



CHILD RIGHTS PARTNERS

**PUTTING CHILDREN'S RIGHTS AT THE HEART OF
PUBLIC SERVICES**

Information booklet



UNITED KINGDOM

CHILD RIGHTS PARTNERS



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ABOUT THIS BOOKLET

The booklet was created by Unicef UK in November 2014 and presents information and guidance about the Child Rights Partners programme, children’s rights and a child rights-based approach to public services. It is intended as a communication and awareness raising resource.

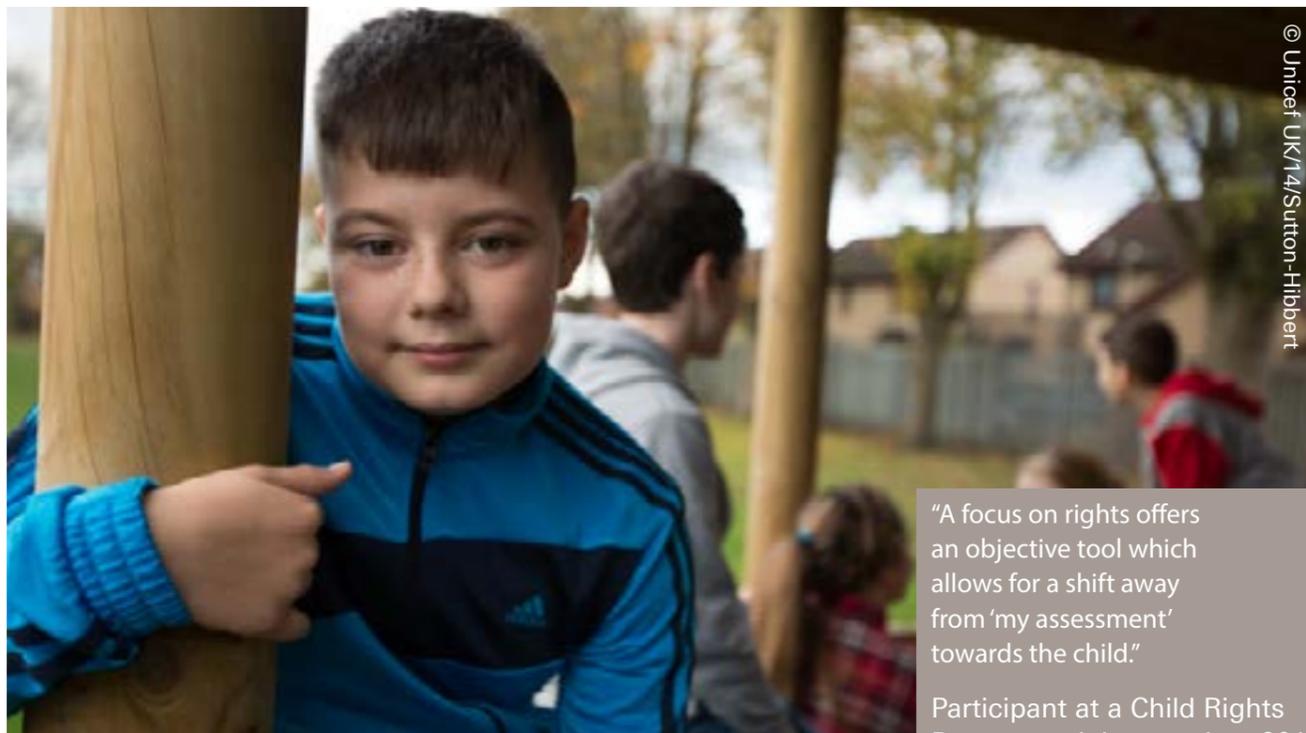
Child Rights Partners is a three-year action research pilot programme therefore this booklet should be considered a working document. We aim to update this document annually based on emerging learning. We will also develop complementary resources on specific areas of our work as the programme progresses.

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1. CHILD RIGHTS PARTNERS: PUTTING CHILDREN'S RIGHTS AT THE HEART OF PUBLIC SERVICES



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"A focus on rights offers an objective tool which allows for a shift away from 'my assessment' towards the child."

Participant at a Child Rights Partners training session, 2014

AN INNOVATIVE PROGRAMME

Unicef UK has partnered with local government in a first of its kind attempt to embed a child rights-based approach in the planning and delivery of public services for children and young people in the UK. We want to demonstrate that adopting a child rights-based approach – placing children's rights at the heart of policy and practice - can transform services, leading to improved outcomes across all dimensions of children and young people's lives.

PUBLIC SERVICES AND CHILD RIGHTS

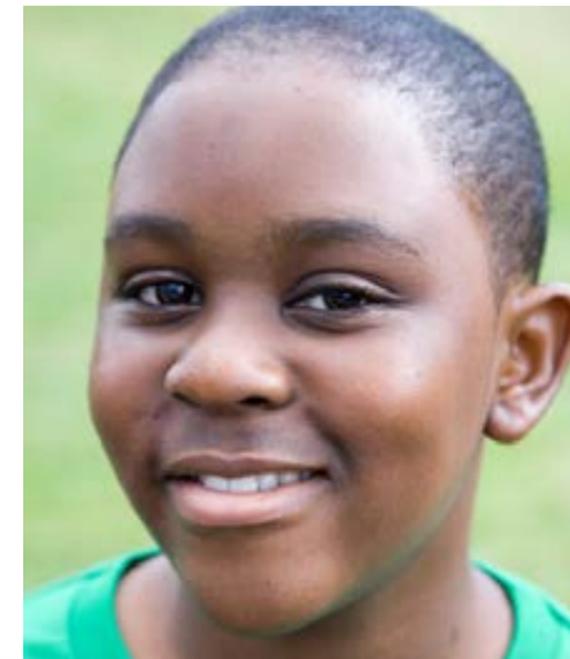
Public services play a vital role in the lives of children and young people. Through universal, targeted and specialist services, local authorities and their partners safeguard

and nurture the well-being of all children and young people in their community.

Despite this, services are seldom designed around the experiences and voices of children. Children in vulnerable situations in particular are even less likely to have their views heard and taken into account, leaving them in danger of becoming marginalised and falling through the cracks. By approaching children as passive recipients defined by a set of needs rather than capable and resourceful individuals entitled to legally enshrined rights, services risk systematically excluding the group they aim to support.

A RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH

We believe that adopting a child rights-based approach – transforming services by weaving rights into structures and systems at all levels - is the best way to work with and for children. The approach requires local authorities to begin with the child. It places children and young people at the centre of services, empowering them and their families. It improves the ability of professionals, services and partner organisations to protect and fulfil children's rights, creating a common driver that connects services across the whole local authority. Ultimately, the approach ensures every child is treated with dignity and fairness, is protected and able to participate.



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All rights are recognised as inherent to the human dignity of the child.

Implementation handbook for the UNCRC

OUR FOCUS

Over the course of the Child Rights Partners programme, we are focusing on three core areas:

- **Child Poverty** – embedding a child rights-based approach in local child poverty strategies, ensuring poverty is understood and responded to as a multidimensional rights issue.
- **Commissioning** – incorporating the principles of a child rights-based approach in the commissioning cycle, supporting commissioners and service providers to secure better outcomes for children and young people.
- **Children's social care** – building on the tradition of social work as a human rights profession, we want to weave the principles of a child rights-based approach into services for vulnerable children and young people, starting with services for children leaving care.

"One can easily get caught up in systems and protocols and lose sight of the human dimension: a rights lens allows for the child in the midst of the process to be brought back into the equation."

Participant at a Child Rights Partners training session, 2014

2. PUTTING RIGHTS INTO PRACTICE: WHAT IS A CHILD RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH?

DEFINITION

A child rights-based approach is grounded in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), a set of internationally agreed legal standards which lay out a vision of childhood underpinned by dignity, equality, safety and participation. Taking a child rights-based approach means using the Convention as a practical framework for working with and for children and young people.

The goal of a child rights-based approach (CRBA) is to promote and secure the full range of a child's human rights.

CHARACTERISTICS

In a local authority context, a child rights-based approach has the following characteristics:

- Knowledge and awareness of children's rights penetrate all tiers and segments of local authority structures and practice.
- Rights provide the lens through which all actions and decisions affecting children are rooted, reviewed and resolved.
- Emphasis is placed on strengthened relationships between children as rights holders and governments and services as duty bearers. Children are empowered to know about and claim their rights and duty bearers are accountable for ensuring that children experience their rights.

PRINCIPLES

The approach is guided by a set of seven mutually-reinforcing principles:

- Dignity
- Best interests of the child
- Non-discrimination
- Life, survival and development
- Participation
- Interdependence and indivisibility
- Transparency and accountability

"A rights focus is about 'the feel' of services, the individual experiences of service users, the culture and ethos within services and institutions."

Participant at a Child Rights Partners training session, 2014

3. INTRODUCING THE PRINCIPLES OF A CHILD RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH

The seven Unicef UK principles of a child-rights based approach (CRBA) form the foundation of a guiding framework for putting rights into practice within public services.

The principles bring together the vision of childhood set out by the Convention, the individual articles as enshrined in the Convention and the core tenets of a human rights-based approach, creating a common point of reference for all programme activities. They offer guidance by describing the quality of care and provision that each child should experience when using services that are grounded in children's rights.

Each individual principle is significant and valuable in and of itself but only together do the seven principles create a child rights framework. A child rights-based approach cannot be dissected and applied in a patchy or arbitrary manner as the seven principles are inextricably linked and mutually reinforcing.

Over the course of the Child Rights Partners programme, we will be developing and testing a range of outcomes and indicators to help participating local authorities:

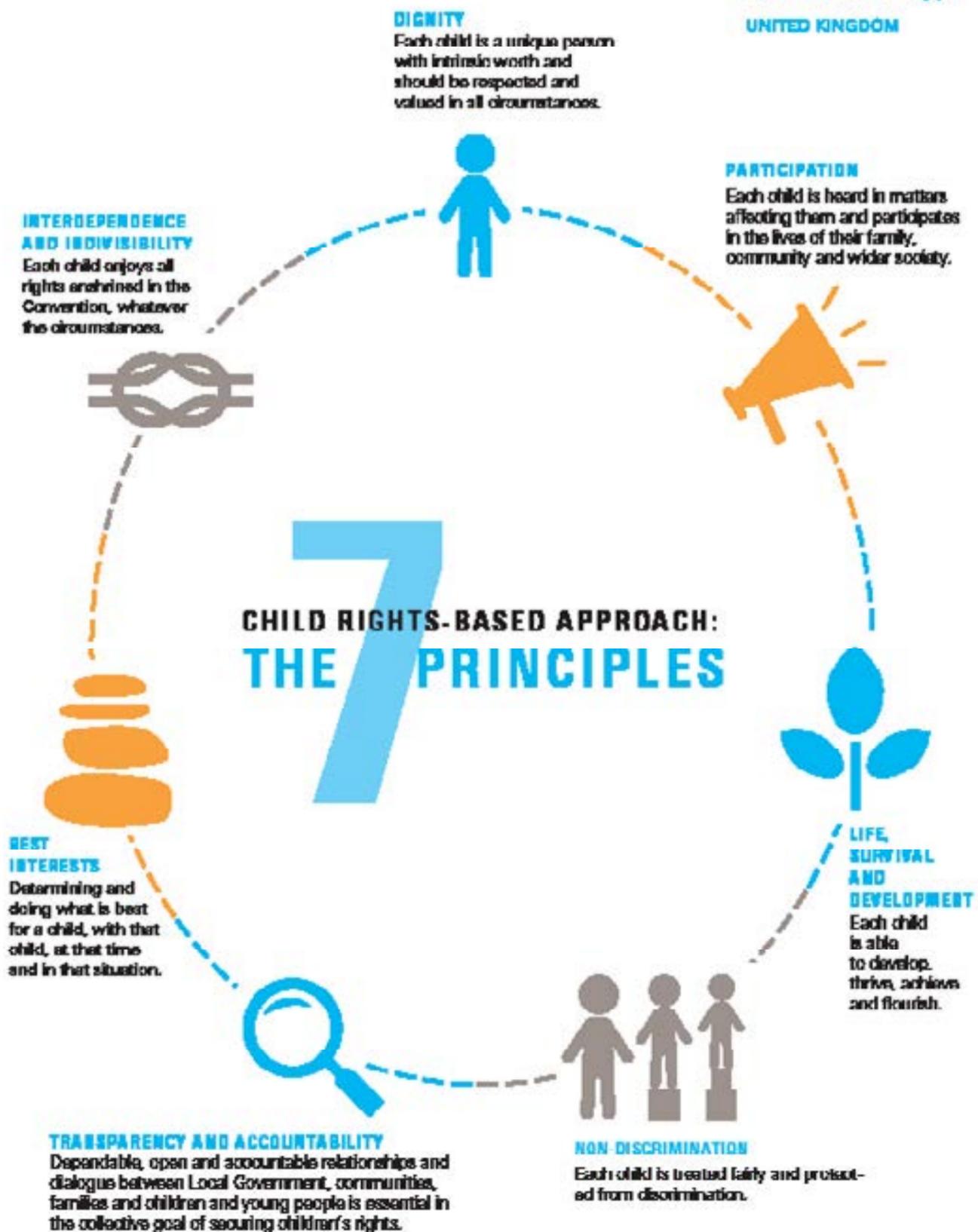
- practically implement the principles;
- set up supporting processes and systems;
- monitor the change process; and
- measure the impact of a child rights based-approach on policy, practice and outcomes for children and young people.



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The State takes on obligations under the Convention and its task of implementation – of making reality of the human rights of children - needs to engage all sectors of society and, of course, children themselves.

Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 5



5. CASE STUDY: LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

A child rights-based approach to commissioning children and young people's services in Tower Hamlets

The London Borough of Tower Hamlets is one of Unicef UK's Local Authority Partners and their focus within the Child Rights Partners programme is on embedding a child rights-based approach (CRBA) in their children and families commissioning framework.

The partnership and its focus area were approved by Tower Hamlets' local Children and Families Partnership Board. Following child rights training provided by Unicef UK, the Council successfully embedded the principle of a CRBA into the Partnership's Joint Commissioning Framework to "guide all future commissioning activity". They also carried out the required needs assessments through a rights lens: a Rights Based Needs Assessment was conducted, bringing together evidence based needs analysis and a child rights framework. Young people from Tower Hamlets were also trained up and supported to become Young Commissioners and work alongside the local authority during the commissioning process.

This work culminated in the commissioning of the first service through a child rights-based approach: Tower Hamlets' new Young People's Substance Misuse Specialist Treatment Service. The service was successfully re-commissioned in April 2014 and is currently being piloted. Some of the features of the new, rights-based service include: a greater focus on outcomes across the whole service; young people being introduced to and discussing child rights during care planning and review; young people have access to small personalised budgets which allow them to address issues of significance to them.

A 'Mayor's Charter of Child Rights' was also developed by young people and signed up to by schools, health, the police and voluntary sector across Tower Hamlets.

Following on from the success of using the approach to commission the Young People's Substance Misuse Specialist Treatment Service, the Council is now planning to embed a CRBA across the Children and Families Partnership. The Council will also work with Unicef UK to evaluate and measure the effectiveness of the new approach and its impact on policy, practice and outcomes for children and young people.

"Using a CRBA had allowed for innovation from the service provider in their approach to delivering against the seven principles [of a CRBA]. It meant the service was not only focusing on the presenting problem but also looking at the young person's wider needs and coming up with innovative ways they can support those needs, all the while ensuring that young people have a voice in service design and delivery."

Bola Akinfolarin – Commissioning Manager, Children's Commissioning, London Borough of Tower Hamlets

6. THE UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Child Rights Partners is grounded in the [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) and aims to put children's human rights at the heart of public services in the UK.

Human rights are a universal set of standards that are founded on basic human needs and apply to all human beings, guaranteeing freedom, equality and a fair standard of living for everyone irrespective of gender, nationality, ethnicity, religion, language, place of residence and any other status. Human rights are set out in international human rights law to ensure that States respect, protect and fulfil the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of all people.

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 1

Children have the same human rights as everyone else. In addition childhood has been identified as a unique period requiring special care and assistance. The human rights of children (everyone under the age of 18) are embodied in international law in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and its three Optional Protocols. The Convention was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1989 and is the most widely ratified human rights treaty ever. The United Kingdom ratified the Convention in 1991.

The Convention sets out the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights that all children everywhere are entitled to. It has 54 articles that cover all aspects of a child's life, from the right to education, health and protection from abuse to the right to freedom of expression and privacy. The Convention must be seen as a whole: all the rights are connected and no right is more important than another.

The Convention is an important document as it defines children as human beings in their own right, and not just as 'adults-in-the-making'. Within it, children are not viewed as 'property' of their family or passive recipients – they are actors in their own lives, capable of navigating and influencing their environment. The Convention also lays out what governments are obliged to do, at the national and local level, to ensure all children can enjoy their rights. Under the Convention, governments and public services – including hospitals, schools and social services – have a duty to treat all children with fairness, equality, dignity and respect, considering the full range of children's rights in everything they do.

The Convention underpins all the work that Unicef does. Unicef is the only organisation (other than the UN itself) whose name appears in the text of the Convention. We are a champion of the Convention and we work with governments, at national and local level, to promote the rights of every child.



7. A SUMMARY OF THE CONVENTION

ARTICLE 1 (definition of the child)

Everyone under the age of 18 has all the rights in the Convention.

ARTICLE 2 (non-discrimination)

The Convention applies to every child without discrimination, whatever their ethnicity, gender, religion, language, abilities or any other status, whatever they think or say, whatever their family background.

ARTICLE 3 (best interests of the child)

The best interests of the child must be a top priority in all decisions and actions that affect children.

ARTICLE 4 (implementation of the Convention)

Governments must do all they can to make sure every child can enjoy their rights by creating systems and passing laws that promote and protect children's rights.

ARTICLE 5 (parental guidance and a child's evolving capacities)

Governments must respect the rights and responsibilities of parents and carers to provide guidance and direction to their child as they grow up, so that they fully enjoy their rights. This must be done in a way that recognises the child's increasing capacity to make their own choices.

ARTICLE 6 (life, survival and development)

Every child has the right to life. Governments must do all they can to ensure that children survive and develop to their full potential.

ARTICLE 7 (birth registration, name, nationality, care)

Every child has the right to be registered at birth, to have a name and nationality, and, as far as possible, to know and be cared for by their parents.

ARTICLE 8 (protection and preservation of identity)

Every child has the right to an identity. Governments must respect and protect that right, and prevent the child's name, nationality or family relationships from being changed unlawfully.

ARTICLE 9 (separation from parents)

Children must not be separated from their parents against their will unless it is in their best interests (for example, if a parent is hurting or neglecting a child). Children whose parents have separated have the right to stay in contact with both parents, unless this could cause them harm.

ARTICLE 10 (family reunification)

Governments must respond quickly and sympathetically if a child or their parents apply to live together in the same country. If a child's parents live apart in different countries, the child has the right to visit and keep in contact with both of them.

ARTICLE 11 (abduction and non-return of children)

Governments must do everything they can to stop children being taken out of their own country illegally by their parents or other relatives, or being prevented from returning home.

ARTICLE 12 (respect for the views of the child)

Every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously. This right applies at all times, for example during immigration proceedings, housing decisions or the child's day-to-day home life.

ARTICLE 13 (freedom of expression)

Every child must be free to express their thoughts and opinions and to access all kinds of information, as long as it is within the law.

ARTICLE 14 (freedom of thought, belief and religion)

Every child has the right to think and believe what they choose and also to practise their religion, as long as they are not stopping other people from enjoying their rights. Governments must respect the rights and responsibilities of parents to guide their child as they grow up.

ARTICLE 15 (freedom of association)

Every child has the right to meet with other children and to join groups and organisations, as long as this does not stop other people from enjoying their rights.

ARTICLE 16 (right to privacy)

Every child has the right to privacy. The law should protect the child's private, family and home life, including protecting children from unlawful attacks that harm their reputation.

ARTICLE 17 (access to information from the media)

Every child has the right to reliable information from a variety of sources, and governments should encourage the media to provide information that children can understand. Governments must help protect children from materials that could harm them.

ARTICLE 18 (parental responsibilities and state assistance)

Both parents share responsibility for bringing up their child and should always consider what is best for the child. Governments must support parents by creating support services for children and giving parents the help they need to raise their children.

ARTICLE 19 (protection from violence, abuse and neglect)

Governments must do all they can to ensure that children are protected from all forms of violence, abuse, neglect and bad treatment by their parents or anyone else who looks after them.

ARTICLE 20 (children unable to live with their family)

If a child cannot be looked after by their immediate family, the government must give them special protection and assistance. This includes making sure the child is provided with alternative care that is continuous and respects the child's culture, language and religion.

ARTICLE 21 (adoption)

Governments must oversee the process of adoption to make sure it is safe, lawful and that it prioritises children's best interests. Children should only be adopted outside of their country if they cannot be placed with a family in their own country.

ARTICLE 22 (refugee children)

If a child is seeking refuge or has refugee status, governments must provide them with appropriate protection and assistance to help them enjoy all the rights in the Convention. Governments must help refugee children who are separated from their parents to be reunited with them.

ARTICLE 23 (children with a disability)

A child with a disability has the right to live a full and decent life with dignity and, as far as possible, independence and to play an active part in the community. Governments must do all they can to support disabled children and their families.

ARTICLE 24 (health and health services)

Every child has the right to the best possible health. Governments must provide good quality health care, clean water, nutritious food, and a clean environment and education on health and well-being so that children can stay healthy. Richer countries must help poorer countries achieve this.

ARTICLE 25 (review of treatment in care)

If a child has been placed away from home for the purpose of care or protection (for example, with a

foster family or in hospital), they have the right to a regular review of their treatment, the way they are cared for and their wider circumstances.

ARTICLE 26 (social security)

Every child has the right to benefit from social security. Governments must provide social security, including financial support and other benefits, to families in need of assistance.

ARTICLE 27 (adequate standard of living)

Every child has the right to a standard of living that is good enough to meet their physical and social needs and support their development. Governments must help families who cannot afford to provide this.

ARTICLE 28 (right to education)

Every child has the right to an education. Primary education must be free and different forms of secondary education must be available to every child. Discipline in schools must respect children's dignity and their rights. Richer countries must help poorer countries achieve this.

ARTICLE 29 (goals of education)

Education must develop every child's personality, talents and abilities to the full. It must encourage the child's respect for human rights, as well as respect for their parents, their own and other cultures, and the environment.

ARTICLE 30 (children from minority or indigenous groups)

Every child has the right to learn and use the language, customs and religion of their family, whether or not these are shared by the majority of the people in the country where they live.

ARTICLE 31 (leisure, play and culture)

Every child has the right to relax, play and take part in a wide range of cultural and artistic activities.

ARTICLE 32 (child labour)

Governments must protect children from economic exploitation and work that is dangerous or might harm their health, development or education. Governments must set a minimum age for children to work and ensure that work conditions are safe and appropriate.

ARTICLE 33 (drug abuse)

Governments must protect children from the illegal use of drugs and from being involved in the production or distribution of drugs.

ARTICLE 34 (sexual exploitation)

Governments must protect children from all forms of sexual abuse and exploitation.

ARTICLE 35 (abduction, sale and trafficking)

Governments must protect children from being abducted, sold or moved illegally to a different place in or outside their country for the purpose of exploitation.

ARTICLE 36 (other forms of exploitation)

Governments must protect children from all other forms of exploitation, for example the exploitation of children for political activities, by the media or for medical research.

ARTICLE 37 (inhumane treatment and detention)

Children must not be tortured, sentenced to the death penalty or suffer other cruel or degrading treatment or punishment. Children should be arrested, detained or imprisoned only as a last resort and for the shortest time possible. They must be treated with respect and care, and be able to keep in contact with their family. Children must not be put in prison with adults.

ARTICLE 38 (war and armed conflicts)

Governments must not allow children under the age of 15 to take part in war or join the armed forces. Governments must do everything they can to protect and care for children affected by war and armed conflicts.

ARTICLE 39 (recovery from trauma and reintegration)

Children who have experienced neglect, abuse, exploitation, torture or who are victims of war must receive special support to help them recover their health, dignity, self-respect and social life.

ARTICLE 40 (juvenile justice)

A child accused or guilty of breaking the law must be treated with dignity and respect. They have the right to legal assistance and a fair trial that takes account of

their age. Governments must set a minimum age for children to be tried in a criminal court and manage a justice system that enables children who have been in conflict with the law to reintegrate into society.

ARTICLE 41 (respect for higher national standards)

If a country has laws and standards that go further than the present Convention, then the country must keep these laws.

ARTICLE 42 (knowledge of rights)

Governments must actively work to make sure children and adults know about the Convention.

The Convention has 54 articles in total. Articles 43–54 are about how adults and governments must work together to make sure all children can enjoy all their rights, including:

ARTICLE 45

Unicef can provide expert advice and assistance on children's rights.

OPTIONAL PROTOCOLS

There are three agreements, called Optional Protocols, that strengthen the Convention and add further unique rights for children. They are optional because governments that ratify the Convention can decide whether or not to sign up to these Optional Protocols. They are: the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict and the Optional Protocol on a complaints mechanism for children (called Communications Procedure). **For more information go to unicef.org.uk/crc/op**

Listening to children should not be seen as an end in itself, but rather as a means by which States make their interactions with children ever more sensitive to the implementation of children's rights.

Committee on the Rights of the Child, Day of general discussion on the right of the child to be heard.



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8. ABOUT CHILD RIGHTS PARTNERS

Child Rights Partners brings together Unicef UK and local government to ensure all children have the same opportunity to flourish.

Launched in November 2013, the partnership is grounded in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and puts children's human rights at the heart of public services. Over a period of three years, we are working with six local authorities across the UK – Derry, Glasgow, Leeds, Neath Port Talbot, Newcastle and Tower Hamlets – to transform services for the most vulnerable, including children experiencing poverty, children living in care and young people affected by drug and alcohol misuse.

Through training, testing and evaluation, we want to profoundly change the way local authorities work with and for children, ensuring children experience services that are adaptable, connected and empowering. Together with our partners, we will demonstrate how putting children's rights into action in public organisations can make a real difference to children's lives. When services take a rights-based approach, children know and understand their rights, are treated with dignity and feel nurtured. They have a say in decisions that affect them, experience services that are built with and for them, know what services are available, and feel safe and prioritised.



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unicef.org.uk/Child-Rights-Partners
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9. ABOUT UNICEF

ABOUT UNICEF

Unicef is the world's leading organisation for children, promoting the rights and wellbeing of every child, in everything we do. Together with our partners, we work in 190 countries and territories to translate that commitment into practical action, focusing special effort on reaching the most vulnerable and excluded children, to the benefit of all children, everywhere.

Unicef UK raises funds to protect children in danger, transform their lives and build a safer world for tomorrow's children. As a registered charity we raise funds through donations from individuals, organisations and companies and we campaign to keep children safe. Unicef UK also runs programmes in schools, hospitals and with local authorities in the UK.



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OUR PROGRAMME WORK IN THE UK

Unicef UK runs three programmes to protect and promote the rights of children and young people in the UK and advocate for lasting change. The Rights Respecting Schools Award (RRSA) supports schools across the UK to embed children's rights in their practice, ethos and culture. Our Child Rights Partners programme works with local authorities to put children's rights at the heart of public services. Unicef UK's Baby Friendly Initiative works in health settings across the UK to protect, promote and support breastfeeding and to strengthen mother-baby and family relationships.

Unicef UK is a registered charity supported entirely by voluntary donations. We do not receive any money from the UN. Find out more at www.unicef.org.uk



