Theory of Change for Making Children's Rights Real in Scotland

A partnership project led by the Observatory of Children's Human Rights Scotland, Matter of Focus and Public Health Scotland

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Since the Scottish Parliament made the landmark decision to bring the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) into Scots law,[1] many people and organisations in Scotland have been thinking about how to prepare for this. Bringing the UNCRC into law is called 'incorporation' and making it real for people's lives is called 'implementation'.

The UNCRC recognises that children have rights (they are 'rights holders'). Those with legal responsibilities to ensure children's rights are respected, protected and fulfilled are called 'duty bearers'.

The UNCRC is the global standard for children's rights which sets out the rights of all children. All the rights are connected, they are all equally important and they cannot be taken away from children.

How will we make children's rights real in Scotland?

Our project has brought together experts on children's rights and many people whose work has an impact on children and young people. We talked to children and young people who have been working on UNCRC implementation and have built up their own knowledge and experience of this work. Together we have talked about how the UNCRC will be put into practice and embedded in Scotland. Echoing what many children and young people have said before, they told us how important it was:

- ✓ For them to experience their rights being met across all aspects of daily life;
- ✓ That adults learn about children's rights and lead by example, treating children and young people in ways that feel equal, respectful and responsive.

Hearing from over 60 organisations, we have created a 'Theory of Change'. This is a vision for how children's rights can be realised across the country, showing the different journeys towards this vision. We commissioned evidence papers to look at what is already known about embedding children's rights and how to approach similar kinds of large-scale changes. These papers gave us important information about the gaps in current knowledge and some of the challenges that we might expect to see.

This short document gives a summary of what the vision looks like. We also have a longer report and an interactive, online report which can be viewed in OutNav, software developed by Matter of Focus to hold outcome maps. These show the Theory of Change in full.

Changing the system to make children's rights real

To realise children's rights, in all settings and for all children and young people, is a long-term project. It requires:

- Changes to policy, law and how budgets are decided;
- Changes to how people work and how people think about their work;
- Valuing children and young people; and
- Making sure we have effective systems to protect children's rights and provide timely and effective solutions if their rights are not being met.

This kind of large-scale change is often thought of as 'system change'. To support such change, we need to:

- ✓ Reach out to people's hearts and minds so that they really want to do this;
- ✓ Work with people, not on them, so they feel they own this work;
- ✓ Provide leadership around the values and principles of this work;
- ✓ Create the kinds of environments that help individuals put into practice the changes we want to see;
- ✓ Listen at all levels in the system and share responsibility across sectors.

The Theory of Change

It has been challenging to set out all of the changes needed so that it is both clear and simple enough to use yet includes all of the important parts. To get this balance we have made four 'outcome maps' that highlight each area of change. An 'outcome map' is a flexible tool that connects up the actions you take with the results you expect to see. It is simple enough to be practical and complex enough to highlight the different possible journeys through the change.

The choice of these four areas was guided by expert input to the project and the evidence that is available to support each of these.

Policy - This includes policy adaptation, coordination, administrative integration and budgetary consideration

Capacity - This includes building cross-sector capacity and capability to integrate rights-based ways of working

Culture - This includes changing attitudes, norms, values and everyday actions

Empowerment - This includes ensuring a system of information, advocacy, complaints, redress and effective remedy for children and young people

You can see the outcome maps in full in our long report and our interactive summary. The table below, to be read column by column, shows the heading of each outcome map along with some of the key actions that will be involved.

Policy	Capacity	Culture	Empowerment
Children and young people meaningfully participate in policy-making Awareness of UNCRC raised amongst policy-makers UNCRC incorporated to maximum extent possible Children's rights integrated across policy areas Tools used such as national action plan and Child Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessments Children's rights considered in budgets Children's rights indicators developed Scrutiny bodies hold government to account	Cross-sector systems leadership for this work Duty bearers take proactive steps to ensure compliance Duty bearers provide capacity-building and implementation support and demonstrate rights-based ways of working Leaders and champions communicate and demonstrate a rights-based approach System grows from positive and negative experiences and challenge	Children and young people are part of changing the culture National awareness-raising and information Explore patterns of social norms on children's rights to inform interventions Leaders and champions communicate and demonstrate a rights-based approach Invest in community-based approaches for people to experience a rights-based approach Children and young people learn about their rights System grows from positive and negative experiences and challenge	Children and young people meaningfully participate in designing system to uphold rights Duty bearers ensure a trusted, effective and child-friendly system to uphold rights at all levels Advocates and scrutiny bodies hold duty bearers to account System grows from positive and negative experiences and challenge

Fig. 1 Key actions for the areas of change

The four outcome maps are not separate and changes in one part of the system will influence the others. For example, we know that countries with more success in implementing the UNCRC tend to have a culture of supporting children's rights and viewing children as rights holders. Another example of such a relationship would be a result of a complaints process that suggests a policy needs to change.

Below is a visual showing that the different areas of the Theory of Change are connected. The cogs tell us that changes or blocks in one part affect the others. Meaningful participation by children, young people, parents and carers, feedback as new initiatives unfold and learning cycles should help things move forward. Factors might come up in the wider context which either oil the cogs or create extra friction. An example would be when the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child gives its findings on the UK's children's rights record. This provides important information for many people that should encourage them to think, advocate for children and young people, and create change. The culture we have surrounds all of this work, especially whether we see children and young people as rights holders and the extent to which we respect their rights as a society.

The purpose of the visual is to keep the whole picture in mind with all of the important areas for change.

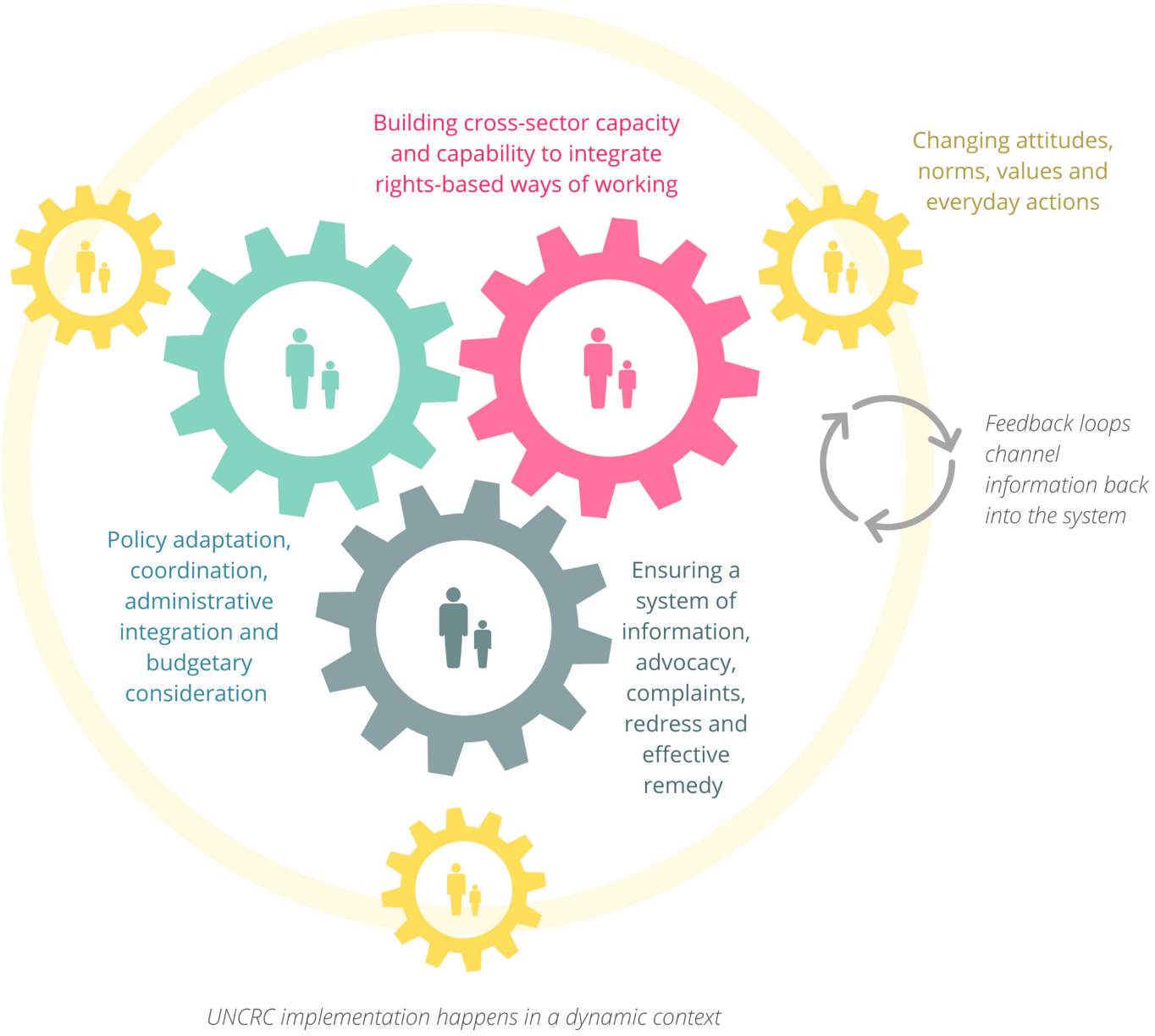

Fig 2. The changes needed to realise children's rights

Messages across the Theory of Change

There are some important messages across all four outcome maps in the Theory of Change. These also help us to see them as one piece of work.

- Essential to this work is that everyone understands and shares the language of children's rights and helps make sure children can enjoy their rights.
- Children and young people need to have opportunities to participate meaningfully, both as individuals and collectively.
- Rights must be realised for all children and young people, with particular attention to those whose rights are most at risk.
- Work is needed to create a rights-respecting culture, where people have good understandings of what it means for them in their settings, and what they can do to help make sure everyone has their rights met.
- Part of the change will be to make sure children and young people are more visible in public life and children's capabilities, contributions and participation rights are recognised.

Building on what we know

As part of this project, four rapid evidence reviews were commissioned to sit alongside the Theory of Change. They looked at existing evidence on each of the four areas of change. You can read these reviews in full here.

The evidence helps us to understand the 'building blocks' for successful change and, to a lesser extent, some learning about what needs to happen in the initial stages. In complex change like this, many things will often happen at the same time or at different times in different places. There is not always enough evidence to say in what order things should happen. In fact for some changes, having multiple interventions happening at the same time at different levels has been shown to work well.

Our full report pulls out the building blocks for successful implementation to help people think about what will work best. One example of this is the

recommendation to build on the new obligations for duty bearers by initially building capacity for the right, supportive environments around individuals. It will be important to reach out to hearts and minds to nurture people's commitment to children's rights. Active support for implementing the UNCRC will be important on the ground. Another example is that a well-resourced and rights-based national action plan underpinned by legislation can make children's rights more visible in policy-making and lead to more coordinated implementation.

What comes next?

A Theory of Change is a good tool for managing complex change. The Scottish Government and other duty bearers can use this Theory of Change to:

- Create action plans; and
- Work out how far they are making progress towards implementation of children's rights.

For example, the Scottish Government can use the Theory of Change to monitor how policies are adapted across departments. A local authority can take the Theory of Change and use it to plan what they need to do within their area to realise children's rights. A children's charity could apply it to a new programme of work. Our full report includes some guiding questions that will help people to apply the Theory of Change to their work.

It will take many years to see all of the changes set out in the outcome maps. In making children's rights real, we talk about 'progressive realisation'. This means that the government and other duty bearers must, while ensuring a 'minimum core' of rights, move forward and make sure that all children's rights are realised over time, keeping track of their progress. Some changes will be detectable sooner than others – these are sometimes called indicators of 'process' (things being done differently). For example in policy change we can usefully monitor whether policies have been adapted, and that layers and areas of government are coordinating this work effectively. We could also track the use of children's rights language. Further work is required to develop a strong set of indicators for children's rights, with participation from children, young people and other stakeholders. Indicators are information helping us to know whether children and young people are having their rights respected.

Who was involved in this project?

This shared work was led by the Observatory of Children's Human Rights Scotland ("the Observatory"), Matter of Focus and Public Health Scotland. It took place from November 2021 to March 2022. It was funded by the Scottish Government. Involving over 60 organisations in this work has been valuable preparation for UNCRC implementation.

We are extremely grateful to all of the individuals who took the time to contribute to the development of the Theory of Change and our reports. We would like to thank the experts who undertook rapid evidence reviews within tight time constraints.

We would especially like to thank the young people who, through Rights Right Now, helped develop the Theory of Change, their supporting adults, members of the Observatory of Children's Human Rights Scotland for their ongoing expertise and feedback, and the many other individuals who gave their time to develop the Theory of Change.

[1] For more information on the status of the UNCRC in the United Kingdom and specifically in Scotland, please see: Scottish Government (2021), *Children's Rights and the UNCRC in Scotland: An Introduction*, https://www.gov.scot/publications/implementing-united-nations-convention-rights-child-introductory-guidance/documents/.

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