

# Learning Lessons

Young People's Views on  
Poverty and Education in Scotland



Scotland's Commissioner  
for Children & Young People



**Save the Children**

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

---

Save the Children and Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People would like to express their thanks to the many individuals and organisations who made this research possible.

Most importantly, very special thanks to the young people and schools who generously gave their time, knowledge and opinions. Many thanks to the young people and staff of the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) who piloted the focus group research and to the students at St Kentigern's Academy for piloting the survey questions.

To the young people from Save the Children Young Leaders programme who gave up their time to develop and undertake the focus group research, many thanks indeed:

Kieran Carroll

Autumn Elliot

Lauren Ferguson

Tanyaradzwa Charity Mafohla

David MacKnight

A very special thanks to Savannah McKibbin for supporting the research and acting as a young advisor on the project. And, finally, thank you to Adelle Gardiner and Dr Susan Elsley for their guidance and support.

The report was written in 2014 by Dr Susan Elsley.

## FOREWORD

---

We are committed to campaigning for more equitable access to opportunities for learning in formal and informal settings, particularly for children and young people living in poverty with low educational attainment.

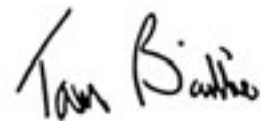
There is much research which tells us about adult perceptions of young people's experiences of poverty and the way it impacts on their opportunities to access and get the best out of their education. However, very little of this research tells us what young people themselves think.

This piece of research offers us all an opportunity to reflect on the things that young people have told us about their experiences and knowledge of families living on low incomes. It is a chance to think about how adults working in education and wider communities can help support young people to achieve, and it is a chance for decision makers at all levels to consider how they can better support those children and young people who feel the impact of poverty on their daily lives.



---

**Neil Mathers**  
Save the Children's  
Head of Scotland



---

**Tam Baillie**  
Scotland's Commissioner for  
Children and Young People

## CONTENTS

---

Acknowledgments	
Foreword	I
Summary of main findings	3
1. Introduction	6
2. Approach to the research	8
3. Main findings	10
3.1 Doing well	11
3.2 Poverty and school	14
3.3 Poverty and home	18
3.4 Poverty in the community	21
3.5 Poverty and education: the future	24
3.6 Making a difference	25
4. Recommendations for future exploration	28
5. Conclusion	30
Appendix	33

## SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

---

This report sets out the key messages from a joint study by Save the Children and Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People to examine young people's views on how to better support young people experiencing poverty to achieve at school – and in life.

It reports on the views of nearly a thousand young people – aged between 11 and 18 – on how poverty affects children and young people's experiences of education and learning – both in and out of school – in Scotland. It also identifies young people's views on what would help young people living in poverty to gain the most from their education and learning. The main findings are summarised below.

### Doing well

- Young people thought that having an education, a home, their basic needs met and a supportive family were essential to doing well in life.
- Education was considered an essential factor to being successful in life by nearly all participants, coming second only to a home.
- Personal qualities and skills such as confidence, being positive and a commitment to learning were regarded as important contributors to doing well at school.
- Young people identified that working hard, studying and getting qualifications and good grades were important, particularly as they moved into senior classes in school.
- Young people were clear that poverty should not deter educational ambitions.
- However, they were also clear that living in poverty presented challenges for young people and their families. They identified issues that could be difficult for young people living in poverty to access, such as school uniforms, resources for school work, going on school trips and having basics such as housing and food.

### Poverty and school

- Not having enough money to pay for essential items such as school equipment and uniforms was seen to disadvantage young people living in poverty.
- Young people highlighted additional costs associated with their education. They were concerned about extra costs for specific classroom subjects. Books were mentioned as an essential but expensive learning resource, but one which could be accessed through libraries.
- Young people thought that school trips could benefit their education and add to their learning experiences. However, school trips were an additional financial burden for families and not all young people were able to participate in them because of cost.
- Having access to a range of different forms of learning support was seen to be necessary for all young people.
- Teachers and other school professionals were regarded as highly important for young people's learning at school. Different kinds of study support were also found to be very helpful.
- All of these approaches were appreciated by young people, with many suggestions for more, rather than less, help from school.

## SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

---

- Overall, young people were unsure about the exact nature of the link between additional costs, school support and educational achievement. However, the majority felt that poverty could affect young people's experiences of school and their ability to do as well as they might.

### Poverty and home

- Young people thought that a supportive home environment was essential to their education.
- They were quite emphatic that doing well and getting support at home did not have to be about money.
- Attributing a lack of parental support to families who live in poverty was not accurate, according to young people.
- At the same time, young people recognised that many families faced challenges because of poverty. Where there were several children in a family, this could put pressures on family budgets. Changes in parents' employment circumstances could also put a strain on families.
- Not having enough money could reduce the level of access young people had to resources needed for learning at home, such as computers and the internet.
- While many young people described the range of family members who helped them with their school work, they recognised that support with home study could be difficult. This could be due to demands on family members because of work commitments or where parents had had different learning experiences.

### Poverty and the community

- Young people thought that there were many benefits in taking part in out-of-school activities. Their hobbies and interests could help with their learning at school as well as help with group work, providing opportunities for support and making friends.
- Overall, young people thought that out-of-school activities had many benefits but having less money could affect their levels of participation.
- Young people's friends provided essential support. However, not having enough money could mean that young people could not take part in social activities or have the same material possessions.
- It was felt that young people could be bullied and stigmatised because they were poor, and their life experiences could be qualitatively different.
- The impact of the local environment on the community, young people's aspirations and local authority budgets emerged as an important factor for some groups.
- Local libraries and community centres were regarded as important resources for young people's activities and out-of-school learning.

### Poverty and education: the future

- Young people had educational aspirations post-school, with most wanting to go to college or university.
- At the same time, young people were aware of the impact of not having money on their future choices.
- Many were concerned that young people would not be able to afford what they needed when they left school, indicating that poverty and lack of money influenced young people's decision-making about their future educational choices.

---

## **Making a difference**

- Young people had a wide range of ideas about what could help low-income families.
- Young people identified that attention needed to be focused on meeting families' basic needs and financial support to help pay for the costs of school, particularly uniforms, which they saw as a high-expense household item.
- Young people wanted to be able to access more out-of-school activities, taking into account their concern that not all young people could participate in such activities because of cost.
- At the same time, young people wanted students with less money to have more opportunities to participate in school trips.
- Support for learning at school was a high priority, with young people wanting more support from teachers, more subject input, smaller class sizes and greater in-school study opportunities.
- More support for home study, with better communications between school and home was also highlighted as important.

This research aimed to address a gap in knowledge with regards to young people's views on how poverty affects children and young people's experiences of education and learning – both in and out of school – in Scotland. Save the Children and Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People believe that the views and opinions of young people should be central to the drive to tackle Scotland's education achievement gap. There is currently a significant amount of attention being paid to the best ways of tackling this issue in Scotland. These findings are intended to promote debate among policy-makers on what can support young people who live in poverty to achieve their full potential at school and in the future.



1

# INTRODUCTION

---



## 1. INTRODUCTION

---

There is little known about young people's views on how poverty affects children and young people's experiences of education and learning – both in and out of school – in Scotland. In response to this gap, Save the Children and Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People wanted to undertake research to explore young people's views on this issue.

The purpose of the research was to explore:

- The impact of poverty on young people's opportunities and learning at school, in the home and also in the wider community
- What would help young people living in poverty to gain the most from their education and learning in and out of school.

Access to an education that fulfils young people's potential is a human right, as outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Yet there is significant evidence of strong links between poverty and lower levels of educational achievement in Scotland, resulting in a significant social and economic cost to individual children and young people, their families and society<sup>1</sup>.

Statistics show a persistent and significant gap in educational achievement between children and young people who live in poverty and their better-off peers. This gap appears to start very early in children's lives, widens at every stage of their school experience and can have life-long consequences.

Evidence has shown that children's attainment is already structured by social class at 22 months<sup>2</sup>. On starting school, children living in poverty are twice as likely to have developmental difficulties as their peers<sup>3</sup>. By the time young people leave school, the achievement gap is most pronounced. By S4, the average tariff score of school leavers from the most deprived parts of Scotland is less than half the average score for pupils from the most affluent areas. On leaving school, almost one-fifth of pupils from the most deprived areas become unemployed, compared to less than 1 in 20 of those from the most affluent areas<sup>4</sup>.

This research is timely, as a number of recent developments have directed focus and momentum to tackling the education achievement gap. An influential report, 'By Diverse Means'<sup>5</sup>, highlighted the need to address the impact of socio-economic disadvantage on educational performance and chances. In response, the Scottish Government set out a national plan to address inequity in Scottish education. This has led to a greater focus by government and education leaders on what more can be done to reduce the impact of poverty on children's and young people's education and learning.

It is intended that the findings of this research will contribute to these debates. It will help to better understand what interventions will contribute to lessening the education achievement gap and promote debate among policy-makers on what approaches can support young people living in poverty to achieve their potential at school.

1 Perry and Francis (2010), The Social Class Gap for Educational Achievement: a review of the literature.

2 Feinstein, L. (2003), 'Inequality in the early cognitive development of British children in the 1970 cohort', *Economica*, vol 70, pp 73-97.

3 Save the Children (2013), *Thrive at Five*.

4 Scottish Government (2013), *Summary statistics for attainment, leaver destinations and healthy living*.

5 The Commission on School Reform (2013). *By diverse means: improving Scottish education*.



# 2 APPROACH TO THE RESEARCH

---



## 2. APPROACH TO THE RESEARCH

---

A combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods was used to explore young people's views. The study was conducted between September and November 2013 and involved nearly a thousand (949) young people:

- 885 young people (from S1, S3 and S5) took part in a self-complete survey
- 64 young people (from S1 and S3) took part in focus-group discussions.

In total, 12 schools took part in the study, across Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Fife, Glasgow, North Ayrshire and West Dunbartonshire. Schools were selected for the survey and focus-group sample based on the proportion of students eligible for free school meals. This is because being eligible for free school meals is a commonly used indicator of poverty.

Young people taking part in the focus groups were informed that they were being asked for their views on poverty and its impact on education and learning for young people. Poverty was described to them as 'not having enough money for all the things needed to have a decent standard of living' – living on a low income and lacking access to basic resources. They chose whether or not to participate in the discussion following a presentation on the research, what it would involve and why the research was being done.

Young people were not asked in the focus groups about their own family circumstances or whether they had personal experience of low income or poverty. However, young people did provide insights about what having little money might mean for families and for young people at home and school. Some did talk about their own experience, while others were aware that there were families who had limited financial resources in their school and community.

### **Young people as researchers**

Six young people from Save the Children's Young Leaders programme worked in partnership with the lead researcher to carry out the focus group research. They undertook a training programme in order to support their role as researchers in this project. These young people had a long-term involvement with Save the Children, participating in a youth development programme and supporting campaigning work on UK child poverty.

Further information on the methodology can be found in Appendix I. An additional report, 'Learning Lessons – Young people's views on education and poverty in Scotland; Survey Results' outlines the results of the survey in more detail.



# 3 MAIN FINDINGS

---



## 3. MAIN FINDINGS

This chapter provides an overview of the main findings of the research. It reflects the views and opinions of nearly one thousand young people in Scotland, aged between 11 and 18 years, on poverty and its impact on educational achievement.

The findings explore the views of young people who took part in the survey and focus groups. The findings are set out in sections covering the main themes that were discussed. These were:

- **Doing well:** what young people need to do well, achieve their potential and be successful in their education
- **Poverty and school:** experiences of learning at school and the impact of poverty on young people's ability to do well and achieve
- **Poverty and home:** support for learning at home and within families and the ways in which poverty affects this
- **Poverty in the community:** role of learning experiences in the wider community, away from young people's homes and schools, and the impact of poverty on young people's access to these opportunities
- **Poverty and education – the future:** young people's hopes and aspirations for the future and the impact of poverty on the choices that are available to them
- **Making a difference:** what can be done to overcome the impact of poverty on education.

All quotes are from the focus group discussions and have been anonymised.

## 3.1 DOING WELL

### 3.1 DOING WELL

The research sought to explore the different aspects of young people's lives that they felt contributed to being successful in life and doing well at school. In addition, the research aimed to consider the impact of poverty on these factors. Young people were asked what they needed to achieve their potential, to be successful and do well in education.

#### What do young people need to be successful in life?

Survey participants were asked to list the five most important things they thought children and young people needed to be successful in life. The survey participants thought that having a home (91%), an education (88%), their basic needs met (86%) and a supportive family (81%) were the most essential factors to doing well in life. Education was considered as the second most popular factor, behind only a home, with nearly all participants considering this an important aspect of being successful in life. More S3 (91%) and S5 (92%) participants considered education to be a key factor compared with younger children in S1 (82%).

#### What contributes to doing well at school?

Young people's views on what contributes to doing well at school were explored in the focus groups. They identified a number of factors that they believed contributed to young people doing well at school. This included support from school and home as well as everyday access to equipment and resources. The key themes that emerged were:

- A commitment to education: going to school, working hard and achieving in exams

## 3. MAIN FINDINGS

- Personal attitudes: qualities such as individual confidence and being positive
- Having the right skills: working hard and preparing for school
- Getting support: from family, friends and teachers as well as having supportive learning environments at school and home
- Accessing resources: equipment such as pens and pencils; internet, computers and books; school uniform and meeting basic needs.

The table opposite provides examples of the factors that young people considered important to doing well at school.

Young people were positive about education and did not generally talk negatively about school. They emphasised the importance of support from both school and home. At the same time, they emphasised the importance of having access to sufficient equipment and resources, from pens and pencils to books and technology.

### Importance of personal qualities and skills

A key theme that emerged from the discussions was the importance of personal commitment and positive attitudes as contributors to doing well at school. This emphasis on an individual's contribution to educational achievement was particularly noticeable in some schools, suggesting that there was a wider school culture which promoted discussion about individual qualities that contributed to learning.

## 3.1 DOING WELL

Young people were aware that hard work, focus and commitment were needed, with studying and doing homework seen as necessary to help individual achievement at school:

*'Getting good results in tests or like achieving something that you wanted to achieve.'*

*'Giving it 100% every day.'*

Young people thought that individual skills and qualities as well as the quality of relationships with family contributed to doing well at school:

*'If you have confidence in yourself it means you'll do better because you will try harder. Where if you just have clothes and a bag and a pencil and pen then you're not really confident.'*

*'You need to have in your head that you want to do well.'*

*'I put a good relationship with people in, like your house... you[r] Mum and Dad, like, if you've not got one then you're not going to do well at school because you don't want to go home, so like it'll be worse for you.'*

Personal qualities and skills such as confidence, positivity and commitment were regarded as important contributors to doing well at school. Young people identified that working hard, studying and getting qualifications and good grades were important, particularly as they moved into senior classes in school.

## 3. MAIN FINDINGS

### 3.1 DOING WELL

#### The impact of poverty on doing well at school

The participants were asked how 'not having enough money' and living in poverty affects young people's educational achievement. The majority said that poverty should not deter or hold young people back in their education. The survey found that:

- Almost two-thirds (63%) of young people stated that growing up in a family that does not have a lot of money does not make a difference to how well a young person does at school.
- Three-quarters (75%) of young people stated that education could provide a route out of poverty.

These positive perspectives were reflected in the focus groups, with several young people stating emphatically that poverty should not deter a young person in their educational ambitions. However, discussions suggested that poverty presented a number of challenges to young people doing well. Some thought that the stress of living in poverty could impact on an individual's achievement at school. As one young person said:

*'It's like the way you grow up that makes you want to learn, or what kind of person you are as well. So [if] you're growing up, like, in an environment where everybody helps you and that, like supports you and that, then you're going to have a good future. But if you don't then it's not really going to be a good future. So I would say it's important.'*

Young people identified a range of resources which were most difficult to access for young people with less money: school uniforms and school equipment; meeting basic needs in terms of housing and food; paying for school trips and activities; and having access to support for school and home:

*'School uniform, getting food, going places with friends, money, finding a good house to live – you need a good house to keep you warm. Getting food and water, paying the bills, to be able to go out and spend lots of money and buy things that you want. But basics like housing, they are maybe too dear. Pens, pencils and paper.'*

**Table: Factors that young people consider important to doing well at school**

Commitment to education	Personal attitudes	Having the right skills	Getting support	Accessing resources
Going to school	Positive thinking	Listening	Support from family	Pens and pencils
Working hard	Will to learn	Concentrating on being taught	Support from teachers	Books
Getting high marks on tests	Your attitude	Working hard	Support from adults and support with your studying	School uniform
Passing exams	Confidence	Doing your work well	Support from friends	Calm and quiet study environment
Getting good grades	Getting up in the morning	Preparing for school	Supportive and helpful teachers	Money
Getting qualifications	Just behaving, not shouting out	Reading and writing	Guidance	Pair of shoes
Sticking until sixth year	Independence	In classes like maths and English	Nothing to worry about at home	Internet
Getting a good job	Paying attention	Study and revise hard tasks	Supportive background	Computer

## 3. MAIN FINDINGS

### 3.2 POVERTY AND SCHOOL

The research sought to better understand young people's views on how poverty impacts on young people's ability to do well and fulfil their potential at school. Young people were asked about the things they needed to learn at school, the different experiences and support that was available to help them and whether having less money made a difference.

#### Additional costs of school

The impact of lack of money on the additional costs of school was highlighted by young people, particularly in relation to classroom costs, school uniform and school trips.

#### Classroom costs

Having the basic tools for school work, such as pens, pencils, rulers, jotters and calculators, was mentioned frequently by young people as essential to doing well at school. They talked extensively about the challenges of having, buying and borrowing pens and pencils and other pieces of stationery.

Young people also described what happened if they did not have these items, specifically the sanction and exchange systems used by schools and individual teachers (e.g. receiving demerits for not having pens and pencils; paying small charges for replacements). If a young person lost many merits by the end of the year, they might not be able to go on school trips. This was seen to be unfair to those who did not have the money to buy stationery.

Having sufficient resources at school was obviously an everyday issue, with young people needing this equipment in order to be ready to learn. The concern about pens and pencils might appear surprising when compared with some of the other issues which impact on young people's daily educational experience. Crucially, however,

### 3.2 POVERTY AND SCHOOL

the impact of these seemingly low-cost items on household budgets emerged as a concern to some young people:

*'I had to get a pencil and then I couldn't afford lunch. It's not a lot. It's, like, I have exact money.'*

*'...because I think the most important would be the school uniform and then some people can only afford to buy school uniform and then a couple of weeks later they get pens and pencils and stuff.'*

Having basic everyday equipment for school in order to be ready to learn was an issue that affected many young people. It can be particularly difficult for young people who have less money, because it is another household cost on top of other calls on family budgets.

#### Access to books

Books were mentioned as an essential but expensive learning resource. However, young people also acknowledged that books could be accessed through libraries. School and local libraries were regarded as important places for seeking out books, accessing the internet and using computers. Young people talked of using school libraries for sourcing information, using computers and attending study sessions and homework clubs. They were regarded as places for individual learning. Limitations around using them included sanctions for a class or year group where library resources had been misused, and having a part-time school librarian.

#### Extra costs for specialist subjects

Young people were concerned about extra costs for specific classroom subjects. They highlighted that there could be additional costs associated with subjects such as design & technology and home economics. Contributions could be requested for materials used in classes (with £20 mentioned



### 3. MAIN FINDINGS

by one group as an annual amount). Young people questioned why students had to pay for materials for taught subjects:

*‘That’s the class. We pay to go to a class. They should be paying us.’*

In some schools, there was support for families who could not make this contribution. One young person pointed out that music lessons were free if families could not afford the cost of lessons. Some thought that it was fair to contribute to these costs while others thought that there should be no charge because it related to learning about that subject. Other costs included transport if a student attended from outside the school catchment area. This was seen to be a high and unwelcome daily cost.

#### **Having school uniform**

School uniform was discussed extensively. It was seen as a significant household cost, with young people quoting figures of between £30 and £100 being spent per annum. Schools had different approaches to uniform. Some participants saw blazers and ties as high-cost or unnecessary items:

*‘I think you should get one, at least one new shirt for their school year, and probably £10 off the blazer it will be hard paying, like, 40, it’s about £40 and all that.’*

Some young people mentioned the impact on family income of buying school uniform, particularly where there were several siblings. There were different ways of dealing with the expense of buying uniforms. One young person pointed out that ‘you buy them huge’ so that they would last. Others pointed out that there was help available with school uniform costs if parents were on benefits.

### 3.2 POVERTY AND SCHOOL

Many young people agreed that school uniform was a good idea, allowing young people to be the ‘same’, with uniforms being ‘equalisers’. Wearing uniform avoided a problem where families were not able to buy ‘designer’ clothes to wear to school:

Girl 1:

*‘Yeah, but if you dress as you want then you get slagged.’*

Girl 2:

*‘Because you’ve got to be constantly keeping up with, like, all the trends and then you might called like...’*

Boy 1:

*‘You’d be bankrupt by the end of school.’*

Girl 2:

*‘You might be getting called, like, certain names for what you’re wearing.’*

Generally, uniform was regarded as a positive way of representing students’ schools, giving a school its collective identity.

In the same way as when young people did not have pens, pencils or appropriate school equipment, young people mentioned that there could be sanctions if they did not wear school uniform. This was particularly ‘tough for families out there who have not got any money’. There were a variety of views on whether it was fair or unfair for families to have to buy uniform. However, one young person pointed out that it was difficult to balance household costs, buying food at the same time as school uniform:

*‘For single parents as well, because my ma’s like, just a single parent. And like it’s hard because I have got my big sister, my wee brother and she has to pay for all of yours.’*

## MAIN FINDINGS

Young people were clear that buying school uniform was difficult for families who did not have much money. It was a significant cost in household budgets, and this issue emerged as significant in further discussion on what could be done to help families more.

### ***Participating in school trips***

School trips were identified as an additional financial cost for families and not all young people were able to participate in them:

- Nearly three-quarters (71%) of participants in the survey thought that growing up in a family without a lot of money did make a difference to how many school trips they could go on
- The proportion of participants to whom it made a difference increased with each year group. This may be due to greater opportunities for trips, particularly longer trips, for the older year groups.

Young people in the focus groups discussed the kind of school trips that were available and whether all young people could participate. School trips varied from days out to local museums, science centres, cinemas and ice rinks, to longer visits to London and abroad (with Paris, New York and Spain mentioned). The costs of these trips varied enormously from being free to several hundred pounds (£600 to £800 were mentioned) for longer visits. Some trips were open specifically to students who had achieved particular goals in the school or had not acquired sanctions. If a young person lost a certain number of merits by the end of the year, they might not be permitted to go on school trips.

## 3.2 POVERTY AND SCHOOL

Young people mentioned that schools did have systems in place to contribute some of the cost if a family could not afford to pay the full amount. One participant mentioned that if a young person had achieved at school and needed help with costs to go on a trip, the school would confidentially discuss this with the pupil. However, it did appear that school trips were an area that could highlight the different financial situations of families.

Young people had a wide range of views on school trips, seeing them as 'treats' or rewards, as an opportunity for new experiences and the chance to have 'been somewhere'. They thought that trips could benefit their education and add to their learning experiences. However, young people who wanted to go on trips but could not afford them could feel left out and annoyed. School trips were an additional financial cost for families and not all young people were able to participate in them.

### **Support at school – teachers**

Young people identified the support provided by classroom teachers, guidance teachers and pupil support staff and one-to-one tuition as important for their learning. School learning bases for those with additional support needs were seen as being helpful places for those who needed specialist interventions. The importance of teachers was consistently reflected throughout the research. They were viewed as a significant influence on young people's learning, supporting them to do well at school and in the future:

*'Like your teachers and, like, your guidey. Because, like at the end of the day they're the ones that can help you get a job. They're the ones that gives you a good reference when you leave here.'*

## MAIN FINDINGS

Individual teachers could make a big difference to young people's experiences in the classroom. Young people spoke of teachers who could identify their needs, and who they could go to for extra support with their learning:

Girl 1:

*'If you don't have them, you'll not be able to learn stuff.'*

Girl 2:

*'Somebody that's caring and will listen to you... your ideas... Will help you if you need support.'*

Girl 1:

*'Make you more confident.'*

Girl 3:

*'They help you maybe if you have problems, they help you through the day, help you to learn. Stuff like that.'*

The qualities that young people appreciated in teachers included having a friendly approach to young people and the ability to develop trusting relationships with their students. 'Nice', 'fun', 'listening' and 'helpful' teachers were much appreciated. It was pointed out that interaction with students and 'having banter' in the classroom made class work less stressful. Their role in giving a 'good reference' for future employment was also noted.

Teachers were also seen to be proactive in supporting young people, especially when a student was not doing well or facing challenges:

*'If you're not doing well and your teacher notices, they'll phone your pastoral care. If you're being bullied or picked on or something happened at home then, they'll help.'*

## 3.2 POVERTY AND SCHOOL

However, in response to the above comment, one participant pointed out that young people did not like teachers getting involved because 'sometimes it's not like good when teachers get involved because they take it too far'. Another thought that support workers could get in touch with families if the young person was not doing well at school and that this was helpful, emphasising the importance of home-school links.

Young people therefore appreciated teachers who were proactive in supporting young people's learning and had positive, trusting relationships with young people in the classroom. They also felt teachers had a role in helping young people who were experiencing challenges in and out of school.

In addition to teachers, young people identified other forms of school support that they found helpful. This included: homework and study clubs (often held during school lunch breaks or sometimes after school); help with specific subjects; resources to help with dyslexia and other additional support needs; and counselling. School libraries were considered to be a physical space where young people could have access to computers, the internet and books.

## MAIN FINDINGS

### 3.3 POVERTY AND HOME

The research sought to explore the impact of poverty on education and learning outside of school. Young people were asked their opinions about support for learning at home and within their families, recognising that the family is a major influence on young people's lives and success at school.

#### Home environment

Young people thought that a supportive home environment was essential to their education. They had different views on whether living in poverty impacted on the support they had at home:

- Around one-third (32%) of participants thought that growing up in a family without a lot of money did make a difference to the help they get at home with their studies
- Around half (49%) thought that it did not make a difference.

Young people discussed the importance of practical support and a physical environment that facilitated studying but also, crucially, the support of parents in encouraging their children by giving them confidence and pushing them 'to do the best they can do':

*'I think support's really important because if your family is not supportive it'll make you feel less loved and less confident and just make you feel really, really bad.'*

Young people recognised the importance of studying and doing their homework. At the same time, some felt that they had a lot of home study and would have preferred a better balance of school work with their other activities and interests. One group talked of their school's emphasis on having study plans and encouraging them to do additional school work at home.

### 3.3 POVERTY AND HOME

A quiet home working environment was considered helpful for home study. What this home working environment might be was not explored in detail but young people pointed out that having noisier younger siblings and sharing a bedroom might impact on having a quiet space to work. The survey found that there was greater uncertainty around whether growing up in a family without a lot of money made a difference to having a quiet place to study at home.

#### Accessing books, the internet and computers

Young people talked about the resources they needed at home and the difficulties that could be associated with accessing them. These resources included books, access to the internet and having equipment such as laptops and tablet computers. These were important for providing access to information, producing homework and for general support with studies.

- An overwhelming 81% of participants thought that growing up in a family without a lot of money did make a difference to the resources (e.g. computers, books) a young person had at home.

Access to the internet and computers was mentioned by all the focus groups. Some young people had computers for their own use given to them by the school. In one school students had tablet computers, while in others some students with additional support needs had access to laptops. There were mixed messages about access to the internet and computers at home, with some saying that computers were not needed and could be borrowed or used elsewhere, and others saying that they were essential since homework was given which required access to the internet.



## MAIN FINDINGS

Where schools requested that homework be produced on a computer or online, this could cause difficulties, with the lack of a home printer mentioned as one problem. One young person pointed out that teachers did not necessarily take a broken computer as a valid excuse for not doing homework:

*'[Teachers] give us homework on the internet. Which doesn't help some people [if] they don't have internet.'*

Young people discussed the different ways that they accessed the internet if they did not have a home computer. They mentioned accessing the internet through school, the library, community resource centre or through friends' computers.

Local libraries were mentioned generally as places to go for access to the internet and to books. Although it was not clear how often young people used libraries, they were seen to be an important local resource. However, accessing libraries was not always easy:

*'When my computer had a virus it's been a nightmare because I can't go down to the library because my dad's got to use the cars and the vans for work and my mum can't drive, so I can't go and get books. And it says "homework" so we're not allowed to do it in school.'*

Poverty within the family could reduce the level of access young people had to the resources they needed to learn at home. Accessing computers and the internet could be more difficult if these resources were not available at home.

## 3.3 POVERTY AND HOME

### Support for learning at home

What appeared to be of high importance was the support of family in their learning at home and school. This support could take the form of help with homework. Support was often sought from parents but also from other members of the family. Older brothers and sisters, still in school or recently at school, were also mentioned as a source of help, particularly because of their familiarity with the curriculum and school. Grandparents and other relatives also could provide help.

*'My uncle, my auntie, my mum and my big sister [help]. And my wee sister tries to help me. My big brother, I get help from him.'*

Young people discussed a number of barriers to receiving support from the family at home. Some mentioned that their parents had not studied the specific subject or were not confident in supporting them in homework tasks because of their own learning experience. This included, for example, leaving school at 16 or being from another country where the school curriculum was different. Young people also drew attention to changes in subject content, which meant that parents were not familiar with homework topics, based on their own experience:

*'Because they might not have got to learn it when they were at school.'*

In terms of wider involvement, one participant suggested that young people do not necessarily like to 'spill everything to mums and dads', while another suggested that parents might not feel comfortable going to schools to talk to teachers. Some young people mentioned ways that their school had provided support to parents (e.g. the production of a maths booklet) so that they had more information in order to support their child.

## MAIN FINDINGS

In discussion about parents who might not or could not provide this moral support, young people were clear that they were talking about other parents, not their own, and that this support was not always available for a range of reasons. One pointed out that young carers were carrying additional burdens:

*'And if you're a young carer as well. Like with poverty as well, when you have to look after your mum as well and you're in poverty and you have to do all that kind of thing, it'd be hard. Really hard.'*

Support at home for young people's learning was regarded as necessary, with help with homework and study coming from different people. Young people recognised that support could be more difficult in some circumstances when there were demands on family members or they had different learning experiences of their own.

### **Demands on parents**

Parents' employment patterns could impact on the support they were able to give to their children. Young people talked variously of parents who worked long hours or night shifts, were tired when they got home from work, had more than one job or were away from home a lot. This meant that a parent was absent or busy and this could put stresses and strains on home life:

*'Sometimes like, if your mum and dad aren't in that day or like if both of them work at the same time or they work night shift... and there's tons of other things that can affect if you can ask them or not.'*

*'It's just because your parents can't afford it and maybe, they don't have as much time to actually, like, give what you need because they're busy with, like, work, because they need to work more if they don't make as much money...'*

## 3.3 POVERTY AND HOME

On the other hand, young people were quite emphatic that doing well and getting support at home did not have to be about money. This is supported by the survey, which found that almost half (49%) of young people thought that it does not make a difference. As one young person pointed out, 'you can't pay money to concentrate'. However, this was not a unanimous view: around a third (32%) of participants thought that growing up in a family without a lot of money does make a difference to the help they get at home with their studies.

### **Meeting basic needs**

Discussion about basic needs such as food and housing varied between the different school groups. Young people were aware that those from families on a low income were entitled to free school meals:

*'Well, free meals are actually, like, there for a person because people can't afford...'*

Some young people came to school without breakfast because they did not have time or were too tired, but it was recognised that this had an impact on students' ability to learn, affecting their concentration:

*'Aye, if you don't eat then you've not got the energy and then you can't think.'*

Food was mentioned by a significant number of young people either in relation to basic needs being met, buying school lunches or eating breakfast before school, suggesting that costs associated with food were seen to be part of the experience of school.

## MAIN FINDINGS

### 3.4 POVERTY IN THE COMMUNITY

The research explored how wider community factors, such as out-of-school activities and the environment, impacted on young people's education. This was to better understand the role of learning experiences that take place away from home and school and if, and how, they felt poverty impacted on these activities. The survey found that young people had a range of views:

- Over half of participants in the survey thought that growing up in a family without a lot of money did not make a difference to taking part in after-school activities such as sports or clubs
- Over a quarter (27%) of participants thought that it did make a difference.

This issue was further discussed in the focus groups in order to explore the interaction of out-of-school activities on learning at school.

#### Participating in activities outside school

Young people in the focus groups were asked which activities they took part in outside school. They highlighted a wide range of formally organised and informal activities including sport, dance, music, cinema, youth clubs and belonging to uniformed organisations.

Young people described how some families might not be able to afford the costs associated with going to clubs and sports, especially if there were several children in a family, resulting in increased costs. Some activities could take place several times a week and involve more costs, especially if young people were skilled at, or interested in, that particular activity. This increased level of participation could then become an additional cost on family budgets. Some also said that young people would be left out because they might not have enough money to participate in these activities:

### 3.4 POVERTY IN THE COMMUNITY

*'Because if you have three kids... or two and it's £3.50 – sometimes £2.50 – and some of the activities are on twice a week – [sometimes] three times a week – and it's £3 for each.'*

*'Just because your parents aren't earning as much and they can't, like, let you do all the things that other children do.'*

*'Because they do cost money. And if people don't have a lot of money, it's really hard because they'll... need to buy it for clothes and like food and that. So, like, you can't just go spending it on free-time stuff. You'll have to think about the stuff that matters.'*

Young people thought that doing activities outside school was beneficial to their confidence, could help them develop new skills and could contribute to ideas about future educational and employment options:

*'It might help, like, since we went to dancing, it might make you want to have a different career from what you did in school – like, you might want to be a dance teacher. Or with anything else, it might give you different ideas about what you would like to do.'*

Others pointed out that it helped them be 'happier' and contributed to their well-being, making them healthier and fitter:

*'Well, going to drama, that helps you to build up your confidence and it's helped me at school feel better about my work and feel better about doing some different subjects.'*

*'Just like practical skills... like being good at something or talented at something. And also that will make you feel better about yourself because, like, you're good at something and it can teach you like discipline and stuff.'*

## MAIN FINDINGS

Leisure activities could help young people to relax and give them time away from school. Activities could also help with group work and provide opportunities for support and making friends. Some skills acquired in out-of-school activities could help in school subjects such as maths. Overall, young people thought that out-of-school activities had many benefits and that having less money could affect their ability to participate.

### Support from friends and peers

Friends were mentioned by young people as important sources of support both in school and out-of-school. Young people mentioned the different ways in which they got support from their peers. They could borrow things from them as well as ask advice. Friends were an essential part of their social lives and out-of-school activities. However, not having enough money to participate in activities and hobbies could mean that young people felt left out of activities in which their friends were participating:

*'It might affect their social life. Like, talking to friends because maybe their friends are going to a club and they want to go but can't.'*

This exclusion from social activities could make young people feel unhappy and sad. In addition, they might not be able to afford material possessions that other young people had, such as designer brands of clothes and computer games. This might make some people 'feel a wee bit jealous that they've got it and [you] don't'.

In some instances, friends could be a negative influence, according to one group discussion, because they might not realise what would be important for learning. In addition, being bullied and picked on by peers was mentioned by several groups as one challenge that young people whose families had less money might experience:

## 3.4 POVERTY IN THE COMMUNITY

*'Poverty would, like, affect your school as well, like. Because if [you] are poor, like, you might be bullied... and it'd affect your learning because you don't want to go to school and that because you're getting bullied and stuff.'*

Participants pointed out that there could be qualitative differences in young people's experience if they had less money. One young person talked about the difference between his/her experiences and that of friends:

*'The more money you have, the better the childhood you have, in my opinion. Because I've got mates that are minted and they're just loving life. And then you see people like me, who don't have a lot of money, while they're walking about with new shoes and everything, and I'm still wearing from 2003.'*

Friends provided essential support. Not having enough money could mean that young people could not participate in the same out-of-school activities or have similar material possessions. Young people could be bullied because they were poor and this could negatively impact on their learning. At the same time, young people who had less money were aware that their life experiences could be qualitatively different.

### Communities affected by poverty

Young people in some groups described the areas where they lived as being affected by poverty. One group described their area as 'run down'. One young person described their community as one of the 'poor areas', a description that was countered by another who said 'I wouldn't say we're poor'. The discussion explored negative environmental aspects such as the area being seen as 'a mess' and the difference between 'people' and 'the place'. Although housing was being improved, the young people talked about the potential impact on aspiration:



## MAIN FINDINGS

*'If you were good, like, smart, you'll get all the, like, qualifications that you need and then you can go away and get your own job and that.'*

Another group highlighted that its school had students from many local areas and that some of these were considered to have higher levels of poverty than others, resulting in a 'big mix'. Another group debated the merits of spending local-authority money on schools while the local environment needed to be improved.

Two focus groups discussed the impact of the local environment on people's perception of the areas in terms of housing, the state of roads and the general environment. One young person pointed out that maybe families could 'not afford a house in a quiet area' and that it would be difficult to concentrate when studying.

Young people also talked of different ways that they accessed support with learning in the wider community. As noted previously, some young people felt that libraries and community centres in particular could be an important resource if families did not have a computer at home or the resources they needed to learn.

The impact of the local environment on the community and local authority budgets was not a central topic of the focus-group discussions. However, it was an important factor for some groups, with the suggestion that a poor environment could have an impact on young people's aspirations. Local libraries and community resources were regarded as important resources for young people's activities and out-of-school learning.

## 3.4 POVERTY IN THE COMMUNITY

### **School involvement in community projects**

One school in particular talked about other activities they were involved in, including fundraising for projects in Malawi and the involvement of a local well-known community organisation in school on topics such as gangs and poverty. This involvement was seen to be positive and appreciated.

## MAIN FINDINGS

### 3.5 POVERTY AND EDUCATION: THE FUTURE

The research sought to better understand young people's views on the ways poverty affects young people's futures. Survey participants were asked if a young person could be successful if they were brought up in a family that does not have a lot of money:

- More than half (55%) believed that a young person would have the same chance of being successful in life if they were brought up in a family that did not have a lot of money
- A third (33%) believed that they would have 'some' chance.

Older participants (S5) were slightly more optimistic about a young person's chance of success (62%), compared to 50% of younger (S1) participants. This positive view about a young person having the potential to be successful even though a family has less money was reflected in the focus-group discussions, with participants stating that being poor did not mean that a young person could not achieve.

In order to explore future expectations further, young people were asked: 'Do you think school and education can give young people a way out of poverty?'

- Three quarters of respondents said 'yes, school and education can give young people a way out of poverty'
- A slightly higher proportion of male participants answered 'yes' (male 80%; female 70%).

The proportion of those who answered yes increased with each year group, underlining the importance throughout the research that young people gave to education and its impact on future life opportunities.

### 3.5 POVERTY AND EDUCATION: THE FUTURE

#### Young people's hopes for the future

Young people were asked in the survey whether not having much money affected young people's hopes for the future. This gave a divided response, with 45% saying yes and 40% saying no. A much smaller percentage of 15% did not know.

There was less emphasis in the focus groups on what doing well might mean for future options for young people, with a smaller number of responses looking ahead to the impact of doing well post-school e.g. further and higher education and employment. This may reflect the interests of the younger age group of participants than some of the survey participants. Threaded throughout the focus-group conversations, however, was an understanding that doing well at school could result in better employment opportunities.

Considering their aspirations after school, half of the participants thought that not having much money did affect whether young people went on to further study or training after leaving school. A third, on the other hand, did not think having much money affected whether young people went on to further study or training after leaving school.

Young people who thought that not having much money did affect further study or training after school expanded on why this was the case, with the option of giving their top three reasons. The two most common responses were:

- Young people cannot afford the things they need (given by 81%)
- Young people want to get a job straight after school (given by 57%).

More students who were older wanted to get a job straight away after school than did the younger students.

## MAIN FINDINGS

In planning for the future, most young people had been offered help or advice about what to do after leaving school, although a third (33%) had not been given any help or advice. Almost half thought it was 'very hard' to get work near to where they lived.

Participants were asked what they wanted to do in the first two years after leaving school and were able to choose their top two options. The most popular options were:

- Going to university (52%)
- Going to college (46%)
- Getting a job (34%).

Less popular options were getting an apprenticeship (12%), a job with training (10%), taking a gap year (6%) and volunteering (5%). More female participants wanted to go to university than males.

## 3.6 MAKING A DIFFERENCE

### 3.6 MAKING A DIFFERENCE

The final part of the research examined young people's views on what support should be available to support young people living in poverty to gain the most from their education and learning in school and at home. In the focus groups, young people were asked how they would spend the education budget for Scotland if they were in charge. This provided some rich responses which complement young people's responses to other questions with a focus on equipment and resources, more opportunities to go on school trips and support for learning in and out of school.

#### Making a difference at school

- Having basic equipment and resources  
Suggestions included: pens and pencils and other stationery; help for those who do not have the internet; more books; more computers (with one school suggesting fewer smart boards instead).
- Increasing opportunities for young people to go on school trips  
Suggestions: more trips including bigger and smaller trips; help with costs of bigger trips.  
*'More smaller school trips so people won't feel left out on the big ones that cost more.'*
- Providing more support for learning in and out of school  
Suggestions included: more supported study; homework clubs with helpers; support workers who can speak to parents; home tutors; supportive teachers, extra support for after-school clubs.

## MAIN FINDINGS

*'More teachers so they could have private lessons in small groups.'*

*'Like you can make each class smaller, have more teachers and like different classes so you can get more one-to-one help.'*

The survey asked young people what schools could spend money on to help students from poorer families do well. Participants chose their top five from a list of ten with options including a range of different forms of support such as classroom and subject support as well as other approaches similar to those highlighted in the focus-group discussions.

The most popular options from the survey were:

- Specialist teachers (67%) (e.g. guidance, pastoral, support)
- More maths and English tutoring in school (63%)
- Improving feedback between teachers and students (62%)
- More one-to-one tuition (59%)
- More lessons in different subjects (51%).

### **Making a difference at home**

- Meeting basic needs  
Suggestions included: food and clothes.
- Help with school uniforms  
Suggestions included: bigger clothing grants; providing uniforms that young people want.

### **Making a difference in the community**

- More out-of-school activities  
Suggestions included: clubs (including free clubs); community centre with library, football pitch and games hall; supporting young people in their hobbies and interests; music lessons

## 3.6 MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Findings from the focus groups and the survey suggest a range of ways in which more support could be provided to young people from families with less money. Support for learning at school was a high priority, with young people wanting more support from teachers, more subject input, and more and greater in-school study opportunities. They wanted more support for home study with better communications between school and home.

At the same time, young people wanted there to be more opportunities to participate in school trips for those with less money. They identified that attention needed to be focused on meeting families' basic needs and financial support to help pay for the costs of school uniforms, which they saw as a high-expense household item. Finally, young people wanted to be able to access more out-of-school activities, taking into account their concern that not all young people could participate in such activities because of cost.









# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE EXPLORATION

---



## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE EXPLORATION

---

The following issues emerged from the research and could be further explored in order to deepen understanding of young people's views on and experiences of the impact of poverty on their educational achievement. Considering these areas in greater depth could provide insights into how to support young people's educational achievement in the future.

### **Support for learning at school**

Support for learning at school emerged as a significant issue, with young people valuing classroom support, homework clubs, specialist inputs and supported study.

Exploring the different approaches that schools have to support students could provide greater understanding of their role in supporting young people's educational achievement, especially where this is affected by poverty.

### **Support for learning at home and in the community**

Young people thought that getting support from families was essential for their learning, identifying that there were challenges for families with less money. Appropriate home school support could be developed, where it is not available, by finding out what parents need in order to be able to support their children in their learning. This could also extend to the role of neighbourhood resources such as libraries and community centres in supporting young people's learning.

### **Young people's views on the impact of poverty on educational achievement**

Young people highlighted the importance of positive attitudes as a contributor to their educational achievement. Exploring their views on how these attitudes could be fostered and sustained in school practices could be considered in more depth by identifying examples of schools which have developed innovative approaches.

### **Access to computers and the internet**

Young people highlighted problems in accessing the internet and using computers at home. It would be helpful to explore in more detail what technology young people had access to at home and the impact of the associated costs on households with less money. In addition, exploring schools' strategies for supporting students' use of, and access to, computers and the internet would provide more information on the barriers experienced by families living in poverty.

# 5 CONCLUSION

---



## CONCLUSION

---

The purpose of the research was to better understand the views of young people in Scotland on the impact of poverty on young people's opportunities and learning at school, in the home and in the wider community. It also aimed to identify the support that young people believed should be available to improve educational experience and reduce the impact of poverty on achievement in and out of school. This report highlights the key themes and issues that were raised by the participants. A number of observations and conclusions can be drawn.

It was apparent that young people were aware of different factors that affected families with less money. They thought that there were qualitative differences in young people's experience if their families experienced poverty. They were unsure about the exact nature of the link between poverty and young people's educational achievement, but the majority felt that it could affect students' experiences of school and their ability to do as well as they might.

Education was regarded as an important priority for young people. A general view was that the experience of being brought up in a family with less money did not necessarily mean that a young person would not achieve or be successful. However, at the same time, young people were aware that a lack of money might impact on their experiences of learning and future choices after school. There was a strong emphasis on the importance of an individual's attributes such as confidence, aspiration and working hard. These qualities were seen to be necessary for success in education.

Some of the costs which were associated with school were not obvious. Areas affected by having less money included the equipment and resources that were needed to be bought for school and which families could find hard to afford, from pens and pencils, to books, access to the internet and computers. Across the different discussions, young people pointed out that it was sometimes hard to buy what was needed for school. The impact of having less money was particularly noted in relation to buying school uniforms and participating in school trips. These issues were discussed extensively by the participants in the focus groups and were of concern, particularly where young people could be excluded or stigmatised.

Young people described a number of ways in which their learning was supported in school. This included the important roles of individual teachers, guidance staff and learning support staff. School libraries and activities such as homework clubs and supported study were regarded as helpful. Young people indicated that access to digital technology at home varied and that there could be problems in being able to use computers and the internet for home study and homework tasks.

Support at home was of central importance to young people's learning. This family support could take the form of commitment to school and education generally, practical support including providing resources and uniform for school as well as help with home study. Young people identified the resources they needed at home to learn – books, access to the internet and computers – and the difficulties associated with accessing them. The impact of parents' employment patterns (working shifts, long hours and being away from home) and the associated stresses and strains were mentioned as affecting some families.

## CONCLUSION

---

Where there were several children in a family, this put pressures on budgets. Young people were emphatic that having less money did not equal less support from parents. However, having less money could put pressures on families and young people at home and school.

Young people thought that there were many benefits from taking part in out-of-school activities. Their hobbies and interests could help with their learning at school as well as help with group work, providing opportunities for support and making friends. Overall, they thought that out-of-school activities had many benefits and that having less money could affect their ability to participate.

Young people's friends provided essential support. However, not having enough money could mean that young people could not take part in social activities or have the same material possessions. Those with less money could feel left out or stigmatised and their life experiences could be qualitatively different. The impact of the local community on the environment, young people's aspirations and local authority budgets emerged as an important factor for some groups. Local libraries and community centres were regarded as important resources for young people's activities and out-of-school learning.

Young people had a wide range of ideas about what could be done to help those who had less money in their education in and out of school. This included more help for families with additional costs at school such as basic equipment and resources, and increasing opportunities for young people to go on school trips. Young people wanted more support for learning in and out of school through, for example, supported study, homework clubs, specialist input and more individually tailored support from teachers. At home this support included ensuring that families' basic needs were met and help with paying for school uniforms

which were seen as costly household items. In the community, young people wanted more out-of-school and leisure activities such as clubs and sports facilities.

Many young people were keen to continue their education post-school, with most wanting to go to college or university. At the same time, they were aware of the impact of not having money on their future choices and were concerned that young people would not be able to afford what they needed. This demonstrates that poverty and educational achievement are linked in young people's decision-making about their future.

### **Listening to young people**

This report sets out the views and voices of young people on how poverty and living on a low income can impact on education, in and out of school. Young people are experts on their own lives. Yet their voices are not always the first to be heard in debates and discussions about what government and decision-makers should do to ensure that poverty does not impact negatively on young people's education. The insights young people have shared reinforce our conviction that young people have a valuable contribution to make in shaping future education developments.

Save the Children and Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People believe that the views and opinions of young people should be at the heart of the drive to tackle Scotland's education achievement gap. We encourage government, school leaders, teachers and other key stakeholders to use the messages from this report to inform and better identify the policy and practical support that young people need to overcome the effects of being disadvantaged so that they can benefit from school and wider learning opportunities.

# APPENDIX: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

---

## APPENDIX: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

---

This research employed qualitative and quantitative methods in order to achieve an understanding of young people's views on the impact of poverty and low income on young people's education and learning – both in and out of school. A similar study, 'Small Voice, Big Story' was carried out by Save the Children Wales in 2013<sup>6</sup>. This project provided a starting point for developing a study of young people's views in Scotland. The research took place over 10 months. The data collection was undertaken between September and November 2013.

### **Age range of participants**

Participants were aged between 11 and 18. The research focused on secondary school aged children in three year groups (S1, S3 and S5). These year groups were chosen to ensure a spread of views across this stage of schooling – from the transition year from primary school, to the middle and senior phases of secondary school. The focus group part of this study focused in more detail on the younger age groups (S1 and S3).

### **Understanding poverty**

For the purposes of this research poverty was broadly defined as 'not having enough money for all the things needed to have a decent standard of living' – living on a low income and lacking access to basic resources. This understanding of poverty was set out at the start of the survey and focus group discussions.

Young people were not asked about their own family circumstances or whether they had personal experience of low income or poverty. During the focus groups some young people did talk about their own experience, while others were aware that there were families who had limited financial resources in their school and community.

### **About the schools**

#### ***Geographical coverage***

Six broad areas in Scotland were selected for the fieldwork. The areas were chosen on the basis of a mix of key criteria, primarily levels of deprivation and existing relationships with Save the Children and Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People. A spread of urban and rural areas was also sought. The 12 participating schools were from the following local authority areas:

- 2 from Aberdeen
- 3 from Edinburgh
- 2 from Fife
- 2 from Glasgow
- 1 from North Ayrshire
- 2 from West Dunbartonshire.

#### ***Schools selection***

Schools were identified and approached to participate in this study based on the proportion of students eligible for free school meals. In the focus groups, all of the schools had high or above-average free school meal eligibility, with one exception. This school was selected on the basis of a previous good relationship with the school and provided an opportunity for comparison with schools with above-average free school meal eligibility.



## Young people as researchers

A key aim of the research was the active involvement of young people as research partners in this project. Young people from Save the Children's Young Leaders programme worked in partnership with the lead researchers to carry out the focus group research. These young people have had a long-term involvement with Save the Children, participating in a youth development programme and supporting campaigning work on UK child poverty.

One young person took on the role of research assistant. This involved working with Save the Children as part of a paid placement to support the development and delivery of the project and liaising with the office of Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People. The research assistant also volunteered as a young researcher along with five other young people who were involved at all stages of the research process.

Save the Children developed a programme to support the young researchers exploring: what research is; the impact of poverty on education; key research skills; and the content of focus groups. The programme included contributors from Save the Children, Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People and an external research advisor. Young people and staff at YWCA Scotland also contributed through piloting the methodology and providing feedback on the focus group questions.

Save the Children and Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People are committed to ensuring that the voices of children and young people are central to how we understand and address child poverty in Scotland and how we can ensure that children's rights are best realised. The involvement of the young researchers helped to make sure that the research was informed and shaped throughout by the views, experiences and perspectives of young people.

## Survey

Twelve schools across six Scottish local authorities took part in the survey, with 885 surveys returned. In each school, one class from each of three different year groups (S1, S3 and S5) completed the survey. Each year group returned a similar number of surveys. Similar numbers were returned from male and female participants.

The Save the Children Wales research survey questions were used as the starting point. These questions were adapted to the Scottish context and developed to meet the focus of this research project by staff at Save the Children and Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People and the young researcher.

An independent researcher analysed the survey responses by year group and gender. Most of the findings did not show significant differences in responses by gender. Responses to the survey were anonymous and have not been attributed to individual schools.

## Focus groups

Sixty-four young people in six schools took part in seven focus groups. The schools were in Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Fife, Glasgow, North Ayrshire and West Dunbartonshire (including two groups in one school).

**Table: Focus group participants by year group**

Year	Groups	Girls	Boys	Sub-total
S1	4	24	16	40
S3	3	12	12	24
Total number of participants				64

## APPENDIX: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

---

The focus group discussions were informed by the results of the survey. The focus group schedule was developed in partnership with the young researchers. Two young researchers, the research assistant and one Save the Children member of staff led each focus group research session. These were recorded and then transcribed.

The focus group was piloted with young people from the YWCA. The discussions used visual prompts for young people to comment on a wide range of issues.

The discussions in each focus group covered broadly the same themes, although some groups looked at particular areas in detail, depending on the participants' interests. Where young people made similar comments or raised particular points, this was noted. All quotes were anonymised.

The overall analysis of the focus group research was undertaken by an external research advisor who also wrote this report. The young researchers took part in an analysis session to identify key themes and messages arising from the data.

### **Ethics**

Ethical considerations took into account Save the Children and Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People organisational guidelines, recognising that the research topic had to be approached with sensitivity. Young people's informed consent was sought for both the survey and focus groups. The researchers were clear that participant's anonymity would be protected in all outputs arising from the research and that confidentiality would be ensured unless it was revealed that a child was at risk from serious harm.

In the focus groups, participants chose whether or not to participate in the discussion following a presentation on the research – what it would involve and why the research was being done. Similarly survey participants could opt out of the research if they chose.







**Scotland's Commissioner  
for Children & Young People**

85 Holyrood Road, Edinburgh EH8 8AU  
**Tel:** 0131 558 3733 **Fax:** 0131 556 3378  
**Young People's Freephone:** 0800 019 1179  
**Email:** [info@sccyp.org.uk](mailto:info@sccyp.org.uk)  
**Twitter:** @RightsSCCYP  
**sccyp.org.uk**



**Save the Children**

5 Thistle Street, Edinburgh EH2 1DF  
**Tel:** 0131 527 8200  
**Fax:** 0131 527 8201  
**Email:** [infoscotland@savethechildren.org.uk](mailto:infoscotland@savethechildren.org.uk)  
**Twitter:** @SaveChildrenSCO  
**savethechildren.org.uk/scotland**