

2025 IMPACT REPORT

Putting children first.

Children First is Scotland's national children's charity.

OUR PURPOSE

To protect Scotland's children.

OUR MISSION

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.

OUR VISION

A Scotland where every child is safe.

OUR VALUES

With **love**,
we put
children first.

With **purpose**,
we transform
children's
lives together.

With **strength**,
we do whatever it
takes to protect
Scotland's children.

Our impact on children and young people

MORE UNDERSTOOD
belonging {**CONNECTED**}
SAFER happier
improved wellbeing
Secure
Learn & grow
RECOVERY

STRONGER
RELATIONSHIPS
HEARD
Seen

HEALING {**LOVED**}

"If it wasn't for Children First
I don't think me or my son
would be here. He was feeling
suicidal. It is a lot better now."
Helen*, mum.

* Names have been anonymised throughout the report to protect the identity of children and families.

more than 140 YEARS OF PUTTING CHILDREN FIRST

As Scotland's national children's charity, Children First will never stop fighting to protect children from harm, help them recover from abuse and give them a brighter future.



In 2025, through our national and local services and campaigns for change, we supported babies, children and families when they needed us most. Calls to our support line from parents and carers in distress rose by more than 50 per cent.

As demand for our services continues to grow, we continue to fight for a Scotland where children are safe, supported and heard - from improving children's mental health and reducing online harm and poverty, to creating a justice system that truly puts them first.

Last summer, along with partners, we celebrated the opening of the Aberdeenshire Bairns Hoose Hub. This was a landmark moment - expanding access to specialist, trauma informed support for children in rural communities and strengthening understanding of how the world leading Bairns Hoose model can work beyond cities.

In the autumn, we proudly launched our manifesto ahead of the 2026

"You have changed my life so much and I am happier than ever!"

Sam, young person in foster care.



"You help turn children's hopes into reality."

Mary Glasgow, Children First Chief Executive

Scottish elections, calling on the next Scottish Government to put children first. Working alongside children, families, partners and supporters, we developed new strategic priorities to shape the future of Children First, guided by the hopes and needs of children and young people, which will be launched in Spring 2026.

We ended the year at the Scottish Parliament, where families supported by our whole family mental health and wellbeing services called for the national rollout of this life-changing approach.

This impact report reflects the voices and hopes of the children and young people we work with. Children like eight-year-old Kieran, who told us:

"I want my family to be happy."

Their words remind us why urgent action matters. With more than 140 years' experience, we know these hopes are achievable and that a safer, happier future for Scotland's children is possible.

By donating, fundraising, volunteering, campaigning or standing with us, you help turn children's hopes into reality. Thank you for everything you do to put children first.



Mary Glasgow
Children First Chief Executive

SCOTLAND IS FACING A CHILDHOOD EMERGENCY.

Life is tougher today for many children and families than it's ever been.

Children and families across Scotland tell us that they feel alone and overlooked. They're finding it tough to make ends meet, support their children to go to school, stay safe in their communities and avoid abuse and exploitation online.

With almost 100 children being referred to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) every day,* Scotland is facing a children's mental health crisis. This is reflected in the top concern families contacted us about this year - child emotional wellbeing.

240,000
children live in poverty in Scotland.

*(Children First, 2024).

1 IN 3 young people will experience a traumatic event before they turn 18.

60% of families we supported were worried about their child's wellbeing.

1 IN 5 children have been sexually abused.

In a survey we did
78% OF CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE said they were anxious about the impact of social media.

30 SECONDS

is how long it takes an online predator to find a child to engage with.

30% of people support line helped faced financial hardship.

CYBERCRIME HAS DOUBLED

since 2019–20.

(Recorded Crime in Scotland 2024-25, Scottish Government, June 2025)

TOP 10

Top 10 challenges that families contacted us about:

- 1 Child emotional wellbeing
- 2 Family relationships
- 3 Parental mental health and wellbeing
- 4 Family separation
- 5 School and education
- 6 Poverty and money worries
- 7 Parenting
- 8 Disability
- 9 Child development
- 10 Domestic abuse and coercion



"It feels like there's no one that helps families at the moment."

Joe, young person.

"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."

Group of young people.

"I worry about people staying safe in their homes, sometimes people come and cause fights and this is really frightening."

Liam, age 10.

Almost **11,300 CHILDREN** and close to **10,000 PARENTS** and carers reached.

21,265 PEOPLE reached in 2025 - an 8 percent increase on 2024.

We're here for all Scotland's children. Our life-changing work helps families when they need it most. In 2025 we helped close to 11,300 children and their families to have a brighter future.

Worried about a child? Our support line is here to help: **08000 28 22 33**

SUPPORT LINE

Our support line provides a lifeline to children and families across Scotland. From mental health, money worries and online harm to struggles at school our support line offers practical, emotional and financial help to families when they need it most.

In the past year, our support line saw calls sharply increase by more than 50 percent as more parents and carers turned to us for help when facing challenges bringing up children.

We worked with nearly 1,500 families to provide financial wellbeing support and advice that helped put £1.8 million in financial gains

back in their pockets and manage over £1 million pounds in debts.

Mum Lisa rang our support line in a desperate plea for help when she was worried sick about the mental health of her daughter.

“I honestly don’t know what I’d do without the Children First support line.”

Lisa, mum.

In the past year calls have increased more than
50 PERCENT.

In total, our support line gave expert, confidential advice to more than
6,500 PEOPLE
in 2025.

We put
£1.8 MILLION
in financial gains back in families pockets.

childrenfirst.org.uk

KINSHIP CARE ADVICE SERVICE for Scotland

We’ve been supporting kinship families for over 30 years across the country, so we were delighted when we were selected in September to take over the Kinship Care Advice Service for Scotland on behalf of the Scottish Government.



The service offers practical, emotional and specialist financial and legal support that strengthens kinship families, while also playing a key role in shaping policy. In 2025 we supported close to 750 kinship care families across Scotland.

“I had a big debt for my electric account and got help from Children First. I had been struggling for months on my own. Getting support was pressure off my shoulders. I would highly recommend this service - very helpful, warm staff, kind and supportive.”

Mary, kinship carer.

“Kinship is not an easy task both physically and mentally, I’d never have managed without the support I received from Children First.”

Sarah, kinship carer.



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GIVING CHILDREN a brighter future

Every day across Scotland, our teams stand beside children and families who are distressed and facing unimaginable trauma.

We help them stay safe, heal and rebuild their lives. We work alongside babies, children, young people and their families for as long as they need us.

In 2025 our local services supported thousands of families, helping them find strength and hope again. Together, we're creating a brighter future for Scotland's children.



SPOTLIGHT ON MIDLOTHIAN

Our Midlothian service provides whole family support, specialising in working with families affected by substance use. Our expert team makes sure the children affected are safe and their wellbeing is supported; we are there for the whole family for as long as it takes. When families do well, children do well so we offer support ranging from parenting advice to peer support groups for adults recovering from addiction.

The team also has expertise in supporting young people with their mental health and working with kinship carers, ensuring they have the help they need to provide secure and loving homes for the children.

"I like that you're there for me AND Dad, you know us both and get us."
Leonie, young person.

"Without the support I wouldn't be here and the children would be in foster care."
Ann, kinship carer.

"I have someone to talk to I know I can trust."
Sadie, kinship carer.

"Without Children First I would not be where I am today - coming along to the family activities was great for me and my son. Working together has been so important to our relationship today."
James, dad.

In 2025 our team
REACHED 921 PEOPLE.

SPOTLIGHT ON ABERDEEN

Our family wellbeing service in Aberdeen, provides expert, whole-family support to help children and families address challenges before they reach crisis point. Working alongside families as early as possible, the service responds to a wide range of needs in a supportive and preventative way as part of a wider collaborative of organisations known as FitLike Aberdeen.

Families can get help in many ways including group work, events, family group decision making, peer support and direct family support. The team takes time to understand each family's unique circumstances, working in partnership with them to build on strengths, increase resilience and support children and families to achieve brighter, more positive futures.

In 2025 our
Aberdeen service
REACHED 566 PEOPLE.

"Boys group after school, makes going to school so much easier."
Luca, young person.

"Don't be afraid to talk about your feelings. You can do it here."
Jess, young person.

"You can come here no matter what mood you are in. When you leave you always feel 10 times better."
Jacob, dad.



LIFE-CHANGING SUPPORT for child victims



Our Bairns Hoose teams support children who have been victims or witnesses of horrific crimes, helping them recover from trauma and harm. We work side by side with children and their families, making sure they receive the care, protection and support they need to navigate Scotland's health, child protection and justice systems.

In response to the significant trauma children can experience during the criminal justice process, we opened Scotland's first Bairns Hoose in 2023.

Last year, our North Strathclyde Bairns Hoose celebrated its second birthday and we were proud to support the launch of a new Bairns Hoose in Aberdeenshire.

We have also contributed to the development of the Bairns Hoose approach by working with partners across Scotland including in Aberdeen, the Scottish Borders, West Lothian and Ayrshire, helping ensure more children receive expert support from the moment they disclose they have been harmed.

In 2025 Bairns Hoose services across Scotland supported
1,155 CHILDREN, 839 ADULTS AND 516 FAMILIES.

In 2025, a new Bairns Hoose opened in Aberdeenshire, giving more children who have experienced serious harm a safe, welcoming place to begin their recovery. Designed with local young people and the result of a partnership between the local council, Children First and other key organisations, the Hoose brings health, care and justice services together under one roof.

This new site brings our child-centred model to rural communities through a new approach, with several family centres available for interviews across the region. This means children can choose the space where they feel most comfortable being heard and supported.

Children and young people in the area are already seeing the impact.

"A year ago, I had no confidence and no hope. Now, I feel proud of myself. I've found purpose. Bairns Hoose is more than just support - it's someone walking beside you through the hardest times. It's a second home, a safety blanket and a reminder that you're never alone."

Evangeline, young person.

The Aberdeenshire Bairns Hoose is one of six Scottish Government pathfinder projects set up to support the national roll-out of the approach across Scotland.



KEEPING FAMILIES TOGETHER

Family group decision making (FGDM) can empower a child's wider family to come together to discuss and agree a family plan when facing a life-changing decision about the care of their child. This approach helps keep children safe and can prevent children being taken into care.

In 2025 we provided family group decision making services to over

2,300 PEOPLE

across Scotland, that's 40 percent more than in 2024.

Our expert teams worked with close to

500 FAMILIES,

including in South Lanarkshire and Inverclyde.

SOUTH LANARKSHIRE

Our South Lanarkshire service supports pregnant women to plan for the safe care of their babies once they are born, often working closely with wider family members to build strong networks of support.

The service also helps young people take an active role in decisions about where they live and who they live with. Wherever possible, the team works to strengthen relationships within families, helping to create safer, more stable and connected futures for children and young people.

"I wouldn't have thought last year me and my mum would have been talking to each other and now we are working together for the kids."

Geraldine, mum.

"I would recommend family group decision making to other families, I would tell them it's good because they will be heard and things can change."

Simon, dad.

"The biggest change is having my baby home."

Chloe, mum.

In 2025 the team supported
189 CHILDREN AND 98 FAMILIES.

INVERCLYDE

Our Inverclyde family group decision making team, which is part of our wider family wellbeing service in the area, has been running for three years.

One family the team worked with was the Kellys. They described the family group decision making process with Children First as "transformative" after going through a difficult time.

Below the family shares some of their reflections.

"I'm doing so much better and trying harder at home and in school."

Joe, young person.

"There was a lot of stress and disharmony in our home. We now have grown closer and communicate well together."

Lena, mum.

"Thank you, Children First, for really helping our family go from a dark place back to a loving, calm and kind one."

Dean, dad.

In 2025 the team supported
28 families through family group decision making.

CAMPAIGNING ON FAMILY GROUP DECISION MAKING

In 2025 we published new research which highlighted that addressing unequal provision of family group decision making can speed up progress to ensure Scotland keeps its promise to care-experienced children by 2030.

Our *Family Group Decision Making in Scotland* report found that while a majority of professionals who offer these services (60%) identified improving outcomes for children, including keeping children out of care, as a key strength, a third of local authorities offered no family group decision making provision.

We are campaigning for the Scottish Government to address this lack of provision by ensuring sustainable funding and giving family group decision making a clear and certain place in legislation.

KEEPING CHILDREN safe in sport



Child Wellbeing and Protection in Sport (CWPS) and our Case Management Support Service are national partnerships with **sportscotland**, working to make sport safer for children and young people across Scotland.

The CWPS team supports sports governing bodies to strengthen wellbeing and protection policies in line with national standards. They provide expert advice, consultancy and tailored training for sports organisations, parents and **sportscotland** staff.

Demand for advice continued to rise last year, with enquiries up 30% to 317. The team also championed children's rights in sport and strengthened partnerships, including with Kyniska Advocacy, to drive sector wide change.

Launched in 2024, our Case Management Support Service helps governing bodies manage disciplinary concerns fairly and effectively.

In 2025,
**THE SERVICE SUPPORTED
24 GOVERNING BODIES,
HANDLED 96 CASES,**
delivered training on investigations and hearings, published new guidance and partnered with the Ann Craft Trust to develop an Adult Wellbeing and Protection in Sport course for coaches and volunteers across Scotland.

SAFEGUARDERS PANEL TEAM

We are contracted by the Scottish Government to manage and operate the national Safeguarders Panel, which includes around 113 Safeguarders across Scotland.

A Safeguarder is someone appointed by a Children's Hearing or Sheriff to make sure a child or young person's best interests and human rights are represented in the court process.

They develop positive, trusting relationships with children, their families and the other important people around them. The Safeguarder listens to children's views so that decisions about their future reflect their rights and best interests.

The Children First Safeguarders Panel team is responsible for the recruitment and selection of Safeguarders, their learning and development and monitoring their performance.

"I have really enjoyed my time as a Safeguarder and wish to thank everyone at Children First who have been so incredibly helpful and supportive."

Jenny, former Safeguarder.

The team matched
1,572 CHILDREN
with a Safeguarder in 2025.



STANDING UP FOR CHILDREN

In 2025, we continued to champion children's rights and protect childhood, campaigning on the issues children and young people tell us matter most.

Working with partners, decision makers and politicians, our expert team helped drive change to better protect children by campaigning to tackle online harm, improve mental health support, reform the justice system and increase support for families.

We influenced positive change around reducing child poverty, improving children's experiences of the justice system and pressed for continued progress on keeping the promise, ensuring care experienced children grow up loved, safe and respected. We secured a commitment to stronger national policy and legislation to support kinship care families.

childrenfirst.org.uk

OUR MANIFESTO

Ahead of the 2026 Holyrood elections we launched our manifesto, rooted in the needs and concerns of the children, young people and families we support. Our manifesto calls on 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.

CHANGE IS POSSIBLE.

We know this because we see it in the families we work alongside. Even though a combination of crises makes a better future difficult to see, Scotland has the tools it needs to make things better for babies and children now and for future generations.

AS WELL AS MAKING PREVENTION ITS MISSION BY DELIVERING THE THREE COMMITMENTS SET OUT IN OUR MANIFESTO, THE NEXT SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT MUST ALSO:

- Increase the Scottish Child Payment.
- Meet the Child Poverty Targets.
- Keep the promise.

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TACKLING ONLINE HARM

Children and young people in Scotland told us in a survey that online harm is one of the greatest threats they face today. They don't expect to feel safe online.

The level of fear and anxiety many young people face is shocking and the impact on their mental health is appalling.

79%

of young people told us they are worried about seeing harmful online content.

78%

of young people told us they are anxious about the impact of social media.

ANIMATIONS

In 2025 we worked closely with children and young people to understand their concerns about online harm and how professionals can best support them. Together with two young people, Erin and Jamie-Leigh, we developed a series of short animations that were shared internationally. Aimed at teachers, social workers and police, these explain how best to respond if a child is harmed online.

“We hope the animations will help you understand how to respond and the impact that online harm has on children’s mental health.”

Jamie-Leigh.

Watch our animations



CAMPAIGNING

In 2025 we worked hard to shine a light on online harm, raising awareness and influencing change. We're now collaborating with partners to develop a public health approach to tackling online harm in Scotland, drawing on international best practice such as Ireland's Online Health Taskforce.

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

Sam, age 10.

“My Children First worker has been helping me understand what's safe in relationships and I knew that we shouldn't just let it go. I told an adult I trusted and we reported it to the police.”

Amelia, young person who was one of a group of friends targeted by an abuser online.



RESPONDING TO THE CHILD MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS

Statistics from 2025 show almost 100 children a day are referred to CAMHS and persistent absence rates in Scottish schools are the worst in the UK. Something needs to change.

Children's mental health is under immense pressure and at Children First we support children daily who are in such distress they are, in some cases, at risk of suicide. This can have a devastating impact on children's lives and leave parents at a loss.

Too many families feel like they don't know where to turn. Many are referred to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) but don't get support when they need it because of the huge strain the health system is already under.

In 2025, an independent evaluation was published showing that our family wellbeing model, which provides early help and

support, has reduced repeat child mental health visits to GPs by more than 86%.

Imagine if every family in Scotland that had a child in distress with their mental health could access early, relational, whole family support.

Support that was compassionate, flexible and built around real lives. Support that prevented further crises.

With more political backing and investment, this life-saving approach could be rolled out across Scotland.

FIGHTING FOR CHANGE ALONGSIDE FAMILIES

We held a roundtable with decision-makers at the Scottish Parliament in December to shine a light on the need to move to a more preventative, relationship and community-based model of support for children's mental health.

Families spoke about the life-saving support they have received from Children First and made an urgent call on cross-party MSPs and professionals to make this help available for every family that needs it in Scotland through a powerful letter.

Eighteen-year-old Lily who spoke at the event and has been supported by Children First said:

"When I met Children First I couldn't go to school. My anxiety was constant. I saw danger everywhere and reason to fear to everything... Now I've started my dream course at my dream university – I couldn't have done it without Children First."



View the letter from the Children First Coffee and Connect group.



"{Children First}... walked with us, not ahead of us or behind us, but beside us. Families heal faster and stronger when we heal together."

Parents from Coffee and Connect group.

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S VOICES

Children and young people's voices are at the heart of our work. We empower them to share their views, feelings and wishes on the issues that affect their lives, influencing key decision-makers and driving change.

Evangeline was supported by our Aberdeenshire Bairns Hoose after experiencing abuse that had a terrible impact on her mental health. She bravely wrote and illustrated her own book sharing her experiences to influence and appeal for positive change to the justice system.



"Our hopes are that the justice system will get better."
Group of young people.

"If I could speak to the people in charge of the justice system, I'd ask them to really think about the victims. The system can be scary and damaging, especially for young people. We need to be heard, supported, and treated with care. We're not adults yet, and the process needs to reflect that. Please listen to our voices - we matter."
Evangeline



SHAPING THE FUTURE OF CHILDREN FIRST TOGETHER

We asked children and young people to share their hopes and dreams for the future with us. Understanding what matters most to them is helping guide our mission to give every child in Scotland a safer future.

Their views have shaped our new strategic priorities from 2026 onwards. Here are some of their hopes for the future.

"I want to be a happy boy."
James, age 7.



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

"All children should have a home, a safe place to live."
Luca, age 9.



"People trust children and listen and act on the bullying that they share."
Liam, age 10.



"Having things in my town that me and my family can use."
Harris, age 9.

"I want to go places."
Dan, age 10.

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CELEBRATING PARTNERSHIPS

We could not achieve our mission without the support of our partners. Together, we are creating safer, stronger childhoods for children across Scotland.

PEOPLE'S POSTCODE LOTTERY

Since 2008 players of People's Postcode Lottery have raised an incredible £12,878,466 for Children First, helping us to protect children from harm and campaign to protect childhood. People's Postcode Lottery is a charity lottery which raises vital funding to support a huge range of good causes and we are so grateful for players' amazing support.

ST JAMES QUARTER

We are proud to be the chosen charity partner of leading retail and lifestyle destination, St James Quarter. Their invaluable support means we can let more people across Scotland know we are here to give children a brighter future

SGN

Thanks to crucial funding from SGN, our support line was able to provide targeted energy advice through our financial wellbeing team, helping families to stay warm, well, make financial gains of close to £1m and manage debts of nearly £500,000 in 2025.

GILSON GRAY

As the charity partner of Gilson Gray, the full-service law firm, we benefit each year from their outstanding commitment to fundraising. From their ongoing initiatives to the annual GRACE Ball which they host, their dedication and generosity make a meaningful difference to our work. Their continued support truly means a great deal to us.

Thank you!



SCOTLAND'S CHILDREN need your support

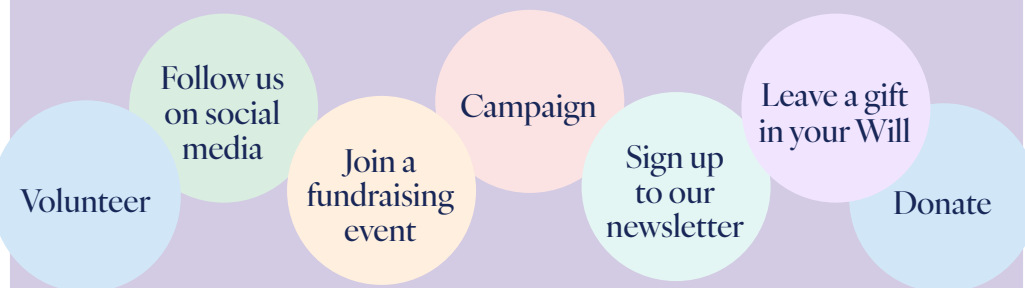
Every year, we protect thousands of children from harm, keep them safe, and support them to recover from trauma and abuse. But we can't do it alone. Together with our colleagues, volunteers, supporters, donors, action groups and partners, we are creating a brighter future for all Scotland's children and we can't thank each and every one of you enough.

A huge thank you to our incredible Action Groups who fundraise across Scotland: **Selkirk Action Group, Lockerbie Action Group, Elgin and Moray Action Group, East Neuk Action Group, Dumfries Action Group, Deeside Action Group.**

An extra special thank you goes to the wonderful children, young people and families who share their views and ideas with us, helping shape our services and strengthening our influencing and campaigning work.

We believe that every child should have a safe and happy childhood. Every child should have hopes, dreams, prospects and opportunities. But, for many, they simply do not exist. Scotland's children urgently need your support.

There are countless ways you can show your support:



Whatever you choose, you'll be helping make children's lives brighter. Visit www.childrenfirst.org.uk today.



With love,
we put children first.

With purpose,
we transform lives together.

With strength,
we do whatever it takes
to protect Scotland's children.

Children First, 83 Whitehouse Loan, Edinburgh EH9 1AT

Registered Scottish Charity Number: SC016092

Support line 08000 28 22 33 | Fundraising 0345 10 80 111 | childrenfirst.org.uk