



Children's Law Centre
Rights House
127-131 Ormeau Road
Belfast
BT7 1SH

(028) 9024 5704
info@childrenslawcentre.org

Children's Law Centre **Strategic Plan** 2022 - 2025

Children's Rights Change Children's Lives

www.childrenslawcentre.org.uk

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Chairperson's Foreword



Sustainable growth in the centre, its services and resources are critical to meeting the growing challenges

As Chairperson of the Children's Law Centre and a board member of a number of years, I am acutely aware of the important work carried out by the centre and the impact it has had on children's lives. That's why I am pleased to be presenting this 2022-25 strategic plan, which will set the centre up for long-term, sustainable success.

This plan has been developed through one of the most participatory processes in the centre's history. It has included two workshops with staff and the board, two workshops with

youth@CLC and sustained work to shape and develop the content through further focused sessions and opportunities to consult. It is a reflection of the ambition, specialism and dedication we know we can rely on from Children's Law Centre staff, board and youth panel members.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone for their contribution. I would also like to pay particular thanks to Brenda Kelly Consulting and the Paul Hamlyn Foundation for their support throughout the process.

This strategic plan comes at a particularly important time for the centre. Having been established in 1997, the Children's Law Centre is now in its 25th year. Having developed into the leading children's rights charity in this jurisdiction over that time, it remains more needed than ever before. Major aspects of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child remain unadopted into domestic law, and major issues like the minimum age of criminal responsibility and the defence of reasonable chastisement have been criticised in successive concluding

observations by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child.

In recent years, severe gaps in children's rights have turned into a chasm with delays caused by repeated NI Executive collapses, the impact of Brexit and the response to Covid. Meanwhile, the future of human rights protections has not looked as bleak since the initial introduction, with a sustained attack on domestic and international human rights laws like the Human Rights Act and the 1951 Refugee Convention.

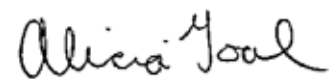
That's why this piece of work is so important. Sustainable growth in the centre, its services and resources are critical to meeting the growing challenges. The Children's Law Centre

is often the last line of defence for children in this jurisdiction and, as the scale and complexity of the work increases, there is a need to grow and meet those challenges.

Under the direction of Paddy Kelly, the centre has made a huge impact since it was established 25 years ago. This plan will continue to build on successful work to date, while also setting the centre up for the next 25 years. It sets out a number of measurable outcomes to ensure that happens. Most critically, it will ensure the centre increases access to opportunities to support all young people to claim their rights.

So, while the challenges facing children and young people have grown rapidly,

the Children's Law Centre has demonstrated its ability to step up and protect children by defending, vindicating and advancing their rights. I have no doubt the challenges over the next three years will remain, but I am confident this strategy will put the centre in the best possible position to protect children and young people now and into the future.



Alicia Toal
Chairperson



Who We Are



At CLC we have always believed that children's rights change children's lives

Founded upon the principles laid down in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), we were established in 1997 to provide legal advice for children and young people. For over 25 years, we have worked to protect the rights of all children living in Northern Ireland, particularly those who are the most disadvantaged, including children with disabilities, special educational needs, mental ill health and homelessness issues.

We have developed into the leading children's rights char-

ity in this jurisdiction, helping thousands of children vindicate their rights each year, and ensuring they have access to services and equality of treatment.

The centre provides a range of services for children.

- We use the law to access critical services for children and young people and to challenge the discrimination and disadvantage suffered by many of our most vulnerable children.

- We provide a free legal advice service and legal

representation for children and young people, through our CHALKY freephone advice line and digital advice and information offerings REE Rights Responder and REE Live Chat.

- We work to create a society where all children can access all necessary



services and opportunities they need to enjoy their childhood and realise their full potential.

- We are committed to giving a voice to children, including those who are the most disadvantaged and voiceless.
- Our work is guided by our youth advisory panel, Youth@CLC.

In recent years, and particularly during Covid restrictions, we have overseen a rapid growth in the centre, rising to meet the increasing pressures on children and young people and demand for rights protections. We continue to grow as a leading children's rights charity and our work continues on a broad range of children's rights issues.

Our belief that children's rights

change children's lives has only been strengthened by our work since 1997.



Legal Representation



Advice and Information



Equal Opportunity



A Voice for Children



Youth Participation

Key Achievements from our 2018-21 Strategy

The period of 2018-2021 was a pivotal time for CLC, with a rapid increase in the volume, complexity and types of work completed by the centre.

The sudden impact of Covid forced the centre and its staff to quickly adapt to a new climate and ways of working. Thankfully, work had already

been undertaken to transform the centre's methods and scope of work to achieve continued success.

We Delivered >>



Strategic Litigation: A rapid increase in the number of pre-action correspondence and judicial reviews, with a focus on respite provision, delayed discharge, access to education and asylum.



Covid Response: Advice and representation services remained open throughout lockdown, with the centre responding to pressures on children and young people. Remote working was delivered at speed, helped because CLC had already embarked on a process of digitalisation.



New Services: Including a new immigration unit dealing with EUSS applications, unaccompanied asylum seeking children and citizenship cases. REE Rights

Responder and REE Live Chat was also launched, providing an innovative new digital advice service for 13-17 year olds.



Digitalisation: Embraced the digitalisation of services, including moving to cloud based systems and a new advice database. This helped the centre strengthen GDPR compliance, improve reporting abilities, identify trends and respond rapidly to need.



Communications: Developed resources to ensure key issues affecting children were communicated to a range of stakeholders, including decision makers, duty bearers, the public and children themselves. Increased awareness of CLC's work and impact.



A Child Law Hub: Developed and launched a new website, which included access to child friendly information on rights, resources for parents, guardians, carers and professionals, and a repository for policy papers and annual lectures



Youth Participation: Adapted to remote engagement throughout Covid to build capacity on rights awareness and consult on key issues. Shaped the direction of digital advice services, securing runner up in the Pearson World Changer Awards.



Organisational Development: Recruited new trustees to our board to ensure continued good governance, support in the de-

velopment of a new strategic plan and to enable organisational growth.



Team Growth: CLC introduced six new roles, including two new immigration solicitors, an additional advice worker, a participation and advocacy worker, a communications and marketing manager and a policy and public affairs manager.



Sustainable Success: Secured major funding for the continuation and growth of services. Included funding to improve digitalisation, encourage organisational development and continue the delivery of core advice and representation services.

We Influenced >>



The UNCRC: Led the sector in submitting the NGO stakeholder report to inform the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child 'List of Issues Prior to Reporting'. Successfully highlighted key systemic issues affecting children in this jurisdiction.



Public Awareness: Expanded our leading role in the public debate around children's rights. This included raising issues identified early through advice, representation and policy work, offering evidence-based solutions with recognised expertise.



Covid Decision Making: Developed essential relations with decision makers and duty bearers, becoming the leading specialist voice on protecting children from Covid related measures, including lockdowns, reduced access to services and access to justice.



The NI Assembly: Attended a number of the new NI Assembly committees to give evidence on children's rights issues, including the impact of Covid policies on children, SEN services and a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland.



Policy: Submitted expert led and evidence-based policy responses to ensure children's rights and equality commitments were considered and adhered to throughout government policy development.



Youth Justice: Alongside leading academics in youth justice, Nicola Carr and Siobhán McAlister, and organisations Include Youth, VOYPIC and NIACRO, CLC

launched 'Tracing the Review', a comprehensive document mapping the lack of progress on youth justice issues.



We Had Impact >>



Vulnerable Child Action Plan: Successfully raised awareness of the impact of Covid restrictions on vulnerable children, including SEN children, and ensured the Departments of Health and Education developed a 'vulnerable child action plan' to protect children.



Safeguarded Children: The CLC policy team successfully opposed the weakening of child safeguarding duties that were introduced through temporary Covid regulations. This work ensured the return of vital safeguarding protections for vulnerable children.



A Voice for Children on Brexit: Worked alongside children and young people to ensure their voices were heard in relation to the Brexit debate and to ensure matters affecting children were

considered. This included the launch of accessible materials and Brexit discussions.



Tackled Mental Health: Youth@CLC worked in partnership with the NI Youth Forum and the Belfast Youth Forum on the Youth Mental Health Committee to launch the 'Elephant in the Room' report, focusing on children's views in relation to mental health.



Provided EUSS and Asylum Support: The new immigration unit worked to identify and assist children in care to ensure their EUSS applications were successfully completed on time. The work, alongside the health and social care trusts set the standard for successful completions.

**Challenged Respite Failures:**

CLC commenced JR proceedings against a decision to re-purpose a respite care facility during Covid. The case was decided in our client's favour in 2021 and work remains ongoing to secure long-term systemic improvements.

**Protected School Children:**

Leading a campaign alongside a number of other organisations, CLC successfully argued that exam plans for 10 and 11 year old children would adversely impact SEN and mainstream children who missed school during Covid restrictions.

“If it wasn’t for the Children’s Law Centre, I wouldn’t be here.”

Tina | Mum of 17 year old CLC client

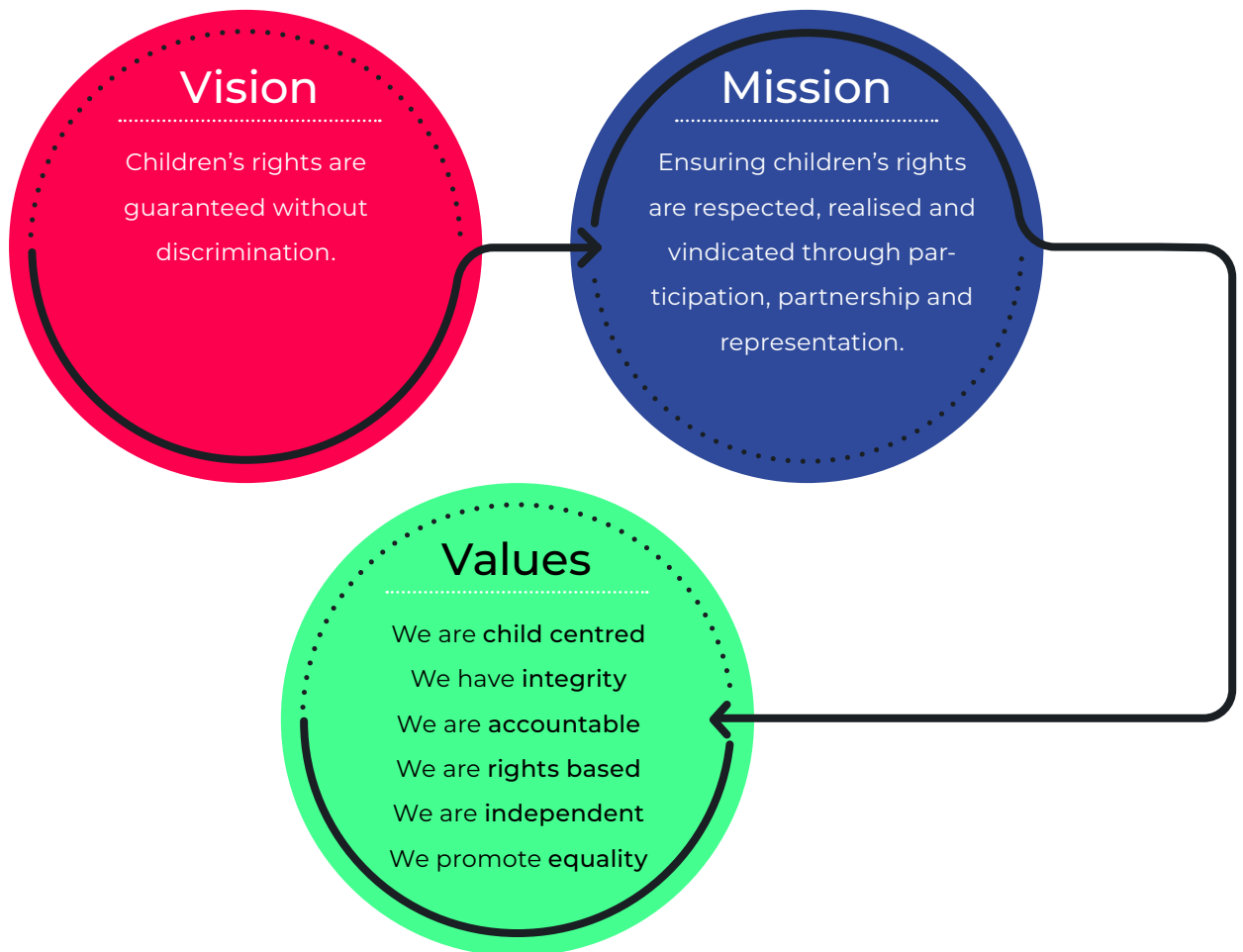
“This organisation is amazing and I know for sure my grand daughter would not have got the support she needed without them.”

Grandmother of CLC client

With Ian’s whole education at risk, I began legal proceedings. After that, Ian was given the extra support he needs and is now happy and settled at school.”

Magda | Mum of CLC client

Vision, Mission, Values



**Child
Centred**



Integrity



Accountable



**Rights
Based**



Independent



Equality



Which means we will:

Ensure the best interests of the child is paramount and their voices are listened to.

Enable and encourage children to participate in decisions that impact on their lives.

Be transparent about our organisation and work.

Be welcoming and be open to challenge and scrutiny.

Be persistent in working for children's rights.

Be accountable to stakeholders e.g., children etc.

Follow through on our commitments.

Take Action.

Make evidence-based decisions.

Root all of our work in the Human Rights Act, UNCRC and other international standards.

Be Brave and stand for what is in the best interests of children's rights.

Hold duty bearers and law makers to account.

Positively challenge decision makers to deliver on their duty to prioritise and uphold children's rights.

Ensure our services and communications are accessible.

Ensure our work is inclusive and represents the diversity of the young people we serve.

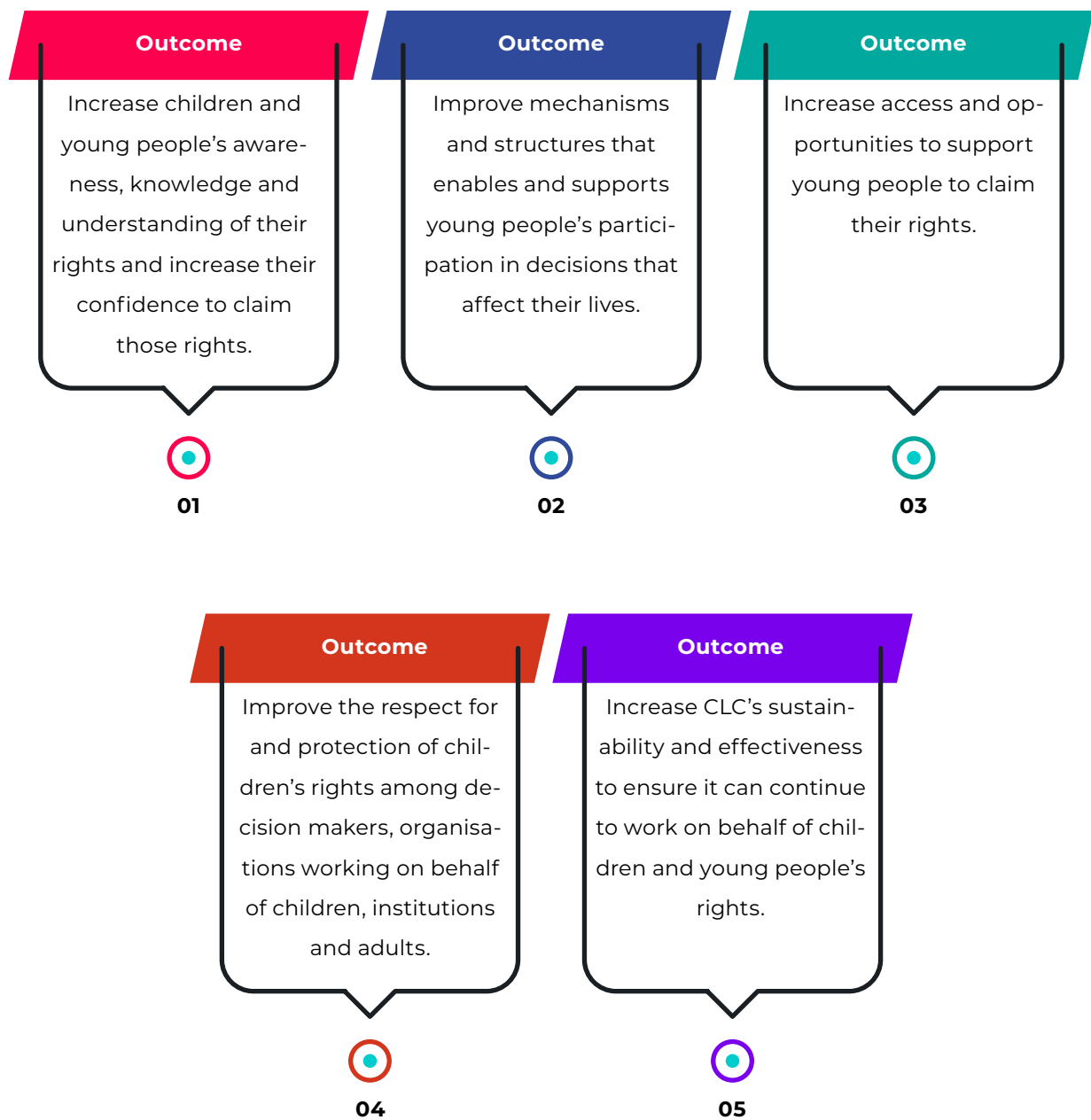
Respect every individual who we work with.

Promote Diversity and ensure equality of opportunity.



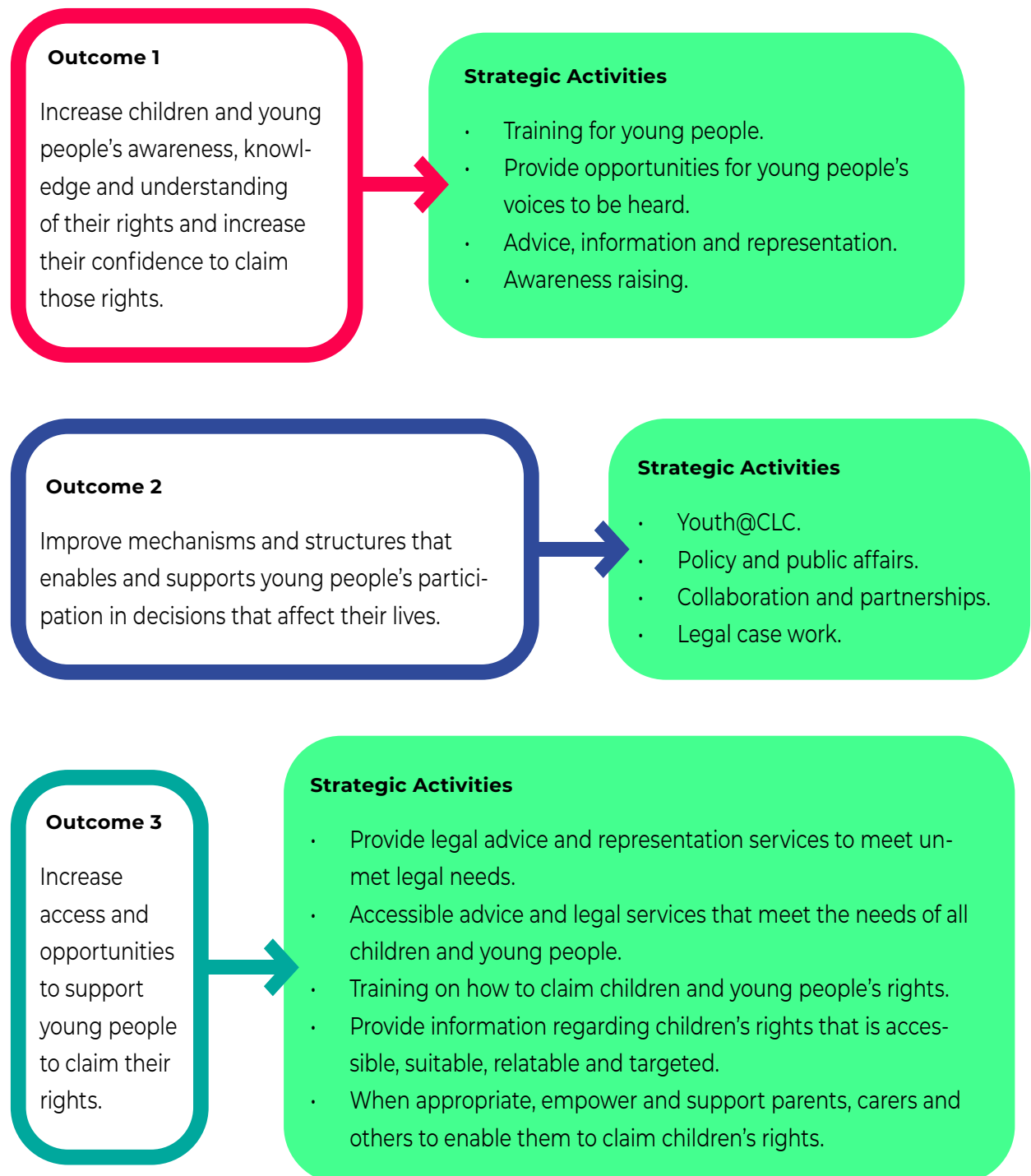
Outcomes

The difference we want to make >>



Activities

The work we will do >>



Outcome 4

Improve the respect for and protection of children's rights among decision makers, organisations working on behalf of children, institutions and adults.

Strategic Activities

- Undertake strategic legal work to strengthen and vindicate adherence to children's rights.
- Develop and undertake an effective communications and public awareness strategy.
- Work in partnership with children and young people and other partners to develop strategic campaigns.
- Undertake strategic policy and public affairs engagement.
- Training for duty bearers on their duties to respect children's rights.
- Training on how to vindicate children's rights.

Outcome 5

Increase CLC's sustainability and effectiveness to ensure it can continue to work on behalf of children and young people's rights.

Strategic Activities

- Develop and maintain the organisation's infrastructure.
- Continued development and maintenance of good governance.
- Ensuring adequate funding to undertake the work of the organisation.
- Continue to grow, develop and diversify work to meet the needs of children and young people regarding their rights.
- Improve the recording and reporting of the impact of the work of the organisation.

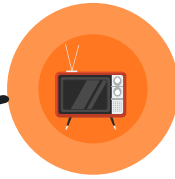
Outputs

These are outputs we currently record. However, we are moving towards developing impact focused outputs for the future.

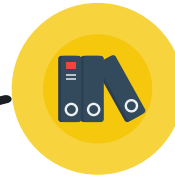
The numbers we record >>



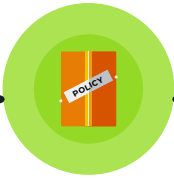
Number of advice queries responded to each year



Number of media interventions to raise awareness



Number of information and training sessions delivered on children's rights each year



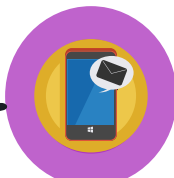
Number of policy responses per year



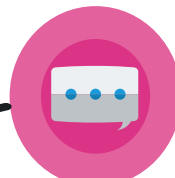
Number of direct engagements with decision makers



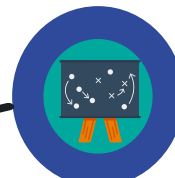
Number of strategic legal cases



Number of REE users



Number of 'Live chats' through REE



Number of strategic partnership campaigns

Theory of Change

1. Resources

- Funding
- Staff with Expertise
- IT Systems
- Good Governance
- Organisational Infrastructure
- Professional Accreditation
- Data / Information
- Clients
- Networks
- Case Stories
- Legal Counsel
- Youth@CLC



2. Activities

Outcome 1

- Training for young people.
- Provide opportunities for young people's voices to be heard.
- Advice, information and representation.
- Awareness raising.

Outcome 2

- Youth@CLC.
- Policy and public affairs.
- Collaboration and partnerships.
- Legal case work.

Outcome 3

- Provide legal advice and representation services to meet unmet legal needs.
- Accessible advice and legal services that meet the needs of all children and young people.
- Training on how to claim children and young people's rights.
- Provide information regarding children's rights

that is accessible, suitable, reliable and targeted.

Outcome 4

- Undertake strategic legal work to strengthen and vindicate adherence to children's rights.
- Develop and undertake an effective communications and public awareness strategy.
- Work in partnership with

children and young people and other partners to develop strategic campaigns.

- Undertake strategic policy and public affairs engagement.
- Training for duty bearers on their duties to respect children's rights.
- Training on how to vindicate children's rights.

Outcome 5

- Develop and maintain the organisation's

infrastructure. Continued development and maintenance of good governance. Ensuring adequate funding to undertake the work of the organisation. Continue to grow, develop and diversify work to meet the needs of children and young people regarding their rights.



5. Impact

Children's rights are guaranteed without discrimination



4. Outcomes

Outcome 1

Increase children and young people's awareness, knowledge and understanding of their rights and increase their confidence to claim those rights.

Outcome 2

Improve mechanisms and structures that enables and supports young people's participation in decisions that affect their lives.

Outcome 3

Increase access and opportunities to support young people to claim their rights.

Outcome 4

Improve the respect for

and protection of children's rights among decision makers, organisations working on behalf of children, institutions and adults.

Outcome 5

Increase CLC's sustainability and effectiveness to ensure it can continue to work on behalf of children and young people's rights.



3. Outputs

- Number of advice queries responded to each year.
- Number of media interventions to raise awareness.
- Number of information and training sessions delivered on children's rights each year.
- Number of policy responses per year.
- Number of direct engagements with decision makers.

- Number of strategic legal cases.
- Number of REE users.
- Number of 'Live Chats' on REE.
- Number of strategic partnership campaigns.



External Stakeholders Map



Children and young people

Engage | Listen | Empower



Those who care for children and young people

Inform | Engage



Those who engage with and support children and young people

Promote | Support



Those who make decisions about children and young people

Challenge | Inform | Influence



Those who hold duty bearers to account

Inform | Advise | Influence

External Stakeholders Map Glossary

Stakeholder mapping is the visual process of laying out all CLC's external stakeholders on one map. The main benefit of a stakeholder map is to get a visual representation of all the different types of groups of stakeholders which the organisation engages through its daily work. The aim of the map is to support effective planning and coordination of communications to and engagement with various groups within CLC's sphere.

Engage | Listen | Empower

Children and young people.

Different groups of young people eg. in care, disability, newcomers, asylum seekers.

Inform | Engage

Those who care for children and young people.

Parents, carers, guardians and corporate parents.

Promote | Support

Those who engage with and support children and young people.

Teachers and schools, social workers, youth agencies, lawyers, voluntary and community organisations (NAS, Autism NI, Angel Eyes, SENAC, VOYPIC), social enterprises, CAHMS and psychologists / psychiatrists.

Challenge | Inform | Influence

Those who make decisions about children and young people.

Politicians (NI Assembly and Westminster), civil servants (government departments), judges, policy makers, PSNI, criminal justice organisations and funders.

Inform | Advise | Influence

Those who hold decision makers to account.

Non departmental public bodies (eg. ECNI, NIHRC, NICCY, PSONI), journalists, academics, treaty bodies (eg. UNCRC) and arms length bodies.

Arms length bodies (including non departmental public bodies) - a body which has a role in the processes of national government, but is not a government department or part of one, and which accordingly operates to a greater or lesser extent at arms' length from ministers.

Treaty bodies - The human rights treaty bodies are committees of independent experts that monitor implementation of core international human rights treaties. Each state party to a treaty has an obligation to take steps to ensure that everyone in the state can enjoy the rights set out in a treaty.

Statutory bodies - Statutory bodies are organisations or institutions that have been set up by an act of parliament. This means that their existence and powers are regulated by law. They often have public function, such as regulating certain industries or protecting the environment.

ECNI - Equality Commission for Northern Ireland

NIHRC - Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission

NICCY - Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People

NIPSO - Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman

SENAC - Special Education Needs Advice Centre

VOYPIC - Voice of Young People in Care

CAMHS - Child and Adolescent Mental Health

PSNI - Police Service Northern Ireland

UNCRC - United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

EU - European Union

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Children's Law Centre

Rights House
2nd floor
127 - 131 Ormeau Road
Belfast, BT7 1SH

Tel: 028 9024 5704
Fax: 028 9024 5679

Charity Registration No. NIC101148
Company Registration No. NI033998 (Northern Ireland)

childrenslawcentre.org