



**RENFREWSHIRE CHILDREN'S
SERVICES PARTNERSHIP**

Growing up in Renfrewshire Focus Group's Report

About this Report

This report draws on a series of focus groups with children and young people across Renfrewshire, undertaken to inform the development of the Children's Services Partnership Plan. The core purpose of the focus groups was to understand what it is like to grow up in Renfrewshire from the perspective of children and young people themselves, and their families. They were designed to explore everyday experiences, what young people value about their lives and communities, the challenges they face, how they experience being listened to, and what they would change to make things better. The intention was not to evaluate individual services or projects, but to centre young peoples lived experience in local planning and decision-making.

The discussions were guided by a shared set of broad questions covering daily life, positive experiences, barriers and pressures, voice and participation, priorities for change, and messages for adults. At the same time, facilitators were encouraged to follow participants' interests and allow conversations to develop naturally, prioritising depth and authenticity over rigid coverage.

The focus groups were facilitated by Connected Communities, whose support, relationships, and knowledge were central to enabling young people to participate openly and meaningfully. The Partnership is grateful for their role in organising and delivering the sessions.

In total, six focus groups were undertaken, involving young people from a range of ages, settings, and backgrounds. One group was conducted with Parents/Carers. Participants took part through different services, community spaces, and local contexts, and reflected a mix of experiences, interests, and circumstances. The data for this report is drawn from facilitator notes, flipchart records, and written responses captured during the sessions.

This approach allows clear patterns and shared concerns to be identified across groups. However, it also means that caution is required in interpreting strength of feeling, emphasis, and how widely particular views were shared within individual sessions. Some groups covered certain topics in more depth than others, and some questions received more detailed responses than others. The findings in this report should therefore be understood as reflecting

the views and experiences of the young people who took part, rather than being treated as statistically representative of all children and young people in Renfrewshire. They provide insight into lived experience and priorities, rather than definitive measures.

Analysis was carried out by systematically mapping responses against the core areas of discussion, identifying recurring themes, and examining areas of consistency and difference across groups. Interpretation has been grounded in the recorded data, with care taken not to extend conclusions beyond what the material supports.

Taken together, the focus groups provide a rich picture of how young people experience growing up in Renfrewshire, the opportunities they value, the barriers they face, and the changes they believe would make the greatest difference. These insights are intended to inform partnership planning towards the formation of the next RCSP three-year plan.

Everyday Life in Renfrewshire

Across the focus groups, young people described everyday life as largely centred on school, home, and a number of familiar local spaces. Weekdays were dominated by attending school and spending time at home, with some young people also describing everyday responsibilities such as cooking or helping family members. After school and at weekends, time was commonly spent meeting friends, staying at home, using online spaces, or taking part in structured activities such as football, dance, drama, cadets, and youth groups.

Social and leisure activity tended to concentrate in a limited number of places, particularly Paisley, Braehead, and, for some, travelling into Glasgow. These locations were repeatedly referenced as places to meet friends, get food, or spend time when there were few alternatives locally. For some young people, this reflected convenience and accessibility. For others, it reflected a lack of local options. It is important to note that place-based discussion is of course dependent on the geography of the young people who attended the groups where the focus groups took place.

Where young people lived shaped what they were able to do. Some described their area as isolated or poorly connected, while others highlighted unreliable bus services and limited evening transport. Concerns about travelling at night also influenced movement and routines. As a result, everyday life was often structured around what was realistically accessible rather than what young people might prefer to do.

The parental focus group reinforced the structured and localised nature of everyday life, but framed it through the lens of responsibility and coordination. Parents described significant mental load associated with school engagement, appointments, support services, and transport, highlighting how children's daily routines are embedded within broader family pressures.

Overall, the data suggests that young people's daily lives are relatively localised, shaped by transport availability, cost, and safety, and characterised by a mix of informal socialising and structured provision where it is accessed.

What Is Good About Growing Up in Renfrewshire

When asked about what is positive about growing up in Renfrewshire, young people identified a range of community and environmental assets. These included parks and green spaces, access to swimming facilities and leisure centres, and a variety of food outlets and cafés. Several groups highlighted the importance of being able to spend time in these spaces with friends and family.

Local events were also valued. Young people referred positively to activities such as Halloween in Paisley Town and the town shows at Christmas. These events were seen as adding excitement to local areas and creating opportunities for social connection and shared experience. Family, friends, and schools were important sources of positive experience. Some young people spoke about liking their friends at school, having family nearby, and valuing close relationships with peers. For many, these relationships formed the foundation of their sense of belonging.

Youth services and youth workers were consistently valued. Where young people had access to supportive youth provision, they described feeling welcomed, listened to, and supported. These spaces were seen not only as places for activities, but as environments where trust and positive relationships had developed. Parents echoed many of these positives, particularly access to parks, green space, community events, and a sense of local identity.

At the same time, some groups initially struggled to identify positive features, with responses such as “nothing” or “nothing really”. This suggests that positive assets are not experienced equally by all young people, and that for some, opportunities may feel limited or distant.

What Makes Things Harder

Across groups, young people identified a set of interconnected barriers that made life more difficult.

Transport and Connectivity

Transport emerged as a major constraint. Young people referred to unreliable buses, limited routes, and difficulty travelling out of certain areas. These issues affected access to activities, social opportunities, and services. Concerns about travelling at night further restricted mobility.

Transport problems were not presented as minor inconveniences. They shaped where young people could go, how independent they could be, and whether opportunities were realistically accessible.

Parents reinforced concerns about transport reliability but also emphasised cost as a significant barrier. They described travelling into Paisley for activities due to limited local provision and highlighted that transport affordability directly shaped what children could access.

Safety in Public Space

Safety concerns were expressed in multiple ways. Some young people referred to gang activity, knife crime, bullying, and peer conflict. Others described avoiding town centres, buses at night, or certain areas because they felt unsafe.

There was evidence that young people actively adapted their behaviour in response to perceived risk, for example by staying in well-lit areas and limiting movement at night. Requests for better lighting, visible reassurance at weekends, and improved supervision reflect a desire for greater reassurance in public spaces.

Parents also raised safety concerns, though often framed in more structural and environmental terms. These included neighbour issues, substance misuse, antisocial behaviour, environmental neglect, and concerns about the placement of high-risk individuals near schools and parks. This suggests that while young people experience safety through peer interaction and public space navigation, parents additionally interpret safety through housing management, policing, and environmental standards.

Cost

Financial barriers appeared repeatedly across groups and operated at several levels. Young people referred to the general cost of activities, transport, and leisure, with some describing everything as expensive and highlighting the difficulty of going places without money.

Requests for more free or low-cost options were common, particularly from younger participants. Limited finances restricted the ability to travel, take part in activities, and socialise outside the home. In some cases, financial constraints interacted with parental boundaries, with young people describing being unable to go out alone or participate in activities even when they were interested.

These pressures meant that opportunities available in principle were not always accessible in practice. As a result, some young people's lives were shaped less by choice and more by affordability.

Education

School featured in the data both as a routine part of life and as a source of pressure. Some young people described school as challenging and linked this to reduced motivation and reluctance to attend. Others referred to academic expectations being too demanding.

Several groups also reported feeling less listened to in school than in youth settings. In this context, school was sometimes experienced as a place where young people's views carried less weight, which may compound feelings of pressure and disengagement.

While many young people spoke positively about aspects of school life, the data indicates that for some, education is closely linked to stress and limited opportunities to influence decisions that affect them.

Limited Opportunities

A recurring theme was the lack of things for young people to do. Participants spoke about having nowhere to go, nothing to do, and few spaces to spend time informally.

In some cases, this was linked to hanging about in town centres simply because there were no alternatives. This sense of limited opportunity underpinned many other concerns, including safety, boredom, and antisocial behaviour. Parents also called for more activities, particularly for those aged 12 and over and in the evenings. Some linked limited provision to boredom and antisocial behaviour, suggesting a belief that expanded youth services would have preventative benefits.

Being a Young Person in Renfrewshire

Young people's experiences of being listened to and taken seriously were mixed and highly dependent on setting and relationships.

Youth clubs and youth services stood out as places where young people felt heard, respected, and able to express themselves. In these environments, relationships with trusted adults supported open communication and meaningful participation.

In contrast, many young people reported feeling judged, dismissed, or misunderstood in other contexts. Adults in public spaces and institutional settings were sometimes described as making assumptions about young people based on how they speak, their age, or their appearance. This contributed to feelings of being stereotyped and undervalued.

Teachers were also named in some groups as not listening to young people's views, reinforcing perceptions that young people have limited influence within school environments.

There was evidence of frustration with consultation processes, particularly where young people felt that they were repeatedly asked similar questions without seeing visible change. At the same time, some young people described being listened to in formal settings and when engaging with services.

Overall, the data indicates that young people's sense of being heard is relational and context dependent. Where trust and respect exist, voice is enabled. Where judgement and low expectations dominate, voice is constrained.

What Needs to Change

When asked what would make the biggest difference, young people's responses clustered around a small number of practical priorities.

More Youth Spaces and Activities

The most consistent request was for more things to do and more places to go. This included more youth clubs, more groups, more informal spaces, and more venues where young people could meet friends safely and comfortably. Some young people also highlighted the need for indoor spaces and shelters, particularly in bad weather.

Participants linked improved provision to potential reductions in boredom, antisocial behaviour, and crime, suggesting that they saw youth spaces as protective as well as recreational.

Better and More Reliable Transport

Improved bus routes, reliability, and connectivity were repeatedly identified as priorities. Young people recognised that better transport would expand access to education, employment, leisure, and social opportunities.

Safer Public Spaces

Requests for better lighting, visible reassurance at weekends, and reduced alcohol-related disorder reflected a desire for public environments where young people feel secure and welcome.

Affordable and Free Opportunities

Young people asked for more activities that did not depend on having money. This included free clubs, low-cost events, and accessible facilities for those from lower-income households.

More Meaningful Engagement

Alongside practical changes, there were calls for adults and institutions to take young people's views seriously and to ensure that participation leads to visible outcomes.

What Young People Want Adults to Understand

In closing reflections, young people emphasised the importance of being seen as individuals rather than stereotypes.

They asked adults not to judge them on appearance, or how they speak, and to recognise that behaviour often has underlying reasons. Several participants highlighted that young people live in a different era, face different pressures, and should not be assessed using outdated assumptions.

Respect was described as mutual and earned. Young people wanted their positive contributions to be recognised, and their maturity and responsibility to be acknowledged. They emphasised that most are not out to cause trouble and that many care about their communities.

This reflects a broader desire for understanding, fairness, and relational respect across systems and everyday interactions.