

CHILDHOOD MATTERS

Creating a brighter future for Scotland's children.



**2026 MUST BE THE
YEAR WE STAND UP
FOR CHILDREN**

Scotland's National Children's Charity
January 2026

**CHILDREN
FIRST** Protecting
Scotland's
Children

HELP PROTECT SCOTLAND'S CHILDREN.

Run with us at the Edinburgh Marathon Festival



From the kids' kilometre to the 10k there is a run for everyone. Find out more and sign up now.

23 and 24 May 2026.

**CHILDREN
FIRST** Protecting
Scotland's
Children



childrenfirst.org.uk



WELCOME

Dear friends and supporters,

I hope you've had a happy new year.

2026 is a pivotal year for Scotland's babies, children and young people. With the country facing a national childhood emergency, those we elect to the Scottish Parliament in May will decide whether children get the change they desperately hope for and urgently need.

That's why this year we must stand up for children with more determination, boldness and courage than ever before.

As well as shaping our manifesto for the elections (see pages four and five), children and young people have been helping us develop our new strategic priorities, together with their families, our partners, colleagues, volunteers and supporters. Thank you to everyone who has contributed to this vital work. These priorities will launch in April – we are looking forward to sharing more in your next edition of Childhood Matters.

On pages 10 and 11 you can read the hopes of some of the children and young people who are inspiring our priorities. Their words are a stark reminder that children can't protect themselves and need adults to act to keep them safe. None of these hopes should be beyond the reach of any child, so as well as a reminder, they are also a powerful call to make this the year that Scotland puts children first.

Thank you for standing with us, as we start 2026 and for everything you continue to do to help us transform children's lives and give them a safer, happier childhood.

Mary Glasgow
Children First Chief Executive



OUR MANIFESTO

In the Autumn, we unveiled our manifesto for the 2026 Holyrood elections which take place in May.

We are urging the next Scottish Government to take action to tackle the national childhood emergency, protect children and safeguard childhood.

Our manifesto calls for the next Scottish Government to deliver:

1

A comprehensive offer of Whole Family Support to tackle child poverty and give every family the emotional, practical and financial support they need.

2

A consistent Bairns Hoose to put children's recovery at the centre of the justice system.

3

A commitment to urgently tackle Online Harm, its impact on child development and the right to a safe childhood.

Our manifesto comes as rising numbers of children are seeking mental health support, schools are under pressure with the highest absentee rates in the UK and more children are experiencing online harm, with cybercrime doubling in recent years.

Poverty continues to trap families and impact on the health and wellbeing of babies and children, with many families unable to access the support they need to break free.

The manifesto was developed based on the needs and concerns of the children, young people and families we support.

“It feels like there’s no one that helps families at the moment.”

Joe, young person

“A year ago, I had no confidence and no hope. Now, I feel proud of myself. I’ve found purpose and I’m doing amazing things with Bairns Hoose by my side.”

Evangeline, 17

“People in Scotland are worried about staying safe online... whether people are who they say they are.”

Sam, 10

Mary Glasgow, Children First Chief Executive said: *“There is a childhood emergency in Scotland and the cost of inaction is generational.*

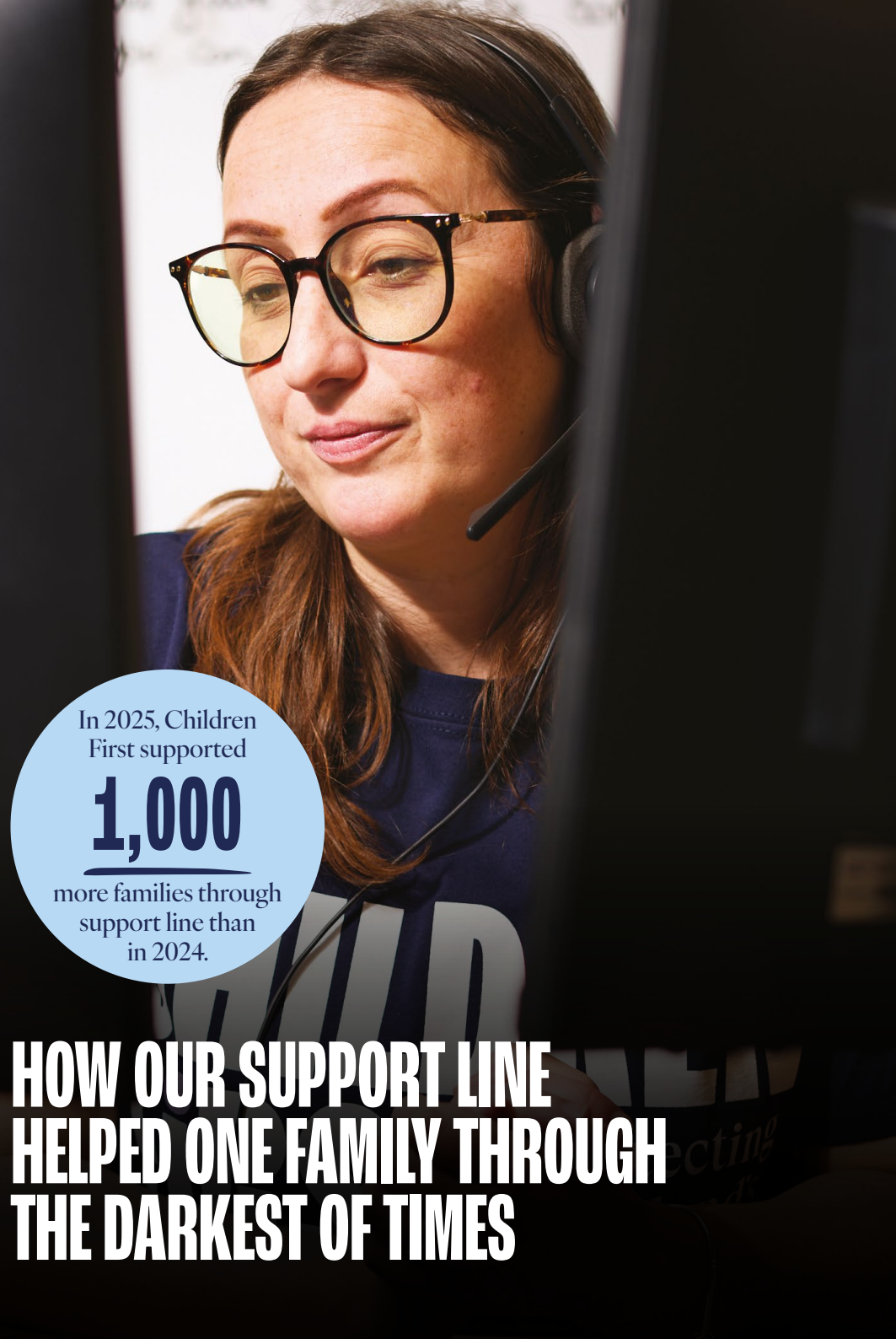
“Families feel alone and aren’t getting the help and support they need when they need it. This makes it harder for children to attend school, feel safe in their communities and stay protected online. All while thousands of children and young people wait for mental health support.”

Mary added: *“Children First’s manifesto sets out a bold, achievable vision for change. We know from our experience of supporting children and families across the country that change is possible. Together, Scotland can build a bright, safe future for every child.”*

Almost
NINE OUT OF TEN
parents don’t know where to turn for support.

Survey for Children First, 2025

Find out more about our 2026 manifesto on our website.



In 2025, Children First supported

1,000

more families through support line than in 2024.

HOW OUR SUPPORT LINE HELPED ONE FAMILY THROUGH THE DARKEST OF TIMES

Thanks to the incredible support of players of People's Postcode Lottery, our support line can be there to help children and families 365 days a year. Together we're giving children across Scotland, like Laura, Alfie and Struan a safer, brighter future.

Young siblings Laura, Alfie and Struan* were devastated and in shock when their dad was taken away by the police and later sentenced to several years in prison for serious offences.

Mum Rhona* thought they were a typical family but overnight her world was turned upside down. She was left to pick up the pieces and Laura, Alfie and Struan, all in the early years of primary school, didn't understand why their dad was gone.

Rhona was frantic with worry about the future and how she would be able to support her children through this.

It was incredibly hard for all of them to go out into the community after what had happened. The children were reluctant to see family and friends and felt confused and distressed. Laura was bullied terribly at school and before long didn't want to go.

Every day there was a new challenge for each child and Rhona was understandably completely overwhelmed and struggling to cope with everything. She felt she had nowhere to turn to get support for her and her children.

She called our support line and immediately spoke to one of our team,

Harry. He was kind, understanding and checked in with her regularly to see how she and the children were doing. He asked the right questions, he understood the individual needs of each child and helped Rhona find strength, reassurance and hope in this dark time.

Since then, Rhona has been a regular support line caller.

Rhona said: *"The support Children First provides is vital. The children and I are on a long road and there is no quick fix to our situation."*

"When the children have been behaving in a challenging way, I know I can pick up the phone and Children First's support line is there for me. Every member of the team is really helpful. They give practical advice on how to deal with situations calmly as a parent and provide me with reassurance when I am questioning myself."

"It's helped me strengthen my relationships with my children and improved our communication with each other. They are all now going to school and coping well with that."

"The support line team really get it. They never judge and know there is no such thing as a perfect parent. They are empathetic and let you know you are not alone. They don't just listen – they hear you."



** Names have been anonymised to protect the identity of the family.*

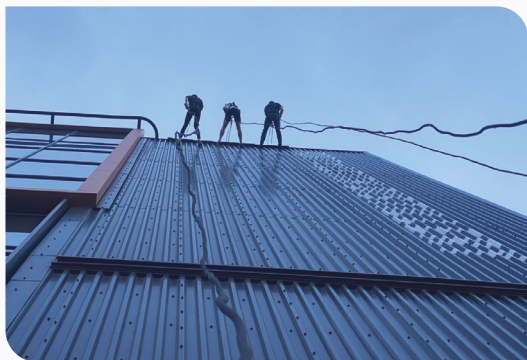


FUNDRAISE WITH US:

You can change children's lives

There are so many ways you can help protect Scotland's children and have fun while doing it!

From joining a Kiltwalk in a city near you, running a marathon, or even abseiling down the world's tallest whisky distillery, there's a challenge for everyone.



"Taking part in the Kiltwalk was a fantastic experience. Being surrounded with such a positive energy felt amazing. Although it was challenging towards the end, the team pushed through! Seeing the final amount we raised made us all feel very proud. We all can't wait for the next one!"

Target FM Kiltwalk team

TAKE ON "ON-MUTE MAY"

Could you go "on-mute" in May? Give up social media for the month or simply cut down your screen time. It's a great way to reset and raise vital funds for children across Scotland.

FUNDRAISING AT WORK

Fundraising with colleagues is a brilliant way to boost morale and make a difference together. Make Children First your charity of the year, take on a fitness challenge, or volunteer locally. Big or small, your workplace can help give children a brighter future.

OTHER WAYS TO GIVE

Want to know exactly what your donation buys? We've created local Amazon wish lists of items children and families need. Just visit our website to find out more.

Our local service in Glasgow is part of the Co-op Local Community Fund. Download the Co-op App, become a member and choose our cause so we can receive a share of £5 million.

You can also give by shopping online including with eBay, easyfundraising and DontSendMeACard by visiting our 'other ways to give' page on our website.

WATCH THIS SPACE

Exciting things are coming in 2026! Our home money box campaign launches this month and it's a new way to donate and protect Scotland's children.

FIND OUT MORE

You can find out more about all the ways to fundraise with us via the QR code or by emailing fundraising@childrenfirst.org.uk. Thank you for your support.



GET INVOLVED

Dates for your diary

Kiltwalk Glasgow
25 and 26 April 2026

Kiltwalk Aberdeen
7 June 2026

Kiltwalk Dundee
16 August 2026

Port of Leith Abseil
10 May 2026

Edinburgh Marathon Festival
23 and 24 May 2026

Scottish Half Marathon and 10K in East Lothian
16 August 2026

Prefer something more personal? Host a cake sale, run a quiz night, or create a birthday fundraiser - the options are endless.



Scan here to learn more or visit childrenfirst.org.uk/fundraise



CHILDREN'S HOPES for 2026

Every new year brings with it a spark of hope and the dream that tomorrow can be brighter. At Children First the hopes and dreams of the children we support, tell us what matters most to them and guide our mission to give every child in Scotland a safer future.

We will never stop fighting to fulfil children's hopes to be protected from harm, to be safe from abuse and to recover from trauma – whether through our Scotland-wide support line and national and local services or through our campaigns.

We're sharing these children's and young people's voices to inspire everyone in Scotland to do what they can to bring about urgent change. With more than 140 years' experience of supporting children and their families, we know that the hopes we share here can be made real. A better future for Scotland's children is possible.

But we cannot do it alone.

"Having things in my town that me and my family can use – swimming pool, activity centre, climbing wall and soft play."

Harris, age 9

You can help turn these hopes into real futures. Whether you make a donation, leave a gift in your will, volunteer, take part in a fundraising event, sign up to our newsletter or share our campaigns you can make a life-changing difference to babies, children and young people across Scotland.

Together, let's make 2026 the year we turn hope into action and create a safer, happier future for every child in Scotland.

"People trust children and listen and act on the bullying that they share."

Liam, age 10

"I want my family to be happy."

Kieran, age 8

"I hope for a better social life. That I can talk to anyone without being nervous or overthinking."

Isla, age 16

"Our hopes are that the justice system will get better."

Group of young people

"All children should have a home, a safe place to live."

Luca, age 9

"My Children First worker stays in our life."

Noah, age 10

"I want to go places."

Dan, age 10

"I hope I make more friends."

Amy, age 13



Do you have what it takes to go on-mute this May? Give up social media in May to raise funds to protect Scotland's children and shine a light on the impact of online harm.

Take time to unplug and rediscover the joy of simple moments, laughing over a board game, cooking a family meal, exploring the outdoors, reading or planting something new.

Children and young people told us in a survey that online harm is the number one threat they face today.

One group of young people told us: "Social media is a worry because no-one knows what is real, photos are edited... as a teenager or young child it's impossible to know what's real."

A staggering 79 percent of young people in Scotland said they are worried about seeing harmful online content and 78 percent are anxious about the impact of social media.

Together, we can increase awareness of the harmful impact social media can have and help children and young people recover from online harm. Join us and go on-mute this May.

We understand how overwhelming online dangers can feel for parents and carers and we are here to help. Anyone who is worried about a child can contact our support line for advice by calling **08000 28 22 33** or starting a webchat at www.childrenfirst.org.uk/supportline.

HOW TO TAKE PART:

- ✓ Sign up and pay your £25 registration fee by visiting our website
- ✓ Set your goal - quit or reduce social media in May
- ✓ Create your fundraising page
- ✓ Spread the word, in advance! Remember you won't be able to do this in May.



SIGN UP TODAY!

Sign up today! Visit childrenfirst.org.uk/onmutemay

WE'D LOVE
TO HEAR
FROM YOU!

Your feedback will help us shape the future of Childhood Matters and ensure that you're hearing about the news from Children First that matters to you.

It will help support us to make a bigger impact so that we can help more children and families across Scotland.

Please take a few minutes to complete our short online survey by scanning the QR code below. It's quick, easy and we really value your thoughts.

As a thank you, everyone who completes the survey will be entered into a free prize draw to win our Step into Spring hamper, packed with seasonal treats.

Thank you for taking part.



Please donate today and protect Scotland's children.

0345 10 80 111 (Mon – Fri, 9am – 5pm)

childrenfirst.org.uk/donate



FREEPOST RSGE-ZGGB-EKCJ, Children First, 83 Whitehouse Loan, Edinburgh, EH9 1AT

1. YOUR DETAILS

Make a donation at childrenfirst.org.uk/donate. Alternatively please fill in the form and send to: Freepost Plus RSGE-ZGGB-EKCJ, Children First, Whitehouse Loan, Edinburgh, EH9 1AT

Title:	First name:	Surname:
Address:		
		Postcode:

By providing us with your telephone number and email address you are consenting to us contacting you via phone, text and email.

Email:	
Mobile:	Telephone:

2. I WOULD LIKE TO MAKE A REGULAR MONTHLY DONATION



Instruction to your bank or building society to pay by direct debit.

For Children First use only

Please pay Children First a monthly donation of:

Originator's ID no.: 6 0 1 2 4 0

<input type="checkbox"/> £5	<input type="checkbox"/> £8	<input type="checkbox"/> £12	<input type="checkbox"/> Other £
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☐ 3rd ☐ 15th of the month

Name(s) of account holder(s):	
Account no.:	Sort code:
Name and address of your bank/building society:	
Postcode:	
Account holder signature:	Date:

Instruction to your bank or building society to pay by direct debit: Please pay Children First direct debits from the account detailed in this instruction subject to the safeguards assured by the direct debit guarantee. I understand that this instruction may remain with Children First and, if so, details will be passed electronically to my bank/building society.

IGCM26A

Remember to Gift Aid it.

Make your donation worth 25% more at no cost to you.

3. I WOULD LIKE TO MAKE A DONATION

<input type="checkbox"/> £25	<input type="checkbox"/> £50	<input type="checkbox"/> £100	<input type="checkbox"/> Other £_____
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☐ I enclose my cheque/CAF voucher made payable to 'Children First'

OR

☐ Please debit my Mastercard / Visa Debit / Visa Credit / Charity card

Card number:																	
Expiry:	M	M	/	Y	Y	Security code				C	V	V					
Date	D	D	/	M	M	/	Y	Y									

Signature: _____

4. DON'T FORGET TO TURN EVERY £1 YOU DONATE INTO £1.25 *giftaid it*

- ☐ I want to Gift Aid any donations I make in the future or have made in the past four years to Children First. I am a UK taxpayer and understand that if I pay less income tax and/or capital gains tax in the current tax year than the amount of Gift Aid claimed on all my donations, it is my responsibility to pay any difference. I understand the charity will reclaim 25p of tax on every £1 that I give.
- ☐ I am not currently able to Gift Aid my donations.

Date:	D	D	/	M	M	/	Y	Y
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5. KEEPING IN TOUCH

We would like to keep in touch with you and provide you with updates on our vital work keeping children safe and how you can support us. We will contact you by post unless you tell us otherwise. We promise to respect your privacy and keep your details safe. You can update your preferences by phoning **0345 10 80 111** (Monday to Friday 9am - 5pm) or emailing **fundraising@childrenfirst.org.uk**. For further details on how your data is used and stored, please see our privacy policy at **childrenfirst.org.uk/privacy**.



Worried about a child?

Our support line is here to help.
Call free on **08000 28 22 33**
or visit **childrenfirst.org.uk**

Please donate today and protect Scotland's children.

0345 10 80 111 (Mon – Fri, 9am – 5pm)

childrenfirst.org.uk/donate

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