

GETTING IT RIGHT TOGETHER

20 Years of GIRFEC in Falkirk

Celebrating the people, partnerships and practice making
a difference to children, young people and families



Introduction

Celebrating 20 Years of GIRFEC in Falkirk

This year marks an important milestone as we celebrate 20 years of Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC). Over the past two decades, GIRFEC has shaped how services across Falkirk work together to support children, young people and families, placing wellbeing, relationships and children's rights at the centre of everything we do.

GIRFEC is more than a policy or framework. It is the shared values, language and approach that guide our practice every day. Through collaboration, early support and a commitment to listening to children, young people and families, partners across Falkirk have worked together to improve outcomes and create lasting positive change.

This document brings together stories of impact from across our partnership. These stories reflect the dedication, creativity and compassion of colleagues, services, communities and families who have embraced the GIRFEC approach and made a meaningful difference in the lives of children and young people. They demonstrate the power of working together, building trusted relationships and responding to individual needs at the right time.

While this celebration provides an opportunity to reflect on how far we have come, it is equally an opportunity to look ahead. The stories shared within these pages remind us that the principles at the heart of GIRFEC remain as relevant today as they were twenty years ago. They continue to inspire us to work together, learn from one another and ensure that every child and young person in Falkirk has the support they need to thrive.

As you read these contributions, we hope you will recognise the collective effort behind each story and join us in celebrating the people, partnerships and practice that continue to make GIRFEC a reality across Falkirk every day.

20 Years of GIRFEC in Falkirk – What These Stories Tell Us

These stories highlight work accross early help, wellbeing, rights, education, employability and Corporate Parenting.

While each story is different, they share the same foundations: trusting relationships, early and proportionate support, shared responsibility across services, and a focus on what matters to children, young people and families.

As we reflect on around 20 years of GIRFEC, these stories show that GIRFEC is not about process or paperwork. It is about how we work, listening, slowing down when needed, working together and keeping wellbeing at the centre of decisions.

Thank you to colleagues across Falkirk who continue to live these values every day. These stories are a reminder that GIRFEC remains as relevant now as it was when it began.

GIRFEC in Action

Helping Care-Experienced Children Find Their Voice: A Partnership Between Speech and Language Therapy and Social Work



SPOTLIGHT

Supporting Children's Voices Through Partnership

This example focuses on how partnership working between Children's Speech and Language Therapy and Children's Social Work is helping care-experienced children and young people to have their voices heard, their needs understood and their views acted upon.

Every child has the right to be heard, understood and involved in decisions about their life. For many care-experienced children and young people, experiences of trauma, adversity and disrupted relationships can impact on speech, language and communication, making it more difficult for them to express their views, build relationships and participate fully in decisions that affect them.

Recognising this, NHS Forth Valley Children's Speech and Language Therapy and Falkirk Council Children's Social Work came together in 2022 to develop a new way of working. What began as a partnership within the Family Placement Team has since expanded to include children's houses and locality social work teams, bringing specialist communication support closer to children, young people, families, carers and practitioners.

Rather than waiting until difficulties escalate, speech and language therapists work alongside social workers, residential staff, foster carers and families to provide consultation, coaching, training and early intervention. The focus is on helping adults understand children's communication needs and creating environments where children feel listened to, understood and able to participate meaningfully in decisions about their lives.

The impact of this partnership can be seen in both the experiences of children and the confidence of the workforce supporting them. Over the last year, 54 early-help conversations took place, with the vast majority of concerns addressed through advice, reassurance and practical strategies without the need for a formal referral. Workforce development sessions have helped social workers, residential staff and carers develop greater confidence in recognising and responding to communication needs, while children have been given more opportunities to share their views and influence decisions.

Professionals report stronger conversations with children, improved participation in planning and a greater understanding of the links between communication, behaviour and wellbeing. Foster carers and residential staff have also developed new approaches that help children communicate more effectively and build confidence in expressing themselves.

One social worker reflected:

“We had the best conversation I’ve had with him so far... using these tools made him feel more heard.”

A residential care worker shared:

“Following the advice of the therapist, I used Talking Mats with D, who shared preferences they had not previously shared. These directly shaped their care plan.”

Through this collaborative approach, children are experiencing stronger relationships, greater participation and a better understanding from the adults around them. Most importantly, they are finding their voice and having that voice heard.

Why this matters

- Children and young people are better able to express their views and feelings.
- Communication needs are identified and responded to earlier.
- Social workers, carers and residential staff feel more confident supporting communication.
- Children’s voices have a stronger influence on planning and decision-making.

This is GIRFEC because...

support is relationship-based, coordinated and centred around what matters to each child. By working together and recognising the importance of communication, professionals are helping children and young people to be heard, included and actively involved in decisions about their lives.

GIRFEC in Action

Building Futures with Young People



SPOTLIGHT

The Family Firm

This example focuses on GIRFEC in practice with care experienced young people.

The Family Firm, established in Falkirk in June 2025, shows how GIRFEC principles can be brought to life for care experienced young people who face significant barriers to education, training and employment.

The Family Firm works with young people aged 16+ who are often disengaged from services, not in a positive destination and lacking confidence in their future. For many, traditional employability or classroom based approaches had not worked, and some had not engaged in purposeful activity for years.

Through intensive one-to-one, trauma responsive support, the Family Firm meets young people where they are at. A key focus is building trusting relationships, helping young people grow their confidence, widen their “window of tolerance”, and explore work opportunities at a pace that feels safe and achievable.

Working closely with Corporate Parents across Falkirk Council, the Family Firm links young people into work tasters, placements and employment opportunities in settings such as care homes, schools and council services. This gives young people meaningful experience, a sense of purpose and a growing belief that they belong in the workforce.

The impact has been significant: young people have moved into employment, developed practical skills, and begun to see themselves as capable, valued adults with a future.

Why this matters

- Young people receive tailored support when mainstream routes haven't worked
- Relationships and trust are prioritised over quick outcomes
- Corporate Parenting is made real through practical opportunities

This is GIRFEC because...

support is relationship based, individualised and coordinated, offering the right help, at the right time, in a way that adapts to each young person's needs and aspirations

GIRFEC in Action

Listening, Slowing Down and Getting it Right



SPOTLIGHT

A young person's journey through secondary school

This example highlights how GIRFEC principles guide decisions when a child's wellbeing is under pressure.

When Amelie* started secondary school in Falkirk, the transition coincided with a period of significant emotional distress linked to early trauma, family change and heightened anxiety. Although academically able and eager to learn, the school environment quickly became overwhelming.

From the first days of S1, Amelie's presentation showed she was struggling to cope with the demands of school life. Despite initial supports and bespoke plans, her wellbeing deteriorated both in school and at home. Attendance reduced and behaviour became increasingly challenging, signalling that the approach needed to change.

Using GIRFEC principles, professionals, family and Amelie herself worked together to prioritise wellbeing before expectations. The decision to pause school attendance was taken jointly, recognising this as a protective step rather than a failure. A key relationship with a trusted school staff member was maintained through regular home visits, keeping connection, aspiration and trust alive.

Through coordinated planning, Social Work, CAMHS, Aberlour, school staff and family shared information and aligned around a single goal: helping Amelie feel safe, heard and supported. Importantly, all steps towards reengagement were led by Amelie, at her pace.

Today, Amelie attends school most days on a flexible, bespoke timetable, engages positively with learning, and speaks confidently about her future. She is making good academic progress and has clear career aspirations.

Why this matters

- Wellbeing was prioritised over compliance and attendance targets
- The young person's voice guided decisions and timing
- Services worked together with shared responsibility and trust

This is GIRFEC because...

support was childled, proportionate and coordinated, with decisions shaped around wellbeing, safety and longterm outcomes rather than shortterm pressures.

*Name changed for privacy.

GIRFEC and Children's Rights in Practice



SPOTLIGHT

Windsor Park School - Rights Respecting Practice

This example explores the strong alignment between GIRFEC and children's rights.

Windsor Park School's journey to achieving Gold Rights Respecting School status shows how GIRFEC values and children's rights can be embedded meaningfully into everyday practice.

Windsor Park supports deaf children and young people through a Total Communication approach and has long prioritised wellbeing and inclusion. Through its Rights Respecting Schools journey, the school worked to make children's rights explicit, understood and lived – not just by staff, but by learners themselves.

Learner-led steering groups, rights-based language woven into lessons, family engagement through accessible resources, and close partnership with the deaf community all played a key role. Importantly, the work focused on building learners' confidence to understand, articulate and advocate for their rights.

In May 2024, Windsor Park became the first school for deaf children and young people in Scotland to achieve Gold status. Learners now confidently use rights-based language, participate in decisionmaking and demonstrate strong identity, pride and agency.

Why this matters

- Children are respected, included and actively involved in decisions
- Rightsbased language supports confidence and selfadvocacy
- Families are meaningful partners, not observers

This is GIRFEC because...

children's wellbeing, voice and rights are central, and support is shaped around what helps them thrive

GIRFEC in Action
WholeFamily
Support and
Early Help



SPOTLIGHT

Intensive Family Support – Housing & Children's Services

This example focuses on early, joined up support for families

Over the past year, Falkirk Council's Intensive Family Support Worker (IFSW) service has shown how early, joined up support can make a real difference for children and families at risk of homelessness.

Historically, too many children in Falkirk were living in temporary accommodation, often arriving there during family crises that had a direct impact on their wellbeing. The IFSW role was created to intervene earlier, working alongside families before situations escalated and housing stability was lost.

By working across Housing and Children & Families Social Work, the service provides holistic, wholefamily support. This includes practical help with routines, budgeting, parenting and tenancy sustainment, alongside emotional support, advocacy and coordination with education, health and community partners.

Over the last 12 months, the number of children living in temporary accommodation reduced dramatically – from 197 in March 2025 to 100 by December. This reduction represents fewer children experiencing instability and trauma linked to homelessness.

Why this matters

- Children experience greater stability and improved wellbeing
- Families receive support earlier, not just at crisis point
- Services share responsibility rather than working in isolation

This is GIRFEC because...

support is timely, coordinated, wholefamily, and focused on improving wellbeing before harm occurs

GIRFEC in Action

Relationships and Belonging in School Communities



SPOTLIGHT

Easter Carmuir's Primary School

This example focuses on how everyday practice and relationships create a sense of belonging for children and families.

Since August 2022, Easter Carmuir's Primary School has made a simple but courageous change: encouraging staff and pupils to use first names rather than formal titles. This wasn't about being informal or lowering standards – it was about removing barriers and strengthening relationships.

The change grew from an understanding that traditional school hierarchies can feel intimidating for some children and families, particularly those who have had difficult experiences with education or authority. At Easter Carmuir's, this did not align with the school's core values of Respect, Inclusion, Sincerity and Empathy.

By moving to first-name use, the school aimed to make everyone feel more equal, approachable and included. The approach was modelled by senior leaders, introduced gradually, and embraced as a whole-community change rather than a rule. Families, pupils and staff were kept informed and involved from the outset.

The impact has been significant. The school is now widely recognised for its warm, welcoming ethos. Most staff now use their first names, families report feeling less anxious about approaching the school, and children demonstrate confidence in speaking to a wide range of adults. Relationships are stronger, communication is more open, and support is accessed earlier – before issues escalate.

Why this matters

- Barriers between staff, pupils and families are reduced
- Children feel respected, included and confident to speak up
- Families are more likely to seek support early

This is GIRFEC because...

it prioritises wellbeing, relationships and inclusion, creating an environment where children and families feel safe, respected and equal partners in their education.

GIRFEC in Action

**Safe Spaces at
the Right Time**



SPOTLIGHT

Breathing Space

This example highlights the importance of timely, compassionate support during periods of crisis

Breathing Space, opened in January 2025 in Grangemouth Town Centre, provides a shortterm, traumainformed place of safety for children and young people experiencing crisis. Funded through Scottish Government Whole Family Wellbeing funding, the service was created in response to a clear gap in local crisis provision.

Frontline staff were increasingly concerned that young people in acute distress were being held in inappropriate settings, such as police stations, social work offices or school buildings after hours, simply because there was nowhere else safe to go. These experiences often increased distress and risk, and sometimes led to unnecessary escalation into statutory processes.

Breathing Space offers a calm, therapeutic environment where young people can eat, rest, play and regulate while professionals work together to agree safe next steps. The service is accessed by Police Scotland and Falkirk Council Children's Services and operates as a testofchange initiative grounded in rights based, relational practice.

Crucially, Breathing Space was codesigned with young people, through the Inside Out Group and the Falkirk CHAMPS Champions Board, ensuring the space reflects their views on dignity, safety and participation.

Why this matters

- Young people avoid police custody and unsuitable waiting environments
- Distress is reduced and wellbeing stabilised during crisis
- Professionals are able to coordinate safe, proportionate plans
- Escalation into formal systems is prevented wherever possible

This is GIRFEC because...

it provides the right support at the right time, prioritising safety, dignity and wellbeing, and enabling coordinated planning around the child or young person when they are most vulnerable

GIRFEC in Action

Helping Children Find Their Voice



SPOTLIGHT

Transforming Children's Speech and Language Therapy in Falkirk

This example highlights how partnership working and early intervention have transformed access to speech and language support for children, young people and families across Falkirk.

Over the last six years, NHS Forth Valley Children's Speech and Language Therapy and Falkirk Council have worked together to move support closer to where children learn, play and grow. Rather than relying solely on clinic-based services and formal referrals, speech and language therapists are now embedded within nurseries and schools, working alongside families and educators to identify needs early and provide timely support.

The approach was developed in response to feedback from children, families and practitioners who wanted support that was easier to access, more responsive and delivered within children's everyday environments. By focusing on prevention, early intervention and workforce development, the partnership has helped ensure that communication support becomes everyone's responsibility.

Through coaching, training and collaborative working, practitioners are better equipped to recognise and respond to speech, language and communication needs. Families have greater access to advice and guidance, while children are able to receive support earlier, reducing barriers to learning, participation and wellbeing.

The impact can be seen in the experiences of children such as Ayaan, whose language and social communication developed significantly through support provided jointly by his family, nursery staff and their link speech and language therapist. It can also be seen in Penny's journey, where coordinated support from school staff, speech and language therapy and her family helped rebuild her confidence and participation in school life.

Beyond individual outcomes, schools across Falkirk have developed more communication-friendly environments, strengthened inclusive practice and increased staff confidence in supporting children's wellbeing and communication needs.

Why this matters

- Children receive support earlier and within familiar environments.
- Families have easier access to advice and practical strategies.
- Staff are more confident in supporting communication and wellbeing.
- Barriers to learning and participation are reduced.

This is GIRFEC because...

Support is provided at the right time, in the right place and by the people who know children best. Through partnership working, early intervention and a shared focus on wellbeing, children are helped to participate, achieve and thrive.



FALKIRK COUNCIL

