



Includem Consultation: Assessment on Wellbeing (GIRFEC)

Includem welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Scottish Government consultation on the Assessment of Wellbeing (draft statutory guidance) and supports the recognition that children's rights and wellbeing are intrinsically linked and mutually reinforcing. We look forward to working with others across services as this approach develops to ensure the best possible support for the children, young people and families we work with.

How clear and easy is the guidance to understand?

Mostly

With regard to the assessment of wellbeing, within the overall GIRFEC approach, does the guidance make practitioners' roles and responsibilities clear?

A little

Are the definitions provided for the wellbeing indicators (section 6.1) clear and easy to understand?

Somewhat

To what extent do you think that the guidance will help practitioners understand how to embed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and to protect, respect and uphold children's rights within the assessment of wellbeing?

A little

Can you outline anything specific that would be helpful to add to this guidance to assist the assessment of wellbeing?

There are a number of areas that could be added to or expanded to better assist practitioners in wellbeing assessments, and the children, young people and families they seek to support. These include greater clarity and guidance on working in **partnership with children and families**, the impact of **social inequalities**, the relationship to **children's rights**, the role of the **third sector**, and employing the full potential of **group wellbeing assessments**.

1. Achieving partnership working with children and families in practice

Under the current guidance, different practitioners could interpret the level of child or parental involvement in wellbeing assessments and decision-making differently. Does partnership mean that children and families will be considered 'partners' in decision making, or only 'included' in the process of decision making?



In engagements with the families we support, their need to be heard and have a say is made clear:

‘At the beginning it felt like nobody was listening to a damn word. Not only from what I was saying but my daughter too [...].’

While a holistic assessment could take account of all views, how are these views ultimately weighted, and what happens where there is a clear difference of opinion between the practitioner and child or family? To ensure a process of truly open communication on wellbeing, guidance for practitioners on assessment must “...create the conditions where it is uncomfortable for adults to solicit children’s views and then ignore them.” (Laura Lundy, Co-Director of the Centre for Children’s Rights and Professor of Children’s Rights)

Especially in situations of differing views, how will transparency with families in recording be ensured?

“I think social workers take a situation and then write reports and they get listened to, the public aren’t given access to express themselves proper.”

As set in the Promise’s 10 Principles for Family Support, we must ensure families are **empowered and have agency**, with access to **responsive and timely** support.

Particularly in situations where families are seeking help but are assessed as not meeting the threshold for support from the Local Authority, there must be an approach or guidance in place that ensures these families are **heard** and their needs are **not discounted**, or a response is **not delayed unfairly**. During our recent research with families with experiences of poverty and services ([Voices Report](#), 2021) feeling judged and a lack of support from statutory services were frequently cited concerns, with some families reporting **not being believed** despite reporting challenges at home to services. Only once the difficulties the child was facing manifested outside the home, was the parent/carer believed.

“I don’t feel comfortable speaking to social work, I don’t have a relationship with them. I don’t think they have been really supportive [...].”

The guidance additionally states that where a child’s needs indicate that they need support from additional services, **agreed local pathways** should be used to access these. With recognition of the real challenges many services are under due to cuts at the local level, what happens where those services are unavailable or out of capacity?

“There are so many services offering a bit of this and that but nothing for kids on the spectrum with anger issues. [...] There were no mental health beds for someone their age, no drug residential services for those under 18. There are no service that deals with Asperger’s, drug addiction and mental health issues.”



We must ensure families do not reach crisis point before they are given access to support. To live up to the refreshed principles of GIRFEC, particularly placing the **child and family at the centre** and on providing an **early offer of support**, they must be reflected in the practical guidance provided to practitioners.

2. Full recognition of social inequalities in wellbeing assessments

While the guidance mentions the recognition that socio-economic status and poverty have an influence on all of the indicators of wellbeing, the impact of structural inequalities has not been sufficiently considered. This approach must be strengthened if we are to live up to the refreshed GIRFEC principle of **tackling intersecting forms of inequality**.

“...It is something they need to look at, they need a school bag, stationary, books, but it is all needing to come out of what I have. It doesn’t cover it.”

Considering experiences of **stigma** and the growing prevalence of **destitution**, structural inequalities must be at the core of guidance for practitioners - setting out the complexity of **intersecting challenges** faced by undersupported children, young people and families. There needs to be more clarity on how this is taken into account during assessments.

“I sometimes struggle but I just get on with it...My kids would never go without, I would, but not them. Sometimes I only eat one meal a day. I did contact the food bank. I felt in there they were judging me. I wouldn’t go back.”

The National Guidance for Child Protection calls this out more clearly, and a similar approach which focuses on setting out the **poverty related wellbeing gap**, and its **specific implications** to wellbeing indicators could better support practitioners in working with families facing these barriers.

3. Understanding the full scope of children’s rights and wellbeing

Within guidance for Wellbeing Assessments, practitioners must be supported to understand the full implications of wellbeing to children’s rights. While this is implied in the guidance, a **clearer link** that sets out the full range and specific aspects of children’s rights (such as the right to privacy, health, review of treatment, social security, adequate standard of living, to leisure and play and more) is needed to better understand what different indicators of wellbeing can look like. This includes links to **structural inequalities**.

For example:

- **Included** has specific implication across Articles 3, 9, 12-15, 20, 22, 23, 26-29 and 31 of the UNCRC, but is often approached with a focus on varying levels of involvement in discussions. However, this should include providing



support for families experiencing poverty and destitution under Articles 26 and 27.

- **Responsible** has specific implications across Articles 5, 12-15, 17, 24 and 29 of the UNCRC, but is often only seen through an individual lens (responsibility over oneself). However, under article 17 this includes providing the child with access to information, and under articles 14 and 29 this includes respecting the rights of others.

This approach would help clarify to practitioners which (and how) elements of rights are **relevant** in each assessment and the lived experience of the child they seek to support.

With the commitment to children's rights in GIRFEC, has (or will) a CRWIA been undertaken on this guidance, and have the views of children and young people been sought in its development?

4. The role of the third sector in wellbeing assessments

The guidance does not sufficiently clarify or recognise the role of the third sector in wellbeing assessments. Noting that "*individuals working in third sector organisations... delivering functions on behalf of any organisation listed*" implies that the third sector only contributes to this area of work when working on behalf of Local Authorities/statutory bodies. How does this fit with The Promise, particularly the 10 Principles of Family Support (including community-based) and moving away from families becoming involved with statutory services?

There is a need to recognize the third sector as **equal partners**, and it needs to be better accounted for in this guidance. If we are to #KeepThePromise, how does this guidance apply to the third sector in delivering early intervention, where they may increasingly actually be the **lead professional**? If GIRFEC is to span the entire spectrum of need and risk for children and young people, it will need to take into account services that are delivered by non-statutory partners.

Additionally, the guidance states that "*Service providers in the community may have information relevant to children's wellbeing, which may be important to inform a wellbeing assessment...*" but leaves a number of practical questions open to interpretation. Is it a duty/responsibility for the lead professional/named person to seek this information? Is it a duty/responsibility for the service provider to convey this information? Where does this fit with data protection/confidentiality?

5. Utilising the full potential of 'group' wellbeing assessments

According to the guidance, wellbeing information relating to groups of children is to be used in planning services and reporting outcomes – and may support the identification of gaps in service provision and the development of services to meet local needs. Includem welcomes an approach that seeks to build support for communities of children, young people and families according to their wellbeing,



particularly in light of the poverty related wellbeing gap. There would be value in building greater guidance on how this should be approached – particularly to ensure often forgotten communities are included, with recognition of their barriers to engagement and potential distrust of public services as a result of stigmatization.

“I always worry about social work coming in and being judged.”

“...Not to denigrate other services...but we have never seen any improvement – we have not seen actual changes. Patrick does what was asked of him at these services – but it hasn’t filtered through....I think for him it was always feeling that it was a bit maybe like school or a test like there were right answers he had to give.”

Organisations like includem that have built relationships within communities could be of support here, to help build a more comprehensive pool of wellbeing experiences within local areas.

“I have an includem worker. It was quite good, you felt included. I was able to talk to them. They were very open and always open-minded.”

Additionally, there could be value in using ‘group wellbeing’ to assess the effectiveness of services, to identify where the greatest impacts to wellbeing are made, as well as identifying approaches in public services that may have limited impact or (unintentionally) serve to hinder the wellbeing of those they seek to support.

Are there any areas where the further development of resources or guidance would be helpful in supporting the assessment of wellbeing?

According to the areas outlined above, the following topics could gain from further resources or guidance to improve how wellbeing assessments are undertaken in practice:

- **Partnership working** with children and families – particularly on decision making, transparency in recording, and identifying and supporting different forms of communication
- Responses where **Local Pathways** are unavailable / out of capacity
- **Real-world examples** of wellbeing indicators
- The relationship to **human rights**, including examples of specific children’s rights and their relationship to wellbeing indicators
- The relationship between **structural inequalities** and wellbeing – particularly in poverty and destitution
- The role of **third sector** service providers
- **Group wellbeing** and ensuring often overlooked perspectives are