

# Promoting the Rights of Children & Young People



## Cowgate Under 5s Centre, Edinburgh.

*Investing in Children* (IiC) is a UK initiative that promotes the human rights of children and young people. Over the last 17 years, IiC has developed a range of different ways in which children and young people are supported to say what they want to say, and help to improve services used by them, by discussing their ideas with the adults who run the services.

One of the ways we do this is through the IiC Membership Award Scheme.

The Award is available to organisations that exist where children ‘live their lives’, e.g. the schools or nurseries they attend, or the surgeries they go to when they are unwell, or the leisure centres where they play. To qualify for the Award, the school or nursery or doctor’s practice or leisure centre must be able to demonstrate two key things:

- that staff are involved in a **dialogue** with the children and young people who use their service; and
- that **change** has resulted as a consequence.

What makes the process particularly potent is that the evidence of dialogue and must come from children and young people themselves.

Cowgate Under 5s Centre was the first organisation in Scotland to apply for the Investing in Children Membership Award. From our early discussions in 2011, it became apparent that all aspects of practice at Cowgate are based upon a respect for the rights of children.

The following quotes are taken from the initial Investing in Children Membership Evaluation Report:

*“The centre has an ethos... which enables children to celebrate their own identities and adopts a free flowing approach to their movement/play. At the centre of this approach is the notion that children are agents who can make choices and decisions about their experiences.”*

*“The interaction between the children and the adults demonstrated a child-led approach – children were never forced to participate and children who were initially reticent to talk were respected and enabled to gradually build their confidence. The situation was characterised by gentle discussion and humour.”*

The Re-evaluation Report in 2012 observed:

*“... the staff see their role as ‘living with the children and seeing children as citizens now with rights and responsibilities’. This rights-based social justice approach is a fundamental part of the ethos of the centre.*

***We don’t have rules we have a set of values that we have developed with the children so if there’s a problem we remind children about the values and there is always a way to resolve things.***

*Member of staff*

*This ethos does appear to translate into practice within the centre and the atmosphere is calm, quiet and nurturing.”*

The decision to award Cowgate Under 5s Centre with Investing in Children Membership was an easy one. There are now more than 500 iC Members across the UK, and few demonstrate the principles of respecting children’s rights as comprehensively as Cowgate. We regularly use it as an example of what can be achieved, especially when trying to encourage other education establishments to adopt a similar approach.

We see this as important *now* –children and young people have the right to a childhood in which their rights as citizens are acknowledged and respected – but it also makes a significant contribution to the future. In 2013, Bill Williamson, Emeritus Professor of Education commented:

*“ Investing in Children, builds the strong case, demonstrated in all its projects, that citizenship is not something to be learned from books in lessons; it is something to be lived and experienced. Investing in Children has a track record in helping children and young people to engage as citizens and to do so throughout their adult lives. It is a remarkable achievement and remains for me an inspiring model for democratic renewal everywhere”*

Cowgate Under 5s Centre does this better than most.

Liam Cairns

Director

Investing in Children

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**Investing in Children CIC**

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