

## Children & Young People's Centre for Justice (CYCJ) Strategy 2020-2025

CYCJ works towards ensuring that Scotland's approach to children and young people in conflict with the law is [rights-respecting](#), contributing to better outcomes for our children, young people and communities. We produce robust internationally ground-breaking work, bringing together children and young people's contributions, research evidence, practice wisdom and system know-how to operate as a leader for child and youth justice thinking in Scotland and beyond. An [evaluation](#) of CYCJ, published in 2020, highlights how our significant contribution stems from our unique role and positioning:

*'CYCJ is a boundary-spanning intermediary organisation. Boundary spanners are capable of contributing to system change. Their work to redress the imbalances of information, to connect and share insight across groups, to coordinate people to collaborate on key issues as well as focused interventions on seemingly intractable issues can come together to create paradigm shifts in the system'*

Our focus for 2020-2025 is supporting Scotland to comply with its international commitments for children and young people in conflict with the law in relation to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). To do this we see the importance of focusing on children as a distinct group, recognising that their legal status differs from adults and that they are in need of specific protections due to their developmental stage. We think this marks an important point in time to clarify our purpose and focus, which is reflected in our new name. Renaming ourselves as the Children & Young People's Centre for Justice clearly positions CYCJ's purpose as being for children and young people, rather than specifically being a centre for practitioners or policy-makers (though of course much of what we achieve for children and young people will be by working to improve and support policy and practice). This reflects what we have been doing, and who we have ultimately been seeking to serve since we were established, but more clearly communicates this, building on the fact that this emerged as a valued characteristic in the evaluation of CYCJ.

The name change more clearly focuses our work on children as a distinct group, recognising that their legal status differs from adults and they are in need of specific protections due to their developmental stage. At the same time, we recognise that young people, those aged 18-26, have specific needs based on their developmental stage and also can have legal rights to additional support where they have experience of the 'care system'. Therefore, focusing on young people as a distinct group is also a priority for us.

If we are to have credibility, the proposed name change requires us making a significant leap forward in our participation work and how we involve children and young people in CYCJ's activities and governance. This is a change we want to see, but we recognise we still have a distance to travel to truly being a children and young people's centre, and this area of work will need greater investment. Alongside this strategy, therefore, we are also currently working on a participation and engagement strategy, building on the significant work by Youth Justice Voices.

## What we do

We focus on three key activities:



**Participation & Engagement** is a new strand of work, building on the Youth Justice Voices project and a range of individual projects and activities to improve children and young people's participation.

**Practice & Policy Development** continues to be the main area of activity for CYCJ. For the next five year period we have made it clear that our work is about policy as well as practice (previously our work in this area was labelled practice development, though has always been about both policy and practice).

**Research** remains one of our priority areas of activities, with our focus on longer-term strategic research which has the potential to make a significant impact on thinking, policy and practice across Scotland and internationally.

These three key activities are underpinned and connected by communication and knowledge exchange work, which is focused on improving awareness of evidence in different forms, and supporting dialogue between different perspectives, types of knowledge and viewpoints.

## Priorities

We have identified nine priorities for our work for 2020-2025:

1. Ensuring that children (all under 18 year olds) are treated as children, and their legal status as a child is protected no matter what harm they may have caused.
2. Ensuring young people are responded to in policy and practice as young people, recognising the specific needs of this age group and the legislative requirements for additional support (18-26 year olds).
3. Our approach to children and young people in conflict with the law is trauma-informed and based on international standards about child and youth friendly justice.
4. Deprivation of children's liberty is genuinely only used as a measure of 'last resort' based on a child's risk and need, and is always trauma informed and focused on reintegration.

CYCJ is primarily funded by the Scottish Government and hosted by the University of Strathclyde.

5. Victims (particularly child victims) are supported to participate in justice processes and have access to the best possible supports to assist with their recovery.
6. Scotland includes children and young people in all activities and settings, challenging itself to continue to include those who cause harm, wherever possible.
7. Participation of children and young people is embedded across all justice settings.
8. There is strong awareness of workforce needs, and clear understanding of those supporting children in conflict with the law as a complex system.
9. Funding is realigned and services redesigned based on children and young people's needs, evidence, skills and opportunities.

### **Governance and Accountability**

To achieve change across these priority areas our work is based on robust methods and the best possible knowledge and insight, and we take the time to reflect on our own practice, sharing our learning openly across the youth justice landscape in Scotland and internationally.

CYCJ is governed by an Executive Governance Group, which is responsible for our strategic direction. This group involves representatives from across youth justice policy, practice and research. Children and young people have roles advising and guiding our work across projects and initiatives. However, we are exploring the most effective mechanisms for children and young people to have a meaningful role in our governance.

We receive funding from the Scottish Government which primarily funds our practice and policy development work. We also receive a financial contribution from the University of Strathclyde, which supports our research work, with specific research projects funded by a range of external sources. Participation and Engagement is a relatively new area of work for us, which has been funded on a project-by-project basis, requiring careful consideration about how this work will be embedded and funded on an ongoing basis.