

APRIL 2022

includem 

includem MANIFESTO



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INTRODUCTION



To amplify their voices and insight from across Scotland, we spoke to children, young people and families we support, as well as their includem workers, about what they think their local area **NEEDS NOW**.

People in Scotland face complex barriers in their neighbourhoods to achieving A Better Life. The children, young people and families we support identified the **ABCs** of NEEDS NOW. They want local councils to begin work immediately to become catalysts and leaders for change. This will protect and secure the health and wellbeing of the individuals and communities they serve. Includem calls for any future council leaders, no matter their party affiliation, to ensure **Access** to support, the **Basics**, and **Connections** for all.

Includem works across Scotland.

Our priority is helping children, young people and families make positive, sustainable changes to build a better life. This is how we transform lives for the long term.

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Those we support faced significant hardship before the pandemic. The impact of Covid-19 and the worsening cost of living crisis has resulted in increasing destitution and deteriorating wellbeing. Being able to access support before families reach crisis point is critical to address NEEDS NOW, helping provide access to the Basics in times of adversity.

Economic Support

When facing greater difficulty, whether due to endemic low-income employment or bereavement, many find themselves unable to access support for basic necessities.

"I wasn't able to get access to anything! I don't qualify for anything. I feel like my back is against the wall." (Robin)

"Whereas other people had their families to turn to for emotional and financial support I had nothing, I was locked out of financial support as I was over 25 when my mum passed. I cared for my mum towards the end but [I] didn't actually realise I was her carer... so [I] didn't receive income that way...I was left in debt from the funeral, and other bills... More than once I thought 'I don't actually have enough money to be alive.'" (River)

"...I do wish that we could stop people struggling. It's heart-breaking to see. People going to the bother of working and they still have to choose whether to eat or pay bills." (Sidney)

#NEEDSNOW CALL TO ACTION

We call on councils to **establish crisis support in their child poverty plan that is accessible and flexible to complex circumstances** - without arbitrary cut off points and ensuring thresholds reflect the true cost of living. This should include financial support and grace periods for bills such as council tax to allow families the breathing space needed to return to financial stability instead of further entrenching a cycle of debt.

1



"I could have cried when I couldn't get access to the uniforms...I think they should look at how much people are actually earning and give more access to the uniforms and free school meals." (Alex)

"... I would have been happy for support to be means tested, a one off grant, literally anything to alleviate some pressure... It felt like just a cycle of complete hopelessness... It seemed like my age was the only important thing... there's no cut off age for when losing your mom will mean "you'll be fine", so why is there a cut off from support?" (River)

The true scale of poverty is likely to be higher than current rates and is hidden in the limitations of official indicators. We know that experiences of shame and stigma are prevalent among families facing destitution when seeking support, often leading to under-reporting.

"I get a bus ticket from the council now and again to take the wee ones out because I am a carer...You feel like you are begging for things though." (Frankie)

#NEEDSNOW CALL TO ACTION

2

Support and resources must be made available as entitlements rather than handouts to counter poverty related stigma, requiring change across how they are accessed, delivered and planned. When setting their integrated child services plans, we call on councils to ensure poverty and stigma informed practice is required across support services, including the prioritisation of supporting access to the **Basics**.

"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." (Jessie)

"[my includem support worker] works with me and I have a trusting relationship with him – he is not stuck up...He's normal – he doesn't judge... He understands that things can be difficult when you have four kids and that's just the way it is." (Blake)

Practical Advocacy & Wellbeing Support

Includem works with children, young people and families that are often facing multiple gaps in the system – such as backlogs in mental and physical health services; oversubscribed housing stock; the lack of free or affordable bereavement, family or substance misuse support services outside city centres or in rural areas.

"...You are trying to grapple with things and then you have far too many people involved. It is very exhausting...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." (Bailey)

#NEEDSNOW CALL TO ACTION

We call on councils to **bring forward the return of in-person services to provide information and support** to access what you are entitled to (both benefits and services), with priority to local areas of high deprivation and insecure and low-income employment. These services must be flexible and accessible when and where families need them, particularly when facing sudden financial and wellbeing challenges. This includes availability on an outreach basis where needed, particularly for rural and island communities which are often prevented for accessing support due to cost of transport.

Often after building up confidence to seek out support, people are faced with having to navigate complex systems, experiencing stigmatisation and being placed on waiting lists indefinitely as their circumstances worsen. This leaves those most in need of support and unable to turn to private providers to lose hope and increases distrust in services.

"I have been phoning the housing office for an update on my housing application but I get told I will get a call back, this rarely comes. The situation is dire, I cannot put in place the things which services recommend to help my children manage their trauma, because there is no space... I feel I have exhausted every option and been told to wait, but the situation gets worse and we have been waiting so long. My children are at risk of being taken into care, and they have been through enough."
(Chris)

"I had the social worker and two other services and they were all running with meetings every fortnight. It was overwhelming. Every fortnight getting the pounding."
(Sam)

"In the midst of this I also had to navigate the admin side of it all, there's a ridiculous amount of people that need to be told when someone dies, each time you need to say the words 'my mums passed' you feel it happen all over again..."
(River)

#NEEDSNOW CALL TO ACTION

Children, young people and families must have **access to free holistic wellbeing support and practical advocacy in situations of complex needs**, to help address practical challenges and build sustainable pathways forward. They need to be supported to access these services as they tell us that signposting does not work for them. We call on councils to ensure this support is an essential feature of their integrated children services plan.

“I don’t feel like I need another service just now but if I did, I would want [my includem worker] to take me and introduce me as I wouldn’t just call someone I didn’t know out of the blue – I wouldn’t follow up on leaflets.”
(Hunter)

Parents and carers have a vital role in supporting and nurturing their child when facing circumstances that impact their wellbeing. However, support to do this to the best of their ability while safeguarding their own wellbeing is unavailable in much of Scotland, or too generalised to address the needs of different families, such as neurodiversity.

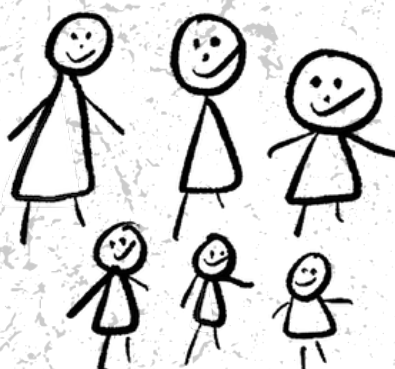
“...understanding that there are more people out there like me. No judgement. I am more likely to help someone else in the same situation and not feel judged when I am having difficulty. I have more understanding of other parents.” (Skyler)

“[I] wouldn’t go to a parenting group with parents with kids without additional needs. I needed a group with mums with similar kids. Even now I feel looked at when I am outside, and Morgan kicks off. I am trying to find different ways of doing things and the content of the group was good for that, but the best thing was connecting with other mothers in the same situation.” (Ashley)

5

#NEEDSNOW CALL TO ACTION

We call on councils to **invest in whole family support now, to ensure children and young people are supported in a way that meets all their needs.** This should include **targeted parenting groups for those with children with additional support needs**, where carers and parents can connect with their peers, feel supported and learn from one another.



A key requirement to addressing **NEEDS NOW** according to children, young people and families is to ensure all have access to basic resources in their local neighbourhoods – including a **Home, Food, Health, Education, Transport** and **Nature**. Ending postcode lotteries in the availability and affordability of basics is key to addressing **NEEDS NOW** and the constant pressure caused by destitution - allow people to **Connect** with their community.

“I was extremely stressed, having panic attacks and only eating smart price frozen vegetables and wearing my dressing gown, hat and scarf around the house just to try and keep costs down... At this point all I was thinking about was how to physically stay alive, mentally living comes after.” (River)

Home

Urgent action is needed to mitigate the effects and change the trajectory of the housing crisis in Scotland. The difficulties faced by children, young people and families to secure a safe and nurturing home have significant implications - such as being stuck in a cycle of temporary housing making the setting of routine difficult, living in unsafe conditions due to black mold with considerable health consequences for small children, and living in highly overcrowded conditions impacting heavily on the wellbeing of the whole family.

These pictures of the mould found in a children's bedroom due to moisture and over-crowding. While the family have been told that 24 hours access is needed to treat this, they have nowhere to go to allow them to come in.



All children, young people and families, no matter their economic or social status, should have access to safe and suitable housing in order to build a home that is nurturing and comfortable.

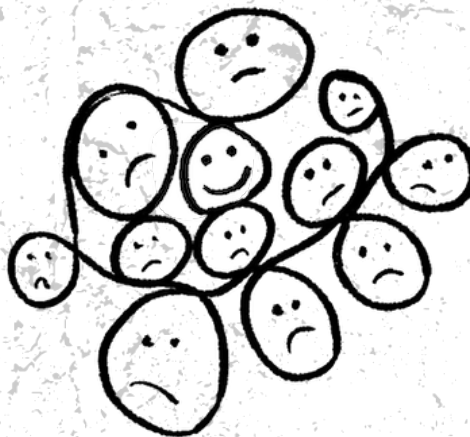
#NEEDSNOW CALL TO ACTION

We call on councils to ensure that **families facing insecure or unsafe housing are prioritised, protected and supported to have access to safe, healthy and warm living**. This must take recognition of their full life circumstances and needs, no matter their social or economic status. This includes supporting families in homeless accommodation to make these homes their own.

“There are now [5 to 7] children living in the one bedroom... I have asked advice from Shelter and have been told that this is overcrowding and it is unsafe, and I qualify as homeless. I have made housing applications and my social worker, school nurse and GP have written supporting letters about the behaviour challenges, school exclusions and welfare concerns that are partly due to the pressure from the housing situation. I have been told I have maximum points. Still, it is 10 months and I am still in this 2 bedroom council flat.” (Chris)

#NEEDSNOW CALL TO ACTION

We call on councils to **ensure all existing empty housing stock is urgently repurposed and used**, with further building in areas of high demand, with the condition to include a significant portion as social housing and meeting the needs of a range of family sizes.





Food

Insecure food is a prevalent challenge across Scotland. This leaves many to make day-to-day sacrifices detrimental to their health, such as reducing the variety of their diet or normalising eating a single meal a day.

“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.” (Riley)

“I'm not ungrateful but it was the same all the time and I was like I'm supposed to feed my weans on tins of tatties, bags of pasta and I ended up saying just give this to someone who really needs it...” (Jackie)

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#NEEDSNOW CALL TO ACTION

Where families are unable to access economic support and cash-first solutions, **councils must ensure there are free or price reduced food resources available.** Accessing them must lessen experiences of stigma and shame, and we call an end to food banks alongside greater funding to be directed at setting up community shops and pantries in local neighbourhoods.

When consulted on what the key needs are in their local area, children and young people all noted the need for 'scrans', with an affordable supermarket close to their home to make it easier to carry shopping home. This reflects a concerning experience that many families face when living in neighbourhoods of high localised deprivation, where only small, and more expensive, corner shops are accessible by walking, with little to no direct public transport routes to larger supermarkets.

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#NEEDSNOW CALL TO ACTION

It is vitally important that future planning ensures that families in all areas can access affordable food without owning a car. We call on councils in their child poverty plans to **ensure all neighbourhoods have access locally to affordable supermarkets.**



Health

There was a key focus by children and young people on the importance of access to health in their local areas – noting the lack of local hospitals and the need for them to be “*properly kitted out*” and ensuring local access to GPs and dentists. In particular, the sparsity and distance to the closest emergency services was concerning (particularly in areas of higher deprivation), making them difficult to access in an emergency.

This includes transport to hospitals, with families having to wait for lengthy periods of time for an ambulance during an emergency and facing a difficult choice between calling a taxi they can’t afford or delaying treatment for their child’s health.

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#NEEDSNOW CALL TO ACTION

We call on councils to **work with health boards to identify how health inequalities are reflected in access to health infrastructure** – both in where they are and how they can be accessed. This is to ensure they serve all intended communities. Transport to and from health facilities must be flexible to needs and non-stigmatising.

It is clear that all neighbourhoods must have basics such as adequate food and safe housing and wellbeing support to address practical needs and avoid the health impacts of deprivation. Change in healthcare access must come alongside holistic economic and wellbeing support and access to other basic necessities.

“My mental health has been impacted as I was in debt and Includem have supported me by getting payment plans put in place so I can reduce my debt. Includem staff have listened to me about my past trauma and linked me into other professionals that can offer the expert advice and support I need.” (Rowan)

Education

Children and young people we support sometimes face challenges to accessing their educational needs including getting to school, being excluded from school and being taught in a way that suits their individual learning styles. Those we spoke to recognised the value of having their school nearby to ease accessibility and build local connections. However, due to the influence of catchment areas on the affordability of housing, families are pushed into areas of lower school investment and attainment, increasing educational inequalities.

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#NEEDSNOW CALL TO ACTION

We call on councils to **prioritise investment in teachers and materials in schools with lower attainment scores and areas of high deprivation**, better supporting them to make the changes that children and young people need. This should include training and culture change on the use of restorative practice across education and related services, to better support those facing trauma, and a focus on the inclusion of those who need additional support or alternative education.

“I need you to make adjustments for my learning style because it’s not something I can change.” (Harris)

“If I can’t learn in class please don’t send me to the base where I can’t learn at all” (Ali)

“They need to know the way your mind and body reacts to certain things – fight or flight. They need to know if someone screams at you [you] are going to hit them or run away, need to know what’s going to happen. And need to know how you’re going to react, or if some things have happened in your past that might trigger you...” (Remi)

Those experiencing reduced hours due to additional needs or who are formally or informally excluded from the school environment often face increasing social isolation and major barrier to access their right to education. Parents and carers in these situations find themselves in a difficult position, with an increase of caring responsibilities during the day, making employment opportunities difficult to access.

“...suspending me makes me want to go to school even less.” (Taylor)

“Excluding them would be the last thing I would do, I would find out the whole story. I would have them in their classroom, take them away that period, let them calm down, let them do the work in the school and after they have settled down and the problem resolved, then send them back to class.” (Cameron)

#NEEDSNOW CALL TO ACTION

As Scotland pursues the ambition to end school exclusions, we call on councils to **invest in targeted learning, social, skills development and recreational activities**. Nurture rooms should be available for as long as needed for the children and young people facing challenges during school hours.

Transport

Children and young people identified key needs for transport. This included more regular and affordable public transport, the importance of being able to depend on buses “*without the slightest doubt*” for school attendance, and the need for more localised transport. This was a particular challenge for accessing areas outwith towns and city centres. For many people, the affordability and limitations to transport routes impacts their ability to access employment as well as undertaking caring responsibilities.

“...I quickly realised even though I was in full time employment I wouldn't be able to actually afford to travel into work.” (River)

#NEEDSNOW CALL TO ACTION

We call on councils to include in their child poverty plan the need to **ensure that transport routes (and their regularity) are established according to the needs of communities**. This includes **setting greater entitlements to free transportation** for those on benefits or when facing financial difficulty.

Some children and young people noted additionally key challenges with existing road infrastructure, wanting to see more traffic lights, as well as less cars and potholes on the streets. Those we support noted how they “*love walking*” and would like more space for cycling.

#NEEDSNOW CALL TO ACTION

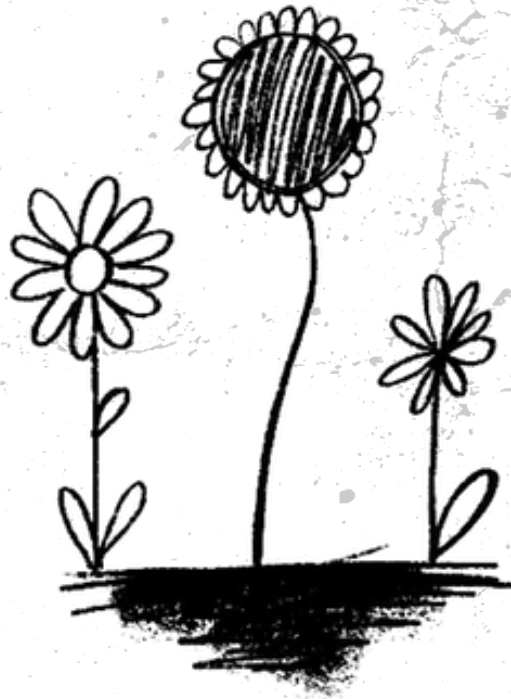
Councils must **ensure public streets are safe and comfortable to live around**, and that **local areas are well connected with space for active travel** that all children and young people can enjoy.

Some children and young people particularly noted how much they valued natural spaces and wanted to see more of them. One young person spoke about enjoying being in the countryside and wanting to have more access to get to the outskirts for peace and quiet. Key to them was having a good supply of trees and “loads and loads of fields with wildlife” - noting that these were lacking in the inner city.

#NEEDSNOW CALL TO ACTION

15

We call on councils to **invest in smaller scale ‘urban rewilding’ with priority to areas of deprivation** - using derelict land and other available spaces to increase biodiversity, using Scottish native wildflowers and trees.



A key challenge that children, young people and their families face in addressing their NEEDS NOW is the deterioration of connections to their communities and neighbourhoods. These connections are vital for providing social opportunities, building hope for change and can form a key role in providing **Access** to support.

To Space

A key challenge to connecting with their community related to the need for spaces that are accessible in their local areas, not just in city centres. This included community resources such as post offices and libraries, with libraries in particular offering a safe space for some children and young people and as a key access point for computers and WiFi.

#NEEDSNOW CALL TO ACTION

16

We call on councils to **reverse the trend in cutting services and ensure community resources are accessible** to address child poverty and to fulfil their responsibilities as corporate parents - with particular investment needed in areas of deprivation.

Community-based services and youth clubs must be more widely accessible across local neighbourhoods, as many young people find themselves unable to access them after moving to different parts of their local areas. Workers noted the particular challenges with sustainable longer-term investment in community hub and the need for greater support to ensure that those who need them know they are there and can access them.

“It is just gangs in my area. There are always stabbings and shootings...if you are not in a gang then you get it heavy...over this past couple of years my friends have ended up either in jail or in a box...People get involved in gangs because it is something to do. Mum said that when she was younger there used to be a youth club where people could go, and there is a youth club here but it is only for certain ages.” (Parker)

#NEEDSNOW CALL TO ACTION

17

Councils should ensure **sustainable and multi-year investment and support to establish youth groups across local neighbourhoods - targeted for a range of age groups - alongside community hubs** that could include a range of resources, spaces, and signposting to better connect communities.

Children and young people particularly spoke about wanting spaces that were dry, free, with WiFi and charging points for phones. This reflects the experiences of many children and young people as being unwanted in public spaces, leaving them to seek out increasingly unsafe environments in order to spend time with their friends.

#NEEDSNOW CALL TO ACTION

We call on councils to **set up dry and free spaces with WiFi and phone charging points across their local neighbourhoods** – whether through shelter inside parks, on high streets or in publicly accessible buildings and community hubs (open in evenings and on weekends). These spaces must be co-designed with children and young people and run in a trauma informed way, ensuring the end to accusations of ‘loitering’ and opportunities to access support if needed.

To Each Other

In lacking these spaces, a linked challenge came from there being fewer opportunities that create a sense of belonging in less affluent areas, specifically for formal and informal volunteering. This could include running support groups, community shops and youth clubs and activities. Even when opportunities are available, children, young people and families facing destitution and wider complex challenges will have greater difficulty to access these opportunities due to time constraints from employment and caring responsibilities.

#NEEDSNOW CALL TO ACTION

We call on councils to **provide greater support for volunteering in local areas as well as paid opportunities to run community spaces and activities**. This should be aimed at those living in the communities they serve, ensuring it provides young people opportunities to develop new skills and meaningful work experience.

To Joy

Children, young people and families all wanted to see free or affordable and accessible recreational spaces and opportunities to engage in hobbies such as sport, music, and skills more widely. For those we support in deprived neighbourhoods, these spaces can be non-existent, inaccessible, or unaffordable. Children and young people must have opportunities and places they can develop their talents or to simply enjoy activities with others.

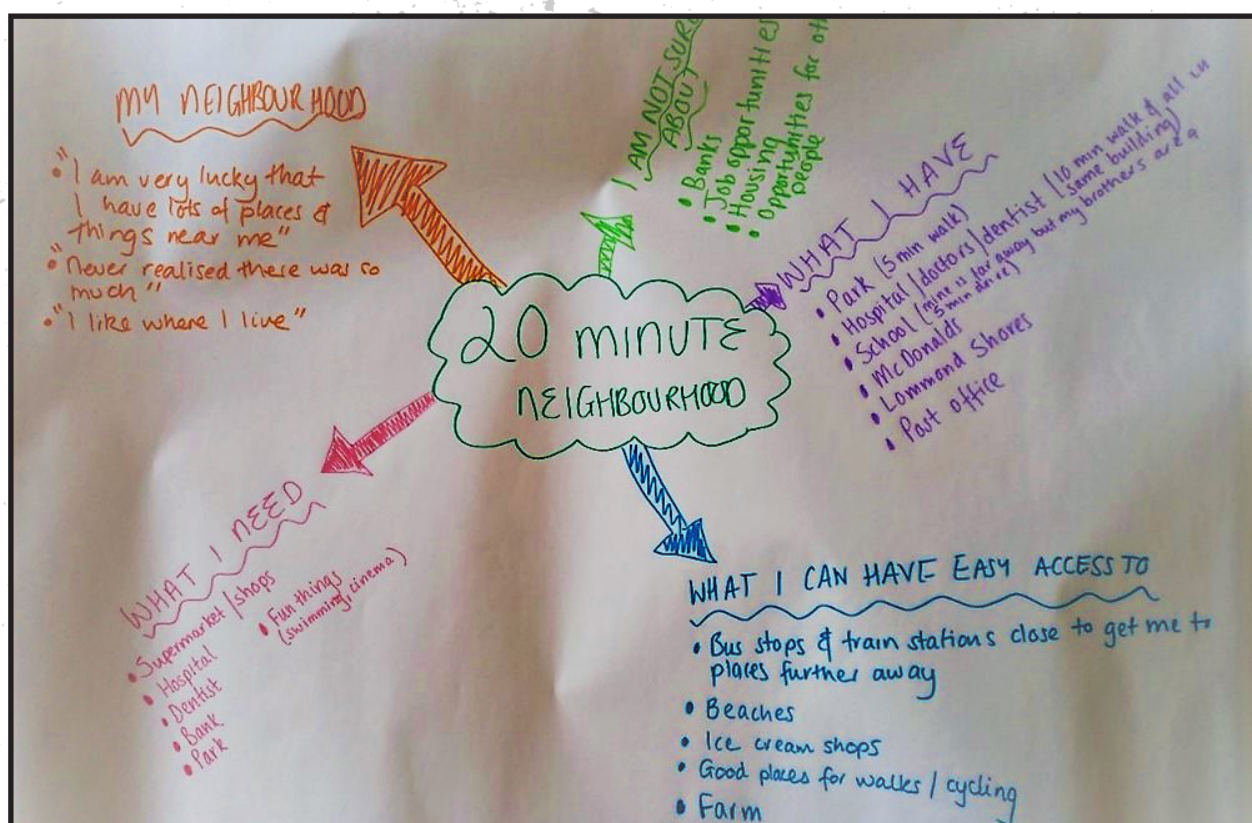
“I’d make sure there was something for all kids to do – there is nothing here – no clubs for them. And I’d put in more cameras and get some of the greenery cut back because it’s creepy at night...” (Jamie)

#NEEDSNOW CALL TO ACTION

We call on councils to embed **access to free and affordable recreational spaces and hobbies for a range of ages in different types of activities** (including equipment) - such as sports, music, skills and arcades – in their child poverty plans. They must ensure these are created and funded according to what children and young people want to have access to locally, prioritising areas deprived of affordable social activities and opportunities.

To Hope

As we gathered the views of the children, young people and families we support, the potential to rebuild hope with communities was striking. While some children and young people have had negative experiences of their areas due to perceptions of high crime, asking about their views sometimes shifted this to a more positive perspective – developing understanding of what is, and what could be, available. Some felt they could live in their areas into adulthood, but identified key needs, as outlined in this manifesto, that were required to make that possible. This illustrates the untapped potential of their insights to identify needs in their communities, address challenges in depopulation, and to rebuild hope for change. This process of gathering their views would not have been possible without the knowledge, skills and trusting relationships includem workers have built with the children, young people and families we support.



#NEEDSNOW CALL TO ACTION

Councils need to ensure children, young people and families are heard and can participate in understanding needs (including in the introduction of group wellbeing assessments), co-designing spaces and planning for their local areas. This must come alongside recognition of the in-depth community knowledge of “boots on the ground” -those that work directly within communities. We call on councils to **embed community co-production and design across decision making and services, allowing local areas to develop according to its communities, reflecting the people in it.**

IN CLOSING

To ensure a future that secures the wellbeing of individuals and communities, we call on any future elected council representative to address the **ABCs** of NEEDS NOW across their work to Keep the Promise and ensure human rights and children’s rights are fulfilled, protected and respected – particularly in their corporate parenting, child poverty and integrated children services plans. Children, young people and families do not experience challenges in silos. Needs around **Access**, the **Basics**, and **Connections** are inter-related and mutually re-enforcing, and cannot be addressed in silos of health, care, justice or education. Above all, children and young people must be recognised as experts by experience, understanding their own needs to truly bring changes to the spaces they live in and rebuild community connection and wellbeing.

#NEEDSNOW CALL TO ACTION

We call on future councils to pledge to **prioritise the NEEDS NOW of the children, young people and families they serve**, identifying priority **ABCs** with communities facing challenging conditions - ensuring all have **Access** to support, the **Basics**, and **Connections** to their community.

INCLUDEM'S APPROACH TO LOCAL ELECTIONS MANIFESTO DEVELOPMENT



Those we work with experience several challenges in their local areas due to gaps in public support systems – including insecure housing, formal and informal social and educational exclusion, health and wellbeing difficulties and barriers to accessing basic necessities. To capture their views, we have taken a flexible approach, reaching out through includem workers to families to understand the challenges they are facing. Further, we explored several different activities that best suited individual children and young people - from exploring the concept of a 20-minute neighbourhood, with graphics, through metaphors, taking a walk and discussing what they would like to see change or what they want from their future council leaders. This included an initial scoping activity that engaged 15 children and young people (aged 6 to 16) through their trusted support workers across Scotland - including Glasgow, Forth Valley, West Dumbarton, Fife, Aberdeen and Dundee – to discuss their experiences of their local area and what they believe is needed in neighbourhoods.

After grouping these responses into themes, we explored these further with includem workers to understand specific localised examples and reflected how these insights aligned to other recent views and perspectives shared by the children, young people and families we support. These included both more in-depth research such as the Voices report and the School Experience report, qualitative research into specific services and situations where families and individuals have come to us about a challenge they are facing. All names have been changed to ensure their anonymity.

This Manifesto is intended to be the beginning of a larger conversation with the children, young people and families we support, as well as their includem workers, to build a feedback loop that allow us to understand and flexibly respond to their needs, including by ensuring they are reflected in the national and local conversations for change. At includem we are on a journey to embed participation and co-production into everything we do to continue our work to **#KeepThePromise**. We recognise this will not be easy and will require difficult and necessary conversations.

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JOIN THE CONVERSATION

#NEEDSNOW

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