



No Knives Better Lives – a rights based approach to preventing knife crime

18/11/2020

Input from Dr Claire Lighthowler, Director at [CYCJ](#)

- From her research on [Scotland's approach to children in conflict with the law](#), conclusions were:
 - o Scotland would benefit from thinking about children in conflict with the law from the perspective of rights
 - o Making upholding rights the basis of what we look to 'do' through the *youth justice system*
- This would represent a shift from thinking about children as troubled, challenged, vulnerable and challenging to children as 'rights holders and defenders'.
- This approach was already taken in Wales from 2014.
- Arguments are that by taking a rights-based approach we would *prevent* children entering the justice system and also prevent the negative consequences of prevention in a youth justice context i.e. stigmatising, labelling.
- Also, a focus on rights *could* assist Scotland's broader attempts to grapple with the inequalities and wider structural issues which are the major reasons why children engage in offending behaviours.
- Currently, Scotland has areas to improve in respecting the rights of children in conflict with the law



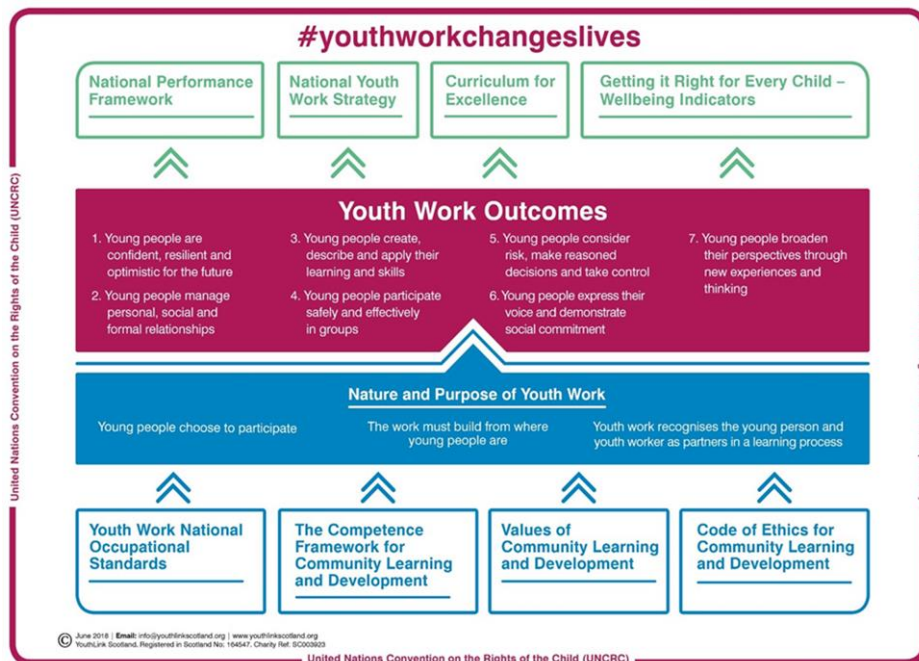
- Covid-19 has exacerbated issues for children in justice system – i.e. poverty, exclusion, Covid specific criminalisation – 'usual suspects', huge rise in Child Criminal Exploitation, no consideration of early release for children on remand.
- In fact, evidence has been found of institutional bias and prejudice in the youth justice system against people from deprived communities.
- The adoption of the UNCRC into Scot's Law will help minimize such discrimination and will force the criminalisation of 16/17 year olds to be illegal.
- The adoption of the UNCRC is a real opportunity to make changes in Scotland. Claire Lighthowler suggests 3 key actions:
 - Coordinate investment in community and social resources to ensure a more strategic approach is taken to developing infrastructure to prevent children from offending in the first place, working with local authorities and community partners to help them disinvest in the 'managing offending' approach to release resources to improve inclusion and prevent offending (building on the inclusion as prevention model being developed in South Lanarkshire).
 - Support those working with children in conflict with the law to critically evaluate their approach to children experiencing poverty; being alert to unintended consequences of individual bias as well as policy and practice that discriminates on the basis of economic disadvantage.
 - Challenge and develop alternative ways of working to the 'eligibility criteria' model which is based on a high level of need

being reached before intervention. Design and cost an alternative vision, developing pilots and approaches based on meeting need first time it is identified, modelling costs and long-term savings for such an approach.

- Support local partners to prioritise the needs and wellbeing of families, and assist families in providing care and protection and in ensuring the physical and mental wellbeing of children.
- A rights and entitlements-based approach can therefore be seen as the next phase of development for a preventative approach building on the Kilbrandon foundations.

Input from Kevin Kane, Policy and Research Manager at [Youthlink Scotland](#)

- Kevin spoke of his personal experiences growing up and the effect youth work had on his life direction. He strongly believes every child has a right to youth work.
- Youth work is an enabling environment, has a proven track record and is 'human rights work' in itself.
- See below for the youth work 'logic model'



- New research on the impact of youth work, using Edinburgh as a case study, found [here](#).
- Study shows:
 - Youth work makes a significant impact on young people's skills, confidence, wellbeing and access to opportunities
 - Young people who had engaged with youth work services learnt new skills and behaviours, became more confident,

made new friends, developed positive and supportive relationships with their youth workers, and significantly improved their wellbeing

- Almost three-quarters of the young people taking part in the research said that youth work had given them skills for life
 - 80% benefited from improved confidence
- With such evidence, it is clear youth work and the UNCRC are inextricably linked. There is therefore a case and opportunity for youth work to be statutory and even the vehicle through which the UNCRC is implemented.
 - Ways we can help this vision are 1- talk to others about it 2- find allies 3- take ownership.

Finally, there was an input from NKBL on their latest resources
<https://noknivesbetterlives.com/practitioners/>