

ELPIS ProjectChildren and young people feedback summary

'It's important to share my story with others to help them.'
Child, 10 years old

December 2024





















This publication has been produced with the financial support of ISF Project Grants of the European Union. The contents herin are the sole responsibility of project partnership and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Commission.

Introduction

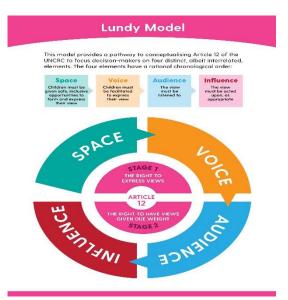
Children First is Scotland's national children's charity. We stand up for every child because all children should have a safe childhood. We protect children from harm and support them to recover from trauma and abuse through our national and local services. We help children, their families and the people that care for them by offering emotional, practical, and financial support. We give children hope and a safer, brighter future.

In Greek mythology, Elpis is named as the spirit of hope. Hope is such an important aspect of our work. We know that with the right support at the right time, children and families who have experienced hurt, and harm can recover and go on to live full lives. We have good reason to have hope and we work to imbue this in others. The ELPIS research project sees us at Children First working alongside European Barnahus/Child Houses in conjunction with the PROMISE Barnahus Network. We draw on our collective experience in promoting and implementing excellence in practice in Bairns Hoose (Scottish term for Barnahus) and our services across Scotland. ELPIS promotes multidisciplinary and interagency models for child victims and witnesses, with a specific focus on specialised interventions and excellence in practice in cases where there is a presumed online element of the sexual abuse. Our ELPIS project has developed and shared the high standards of child participation we promote in Children First with our wider partnerships and networks in Scotland, the UK, Europe and internationally.

Our work through the ELPIS Project has aimed to:

- Create a space to better understand how the children and young people were supported after experiencing online sexual harm.
- Gain knowledge of children and young people's thoughts and ideas on how they should be supported if they have been hurt or harmed online.
- Provided Children First opportunities to learn what the challenges and concerns around online sexual harm are from children and young people's point of view.

We believe respectful and strengths-based recording helps us to elevate and amplify children, young people and family's voices so that they are heard in decision making processes. We are working hard to ensure we have a systemic way of listening and learning that will fulfil commitments made in the UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024 and principles of The Promise (Scotland). Children's human rights sit at the heart of our approach, and we recognise participation is fundamental to fully realising Article 12 of the UNCRC. Our work is all underpinned by the Lundy model of participation where we create space, voice, audience and influence. We are intentional in creating safe and inclusive environments and skilled at capturing voice, and this research project has been no exception.



Methodology

We have developed two elements of the project, to ensure that we could hear the voices of individual children and young people with direct experience of online sexual harm, whilst also wanting to more widely seek the views of children and young people about online harm and how professionals could respond. Given the scale and pervasiveness of online harm for children, we recognised that those who have reported harm to police agencies is likely only to be the tip of the iceberg. By creating two strands of this project, it has helped us carve out different spaces which have offered interesting and informative perspectives.

Individual participation

We developed an activity pack (Appendix 1) which provided opportunities for the young people to share their views in a written format or drawings – this enabled the young people to choose what format they wanted to share their views, which supported everyone to participate in a way that suited them best. The pack provided space for the young people to share important things about themselves, their story and then opportunities to explore what the right support, people, and information looked like for them.



Group participation

We developed a group session which was aimed at children and young people who had no (known) experiences of online harm. This session was led by two vignettes – Elsa and Rory's stories (Appendix 2.1 and 2.2). Our Elsa and Rory stories outlined a brief summary of the characters background, who they met, and how this relationship developed, and how they were later harmed online. Both groups involved chose one of the stories to base their discussion around, where they explored and reflected on questions, such as:



- What should Elsa/ Rory do next?
- Who should Elsa/ Rory speak to?
- How should Elsa/ Rory be treated by professionals?

Using flashcards to support the conversation, the groups also explored:

- Which professionals/ adults should Elsa/ Rory speak to?
- How should Elsa/ Rory be treated by professionals/ adults?

Our Participation Lead worked closely with the Project Support Workers, where they had pre-session discussions to explore any potential risks and child protection considerations. Children First have a child protection policy, Duty Manager on call during evenings (for any group activity requiring management oversight). Our staff are all experienced in working with children where there is child protection concern and are appropriately qualified, vetted and trained.

The sessions took place in a space where the children and young people felt comfortable and safe – this was typically in our Children First services. One young person chose to meet in school as this suited her schedule and another chose to speak with their worker at home. Each of the young people had a Project Support Worker with them, one of which stepped out (at the young person's request) whilst she completed the activity pack. During the group sessions workers were able to support the session and step in to support if a child or young

person needed a breather or made a disclosure – this was especially important due to their established relationship with the child or young person. If the child or young person was under 16 years old parents and carers were informed of the research and consented for their child's participation. We also ensured that the children and young people also consented to participate.

Sessions lasted between an hour – two hours, some of which occurred over two sessions, due to the child or young person's preference/ prior commitments. The sessions went at the pace of the child and young person, we always began the work together with an informal start, and the sessions would be led by them – taking breaks whenever required and we would end the sessions with a check-in. Food and snacks were provided during sessions. Our reward, recognition and thank you to the children and young people was through a voucher (of their choice) and thank you card – we felt it was so important to ensure they understood that their contributions were valued. Feedback from the report will be provided.

Participants

Individual – 3 total				
Individual gender/ pronouns	Scottish Locality	Age range		
Girl - She/Her	Renfrewshire	17		
Girl - She/Her	Glasgow	14		
Boy – He/Him	Aberdeen	10		
Groups – 9 total				
Name of service/ project name	Number of participants	Age range/ gender		
North Strathclyde Bairns Hoose:	5	14 -18		
Changemakers group		All girls		
Aberdeen girls group	4	14-16		
		All girls		

What we learnt from listening to children and young people

Through our conversations with children and young people we have heard such rich and informative feedback. There are 6 key emergent themes, which will be discussed below:

Key themes			
Value of a trusted adult / organisation	Going at children and young people's pace	Prevention and Protection	
Importance of feeling heard	Police response	Challenges of online world	

Value of a trusted adult / organisation (such as Children First)

A common theme throughout the project was that the children and young people felt that having a trusted adult throughout the process is important.

'Speak to his [Rory's] Gran or another trusted adult – he needs to tell someone immediately – anyone you [Rory] trust.'

Aberdeen Girls group

The young people felt that speaking to a trusted adulted is needed. They felt that the child or young person should be 'taken seriously' and 'parents should care.' The Aberdeen group agreed that they would need a trusted adult to rely on through an investigation process and speaking to an adult would help get the protection required. The Changemakers group all agreed that a child or young person harmed online should speak to, 'whoever he [Rory] feels most comfortable with.', 'whoever he [Rory] is closest to.' Another young person reflected on her own journey, where she did not tell a trusted adult to begin with, and later her Mum found out,

'It [photograph] got sent about in the November and that when my Mum found out. Me and ma Mum reported to the police. They done nothing. They blamed it on me.'

Girl, 14 years old

The same young person reflected that she would have liked to have felt,

'Respected, safe, listened to, less worried, brave, hopeful... I didn't feel any of these because I kept it to myself for all these months.'

Girl, 14 years old

She felt telling her Mum enabled her to feel better supported, which highlights the importance of having a trusted adult's support. However, another young person expressed that her trusted adult – her Mum – did not respond to her disclosure well,

'So I did what you are supposed to and reached out for help. I called Childline who told me to call 101 so I did. 101 decided to send Policemen to my door. My Mum had gone mental and these Police men took her side.'

Girl, 17 years old

She shared that in her case, she would have preferred to have had direct contact with the Police,

'Direct communication with me, not my Mum because it happened to me.' Girl, 17 years old

Whilst there was agreement that a trusted adult was important, some of young people also reflected on the importance of having a trusted organisation – such as Children First – they agreed that their trusted adult could be a worker/ professional. One of the Changemakers described their experience of working alongside their Children First worker as 'actually brilliant'. The Changemakers group also shared,

'Rory would benefit as they [Children First workers] are sweet, don't push you for answers like other people, and wait until you're comfortable enough to talk about it.'

'Children First have patience, they wait until you're ready to talk.'

'Speaking to Children First has more of an understanding.'

Another young person (14 years old) reflected that it is good to have 'Someone to open up to about it.' She shared that her Children First worker makes her feel respected. One of the children (10 years old) highlighted

that workers that are good at supporting children and young people is someone that 'plays with you, talks to you and listens to you.'

There was agreement that it should be the child or young persons' decision on who should be told, reflecting that children and young people should '...have control over who gets told.' They also felt that wider family do not need to know and shared that this should be a clear boundary. One of the Changemakers reflected on her own personal journey of disclosure, 'they [family] all just keep asking, are you ok, it's too much.'

Going at children and young people's pace

Throughout this research the children and young people reflected on the importance of going at their pace, so that they feel in control, well supported and able to understand the complexities of the investigation. One girl (17 years old) shared, that it's important to take '...breaks and pauses, don't rush an investigation.' The Changemakers group also highlighted the importance of taking it at the pace of the child or young person, they reflected that children and young people should, 'take it [sharing your story] slow if you want.' They also felt it was important to ensure that the professionals do not put pressure on children and young people, whilst reflecting on their own experiences, one young person said, 'Don't force him [Rory] into talking.' In the individual conversations one of the young people shared,

'Understanding how someone feels while talking and allowing the opportunity for conversational breaks. Articulate big concepts in a child-friendly manner. Making time available, giving opportunities for breaks. Girl, 17 years old

Another young person (14 years old) reflected that 'I felt like it [investigation] was rushed. It confused me a lot more than it was.', she shared that she felt that she received all of the information about the investigation all at one time which was difficult to understand,

'I would have liked it if they came out a couple of times to explain it. I would have liked it if I could have asked more questions.' Girl, 14 years old

The same young person reflected that children and young people might like to talk or share their views in different ways, so providing the, '...same support and help but sitting down to draw, write, what they like.' felt like important options to go at the pace of each person.

Prevention and Protection

There was detailed conversations on the theme of prevention and protection, the Changemakers group discussed that there needs to be more education around online dangers. They reflected that there is education around keeping safe and in person dangers but really lacked the online element. They shared that this needs to be talked about from a young age so felt that younger primary aged children should be targeted for these conversations. When the group explored how adults could support young people to understand the seriousness and help to prevent online sexual harm happening, they all agreed that children need to be taught about the risks from primary school age, so children know not to '...talk to random people online.'

The Aberdeen girls group also felt that there needs to be more preventative and protective measures in place to support children and young people experiencing online harm. They highlighted that when personal details are shared online, such as a home address, school, parents/ carers workplace, the online perpetrator has more ammunition to work with through coercive behaviour. They agreed that the character in the story needed further protection so that she 'can't be contacted by Callum [fictional perpetrator character].' The Changemakers group agreed that school should be informed as it would allow a layer of safety for Rory [Fictional character] who has been harmed. They agreed that safety is key during an investigation process, so you should feel safe

enough to leave the house. The Changemakers group also felt that there needs to be more support for teachers, with a focus on trainee teachers, which would support early intervention and more protection for children and young people,

'Train trainee teachers in this [online harm]. Schools need to take problems seriously.' Changemaker

Importance of feeling heard

After experiencing online harm, all of the children and young people felt that feeling heard was important. Young people reflected that during their investigation they did not always feel like they had been heard by some of the adults, including the police and teachers.

'My old teachers from my old school, especially my old pastoral teacher. She literally locked me in and made me stay there all day. I got angry and one time smashed up the room. She never listened to me.' Girl, 14 years old

The children and young people shared that it's important to feel like they are being listened to, and there were clear traits, behaviours and ways in which professionals should respond, to ensure they feel heard and supported. Examples:

'Talk like you're their friend, like, not too professional.'

'Taken seriously - respect boundaries and understand what it's like to go through the process.'

'Being listened to – this looks like someone responding to what you say or them adding on to what you say. Repeating what you've said in their own words.'

"...feel cared for and supported, this will make him feel listened to and respected."

'It's how you engage in conversation – you're a stake in conversation, like you have an interest in this conversation, like a stakeholder in business.'

'They help you. They talk you through it [the investigation]. They respect you.'

'Being age appropriate but still explaining a concept to its true form.'

Some of the young people reflected that 'rubbish support' can impact how you feel, and if they feel like professionals and adults have heard what they have said and been taken seriously. One child (10 years old), reflected that 'Rubbish support is, treating me badly, ignoring me, and not being given answer.' He went onto reflect that when he feels well supported and listened to adults will, 'Ask Questions. They give you eye contact. They sit properly.'

The Changemakers group highlighted that it is a children's human right to be listened to and taken seriously, which stresses the point that being heard and taken seriously is not just an option, it is a right which must be respected, protected and fulfilled.

Police response

There was a mixed response in how the children and young people felt the Police respond to online sexual harm, one child (10 years old) shared that he would like to be a Police Officer one day, due to his experience being positive. He reflected that :..police officers are there to help keep us safe and protected.' Despite this positive response, there were also a number of reflections from other young people on how the police responded to their investigation, many offering constructive feedback. Some of the young people shared that police arrive unannounced at their homes so providing more notice would be helpful. The Changemakers group

shared that police should arrive at 'normal times, not early in morning or late at night, like maybe lunch time would be good.' Some of the young people also highlighted that non-uniformed police and unmarked cars would be better. When reflecting on what 'bad support' looks like, one young person shared,

'Marked (police) cars and uniformed police – their uniform changes the atmosphere.' Girl, 17 years old

She went onto share that she feels when the police are involved it can feel like *...you're in trouble before you've* even started talking.' Another young person shared that she initially felt like the police had,

'...gave me a bit of hope in the way they were talking but then after that they made me feel like disrespected because they got my hopes up that they'd do something but then came back and said I shouldn't have sent it [photograph].' Girl, age 14

The same young person went onto share that the police had 'done nothing. They blamed it on me.' She felt disappointed in how the police had handled her investigation, reflecting that,

'Police – everything in general are rubbish. They don't support children and young people well enough... treat other people better than you treated me' Girl, 14 years old

A young person (17 years old) explained that her experience of being a victim of online sexual harm led her to not feeling like a person anymore, 'you are a thing that something happened to. I was just a victim, nothing more.' She reflected that whilst feeling like this, she felt that the police,

"...never listened to me and it made me very untrusting of the police. I would never choose to speak to the police again."

Girl, 17 years old

One of the children (10 years old) shared that his heart was beating fast because he had big feelings when the police came to his house, and despite feeling uncomfortable with the police's questions he felt like he had been listened to and they were understanding of his situation. The young people agreed that the police should respond to the 'legal parts.' and any interviews and conversations with police should take place, 'somewhere like Bairns Hoose, otherwise it's scary.'

Challenges of online world

Throughout this research there has been reflections from the children and young people on the challenges and concerns they have of the online world. As discussed above they feel that there needs to further prevention and protection for children, starting at a younger age. They highlighted that children are gaining access to devices at a younger age than ever before and gaining access to apps such as 'Snapchat' and 'WiZ' – this being described as an 'online dating app, like Tindre, but it's for young people.' The Changemakers group shared that WiZ is being used more and more so there are now more added protections, where a child or young person has to show their face to use the app, whereas on Snapchat they felt has limited protections, yet most young people use this to chat with their friends. One young person shared that she is worried about younger children, and that she worries that something might happen to her younger niece, 'I'm scared for my niece if something might happen to her [online].' She reflected that she is trying to understand all of the apps to help her niece stay safe online. Another young person shared, 'my sister has WiZ but she said not tell my Mum because it's bad.' The group agreed that children and young people should never add people they do not know online.

A young person (14 years old) reflected that young people need to 'be careful online. Be careful with who you trust.' She felt that this resonated with her own experience, where she shared,

'Online bullying, a picture got sent around of me. I don't know if that's grooming, I don't know the word for it. It was sent to my pals in school and they then made a fake account on snapchat pretending to be a boy. They were speaking to me and telling me to send pictures of myself without a top on and if I didn't do it they'd go after my mum and dog. That's when I knew it was someone I knew, coz they knew I had a dog. The one without a top got sent originally in February was screenshotted but didn't get sent around until the following November.'

Girl, 14 years old

There was acknowledgment that 'Older people don't take younger people's problems seriously. Adults need to have training on how to respect and take seriously young people's problems.' (Changemakers group). The group went onto share that they feel that every school group should receive training about online harm, and to ensure it stays up to date and delivered 'every year because technology changes.'

Conclusion

Children and young people felt that there was not enough understanding from adults on how to support, respond or teach about the risks and dangers of online harm. There was a clear message that adults and professionals need to respond to online harm cases in an empathetic, kind, supportive and slow-paced manner. Some shared that this did not happen for them but felt it should have, whereas group members felt these were necessary for children and young people to feel safe enough to disclose and navigate the investigation process.

The children and young people highlighted the worry felt across their generation about the concerns and dangers of online harm. Many agreed that you should not speak to or add people on social media that you do not know. Despite this knowledge, there was an understanding that online harm is happening to children and young people. There were various comments that reflected that many of the adults in their lives - both family and professionals, did not offer enough support. Some of the young people shared that it was specifically the police that did not respond well during their investigation. For two of the young people that shared their story of online harm, it was evident that there was mistrust in police, with one of the young people stating that they would never choose to speak to them again. There was a real sense throughout the conversations that adults need to learn more so they can have a better understanding of the online world.

The Changemakers group were clear that there needs to be more done through the education system to support children and young people to understand the risks of the online world. The groups were clear that teachers and trainee teachers need to develop more understanding and skills to support children and young people about the online world – the groups felt that they only learnt about in person danger and nothing around online dangers, which they felt needed to change. The children and young people felt this would better support prevention and protection.

There were also reflections on the pace of the online world changing, this was considered when thinking of ongoing education within schools. The young people felt that there needed to be ongoing up-to-date education, so that they could keep up with the fast paced and changing online world.

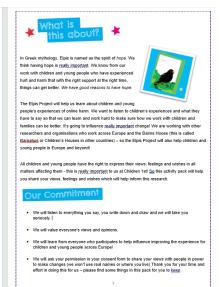
Finally, there was agreement from across the conversations that online harm is happening a lot. Snapchat being the platform that seemed to be the most prevalent. There was a clear view that children and young people need to be listened to and involved in the prevention and protection from online harm.

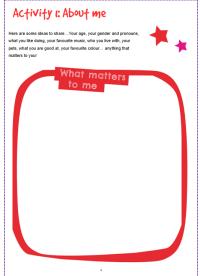
Appendix 1: Individual participation Activity Pack

Note: produced prior to Children First brand refresh

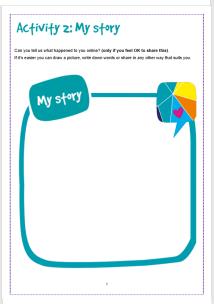


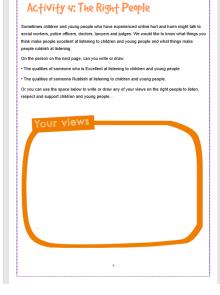






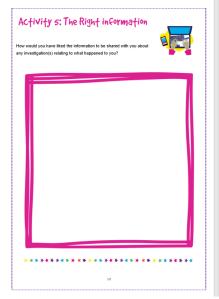


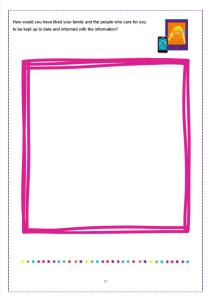




















Elsa's story

A bit about Elsa:

Elsa is 15 years old and lives in Glasgow. She lives with her Mum and her cat Pepper. Her Mum is a nurse and often works late shifts. Elsa's parents aren't together and her Dad lives in England. Elsa is really clever and enjoys playing chess and wants to become an engineer, she also loves gaming.

Elsa is often at home on her own while her Mum is working at the hospital. Her Mum works really hard and takes on extra shifts which means Elsa doesn't spend much time with her Mum and this has made things a wee bit tricky between them – they often misunderstand each other or don't listen to each other very well. Elsa often feels misunderstood by her Mum and feels lonely - this made Elsa want to find other people to talk to so she has made friends online – "Alex" being her best pal online.

At school, Elsa has a few close pals but often feels like an outsider. She doesn't have the same interests as her friends which has made her feel different and lonely. She has been enjoying gaming online as she feels she connects better with her online friends.

Elsa's relationship with "Alex":

Elsa and Alex became friends on Discord (gaming forum). They spoke a lot and as their friendship grew, Alex began asking Elsa more personal questions. Elsa really trusted Alex so shared what school she went to, where she lived and where her Mum worked.

Alex told Elsa he was from Inverness, lived with his parents and loved gaming, football and animals. He made it seem like he was just a normal teenager, which made Elsa feel safe and comfortable. They had loads in common.

What happened next?

Alex then started asking Elsa for pictures. At first it was things like pictures of her cat Pepper and then he gradually, started asking for selfies, then more personal and more inappropriate pictures.

Eventually, Alex made Elsa take photos of herself without a top on. She felt uncomfortable doing this, but Alex said he would share her personal information and photos online and with her school if she didn't do it.

Questions to think about:

- What should Elsa do next?
- Who should Elsa speak to (using flashcards: Police, Children 1st, School, her Mum, Childline, anyone else?)
- What should adults do to support Elsa?
- What should the Police do about this?
- How should Elsa be treated by professionals (using flashcards: respected, listened to, in control, taken seriously, calmly, anything else?).
- What are the qualities (good and rubbish) of the workers that might be involved with Elsa's case (using cut out people to write/ draw)?
- How should Elsa be kept in the loop and informed of what's happening next?
- What should happen to "Alex"?
- What would you want to say to Elsa?



Rory's story

A bit about Rory:

Rory is 13 years old and lives in Elgin. He lives with his Gran and 9 year old sister. He's lived with his Gran for about 7 years and has a really good relationship with her. He sees his Mum quite often but hasn't seen his Dad since he was a baby. Rory is really quiet, he loves art and is learning to play the guitar. He doesn't really like school and has one pal that he hangs out with. Rory likes to practice his guitar in his bedroom and likes to sketch and doodle. He has recently started using Snapchat a bit more and has had people adding him that's he's accepted. He has started to have a few streaks with new people and has been chatting to a boy called "Callum" that recently added him.

Rory's relationship with "Callum":

Callum is 14 and lives down in England. Callum hates school and doesn't have many friends – just like Rory. Callum is always sending Rory Snaps but never shows his face. They have been talking a lot and Callum is really impressed that Rory is learning to play guitar. Callum has asked Rory to send him videos of him playing his guitar.

What happened next?

As times went by Rory sees Callum as his best pal, they have started talking about meeting up in the summer holidays. Rory and Callum have started calling each other on Snapchat but always use their bitmoji's so never see each other's faces – this was suggested by Callum.

Eventually Callum asks Rory to send him inappropriate photos and videos. Rory feels like he shouldn't, but Callum has become his best friend so feels like he should send them to keep Callum happy. He gets a notification saying that Callum has screenshot the photos. He asks Callum why he did this and Callum reassures him it's OK. Rory feels really bad about sending them and feels like he shouldn't have but it made Callum happy.

Questions to think about:

- What should Rory do next?
- Who should Rory speak to (using flashcards: Police, Children 1st, School, his Gran, Childline, anyone else?)
- What should adults do to support Rory?
- What should the Police do about this?
- How should Rory be treated by professionals (using flashcards: respected, listened to, in control, taken seriously, calmly, anything else?).
- What are the qualities (good and rubbish) of the workers that might be involved with Rory's case (using cut out people to write/ draw)?
- How should Rory be kept in the loop and informed of what's happening next?
- What should happen to "Callum"?
- What would you want to say to Rory?