Autumn/Winter 2026

Children's Health Scotland



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MY HEALTH, MY RIGHTS CONFERENCE 2026

Children's Voices Turning Rights Into Action

On 2 October 2026, more than 160 children and young people, families, professionals, policymakers and partners gathered at Stirling Court Hotel for the My Health, My Rights Conference 2026, a landmark event celebrating 50 years of Children's Health Scotland and the launch of the National Health Rights Report 2026.

Hosted by broadcaster Laura Boyd and shaped with our Health Rights Defenders, the conference brought together those with lived experience of navigating Scotland's health services and those with the power to influence change. Throughout the day, one message rang loud and clear: ***Children and young people want to be heard, involved and respected in decisions about their health and wellbeing.***

The day began with a powerful film created by our Health Rights Defenders, reminding delegates why children's voices must remain at the centre of decisions about health, care and support. Their experiences, hopes and aspirations set the tone for a conference built on participation, inclusion and meaningful engagement.

Health Rights Defender Isha captured the spirit of the day perfectly: *"It's been amazing to see everyone come together from something we created. It's been a lot of fun too."*

The conference featured inspiring contributions from the Rt Hon John Swinney, First Minister of Scotland; Nicola Killean OBE, Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland; Sammi Kinghorn OBE; health professionals; national organisations; and, most importantly, children and young people themselves. Together they explored how Scotland can become a nation where rights are not only understood but consistently experienced.



As delegates gathered throughout the day, there was a strong sense that this conference was not simply about launching a report. It was about creating a shared commitment to action and ensuring children's voices continue to influence the future of health and wellbeing in Scotland.

Read more about our conference on page 20.



SCOTTISH CHILDREN'S HEALTH WEEK 2026

50 Years of Shaping Children's Health, Wellbeing and Rights

Scottish Children's Health Week 2026 was more than a celebration. It was a moment to reflect on where we've come from, celebrate how far we've come, and look ahead to the future children and young people want to see.

From 7-13 September, children, young people, families, schools, healthcare professionals and communities across Scotland came together for our biggest Scottish Children's Health Week yet. As we mark our 50th anniversary as a Scottish registered charity, the week provided an opportunity to celebrate five decades of supporting children, young people and families while reaffirming a simple belief that continues to drive our work today:

Every child has the right to the best possible health.

This year's theme, My Health, My Rights, encouraged children and young people to think about what health rights mean to them and why every child should feel safe, respected, included and listened to whenever decisions are made about their health and wellbeing.

Throughout the week, activities took place in schools, hospitals, community settings and homes across Scotland, helping children learn more about their rights through creativity, play, storytelling and conversation. Children explored topics including being heard, accessing information they understand, having trusted adults by their side, and feeling confident enough to speak up about what matters to them. The week also celebrated the growing role of children's voices in shaping the future of health and wellbeing in Scotland.

Helen Forrest, Chief Executive of Children's Health Scotland, said:

"As we celebrate 50 years of Children's Health Scotland, Scottish Children's Health Week reminds us why our work matters. Children and young people have told us that health rights matter to them. They want to be heard, respected and involved in decisions about their lives. This week is about creating opportunities for those voices to be heard and helping Scotland become a nation that truly understands and respects children's health rights."



From colourful activities and community events to national conversations about children's healthcare rights, Scottish Children's Health Week 2026 demonstrated the power of working together to create a healthier future for every child.

Because every child deserves to know their rights. Every child deserves to be heard, and every child deserves the best possible health.



The Activity Book Bringing Health Rights to Life



One of the highlights of Scottish Children's Health Week 2026 was our special anniversary Scottish Children's Health Week Activity Book, created to help children and young people explore their health, wellbeing and rights in fun and engaging ways.

Packed with creative activities, games, puzzles and challenges, the Activity Book encouraged children across Scotland to discover more about what it means to have the right to the best possible health. Through play, creativity and reflection, children learned about their rights, developed self-management skills, explored wellbeing themes and celebrated the things that make them unique.

Each day of Scottish Children's Health Week focused on a different theme:

Be Active, Be Brave, Be Calm, Be Happy, Be Friendly, Be Kind and Be Helpful.

Activities were designed to build confidence, encourage positive wellbeing and remind children that their voice matters.

Created with support from a range of charities, community organisations and partners, the Activity Book reached children in schools, homes, hospitals and community settings throughout Scottish Children's Health Week. We're incredibly grateful to our partners who helped bring the Activity Book to life, and to the children and young people who inspired its content – particularly our Health Rights Defenders. Their creativity and insight continue to shape our work and remind us why rights-based, child-centred approaches matter.

At the heart of the Activity Book was the My Health, My Rights Children and Young People's Charter (shown below), created by children and young people living with health conditions in Scotland. The Charter highlights the health rights that matter most to them and reflects their vision of a Scotland where every child feels safe, respected, informed and heard. As one Health Rights Defender told us: *"I didn't know I had health rights until I learned about them. Now I know my voice matters."*

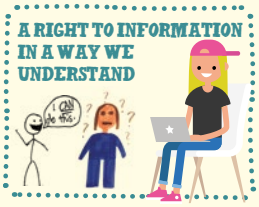


MY HEALTH, MY RIGHTS

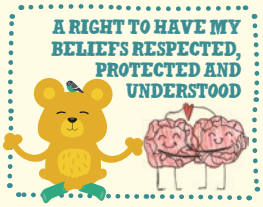
CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S CHARTER

This Charter has been created by children and young people living with health conditions in Scotland. In no particular order, it shows their 10 most important health rights. They asked for them not to be numbered, as they are all equally important in their own right. At Children's Health Scotland, we listen to what children and young people tell us about their health and wellbeing, and support their right to the best possible health. We think this Charter is amazing and send a big thank you to every individual who has helped to create it.





















Highlights from the Week



Bringing Health Rights to Life Across Scotland

Scottish Children's Health Week 2026 was filled with opportunities to celebrate children's health, wellbeing and rights while strengthening partnerships across Scotland. From national conversations with decision-makers to activities with children and families, the week highlighted the importance of working together to ensure every child can enjoy the best possible health.



Taking Children's Health Rights to Parliament

One of the highlights of the week was attending the Children's Hospices Across Scotland (CHAS) Parliamentary Reception at the Scottish Parliament. The reception brought together MSPs, Scottish Government officials, NHS leaders, charity representatives, families and supporters to explore how Scotland can continue improving care and support for children and young people with serious and life-shortening conditions. At the event, we were delighted to host an exhibition stand showcasing our work and Scottish Children's Health Week. Commenting on the event Helen Forrest our Chief Executive said: *"Children's health and rights are everyone's responsibility. It is through partnership working and listening to children's voices that lasting change happens."*

Celebrating Children's Voices at Robin House

On Friday 11 September, Scottish Children's Health Week continued at Robin House with a special party event delivered in partnership with CHAS and the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland. The event brought together children, families and professionals to explore what children's rights mean in everyday life and how we can continue to ensure children's voices are heard when decisions affecting their lives are made.

A Week to Remember



Across Scotland, children learned about their rights, celebrated health and wellbeing, and discovered how their voices can help shape the future. As Children's Health Scotland celebrates its 50th anniversary year, Scottish Children's Health Week 2026 demonstrated the power of collaboration, partnership and participation. Most importantly, it reminded us that when children are listened to, supported and empowered, they can help create positive change for themselves and for future generations.

SCOTTISH CHILDREN'S HEALTH AWARDS



Meet Our 2026 Winners and Nominate Your 2027 Heroes



Every year, the Scottish Children's Health Awards celebrate the remarkable people, teams and organisations who make a positive difference to the lives of children and young people across Scotland.

As part of Children's Health Scotland's 50th anniversary year, the 2026 Awards brought together inspiring young people, dedicated professionals, outstanding teams and community organisations to recognise their compassion, commitment and achievements. The awards were presented by broadcaster Laura Boyd, who spent Scottish Children's Health Week sharing the stories behind each winner and helping us celebrate their incredible impact.

Of course, no Scottish Children's Health Awards would be complete without our much-loved Teddy trophies. These special awards recognise the individuals and organisations who help children and young people feel healthier, happier, more confident and more supported.

The stories on the following pages showcase this year's deserving winners and finalists, demonstrating the difference that kindness, dedication and determination can make in the lives of children, young people and families.



Awards 2027 Are Now Open

Do you know someone who has made a real difference to the life of a child or young person? Nominations for the **Scottish Children's Health Awards 2027** are now open, and we'd love to hear their story.

Find out how to nominate on pages 16-17

Because when we celebrate those who care, support and inspire, we help create a Scotland where every child's health, wellbeing and rights matter.



YOUNG ACHIEVER AWARD 2026: A LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

Each year, the Young Achiever Award honours a child or young person who has shown extraordinary courage, determination and resilience in the face of adversity. It recognises someone who, despite the challenges life has thrown their way, has never given up and has continued to inspire others through their actions. This year, we are proud to celebrate Millie Coe as our Young Achiever Award winner.



Turning Adversity Into Inspiration

At just 14 years old, Millie Coe has already faced more challenges than many people experience in a lifetime. Yet rather than allowing those challenges to define her, she has used them as motivation to grow, succeed and support others.

Millie's journey took a significant turn when she entered foster care while starting high school. Adapting to a new living situation while navigating the challenges of secondary school was far from easy. Naturally quiet and reserved, she initially found it difficult to build friendships and experienced a period when her mental health was at its lowest. With determination, and support from those around her, Millie gradually found confidence, discovered her strengths and began to thrive.

Today, school is one of the places where Millie feels most at home. She enjoys being part of the wider school community and has become known for helping and encouraging others. Her hard work has been recognised through academic awards in Science and Information Technology, achievements that reflect both her commitment and ability.

A key part of Millie's story is her desire to help those around her. Reflecting on her experiences in foster care, she realised that everyone carries challenges of their own. Rather than focusing solely on her own circumstances, Millie looked for ways to make a positive difference in the lives of others.

"After a while in foster care, I realised everyone had something making life a bit harder and I decided I should do something because I didn't like standing by and doing nothing if there were things I could be doing."

One of her proudest achievements has been taking part in a charity 5K event for Kayleigh's Wee Stars. Through training and fundraising, Millie raised around £120 to support the charity's work. She also volunteers through her Scout group, giving her time to support activities and young people within her local community.

Millie's ambition for the future is equally inspiring. She hopes to become a GP, combining her love of helping others with a career that can make a real difference to people's lives.

"When I leave school I want to be a GP to help other people and to be a light in the darkness that can cloud many people's lives."

The judging panel was particularly impressed by Millie's resilience and her commitment to helping others despite the challenges she has faced. Her fundraising, volunteering and determination to succeed demonstrated exactly why she was such a deserving winner of the Young Achiever Award.

Helen Forrest, Chief Executive of Children's Health Scotland, said: "*Millie embodies everything the Young Achiever Award stands for. Her resilience, kindness and determination to make a positive difference to the lives of others are truly inspiring. She is a remarkable young person and a very worthy winner.*"

Congratulations, Millie. Your courage, compassion and determination are an inspiration to us all.

To read Millie's full story visit: **www.childrenshealthscotland.org/youngachiever2026/**



CHILDREN'S BRAVERY AWARD 2026: A LIFETIME OF COURAGE

The Children's Bravery Award honours a child or young person who has shown extraordinary courage while living with serious illness, disability or complex health challenges. It recognises those whose determination, resilience and strength inspire everyone around them. This year, we are proud to celebrate Madiee Merrick as our Children's Bravery Award winner.

Strength Beyond Measure

For 16-year-old Madiee Merrick, courage has been part of everyday life since the moment she was born. Diagnosed with gastroschisis, a condition where a baby's intestines develop outside the body, she faced major medical challenges from her earliest days and spent much of her childhood in hospital.

For the first three and a half years of her life, Madiee never made it home. While most children were growing up in familiar surroundings, she was surrounded by hospital wards, doctors and nurses. Yet even then, she showed the determination and fighting spirit that continues to define her today.

At the age of five, Madiee underwent a life-saving small bowel transplant. The operation offered hope for the future, but further challenges followed when she later developed cancer linked to the transplant and had to endure extensive chemotherapy treatment.

Despite spending much of her life receiving medical care, Madiee has never allowed her health challenges to define who she is. Instead, she has become known for her kindness, positivity and willingness to support others.

Having spent so much time in hospital herself, she understands how difficult long hospital stays can be for children and families. On Ward 3B, she became a familiar and much-loved presence, spending time with younger patients, sharing books and helping brighten difficult days for others facing health challenges of their own.



Her mum, Alana, described the impact Madiee has on those around her: "*Madiee takes everything in her stride and when she's on the ward she will always go out of her way to play with anyone in the playroom.*"

Now 16, Madiee has finally been discharged home, although she continues to receive ongoing treatment. For her and her family, milestones that many people take for granted have been hard earned and deeply cherished.

The judging panel was deeply moved by Madiee's story and particularly impressed by the way she continues to encourage and support other children despite facing significant health challenges herself. They recognised her as an exceptional example of courage, resilience and kindness.

Helen Forrest, Chief Executive of Children's Health Scotland, said: *"Madiee's story is truly inspirational. She has faced more challenges in her young life than most people could imagine, yet she continues to show extraordinary courage, compassion and positivity. She is a remarkable young person and a very deserving recipient of this year's Children's Bravery Award."*

Congratulations, Madiee. Your courage, kindness and determination inspire everyone around you.

To read Madiee's full story visit: **www.childrenshealthscotland.org/childrensbravery2026/**



CHILDREN'S CHOICE AWARD 2026: CARE THAT CHANGES LIVES

The Children's Choice Award is unique because it is nominated by a child, young person or family who want to recognise someone who has made a real difference during their healthcare journey. The award celebrates those whose kindness, compassion and dedication leave a lasting impact when it is needed most. This year, we are proud to present the Children's Choice Award to Caitlin Patterson and Susan Campbell from the Children's Community Nursing Team at University Hospital Wishaw, NHS Lanarkshire.



Building Confidence Through Compassion

For one family in Lanarkshire, nurses Caitlin Patterson and Susan Campbell have made an extraordinary difference to their son's healthcare journey. Through patience, kindness and a commitment to helping him feel involved in his own care, they have transformed experiences that were once distressing into opportunities for confidence and independence.

The pair work as part of the Children's Community Nursing Team, supporting children and young people with a range of complex health needs in homes, schools, clinics and community settings. Their role is not only to provide clinical care, but also to empower children and families to manage health conditions as confidently as possible.

They were nominated by Jennifer Cunningham, whose son has a processing issue and experiences significant anxiety around medical procedures. Over several years, Caitlin Patterson and Susan Campbell built a trusting relationship with him, helping him become more comfortable, involved and independent in his care.

In her nomination, Jennifer explained: *"These nurses include him in his care and encourage him to be independent where appropriate. This gives him a sense of responsibility and makes him feel good. It also helps change his focus from his fears and he no longer needs restrained to complete his medical procedures or maintain his stoma site."*

One of the most rewarding aspects of the nurses' role has been watching the young boy grow in confidence over the years. Having supported him through nursery and into school, they have been there for many important milestones, celebrating achievements and helping him develop greater independence.

For Caitlin Patterson and Susan Campbell, receiving the Children's Choice Award is particularly meaningful because it comes directly from a family they have supported.

The judging panel was particularly impressed by the nurses' focus on helping children feel included in their care and their commitment to building trusting relationships with families. Their nomination perfectly demonstrated the purpose of the Children's Choice Award: recognising those who make a lasting difference through compassion, understanding and outstanding care.

Helen Forrest, Chief Executive of Children's Health Scotland, said: *"Caitlin and Susan demonstrate the very best of children's healthcare. Through patience, kindness and a commitment to helping children feel included and empowered, they have made a real difference to one young boy's life and his family's experience of care."*

The Children's Choice Award is particularly special because it comes directly from those who have experienced care first-hand. Through their unwavering support, Caitlin Patterson and Susan Campbell have helped one young boy overcome his fears, build confidence and become more involved in his own healthcare journey.

Congratulations, Caitlin and Susan. Your compassion, professionalism and dedication have made a lasting difference to a child and his family.

To read Caitlin and Susan's full story visit: **www.childrenshealthscotland.org/childrenschoice2026/**



HEALTH AND WELLBEING AWARD 2026: HELPING CHILDREN FIND HOPE AND HEALING

The Health and Wellbeing Award recognises an individual or team whose care, compassion, support or advocacy has made a significant difference to the health and wellbeing of children and young people. It celebrates those who go above and beyond to ensure children, young people and families receive the support they need to thrive. This year, we are delighted to present the Health and Wellbeing Award to Tanya Richards from Wellbeing Scotland.



Supporting Children When They Need It Most

For Tanya Richards, supporting children and young people is far more than a profession. As Team Leader within the Children and Families Service at Wellbeing Scotland, she is committed to ensuring children, young people and families feel listened to, respected and supported during some of the most difficult periods of their lives.

Tanya was nominated by Emma Jackson, who described the exceptional impact Tanya has on both the children she supports and the colleagues she leads. Through her compassionate approach and unwavering commitment, Tanya has helped shape services that provide safe, effective and nurturing support for vulnerable children and young people.

A key part of Tanya's role involves supporting children and young people who have experienced abuse. Often one of the first people families meet when they access the service, she works hard to create an environment where children feel safe, valued and in control from the very beginning.

"At Wellbeing Scotland, I support children and young people who have been impacted by child abuse. My role is to provide a safe, supportive space where they can begin to make sense of their experiences at their own pace," Tanya explained.

Alongside her leadership responsibilities, Tanya also works directly with children and young people through counselling sessions, helping them understand their experiences, recognise their strengths and build confidence for the future. While the work can be challenging, she believes every child deserves the opportunity to move forward with hope.

For Tanya, the most rewarding moments come when children begin to believe in themselves again.

"When a child or young person opens up about what they're experiencing, it signifies that they are starting to trust me. Then, at the end of the counselling journey, it's wonderful to see them move forward and tackle new challenges. This is a time filled with hope."

Helen Forrest, Chief Executive of Children's Health Scotland, said: *"Tanya's compassion, dedication and commitment to placing children and young people at the centre of everything she does truly sets her apart. Through her leadership and direct support, she helps children and families navigate some of the most difficult experiences imaginable while ensuring they feel listened to, respected and valued."*

Through her kindness, leadership and unwavering commitment to supporting children and young people, Tanya Richards has made a lasting difference to countless lives and is a truly deserving recipient of the Health and Wellbeing Award 2026.

Congratulations, Tanya. Your compassion, dedication and commitment to helping children find hope and healing are an inspiration to us all.

To read Tanya's full story visit: **www.childrenshealthscotland.org/healthandwellbeing2026/**



IMPROVING LIFE EXPERIENCES AWARD 2026: TRANSFORMING LIVES THROUGH CARE, LEARNING AND OPPORTUNITY

The Improving Life Experiences Award recognises an individual, team or organisation that has made a significant difference to the lives of children and young people living with health conditions, disabilities or additional support needs. The award celebrates those who create opportunities, remove barriers and help children and young people reach their full potential. This year, we are delighted to present the Improving Life Experiences Award to the Stanmore House School Multidisciplinary Team.



Every Child Deserves the Opportunity to Thrive

For the dedicated team at Stanmore House School, improving the lives of children and young people with disabilities and complex needs is not simply a job. It is a commitment that shapes everything they do. Every day, education professionals, therapists and care staff work together to ensure each child has the opportunity to thrive, achieve their potential and enjoy a rich and fulfilling school experience.

At the heart of the school's approach is a belief that every child deserves an education tailored to their individual needs, abilities and aspirations. By bringing together expertise from education, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, speech and language therapy and care, the multidisciplinary team creates personalised learning experiences that support children in every aspect of their development.

The team's work is firmly rooted in the principles and values of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), ensuring every young person is treated with dignity, respect and understanding. They work tirelessly to create opportunities that enable children to flourish both inside and outside the classroom.

Those who nominated the team spoke passionately about the impact the school has on children and their families, describing it as *"a truly wonderful place."* The nomination recognised not only the expertise of staff but also the warmth, compassion and dedication that is evident throughout the school community.

Clare McCarron, Head Teacher, said the team was both surprised and delighted to receive the award. She said: "*I know that I am speaking on behalf of the Stanmore Team when I say it is a privilege to work with the children of Stanmore House School. They are what motivates us.*"

The school's success is built on a collaborative approach where education, care and therapy professionals work seamlessly together to support children in achieving the very best outcomes. While academic learning is important, the team is equally committed to providing experiences that build confidence, independence and self-esteem.

The judging panel was particularly impressed by the way the multidisciplinary team lives and breathes the principles of children's rights, ensuring young people are supported to learn, grow and achieve their full potential every day.

Helen Forrest, Chief Executive of Children's Health Scotland, said: "*The Stanmore House School Multidisciplinary Team demonstrates the life-changing difference that can be achieved when education, care and therapy professionals work together around the needs of the child. Their commitment to children's rights, dignity and wellbeing shines through in everything they do.*"

Congratulations to the Stanmore House School Multidisciplinary Team. Through your dedication, expertise and unwavering belief in every child's potential, you continue to create opportunities for children and young people to thrive.

To read the full story visit: **www.childrenshealthscotland.org/improvinglifeexperiences2026/**



HEALTH-RELATED PLAY AWARD 2026: CREATING JOY THROUGH THE POWER OF PLAY

The Health-Related Play Award recognises an individual or team who uses play to support children and young people during their healthcare journey. The award celebrates those who help children cope with treatment, build confidence, reduce anxiety and create positive experiences through the therapeutic power of play. This year, we are delighted to present the Health-Related Play Award to Chelsea Stuart.



Bringing Joy, Comfort and Confidence to Children in Hospital

For Chelsea Stuart, play is far more than fun and games. As a Health Play Assistant on a children's ward, she uses creativity, imagination and compassion to help children and young people navigate some of the most challenging experiences of their lives.

Working with patients from birth to 18 years old, Chelsea creates opportunities for children to play, express themselves and feel more comfortable within the hospital environment. Whether she is organising messy play activities, encouraging creativity through arts and crafts or simply spending time listening to a young person who needs support, her approach is guided by the needs of each individual child.

Despite the significant impact she has on children and families, Chelsea was genuinely surprised to learn she had won the award.

"Honestly, it's extremely surreal. When I first opened the email and saw the word 'winner', I thought it was spam! I genuinely couldn't believe it. I'm still in complete disbelief that I've won," she said.

A key part of Chelsea's role involves helping children cope with unfamiliar surroundings, difficult treatments and lengthy hospital stays. Through health-related play, she helps reduce anxiety, build confidence and create moments of normality during what can often be stressful experiences.

Her support extends beyond young patients to parents, carers and siblings, recognising that a child's hospital stay affects the whole family. By creating opportunities for families to spend quality time together and helping them make positive memories, Chelsea ensures those around the child feel supported too.

One of the things Chelsea values most is building meaningful relationships with children and families. She explained: *"The biggest privilege for me is getting to know each child and their family. Spending time with them, building trust and watching those relationships grow is something I'll never take for granted."*

The judging panel was particularly impressed by Chelsea's passion, creativity and dedication to ensuring children feel seen, heard and valued throughout their healthcare journey. Her nomination demonstrated the profound impact health-related play can have on children and families during difficult times.

Helen Forrest, Chief Executive of Children's Health Scotland, said: *"Chelsea embodies everything that health-related play should be. Through her creativity, kindness and ability to connect with children and families, she helps transform hospital experiences and creates moments of joy, confidence and comfort when they are needed most."*

Through her imagination, compassion and unwavering commitment, Chelsea Stuart continues to make a lasting difference to children and families when they need support most.

Congratulations, Chelsea. Your creativity, kindness and dedication continue to bring joy, comfort and confidence to children across Scotland.

To read Chelsea's full story visit: **www.childrenshealthscotland.org/healthrelatedplay2026/**



HEALTHCARE RIGHTS AWARD 2026: EMPOWERING YOUNG PEOPLE TO SHAPE HEALTHIER FUTURES

The Healthcare Rights Award recognises an individual or team that has made an outstanding contribution to advancing children's healthcare rights. It celebrates those who ensure children and young people are informed, included and empowered to have a voice in decisions affecting their health and wellbeing. This year, we are delighted to present the Healthcare Rights Award to the Borders Nicotine Prevention Toolkit Team, comprising Lizzie MacLeish, Sophie Gillians and Shona Easingwood.



Putting Young People's Voices at the Heart of Change

The Borders Nicotine Prevention Toolkit Team has transformed the way nicotine prevention is understood, taught and embedded across the Scottish Borders, ensuring young people are active participants in shaping messages about their health and wellbeing. Their innovative approach has been so successful that it has been recognised by ASH Scotland and shared internationally as an example of best practice.

Working as part of the Children and Young People's Health Improvement Team at NHS Borders, the team collaborates with schools, youth organisations, public services and third-sector partners to improve health outcomes for children and young people. Their work focuses on prevention, early intervention and ensuring young people have access to accurate information, support and opportunities to make informed decisions about their health.

At the centre of the project is a strong commitment to children's rights and participation. Rather than designing a programme for young people, the team worked alongside them to create resources and campaigns that reflected their experiences and concerns.

Reflecting on the initiative, Lizzie MacLeish explained: *"Our nicotine prevention initiative has been successful because it has been built with young people, rather than for young people. A key strength of the initiative has been empowering young people to shape the messaging and become advocates for positive change within their schools and communities."*

Through this collaborative approach, the team developed a suite of educational resources now used in schools and community settings across the region, helping increase awareness of nicotine-related harms while challenging misinformation and promoting healthier choices.

One of the most powerful moments of the project came when young people involved in the initiative were invited to speak directly with Scottish Government representatives at the nicotine prevention launch event. Having the opportunity to share their experiences, ideas and concerns demonstrated the true impact of meaningful participation.

The judging panel was particularly impressed by the team's rights-based approach, innovative partnership working and commitment to ensuring young people have a genuine voice in decisions affecting their health. The panel recognised the significant impact of the toolkit and the way the project has successfully targeted support where it is most needed.

Helen Forrest, Chief Executive of Children's Health Scotland, said: *"The Borders Nicotine Prevention Toolkit Team has demonstrated what can be achieved when children and young people are placed at the heart of designing solutions to improve health. Their commitment to listening to young people and ensuring their voices are heard has created a lasting impact across their communities."*

Congratulations to Lizzie, Sophie and Shona. Your dedication to empowering young people and advancing healthcare rights makes you worthy recipients of the Healthcare Rights Award 2026.

To read the full story visit: **www.childrenshealthscotland.org/healthcarerights2026/**



LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD 2026: A LEGACY THAT WILL BENEFIT GENERATIONS



The Lifetime Achievement Award is a special award chosen by the judging panel of the Scottish Children's Health Awards. It recognises an individual who has made an outstanding and lasting contribution to improving the health, wellbeing and lives of children and young people. This year, we are delighted to present the Lifetime Achievement Award to Dr Zoe Dunhill in recognition of her exceptional commitment to children and families across Scotland.

Shaping Better Futures for Children and Families

Throughout a distinguished career spanning many decades, Dr Zoe Dunhill has dedicated her life to improving the health and wellbeing of children, young people and families. As a respected paediatrician, leader and advocate, her influence has extended far beyond the families she supported directly, helping shape services, resources and information that continue to benefit countless people across Scotland.

Among her many achievements, Zoe played a pivotal role in the redevelopment of Ready Steady Baby and Ready Steady Toddler, trusted resources that have become familiar companions to generations of parents. By transforming complex health information into practical, accessible advice, she helped families feel informed and confident during pregnancy, birth and the early years of a child's life.

Zoe's impact has also been felt through her leadership within children's healthcare services. During her career, she spent more than 20 years working as a paediatrician in Edinburgh and served as Clinical Director at the children's hospital for eight years, helping lead services and support the planning of the new hospital. She later advised Health Boards and the Scottish Government on the delivery of children's health services and carried out inspections of services in England.

Despite the enormous impact of her work, Zoe remains characteristically modest about her achievements. *"I am so surprised and honoured to receive this award. It is really the whole team who should be thanked!"*

Reflecting on her career, Zoe spoke warmly about the opportunities she has had to make a difference and the colleagues she worked alongside throughout the years. *"I was a paediatrician in Edinburgh for more than 20 years and had the honour of being Clinical Director at the Children's Hospital for eight of them. That was the privilege of my life, leading a wonderful team of clinical staff and getting the planning of the new hospital under way."*

The judging panel was unanimous in recognising Zoe's exceptional contribution to children's health. Her work has influenced public health policy, shaped professional practice and provided trusted information to families across Scotland. The lasting impact of that work continues to be felt today.

Helen Forrest, Chief Executive of Children's Health Scotland, said: "*Dr Zoe Dunhill's influence on children's health in Scotland has been truly exceptional. Through her clinical leadership, expertise and unwavering commitment to improving information and services for children and families, she has helped shape the experiences of generations of parents and young people.*"

From her years as a practising paediatrician to her work influencing national services and resources, Zoe's contribution to Scotland's children and families cannot be overstated. This award celebrates not only a remarkable career, but a lasting legacy that will continue to support future generations.

Congratulations, Dr Zoe Dunhill. Thank you for your exceptional dedication to improving the lives of children, young people and families across Scotland.

To read Zoe's full story visit: **www.childrenshealthscotland.org/lifetimeachievement2026/**

SCOTTISH CHILDREN'S HEALTH AWARDS 2027

Celebrating the Moments That Matter

Every day across Scotland, individuals, teams, organisations and young people make a difference to the lives of children and young people. Sometimes it is a life-changing act of kindness. Sometimes it is a moment of encouragement, compassion or understanding. Often, it is simply someone taking the time to listen, care and make a child feel seen.

The Scottish Children's Health Awards celebrate these Moments That Matter.

Each year, the awards shine a spotlight on the people who go above and beyond to improve children's health, wellbeing, healthcare experiences and rights. They recognise the dedicated professionals, volunteers, organisations and inspiring young people whose actions can have a lasting impact on children, young people and families.

Following another unforgettable awards ceremony, we are delighted to announce that nominations for the Scottish Children's Health Awards 2027 are now open.

Our much-loved Teddy Awards have become a symbol of kindness, courage, compassion and achievement. Behind every Teddy Award is a remarkable story and every nomination helps us celebrate the people making a positive difference in the lives of children and young people across Scotland.





In 2027, finalists and guests will gather once again at the magnificent Balmoral Hotel, Edinburgh, for a special afternoon of celebration hosted by broadcaster and presenter Laura Boyd. Having interviewed our 2026 winners and shared their inspiring stories throughout Scottish Children's Health Week, Laura will return to help us celebrate the next generation of award winners and the incredible work taking place in communities across Scotland.





Whether it's a healthcare professional who went above and beyond, a volunteer who made a child smile, an organisation creating new opportunities, or a young person whose courage and determination inspire others, we want to hear their story.

Children's Health Scotland

The award categories for 2027 are:

Children's Choice Award

Recognising an individual or team who has made a significant difference to a child or young person through their care, kindness, support, encouragement or understanding. This award can only be nominated by a child or young person.
https://www.childrenshealthscotland.org/events/awards/childrens-choice-award/

Health and Wellbeing Award

Recognising an individual, team or organisation that has made a positive and lasting difference to the health and wellbeing of children and young people through care, support, treatment, advocacy or innovation.
https://www.childrenshealthscotland.org/events/awards/health-and-wellbeing-award/

Healthcare Rights Award

Recognising an individual, team or organisation that has gone above and beyond to promote, protect or advance the healthcare rights of children and young people.
https://www.childrenshealthscotland.org/events/awards/healthcare-rights-award/

Health-Related Play Award

Recognising an individual, team or organisation that has made a significant difference to the lives of children and young people through health-related play.
https://www.childrenshealthscotland.org/events/awards/health-related-play-award/

Improving Life Experiences Award

Recognising an individual, team or organisation that has helped children, young people or families build confidence, resilience, self-management skills and independence, improving their life experiences and future outcomes.
https://www.childrenshealthscotland.org/events/awards/improving-life-experiences-award/

Young Achiever Award

Recognising a child or young person who has achieved something special through determination, leadership, creativity, advocacy, volunteering, fundraising or by making a positive difference to others.
https://www.childrenshealthscotland.org/events/awards/young-achiever-award/

Children's Bravery Award

Recognising a child or young person who has shown remarkable bravery when facing challenges relating to their health, wellbeing, disability, care experience or life circumstances.
https://www.childrenshealthscotland.org/events/awards/childrens-bravery-award/

Health Rights Defender Award

Recognising a child or young person who has promoted, protected or advanced the rights of children and young people by using their voice, sharing their experiences and helping to create positive change.
https://www.childrenshealthscotland.org/events/awards/health-rights-defender-award/

Lifetime Achievement Award

As in previous years, the Lifetime Achievement Award will be selected separately by the judging panel and will recognise an individual who has made an outstanding and lasting contribution to improving the lives of children and young people over many years.

Every Nomination Matters

One of the most powerful aspects of the Scottish Children's Health Awards is that they give children, young people and families an opportunity to say thank you.

Every nomination tells a story. A story of compassion. A story of resilience. A story of someone who made a difficult day easier, a healthcare experience better, or a child's future brighter.

If you know an individual, team, organisation or young person who deserves recognition, now is the time to nominate them.



Help us celebrate the people creating Moments That Matter for children and young people across Scotland.

Nominations are open now

www.childrenshealthscotland.org/events/awards

Scottish Children's Health Awards 2027
The Balmoral Hotel, Edinburgh
Hosted by Laura Boyd

"Every Teddy Award tells the story of someone who has made a real difference to the life of a child or young person."

CELEBRATING 50 YEARS OF CHILDREN'S HEALTH SCOTLAND

Every Child Has the Right to the Best Possible Health

For 50 years, Children's Health Scotland has worked alongside children, young people, families, carers, professionals and policymakers to improve health, wellbeing and rights across Scotland.

What began as a commitment to improving children's experiences of healthcare has grown into Scotland's national children's health rights charity, supporting thousands of children and families and influencing policy and practice at a local and national level.

Throughout our history, one thing has remained constant:

Our belief that every child has the right to the best possible health.

A JOURNEY THROUGH THE DECADES...

1961



Our story begins

Mother Care for Children in Hospital is established, later becoming the National Association for the Welfare of Children in Hospital (NAWCH). The organisation was founded to improve the experiences of children in hospital and advocate for care that recognised the vital role of families in a child's wellbeing.

1976



We become an independent Scottish Charity

Our organisation was known as NAWCH (Scotland) in 1976 and became Action for Sick Children Scotland from 1991. We became Children's Health Scotland in 2017 continuing our journey to become a national voice for children's health, wellbeing and rights.

1985

Listening to children and families

The Charity undertakes one of Scotland's earliest national reports exploring children's experiences of healthcare and hospital services.

1995-2019



Building the evidence

Further national reports continue to gather the experiences of children and families, helping influence improvements in healthcare practice across Scotland.

2016

Supporting children and families across Scotland

Scottish Government investment through the Children, Young People and Families Early Intervention Fund helps Children's Health Scotland expand its reach, strengthen services and increase national impact.

2020-2025

A Rights-Based Future

- Health Rights Defenders launched.
- Self-Management Skills Programmes expanded.
- Bear's Big Adventure Days created.
- Scottish Children's Health Week grows.
- Thousands more children, young people and families supported across Scotland.

2026



My Health, My Rights

- Children's Health Scotland celebrates its 50th Anniversary.
- Health Rights Defenders invite Scotland's First Minister to attend the conference.
- The National Health Rights Report launches, giving more than 1,100 children, families and professionals the opportunity to share their experiences and aspirations for the future.

OUR IMPACT TODAY

8,955 CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SUPPORTED

18,509 PROFESSIONALS ENGAGED

44,960 HEALTH RIGHTS PUBLICATIONS DISTRIBUTED

10,642 FAMILIES REACHED

38,159 PEOPLE INVOLVED IN HEALTH RIGHTS ACTIVITY

569,000+ PEOPLE REACHED THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

LOOKING FORWARD

The last 50 years have taught us that children and young people flourish when they are listened to, respected and supported. The next 50 years will be shaped by the voices of children and young people themselves.

Through our Health Rights Defenders, Family Participation Groups, national partnerships and direct services, we will continue to:

- Support children's health and wellbeing
- Promote children's health rights
- Influence policy and practice
- Amplify children's voices
- Help every child realise their right to the best possible health

50 Years. Thousands of Children. One Vision.
Every child has the right to the best possible health.





CONFERENCE SPECIAL

MY HEALTH, MY RIGHTS CONFERENCE 2026

CELEBRATING CHILDREN'S VOICES, HEALTH RIGHTS AND 50 YEARS OF CHILDREN'S HEALTH SCOTLAND

On 2 October 2026, more than 160 children and young people, families, professionals, policymakers and partners gathered at Stirling Court Hotel for the My Health, My Rights Conference 2026.

Held during Children's Health Scotland's 50th anniversary year, the conference brought together people from across Scotland to explore how we can create a future where every child knows their rights, experiences their rights and can realise their right to the best possible health.



Hosted by broadcaster **Laura Boyd**, the conference was shaped with and by our **Health Rights Defenders**, whose voices, experiences and ideas influenced every aspect of the day. From the opening session to the closing reflections, children and young people remained firmly at the centre of the conversation.

A particular highlight was welcoming Paralympic gold medallist and motivational speaker **Sammi Kinghorn OBE**, whose inspiring keynote encouraged delegates to think beyond barriers and focus on opportunities, resilience and the importance of believing in your potential. Through her personal story, Sammi reminded us that determination, support and inclusion can help young people achieve extraordinary things.











Learning, Sharing and Taking Part

The conference programme offered something for everyone, with a packed schedule of interactive workshops, discussions and activities.

Delegates explored children's healthcare rights through creative and engaging sessions including LEGO® Health Builders: Rights in Action, Art for Advocacy: Rights on Canvas, media and storytelling workshops, and opportunities to learn about participation, wellbeing and children's rights in practice.

Health and wellbeing were brought to life through hands-on experiences including a space-themed workshop, a wellbeing-focused science session exploring the power of bubbles, and opportunities to meet therapy dogs from Therapets and Canine Concern Scotland.

Children and families also enjoyed stepping into the role of veterinary professionals during Edinburgh Zoo's popular "Vet for a Day" workshop, while other sessions focused on mental health, early years support, financial wellbeing and children's rights from infancy onwards.

Throughout the day, delegates were encouraged not just to listen, but to participate, create, question and share ideas. The result was a vibrant atmosphere where learning, discussion and fun sat side by side.



Continues overleaf...



Continued...

An Interactive Exhibition Space

A busy exhibition area provided opportunities for delegates to meet organisations working across health, wellbeing, participation and children's rights.

Our exhibitors showcased a wide range of services, resources and opportunities for children, young people and families, helping delegates discover new ideas, make connections and explore innovative approaches to supporting children's health and wellbeing.

The exhibition space remained busy throughout the day, creating valuable opportunities for networking, partnership building and sharing effective practice.

Celebrating 50 Years

As Children's Health Scotland marks its 50th anniversary, the conference also provided an opportunity to celebrate five decades of supporting children, young people and families.



Throughout the day, delegates reflected on the charity's journey from its beginnings supporting children in hospital to becoming a national organisation promoting children's health, wellbeing and healthcare rights across Scotland.

The anniversary celebrations culminated in a special birthday cake cutting, bringing everyone together to recognise this important milestone and celebrate the many children, families, volunteers, staff, partners and supporters who have helped shape the organisation over the past 50 years.



Powered by Young People's Voices

Perhaps the most inspiring aspect of the conference was seeing our Health Rights Defenders in action.

From helping shape the programme and developing resources to engaging with delegates and sharing their experiences, they demonstrated the impact of meaningful participation and the difference that can be achieved when children and young people are given opportunities to influence change.

Health Rights Defender Isha summed up the day perfectly:

"It's been amazing to see everyone come together from something we created. It's been a lot of fun too."

Those words captured the spirit of the conference. It was a day built on collaboration, participation and a shared commitment to improving children's health and wellbeing.

As delegates left Stirling, there was a strong sense of optimism about what can be achieved when children and young people are listened to, respected and involved in decisions that affect their lives.

The conversations may have ended, but the commitment to turning children's voices into action continues.















Our 50th Conference and the work of the Health Rights Defenders to deliver and attend the conference was made possible by The National Lottery Community Fund.

NATIONAL HEALTH RIGHTS REPORT 2026

A Picture of Children's Health Rights Across Scotland

Every child has the right to the best possible health.

To mark our 50th Anniversary, Children's Health Scotland asked a simple but important question:



> Are children and young people experiencing their health rights in practice?

The National Health Rights Report 2026 brings together the voices, experiences and perspectives of children and young people, families, health professionals and education professionals from across Scotland.

It is one of the most significant pieces of engagement ever undertaken by Children's Health Scotland and provides a unique national picture of children's health rights today.

By the Numbers:

638 CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE



224 CHILDREN'S DRAWINGS



162 HEALTH PROFESSIONALS



56 EDUCATION PROFESSIONALS



321 PARENTS AND CARERS



MORE THAN 1,100 VOICES



Together, these voices provide a powerful insight into what is working well, where challenges remain and what must happen next if every child is to realise their right to the best possible health.

The National Message

> **Children increasingly know their rights, but many are not consistently experiencing those rights in practice.**

The Report tells a story of both progress and challenge.

Across Scotland, children, families and professionals described positive examples of:

- Participation and shared decision-making
- Compassionate care
- Rights-respecting practice
- Trusted relationships
- Approaches informed by Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)



However, the findings also highlight important concerns:

Children want to be listened to

Children told us they want adults to speak directly to them and involve them in decisions about their health.

Support often comes too late

Long waiting times for mental health and neurodevelopmental services emerged as the strongest message across every respondent group.

Families carry a significant advocacy burden

Many parents and carers reported that access to support often depends on their ability to navigate complex systems and persist when things go wrong.

Schools are doing more than ever

Education professionals described schools increasingly responding to children's health and wellbeing needs while waiting for specialist support.



Our Call To Action

We want every child to:

- **Know** their rights
- **Experience** their rights
- **Realise** their right to the best possible health



The findings from the National Health Rights Report will help shape the next chapter of Children's Health Scotland's work and contribute to national discussions about children's health, wellbeing and rights across Scotland.

The National Health Rights Report 2026 brings together the voices, experiences and perspectives of children and young people, families, health professionals and education professionals from across Scotland. It is one of the most significant pieces of engagement ever undertaken by Children's Health Scotland and provides a unique national picture of children's health rights today.

Speaking about the report at the conference, The Right Honourable John Swinney, First Minister of Scotland said: *"Scotland's future will be shaped by its children and young people, which is why their voices must be heard. The Scottish Government is putting them at the heart of the decisions we make, and their views are helping to shape policy, improve services and make Scotland a better place.*

"The experiences shared in this report highlight the progress we have made and the challenges that remain. We will continue to focus on prevention and early intervention, ensuring children, young people and families can access the support they need when they need it, helping families to thrive and doing all we can to ensure no child grows up in poverty. By continuing to listen and act on what we hear we will help ensure every child knows their rights and fulfils their potential."

Nicola Killean OBE, Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland, added: *"Children have the right to the best possible health, both physical and mental. That includes being listened to and taken seriously. Children must have access to services, care, and treatment appropriate to their age and condition. Without this, their rights to health, development, and life can all be impacted.*

"The voices and experiences of children are grounded in this powerful report. They have spoken clearly about what matters to them, where progress is being made, and where change is still needed.

"The report shows that awareness of rights is only part of the picture. Children must be able to see and experience those rights in their everyday lives. This report provides an important opportunity for policymakers, services, and organisations across Scotland to listen to children and young people and act on what they are telling us."

BEAR'S BIG ADVE

Creating Moments That Matter for Kinship Care Families

Laughter on a rollercoaster. A child meeting a giraffe for the first time. Families exploring the historic halls of Stirling Castle together. Moments that might seem simple at first glance, yet for many Kinship Care families they mean so much more.

Throughout 2026, Children's Health Scotland welcomed hundreds of children, young people and carers to three unforgettable Bear's Big Adventure Days, delivered through our Looking After Family and Self (LAFS) Programme. These fun-filled events provided opportunities for families to play, connect, learn and build lasting memories together while developing confidence, resilience, self-management skills and wellbeing.

Bear-ied Treasure at M&D's Scotland's Theme Park

Our first adventure of the year saw families set sail on a pirate-themed takeover at M&D's Scotland's Theme Park.

Disguised as a day of treasure hunts, games and family fun, the event delivered something much more powerful. Children and carers took part in health-related play activities designed to strengthen family relationships, improve wellbeing and reduce feelings of isolation.

One Kinship Carer captured the impact perfectly: *"Being a kinship carer can be a very lonely journey. Events like this make a very difficult role more bearable and make me feel valued."*

The event also demonstrated the importance of creating inclusive spaces where every child can participate, have fun and feel they belong. Children explored, played, made new friends and enjoyed a day where everyone could join in without barriers.

We're Going on a Bear Hunt at Edinburgh Zoo

In June, more than 80 children, young people and Kinship Carers joined us at Edinburgh Zoo for a special *We're Going on a Bear Hunt* adventure.

Filled with songs, storytelling, movement, creativity and wildlife, the day provided opportunities for families to reconnect with nature while learning valuable self-management and wellbeing skills.

Most importantly, children told us they had fun, learned new things and enjoyed spending time with their families.

One child simply said: *"I learned to always love people and that I really matter."*

For Children's Health Scotland, these moments demonstrate how play helps children build confidence, develop resilience and learn skills that support lifelong health and wellbeing.



NTURE DAYS 2026

Bear's Dragon Tails at Stirling Castle



Our final summer adventure brought Kinship Care families together in the stunning surroundings of **Stirling Castle**.

Families enjoyed a day of exploration, discovery and shared experiences in one of Scotland's most iconic historic settings. Children investigated Scotland's history, participated in activities, enjoyed outdoor play and created positive memories with those who matter most to them.

Beyond the figures, the day provided something equally important: connection.

As one carer reflected: *"Sometimes being a kinship carer can be very lonely. It's nice to have some company, even if only for a while."*

Days like these remind families that they are not alone.

More Than Just a Day Out



At Children's Health Scotland, we know that play is not simply about having fun.

Play helps children:

- Build confidence and self-esteem.
- Develop resilience and self-management skills.
- Learn to communicate and express themselves.
- Build friendships and social connections.
- Strengthen family relationships.
- Improve health and wellbeing.

Play is also a right. Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child recognises every child's right to rest, leisure, play and recreation.

Through Bear's Big Adventure Days, children and young people experience those rights in action while creating positive memories that can last a lifetime.

The growing demand for our events, with places regularly filling within minutes, demonstrates just how important these opportunities have become for Kinship Care families across Scotland.



thank you

None of this would be possible without the support of our incredible funders, partners and supporters.

We would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to:

- CYPFEIF
- ALLIANCE Self-Management Fund
- People's Postcode Lottery
- Cash for Kids
- Scottish Children's Lottery Trust
- Children's Aid Scotland
- Dr Guthrie's Charitable Trust

On My Way

Health Rights Defenders Leading Change for the Next Generation



They are young, determined and ready to be heard. Aged 9 to 17, our Health Rights Defenders draw on their experiences of living with health conditions or concerns to campaign for change, lead creative projects and show decision-makers what growing up with a health condition in Scotland is really like.

Their voices matter now more than ever. As Scotland works towards becoming a nation where every child's rights are realised, the Health Rights Defenders are making sure children and young people are not only heard, but valued—and that their experiences lead to action.

That determination was at the heart of our My Health, My Rights Conference, delivered on 2 October. The event brought together children, families, professionals and decision-makers from across Scotland, placing young people's experiences, priorities and rights centre stage. From shaping the programme and discussion topics to identifying the messages decision-makers needed to hear, the Health Rights Defenders helped make it a genuinely child-led conference.

The group also took their message to the screen, partnering with Media Education to create We Want Change. Led independently by the young people, the film gave them control over what to share and how to share it. Speaking directly about healthcare, education and long waiting times, they showed why listening to young people is not optional—it is essential.



Niamh reflected: *"Even if people might not like it, we are the next generation. We are the ones that are coming up. We want change. This film is going to make people sit up and listen. I'm really proud of it."*

Through the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland's Storylines project, the group explored how health conditions affect education. Creative activities and filmmaking helped them identify barriers and explain what needs to change. Isha said: "*This is what the Health Rights Defenders are for, to share our experiences and have adults listen and pay attention."*

Malak added: *"As a young person with a health condition it's really important to me that people in education listen to what we need, not assume what we need."*

Their determination also reached Scotland's highest level of government. Several Health Rights Defenders wrote personal letters inviting the First Minister to the conference so that he could hear directly from children and young people. In their own words, they explained the issues that matter most to them—and their invitation was answered when the First Minister attended the event.

Malak wrote: *"I want some politicians to hear my voice about the struggles in school with a medical condition."*

Sam explained why this matters: *"It is so important that a politician comes and hears our ideas... so that we can make other young people's lives better."*



Rhianne Forrest, Officer for Children's Health Scotland, reflected: *"Listening to children and young people with lived experience is essential if we want services, systems and opportunities that truly work for them. Our Health Rights Defenders have shaped the conference, challenged assumptions and focused us on what matters across Scotland. They are working for a better future, not only for themselves but for the next generation. We must continue to listen, learn and act. Their commitment to creating change, supporting one another and improving lives is inspiring, and I am enormously proud of everything they have achieved."*

We sincerely thank The National Lottery Awards for All, whose support made the conference and We Want Change possible. We are also thrilled that, following the group's contribution to our Young Start application, we have secured three years of funding. This will allow the programme to grow and create more opportunities for children and young people to campaign, participate, influence decision-makers and advance health rights across Scotland. Their voices were at the heart of the application and its success.

A special thank you also goes to Malak, Isha and Orla, who volunteer with our face-to-face Self-Management Skills Programme. By offering peer support to younger participants, they help create welcoming spaces where children can build confidence, develop skills and realise they are not alone.

The Health Rights Defenders show what is possible when children and young people can speak, lead and participate meaningfully. By shaping a national conference, creating films, influencing education and writing to the First Minister, they are keeping







children's health rights on Scotland's agenda. They are not waiting for change, they are creating it. Their voices are helping every child with a health condition move towards a future where their rights are recognised, respected and realised.

If you'd like to find out more about our Health Rights Defenders you can visit us on **www.childrenshealthscotland.org**

thank you

THANK YOU TO THE NATIONAL LOTTERY AWARDS FOR ALL AND YOUNG START.

COMMUNITY FUND youngstart Delivered by THE NATIONAL LOTTERY COMMUNITY FUND

BUILDING CONFIDENCE AND FRIENDSHIPS THROUGH OUR SELF-MANAGEMENT SKILLS PROGRAMMES

For children and young people living with health conditions, life can sometimes feel different from their peers. Managing symptoms, attending appointments, coping with anxiety, navigating school and maintaining friendships can create challenges that many other children do not experience. That is why our Self-Management Skills (SMS) Programmes and SMS:HUB are so important.

Throughout 2026, children, young people and families from across Scotland came together through our SMS: FACE-TO-FACE programmes, SMS:FAMILIES programmes and our growing SMS:HUB community. Together, they developed practical self-management skills, increased their understanding of health rights, built confidence and created friendships that continue long after programmes end.

Learning Skills for Life

Self-management is not about removing challenges. It is about helping children and young people understand themselves, recognise their strengths and develop practical tools that support their health and wellbeing. Across all our programmes, participants explored:

- Confidence and self-esteem
- Stress and anxiety management
- Emotional wellbeing
- Communication skills
- Healthy routines and sleep
- Health rights and participation
- Friendship and social connection
- Coping strategies and resilience

Through games, creativity, discussion, health-related play and shared experiences, children and young people were encouraged to learn at their own pace in safe, supportive and non-judgemental environments.

As Helen Bauld, Programmes and Training Manager explained: *"Our Self-Management Skills Programmes give children the space, confidence and practical tools to understand themselves and their health. We see children grow week by week, finding their voice, connecting with others and realising they are not alone."*

SMS:FAMILIES: Supporting the Whole Family

In 2026, we expanded our self-management offer through SMS:FAMILIES, building on the success of the Flourish programme previously delivered in Dundee and extending support to families living in communities where poverty, inequality and poor health outcomes can have a significant impact on children's lives.

Designed for children, young people and their families, SMS:FAMILIES takes a whole-family approach to wellbeing, confidence and self-management. Through creative activities, shared meals, play-based learning and opportunities to explore health rights together, families developed practical skills to support communication, resilience and emotional wellbeing at home. Families were also able to take food home, helping ease financial pressures during a period of rising living costs.

In both Dundee and Cranhill, families explored topics including anxiety, change, self-care, confidence and healthcare rights. Many children who initially found participation difficult gradually began sharing ideas, building friendships and recognising their own strengths.



The programme also provided accredited learning opportunities for parents and carers, helping them feel more confident in supporting the children and young people in their care. By supporting the whole family, SMS:FAMILIES recognises that lasting change happens when everyone develops the skills, knowledge and confidence needed to thrive together.

Supporting Children and Young People Through SMS:FACE TO FACE

Our SMS:FACE TO FACE Programmes continued to grow throughout 2026, with four programmes delivered in Edinburgh and a further two programmes delivered during the summer holidays in East Renfrewshire. Together, they supported more than 65 children and young people aged 9-17 living with long-term health conditions, anxiety and additional challenges.

Over six weeks, participants explored emotional wellbeing, communication, resilience, self-management strategies and healthcare rights while building friendships with other young people who understood their experiences.

One young person aged 15 told us: *"I am finding it to be extremely helpful. It's made me feel more like part of a group than I have. It's made something I planned to ignore more fun. I am extremely glad I have the opportunity to be here. The games allow me to comfortably express my worries."*

A parent added: *"It's the only thing he's returned to. Seeing him build friendships and enjoy being part of a group again has been amazing."*

Making a Real Difference



Across all of our SMS programmes, we continue to see children and young people grow in confidence, develop stronger friendships, improve communication skills and gain a better understanding of their health, wellbeing and rights. Many arrive feeling anxious, isolated or unsure of themselves. By the end of their programme, they are often more confident, more willing to share their ideas and better equipped to manage the challenges they face.

Behind every programme is a young person who feels listened to, valued and supported.

As one participant told us: *"I had lots of fun, made new friends and enjoyed all the activities. Everyone was friendly and I would definitely love to come back again."*

The SMS:HUB: Staying Connected

For many children and young people, completing an SMS programme is just the beginning. Our growing SMS:HUB provides opportunities for young people from across Scotland to stay connected, maintain friendships and continue developing their confidence, self-management skills and understanding of their health rights throughout the year.

One of this year's highlights was our Golden Ticket Chocolate Adventure with award-winning chocolatier Iain Burnett, The Highland Chocolatier. Young people joined online from across Scotland to take part in a unique chocolate-tasting experience that encouraged creativity, mindfulness, communication and sensory exploration. While chocolate was certainly part of the fun, the experience demonstrated something much more important: children and young people can continue learning, connecting and building confidence regardless of where they live.

One parent told us: "*What an amazing HUB! It really cheered him up after a really difficult time. He was counting down to it and he could join from hospital, meaning he wasn't excluded. Just thank you!"*

Thank You



We could not deliver these life-changing opportunities without the support of our funders and partners.

Our sincere thanks go to:

Aberbrothock Skea Trust, Agnes Hunter Trust, Alchemy Foundation, ALLIANCE Self Management Fund, National Lottery Awards for All Scotland, Cash for Kids, CYPFEIF, National Lottery Fairer Futures Fund, Hugh Fraser Foundation, JTH Charitable Trust, Leng Charitable Trust, NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde Fund, Pixel Fund, People's Postcode Lottery, Souter Charitable Trust and St Katharine's Fund.

Their support is helping children, young people and families across Scotland build confidence, develop self-management skills, understand their health rights and realise their potential.

Children's Health Scotland

FUNDRAISE FOR US

Can you help create a Moment That Matters?

A moment of kindness. A moment of confidence.
A moment of connection. A moment that changes everything.

At Children's Health Scotland, we see these moments every day through our Self-Management Skills Programmes, Bear's Big Adventure Days, Health Rights Defenders and Family Support Programmes.



What moment matters to you?

When you're spending money on a moment that matters to you, could you donate the same amount to help create a Moment That Matters for a child?

- **A coffee with friends?** Turn your coffee into confidence.
- **A birthday celebration?** Turn your celebration into a special experience for a child.
- **Dinner out?** Turn your meal into new friendships.
- **Buying a gift?** Turn your gift into new opportunities.
- **A walk with friends?** Turn your steps into support.

Whether it's £5, £10 or £20, every donation helps create **Moments That Matter** for children and young people across Scotland.

Every Moment Matters. Donate. Fundraise. Make a Difference.

Scan the QR code to donate or start fundraising today.

Registered office:
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