some sympathy with the view that decriminalising runs the risk of giving out the wrong signals, the Church and Society Council agreed with the Children's Commissioner and others that giving 15year olds who have sex with each other a criminal record for a sexual offence (with all the implications that carries) is not the way to deal with this. Our response, as a society, must be based on a concern for the welfare of those involved, and that is not well served by criminal provisions which are likely to remain unenforced.

4.3.6.4 We would want to welcome the increasing recognition within the Scottish Government's sexual health strategy (under the title of "respect and responsibility") of the impact of wider social and cultural factors in influencing especially - but not exclusively - young people's behaviour. Because we see this area of promoting young people's sexual health and healthy relationships as not solely the concern of Government, we would also welcome the growing willingness of Government and Health Boards to engage with faith communities in developing policies in this field, while expressing some concern that this good practice is not yet universal across Scotland. We encourage churches to engage in this process.

4.3.6.5 We have also argued, and emphasised in the context of this recent debate on the role of the law in influencing the sexual behaviour of teenagers, that consultation on policies that affect young people must not be reserved for "adults only" but should include – in ways appropriate to their age – the young people who will be affected.

#### 4.3.7 The Child in the wider community: Rights

4.3.7.1 Children are part of a wider community, and growing up is at least partly about learning to live in that community. Perhaps we are more conscious than ever today of the vulnerability of children – to drugs, to violence, to other pressures.

4.3.7.2 In their examination of how Christian tradition views children, Marshall and Parvis conclude that:

"One strength, one resource of the tradition is its thorough-going commitment to care and nurture. But on the whole the tradition has been more interested in discussing authority and obedience than in discussing care and nurture. And that leaves a problem in need of attention."<sup>70</sup>

4.3.7.3 However, if Christian tradition does contain this "thorough-going commitment to care and nurture", it does not confine that obligation to parents. Marshall and Parvis recognise that, for some, Christian tradition and recognition of children's rights do not sit easily together, but argue for "seeing the obligation to nurture and to care as correlative with a right to be nurtured and cared for; and defining that would have to start with the child".

---

<sup>70</sup> Marshall and Parvis, *Honouring Children*, St.Andrews Press, March 2004

4.3.7.4 The Christian basis for children's rights lies in the recognition of human beings as bearing the image of God. That does not depend on age or understanding, on maturity or mental or physical capacity. Indeed,

"It gives priority to the most vulnerable. It lets us take as our paradigm, not those best capable of functioning in society, but those most at risk."<sup>71</sup>

4.3.7.5 We agree with the conclusion of Honouring Children, that a recognition of children as bearers of human rights is helpful from a Christian perspective. This need not "encourage an attitude of self-seeking confrontation between child and parent and so reflect or even encourage the fragmentation of the family and society". It certainly does not see children as isolated individuals removed from a context of family, community and relationships, but recognises an obligation on wider society to nurture and care for them.

4.3.7.6 We are therefore happy to share with the Children's Commissioner and many of the charities working with children in seeking to respect children's human rights. It has been a matter for concern that the UK Government has placed a reservation<sup>72</sup> on its commitment to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, excluding children subject to immigration controls in the UK from its scope. Children who have committed no crime, and are particularly vulnerable, are therefore seized in early morning raids and held in detention centres that are prisons in all but name. We warmly welcome the UK Government's commitment to remove that reservation, and look forward to its implementation.

4.3.7.7 As this report is being written there are proposals to merge the office of the Children's Commissioner with that of the Scottish Human Rights Commission. We endorse the call from the Commissioner, "the Children's Commissioner must remain as a separate and independent organisation if the voice of children and young people in Scotland is to be heard and their rights protected."

4.3.7.8 This focus on children and their rights is one way of expressing our broad concern for the wellbeing of children in all respects. Central to that concern is the scandal of child poverty. Not only is child poverty a scandal in and of itself, but it is tragically bound up with so many of the other social factors that blight children's lives – the impact of drugs, the health inequalities that mean dramatic differences in life expectancy at birth between children born in neighbouring communities, the higher vulnerability to crime of children in deprived areas, and more.

4.3.7.9 We welcome the cross-party, and indeed cross-Governmental, consensus on the target of eradicating child poverty by 2020, and will continue to work with others to maintain pressure to "keep the promise". The UK Government now plan to embody the target in a statutory obligation. We applaud that ambition, but we join with others in urging a continued focus on the policies needed to fulfil the ambition.

---

<sup>71</sup> Ibid

<sup>72</sup> The UK entered its reservation when it ratified the Convention in 1991, restricting the rights of children who are subject to immigration control.

4.3.7.10 While it is good news to learn that "the child poverty rate in Scotland is now among the lowest in the UK at 25%" (a fall of 1/5 since the late 1990s)<sup>73</sup>, the figure, and what it represents, remains a scandal. In an economic climate in which mind-boggling sums of money are found at short notice to bale out the failings of our financial institutions, there is a danger that targets such as this may be sidelined or treated – with unconscious irony – as luxuries we cannot afford. There are Biblical as well as humanitarian priorities which insist we cannot afford to ignore or accept the scandal of child poverty in an affluent country.

4.3.7.11 Through the work of the Priority Areas Committee, Faith in Community Scotland and many local congregations, the Church is actively engaging with families and communities living in poverty. In this, and other ways, we are seeking to fulfil the gospel commitment to prioritise our poorest parish communities in directing our resources. The challenge of how the Church effectively plays a part in tackling poverty – and its most scandalous impact on children – is a job for everyone.

#### 4.3.8 The Child in the community of faith: Baptism

4.3.8.1 A key moment in our practical theology of growing up is the baptismal service. Recent forms of the service have sought to make clear the starting point for baptism is the gift of God's grace ("for you, Jesus Christ came into the world ..."). It is in response to that grace that we invite parents to make a commitment "to teach your child the truths and duties of the Christian faith and by prayer and example to bring her/him up in the life and worship of the Church". It may be seen as a strength of our tradition that, because these are important commitments for the growth of the child, they are made by the parents.

4.3.8.2 But – as followers of Jesus, who looked beyond his own parents to a community of faith in which he had to grow – we also immediately look beyond the parents, and as a congregation we make a commitment in the baptismal service, to welcome the child and to "live before all God's children in a kindly and Christian way, and to share with them the knowledge and love of Christ". This moment, in which we recognise that the crucial role of parents is not an exclusive one, is where our acceptance of children in the midst of the faith community, and our wider work with them, start.

4.3.8.3 In recent years many Churches have very successfully started having 'Services of Blessing' for parents who struggle with the vows of Baptism. We are aware of a variety of good practice within the Church in emphasising what is happening through both these rituals: a welcoming gift, follow up through the cradle roll, birthday cards, invitations to special services and events, and the involvement of elders and/or children in these services as a way of personalising the shared commitment. If we hope that parents will see baptism as more than a formality, we must as a community of faith ensure that we do so as well: "she/he will always be at home in the Christian community and there will always be a place for her/him".

---

<sup>73</sup> Peter Kenway, Tom MacInnes and Guy Palmer, *Monitoring Poverty and Social Exclusion in Scotland*, Joseph Rowantree Foundation, November 2008

4.3.8.4 While this (and Jesus' stern warning to those who "cause any of these little ones to stumble") clearly means much more than ensuring that children are not harmed within the life of the Church; it includes that as a basic duty. That is why our Churches must be exemplars of good practice in safeguarding children from abuse.

4.3.8.5 That is not to deny that there is a real debate about the impact of a risk-averse culture on children, which we touch on elsewhere in this report. The extra thought and effort required to work carefully with children cannot become an excuse for turning them away; or not doing the work in the first place.

#### 4.3.9 The Child in the Community of Faith: Child Friendly Church

4.3.9.1 Our first aim in presenting this report is to stimulate debate within the Church, particularly when conversations can be held across the generations.

4.3.9.2 As a Church we should view the numbers of children active within the life of our congregations with humility and concern. Yet there remain substantial numbers of young people who are lively parts of the Church, or actively involved in activities rooted in the Church. Research conducted in 2008 identified 16,672 young people aged 12-16 involved in Church of Scotland congregations and 4,383 young adults aged 17-25.<sup>74</sup> They are engaged in activities from traditional Sunday Schools to youth cafes, from after school clubs to uniformed organisations. There are diverse examples of successful new ventures from a high tech Sunday School in rural Dumfriesshire to film-making in a Glasgow housing scheme; many hard-pressed congregations are finding resources to focus on the young people of their parish communities. Many of these activities are carried out in partnership with other organisations and so may not be fully reflected in the church statistics meaning that in this area the work of the church is under reported.

4.3.9.3 As we have gathered material for his report, we have kept in touch with the Mission and Discipleship Council's staff who support this work. That has convinced us that there are success stories to be shared.

4.3.9.4 We have also listened ecumenically, and we have been impressed by the work carried out in the United Reformed Church in developing the "The Child Friendly Church Award".<sup>75</sup> The URC themselves developed it from its first incarnation in an Anglican diocese.

4.3.9.5 The URC summarise the scheme thus; "The process is a simple and helpful one which will encourage you to look at your work with children and young people and ensure that you are taking account of the needs of these important members of your community and also fulfilling your responsibilities to keep them safe while in your care. Areas covered include: Child Protection; Safe environment; Training & support for

---

<sup>74</sup> Research conducted by the Mission and Discipleship Council of the Church of Scotland, September 2008.

<sup>75</sup> This model was originally conceived by the Anglican Diocese of Liverpool.

leaders; Nurture of children & young people; Child friendly worship; Under 5s; Hearing children's voices; Feedback & evaluation; Your vision for Youth & Children's Work".

4.3.9.6 It is our view that relatively little work would require to be done to make this scheme applicable to the Church of Scotland situation (and the URC are happy to allow us to do that) and we would recommend that the necessary work is carried out to incorporate this useful and encouraging award into our systems, with the potential to bring children and young people to the centre of our ways of being Church.

**What can Churches do to help?**

Children's responses included:

- (a) Provide clubs and outings
- (b) Encourage children to come to Church
- (c) More fundraising projects for charity (like people in poverty)
- (d) Summer Sunday School

Young people's responses included:

- (a) Charity work
- (b) Got to combat trend where one goes to Church as kid and then grows out of it.
- (c) Fairtrade groups within schools
- (d) Charity work – unique position with volunteers and fundraising
- (e) Challenge dogged traditionalism which is very intolerant and dismissive of children

Adult responses included:

- (a) Help create community
- (b) Affirm people's real, honest experience
- (c) Make sermons less boring
- (d) Provide appropriate activities and improve quality of religious education
- (e) Prophetic voice
- (f) Enable young and old to listen to each other
- (g) Listen, beyond paying lip service
- (h) Make safe places for young people to hang out and ask questions

**4.3.10 The Child in the image of God: Spirituality**

4.3.10.1 Most, if not all, of the international documents which define the rights of children recognise in some form a right to spiritual development. This is clearly an area of particular concern to the Church. If we are arguing that children have rights because they bear the image of God, then the spiritual dimension of growing up – the dimension that describes their relationship with God – cannot be ignored. For children who grow up in families of faith, the spiritual dimension of life will be embedded into their life together. Those who do not have that kind of family back-ground may only have the opportunity to discover the spiritual dimension of life either through engagement in church based activities or through schools.

4.3.10.2 This case, within the context of education, has been well made in the recently revised ACTS document "A Christian View of Education"<sup>76</sup>:

"The Christian Vision of education is founded upon an understanding of the human person as a unique individual, created in the image of God, worthy of respect and deserving to be nurtured in all his/her God-given talents, for self and for others. Each person, as a unique part of God's creation, deserves to be treated with respect and dignity - in other words, to be loved - for who we are and for what we can become. The purpose of education is to develop the full potential of each person - for our own good and for the good of others. Education should develop all our human capacities - moral, spiritual, emotional, physical and intellectual. It should help us to make meaning out of life and to acquire a sense of purpose in and for life. It should enable us to choose our priorities for life, to develop values and to grow in virtue, and to develop loving relationships with God, with self and with other people."

4.3.10.3 The YMCA and others have also been arguing the case for recognition of the spiritual dimension of youth work within the Scottish Government's youth work strategy.

4.3.10.4 There are widespread pressures, in education and in Government policies, which would reduce growing up to a preparation for life as an economically active consumer. That, we believe, is a recipe for disaster; stunting children's potential. Growing up is about growing, in body, mind and spirit, into the fullness of Christ, about discovering life in all its fullness; anything which narrows that denies both the rights of children and the image of God in them.

4.3.10.5 We do, at the same time, welcome the Government initiative that states that every school must have at least six Religious Observance Assemblies, in addition to traditional celebrations central to the life of the school community.

4.3.10.6 As a Church, we bear witness to a holistic view of young people, resisting anything which reduces them. That includes asserting the crucial spiritual dimensions of education and of youth work.

4.3.11 Growing Up – God isn't finished with me yet

4.3.11.1 At first glance, the New Testament might be seen as equivocal about growing up. On one hand, we are all encouraged to keep growing, in faith, hope and love, into the fullness of Christ; we are to leave childish things behind. Yet, on the other, we are to accept the kingdom with childlike faith. Perhaps this is not so much a contradiction as a challenge: to resist the tendency to assume we have "arrived" as grown-ups in faith and life – God is not finished with us yet.

---

<sup>76</sup> Action of Churches together in Scotland Education Group 'A Christian Vision' for Education in Scottish Schools, <http://acts-scotland.org/news/news2009/003visoneducation.shtml>

4.3.11.2 At the heart of that challenge would be valuing children not for what they might become but for who they are and whose image they bear. Then – both personally and together – we can nurture them as they grow.

4.3.11.3 When Oliver James, the psychologist whose book "Affluenza" is a prophetic critique of our consumer society, was recently asked where we can start in building a different world, he said "by attending to the needs of the under 5s"<sup>77</sup>. Or, as, in more Biblical terms, Keith White puts it:

"In leading us to be alongside children He entrusts us with the heart of His mission and kingdom. He warns us of the costs and dangers. But He promises that as we open our hearts to one child, we welcome Christ himself. At the dawn of a new millennium we have an awesome calling to be alongside children at risk, and in the process to reshape the processes, nature and structures of Church, mission and society. If we fail, it is not just children who continue to suffer but civilisation as God sees it. Not only will children fail to have their rightful place, but Jesus himself will be misunderstood and unrecognised. He will have knocked at the door of our souls and fellowships in vain. But when we welcome a child in His name, we have opened our hearts afresh to Him."<sup>78</sup>

---

<sup>77</sup> Oliver James, *Affluenza*, Vermillion, 2007

<sup>78</sup> Keith White, *A Little Child Shall Lead Them. Rediscovering Children at the Heart of Mission*. Paper presented to the Cutting Edge Conference, De Bron, Holland, 2001