

includem view

A parliamentary briefing from the Scottish children, young people and families charity



A charity registered in Scotland, number SCO30233 | Company registration number: 207985

We are includem, a Scottish charity that works with children, young people and families to help them transform their lives. We see a world where every child and young person is respected, valued, and has the opportunity to actively participate in all aspects of society.

Includem welcomes the Parliamentary debate on Child Poverty and the cost-of-living crisis. The recent figures setting out the stagnation in child poverty between April 2019 and March 2022 have brought this major issue into stark focus. These statistics cannot capture the impact of recent events - with heightening inflation at 10.4% and the much needed increase to the Scottish Child Payment by the Scottish Government.

The children, young people and families we support face some of the direst circumstances in the country. Below we set out key findings from our [It Is Not A Choice](#) Report on the experiences of families we support during the cost-of-living crisis. The findings of the report illustrate how poverty remains the biggest obstacle to making children's rights real in Scotland.

One of our values is to listen to the needs of children, young people and their families and lobby on their behalf.

We ask that you bring their voices with you into parliament and secure change that children and young people need for A Better Life.

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"Listen to people who live like this."

"Listen to what we say, no empty promises."



It Is Not A Choice

Summary Stats

71%



reported they were struggling to meet the costs of two or more essentials.



73%

reported they were struggling to meet the cost of two or more basics.

77%



were left with no safety net to fall back on in the case of emergencies or repairs.



94%

have experienced worsening finances

78%



reported worsening mental health

Essentials

71% reported they were struggling to meet the costs of two or more essentials - energy, goods, food or rent - 'half the time', 'usually' or 'always' over the last year. For 60% it was three or all essentials.

The 29% who struggled with their rent also struggled across all other essentials. Several families echoed the need for better housing.

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"I'm tired of struggling and worrying about heating and having enough food. I am sad that I can't give my child some of the things she asks for."

"More appropriate housing, enough space for all of us and have a garden, we share all space and even our beds."

Basics

73% of families were struggling to meet to cost of two or more basics – including transport, school, child costs, internet, or bills. 66% reported struggling with costs directly linked to childhood, rising to 88% for families whose main source of income was social security.

"More financial support for school. I can't afford school dinner money, or school uniform for the high school uniform, holiday support for clubs etc. It's unfair that as looked after children they don't have the same opportunity as their pals around the corner who live with their mum and dad."

Safety Net

77% of families were left with nothing to meet the costs of emergencies, repairs, rainy-days or holidays. There simply is no safety net to fall back on.

"[W]e don't have money for extras or think about holidays or rainy days. I have worked since I was a child and I want a good future for my kids."

Wellbeing Impact

The majority of families experienced worsening circumstances across all indicators – including finances, debt, mental and physical health. In the last six months, 94% have experienced worsening finances and 78% reported worsening mental health - rising to 88% for families whose main source of income was social security.

"Gone from stressed to anxiety... This has had a big impact on my mental health. I'm a sole provider so this increases anxiety because it is on my head..."

Restricting children to bare essentials has left parents feeling like failures through no fault of their own. A majority of respondents reported feeling judged because of their financial situation, and many felt that decision makers ignore, or simply do not understand, their lived reality. As a result, public health and wellbeing interventions do not effectively respond to poverty-related root causes.

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"I am now on anti-depressants and sleeping tablets due to my worries for caring for my kids. I have lost a lot of weight as I chose to feed my kids over myself all too often."

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"They need to look at not just giving the basic food and fuel. They need to understand the impact it's having on relationships with their children when you have to keep saying you can't have that or you can't do an activity."

What Children, Young People and Families Would Like to See



1 Tackling Poverty & Stigma

Plans and actions by governments should aim to eliminate poverty and the related mental health crisis, not just alleviate it's symptoms - including with preventative measures.

2 Protecting Wellbeing

Invest in wellbeing in a way that works for children and families - addressing the trauma of poverty, prioritising the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund, and creating a Hobby Guarantee.

3 Incomes that Reflect Reality

Social security, employment and means tested support need to be made sufficient to meet human dignity and provide a path out of poverty. The labour market must be brought closer to families.

4 Lowering Costs for Living

When families face crisis, greater costs and barriers is not an appropriate response. Match the Welfare Fund to real needs. Ensure affordable energy provision and public transport works for those who need it most.

5 Making Debts Manageable

Invest in dignified debt support. Set a 6 month moratorium on public debts recovery. Ban the compulsory installation of prepayment meters and write off school meal debt.

6 Homes for All Families

Ensure access to affordable, safe and warm homes of sufficient size. Enhance housing support and repairs services. Invest in the Winter Support Fund. Support families to make their housing a home.

7 Delivering on a Wellbeing Economy

Children and young people should be able to live with dignity. Place wellbeing and children's rights budgeting at the core of decision-making. Increase public investment in social and wellbeing infrastructure. Working with children, young people and families on low incomes to set long-term priorities in a wellbeing framework that effectively implements change for future generations. Recognise and fairly value vital contributions to social wellbeing.



We would welcome the opportunity to discuss our work and how we can work together to transform the lives of children, young people and families.

Please contact publicaffairs@includem.co.uk to arrange a date that works for you!