

CHILDHOOD MATTERS

Creating a brighter future for Scotland's children.



**STATES FOOTBALL
DREAM COMES TRUE**
for young Peter

ALL MONEY
RAISED IN
SCOTLAND STAYS
IN SCOTLAND

Scotland's National Children's Charity
September 2026

**CHILDREN
FIRST** Protecting
Scotland's
Children

STATES FOOTBALL DREAM COMES TRUE

for young Scot thanks to Children First



A young footballer from Penicuik who once faced poverty and uncertainty is now playing collegiate sport in the United States, thanks to Children First.

Just a few years ago, a football scholarship in upstate New York would have seemed impossible for Peter.

When he was 12, Peter's mum Michelle was forced to give up her job as a psychiatric nurse after a shoulder injury. With no financial safety net, she faced impossible choices about her family.

"It took a lot for me to ask for help," Michelle said. "I honestly didn't know how I could support my family and keep Peter's football going."

Michelle contacted Children First's support line and was quickly connected with the charity's Midlothian team. At a critical time, the family began to regain stability and Peter received support to continue playing the sport he loved, including funding for training and new football boots. The Children First team also took him to matches and helped build his confidence.

"Peter wouldn't be where he is today without Children First," Michelle said. "At the point when I reached out to them, I just didn't have the financial capacity to keep his football going."

Peter went on to play for Penicuik, Bonnyrigg Rose and Spartans, where his talent flourished. He also received one-to-one coaching with former professional footballer Gary O'Connor through Five-Star International Events.

In 2024, what Peter and Michelle believed was another training session turned into a life-changing moment when he was offered a football scholarship in the United States.

"It was amazing. It didn't feel real,"

Peter

After spending a year following a strict training and nutrition programme, he moved to the US at just 17.

"The hardest thing I've ever done was leaving him at the airport," Michelle said, "but he makes me proud every day."

Since arriving, Peter has thrived both on and off the pitch. Despite living with dyslexia and struggling at school, with support from his college he is studying general education. He works at the college gym and has become a key player for the Raiders, who recently secured their first victory over the Herkimer Generals in nearly 50 years.

Peter hopes to earn a full scholarship to continue his football career after finishing college. Reflecting on his journey, he said:

"Leaving young has made me mature more. Nothing's impossible if you've got a dream."



Back in Scotland, Michelle watches every match by livestream and continues to marvel at how far her son has come.

"None of this would have been possible without Children First," she said. "They changed the direction of my son's life when we needed it most."

"Leaving young has made me mature more. Nothing's impossible if you've got a dream."

Peter



A FATHER'S LEGACY OF LOVE

John lost his son far too soon. The grief of that loss never disappears. His daughter lives with a lifelong condition that brings daily challenges. Through it all, one thing has never changed. No matter their age or circumstance, they are – and always will be – his children.



Over time, John found a way to honour his son's memory while helping create a brighter future for children across Scotland.

A long-time supporter of Children First, John has seen the difference the charity makes by helping families through their toughest times. Whether supporting children to recover from trauma, keeping families together or providing help through our national support line and local services, Children First is here to protect Scotland's children.

"Scotland is my place and I want to give to children in Scotland."

John

Wanting to make a difference beyond his lifetime, and after making provision for his family and friends, John chose to

leave a gift in his Will to Children First.

"It felt really good to leave a gift to Children First and to have my Will in place," he said.

John is one of many people who have chosen to leave a lasting legacy for Scotland's children. Gifts in Wills help Children First stand alongside babies, children and families facing some of life's biggest challenges, giving them the support they need to thrive and build hopeful futures.

For more than 140 years, Children First has worked to protect children from harm and ensure every child can grow up safe, loved and well. Today, demand for support continues to grow. In 2025 alone, Children First supported 21,300 children and families across Scotland. The impact of that support can be life changing.

"My Children First recovery worker saved my life quite a few times. Without her I would have been lost," said Mia, a young person supported by Children First.

A gift in your Will is a deeply personal decision. It is more than a future donation. It is a lasting promise to protect childhood, stand alongside families and help ensure that children facing fear, trauma or uncertainty have someone in their corner when they need it most.

Like John, you can give the gift of childhood and create a future where every child has the chance to feel safe, loved and hopeful.

Request your free Gifts in Wills guide.

Their future can be your legacy.

Give the gift of childhood.
Leave a gift in your Will

**REQUEST
YOUR FREE
GIFTS IN WILLS
GUIDE TODAY!**



FUNDRAISING SPOTLIGHT

Jo's marathon efforts for the families she supports



For more than two years, Jo has been a valued volunteer on the Children First support line, helping parents and carers across Scotland feel heard, supported and less alone when it comes to coping with the challenges of bringing up children.

Earlier this year, she took her support even further by running the Edinburgh Marathon Festival Half Marathon for Children First.

Jo said it was her experience as a volunteer that inspired her to take on the challenge.

"Volunteering on the support line shows me the impact of Children First's work and how important it is to children and families. Speaking to someone who is emotional at the start of a call and then hearing how supported and listened to they feel by the end is very rewarding," she said.

This year's event was particularly special for Jo. Although it was her seventh half marathon, it was her first since before 2020, after an injury forced her to stop running for several years.

Thinking about taking on Edinburgh Marathon Festival 2027? Jo has this encouragement for you:

"You don't need to be a pro runner to take part and running for a charity like Children First really gives you the motivation to show up and do it!"

Sign up to be part of the 2027 team here.



Learn more or visit childrenfirst.org.uk/EMF

READY TO SIGN UP?



How Weir is helping to protect childhoods across Scotland

Since 2019, global mining technology leader Weir has partnered with Children First, raising more than £300,000 towards our vital work to support children and families across Scotland. Through corporate support, colleague fundraising and volunteering, Weir colleagues are helping protect Scotland's children.

In 2022 Weir made a transformational £100,000 donation towards the development of Scotland's first Bairns Hoose in North Strathclyde.

Thanks to the enthusiasm and generosity of Weir colleagues, who have raised funds through raffles, bake sales, quizzes, walking challenges and other initiatives, Children First can help more children across Scotland enjoy a brighter future.

Rosemary McGinness, Weir's chief people officer and Children First trustee, said:

"At Weir, we are committed to making a positive difference in the communities where our colleagues live and work. That's why our partnership with Children First means so much to us.

"As Chief People Officer at Weir, I've seen the passion our colleagues bring to causes that matter to them. As a Trustee of Children First, I also see first-hand the difference this partnership makes to children, families and communities across Scotland. I'm continually inspired by the generosity and commitment of our people, whose efforts have helped turn ambition into action and created lasting impact for those who need it most.

"Partnerships like this show what is possible when organisations and individuals come together behind a shared purpose. We look forward to continuing our support for Children First and helping more children feel safe, supported and able to achieve their full potential."

INTRODUCING OUR STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Despite progressive laws and a global reputation for children's rights, Scotland is failing to protect childhood and the consequences for babies, children and young people are continuing to escalate.

Whilst we have made some progress, the gap between what Scotland says and what Scotland does is wider than ever. Children are more at risk. Childhood is under threat.

From online harm and rising poverty to poor mental health and family trauma, too many children are growing up without the safety, stability and opportunities they need to thrive.

Together we can change that.

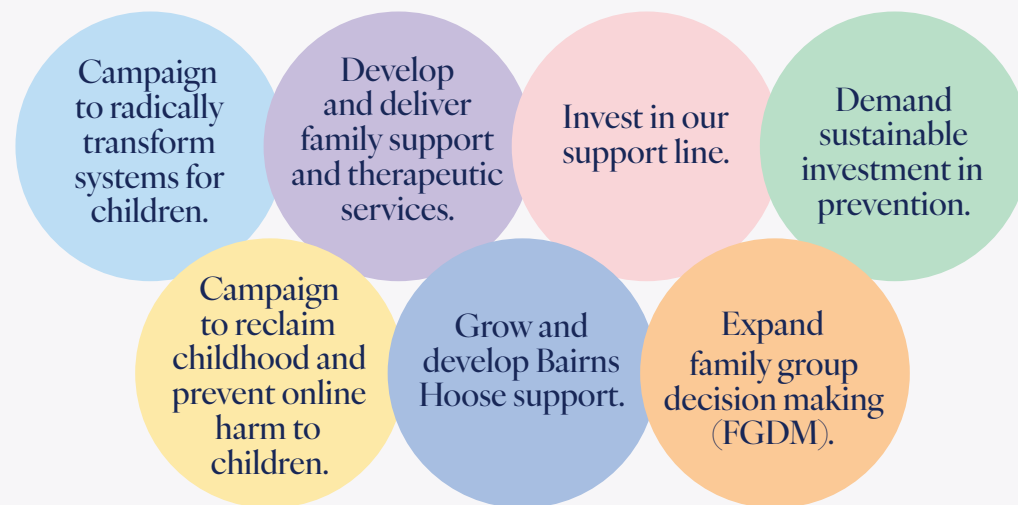
Children can't protect themselves. They need adults to keep them safe.

That is why Children First have launched an ambitious new set of strategic priorities. More than a strategy for the charity, they are a shared vision for the kind of Scotland every child deserves – one where childhood is protected, families are supported and every baby, child and young person has the opportunity to grow up safe, loved and with a bright future ahead of them.

Our priorities set out how we will work over the next five years to strengthen families, protect children from harm, champion children's rights and build lasting change in communities across Scotland. They are grounded in more than 140 years of standing alongside children and families, while responding to the challenges they face today.



OUR STRATEGIC PRIORITIES FOR 2026–2031 ARE TO:



We all have a part to play in closing the gap between what Scotland says and what Scotland does to protect children.

If we are successful, Scotland will be a country where no child lives in poverty, every child stays safe and loved in their own family wherever possible, every child who needs it accesses a quality Bairns Hoose, children are protected from online harm and all children's lives are free from racism, discrimination and exclusion.

Most importantly of all, childhood will be protected and celebrated at every stage.



YOUNG VOICES

driving positive change

Two years ago, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act came into force, marking a landmark moment for children's rights in Scotland. Since then, Children First have worked alongside partners to help turn those rights into reality, including supporting the development of Scotland's Bairns Hoose model by ensuring children and young people's voices shape its future.

To mark this anniversary, four young people supported by Children First's North Ayrshire Bairns Hoose have launched research calling for a Bairns Hoose model that meets the needs of children who have experienced crime or trauma.



Lily, Brooke, Haley and Mia drew on their own experiences, as well as the views of other children, young people and professionals across North Ayrshire.

"Our research is built on a simple idea," they explained. "Children and young people who have lived through these systems understand what helps, what hurts and what needs to change."

One message came through consistently in their research: lasting change can only happen when children are involved from the beginning.

As one senior manager told them:

"Without children's voices it's a bunch of adults coming up with good ideas, not checking what's most important."

Their research found that interview spaces can feel cold, noisy and intimidating, while many children are left anxious because they do not know what to expect. Cameras can feel overwhelming, and environments designed for adults often fail to help children feel safe. Lily summed it up simply:

"No child should have to go through an interview that makes their experience worse."

The young researchers also highlighted the importance of preparation. Lily gathered ideas from other children about how to better explain the interview

process, while Brooke developed a letter to help young people understand what to expect before attending.

Relationships mattered just as much as physical surroundings. Haley's research found that trusted, compassionate adults make a significant difference, helping children feel safe enough to share their experiences.



As our Chief Executive, Mary Glasgow, explained:

"The qualities needed in Bairns Hoose staff are courage, imagination and kindness."

The research also showed why the Bairns Hoose model is so important. By bringing justice, health and recovery services together under one roof, children can access support in one place, reducing the need to repeat painful experiences and helping minimise further trauma.

For the young researchers, Bairns Hoose is about far more than a building. It is about creating welcoming spaces that children have helped design, where they feel safe, listened to and respected.



Looking ahead, they hope their research leads to lasting change. They want every child to receive the same high-quality support in environments that feel calm, welcoming and child centred.

"We have used our voices to recommend how things can be made better. Now we hope that decision makers will listen."



Read more.





PROTECTING CHILDHOOD IN A DIGITAL WORLD

Over recent months, Children First has been calling for urgent action to tackle the digital destruction of childhood, shaping a national conversation about the impact of the digital world on young lives.

“To protect children and young people we must create spaces outside social media to show life without it.”

Anika, young person

It's encouraging to see governments recognising the need to act, with proposals including phone-free classrooms, social media restrictions, digital curfews and a commitment to a public health campaign. These are positive first steps, but they are only part of the solution.

Children First believes this must be treated as a wider public health issue. Children and families should not be left to police harmful online environments on their own. Technology companies must be held accountable for exposing us all to addictive and harmful content. It is their responsibility to design platforms that put children's safety and wellbeing first, backed by stronger regulation and meaningful action to reduce online harm.

At the same time, we must invest in the real-life opportunities every child deserves – safe places to play, supportive relationships and activities that help them build confidence, resilience and belonging. If we want children to spend less time online, we need to give them more reasons to be offline.

The momentum for change is building. Together, we can make sure it leads to lasting action that protects childhood for this generation and those to come.

GROWING UP ONLINE by Erin, 18

Like most young people, I've grown up online. I got my first phone when I was 12 and suddenly had access to everything – good and bad. Back then, the internet felt like a strange place. Now, with AI and endless content, it's even more intense.



There are loads of amazing things about being online, but now that life offline has returned, it's harder to separate the digital world from real connection.

Children shouldn't have to figure out everything alone. Adults need to keep kids safe, parents need support and young people need the chance to be more present, more connected and to find the right balance between life online and offline.

85%
of children and young people say being online stops them from having time for vital activities.

79%
of young people are worried about seeing harmful content online.

When you're 12, 13 or 14, it's almost impossible to tell what's real and what isn't. You see content about how you should look, how you should live, what you should buy and who you should be. It affects your confidence and your mental health without you even realising it.

The scariest part? You can never be fully sure who you're talking to. Adults have so much access to kids online. If a child wandered off alone in the real world, everyone would be worried. But a child can wander into an unsafe online space in their bedroom without any supervision.





£2 MILLION INVESTMENT IN CHILDREN FIRST SUPPORT LINE

Thousands more children and families across Scotland will be able to access practical, emotional and financial support through the Children First support line, thanks to new funding from the Scottish Government.

The investment of £2 million for 2026–27 will enable us to significantly expand our support line, reducing the impact of child poverty by helping up to **7,500 families** and strengthening our role as a trusted national front door for families looking for help. Families like Laura's*.

When Laura contacted Children First's support line, she was feeling overwhelmed. Her son Sean* is neurodivergent and had been struggling with school, social isolation, sleep challenges and his relationship with his dad. At home, Laura was managing difficult and often volatile situations alone, unsure how to move forward.

"From the beginning, the support I received made a significant difference," Laura said. "My support line worker, Jenny, immediately understood our situation and provided

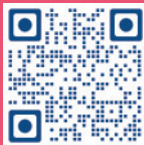
advice that was practical, relevant and completely tailored to what was actually happening at home.

"For the first time in many years of seeking help, I felt truly listened to and supported with guidance I could realistically put into practice."

Today, life at home has changed. Laura has a better understanding of her son's needs, their relationship has improved and she feels more confident as a parent.

Laura's story is one of thousands. Between January and March 2026, Children First's support line reached **8,638 people**, including **5,165 children**, providing families across Scotland with emotional, practical and financial support when they needed it most.

Our support line can be the first step towards feeling safe, supported and hopeful again.



**Names have been changed to protect the family's anonymity.*

HELP PROTECT SCOTLAND'S CHILDREN.

Run with us at the Edinburgh Marathon Festival

29 - 30 May 2027.



From the full marathon to the team relay, there is a run for everyone. Find out more and sign up now.



CHILDREN FIRST
Protecting Scotland's Children

childrenfirst.org.uk

BRINGING UP CHILDREN CAN BE TOUGH AT TIMES.
You are not alone.



Children First support line

Call free: 08000 28 22 33 | Webchat: [childrenfirst.org.uk](https://www.childrenfirst.org.uk)