

Young Wales trip to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, February 2023



Children in Wales is the national umbrella body for organisations and individuals who work with children, young people and their families in Wales. Young Wales is a Children in Wales initiative that amplifies and supports the voices of children and young people across Wales to be heard, listened to and have influence in decisions that affect their lives; underpinned by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Children and Young People's National Participation Standards.

The UNCRC and the Reporting Cycle of the Committee



The United Nations building in Geneva, Switzerland

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is an international treaty signed by nearly all UN member states that sets out the rights that all children are entitled to. There are 54 articles in the UNCRC and they cover a range of rights, such as Article 8 – the right to an identity, Article 19 – the right to be protected from violence and abuse and Article 12 – the right to express views and have them taken seriously (UNICEF, n.d). Article 12 specifically is at the heart of all our work in Young Wales and we work to ensure that young people have the opportunity to have their opinions taken seriously by connecting young people with Welsh Government in different ways.



The UK and Jersey pre-session with the UN Committee of the Rights of the Child

There is a Committee set up by the United Nations to assess and monitor the progress that different States (like the UK and Jersey) are making regarding children's rights under the obligations they signed under the UNCRC (Child Rights Connect, 2020). As part of this process, child rights defenders can go to the committee and inform them about different issues regarding children's rights through a "pre-session". The children's rights defenders also make recommendations for what the Committee should discuss with the national government that is being assessed. The children's rights defenders include people from a range of organisations that are involved with children's rights, like representatives from children's rights charities and Children's Commissioners, as well as young people themselves. These representatives take questions from the committee in reference to reports that they

have made before the meeting and presented to the Committee on their views on the state of children's rights in their country. There can also be a children's meeting where children meet with the committee by themselves to discuss their key priorities without any other adults present.

The Young Wales volunteers



Young Wales volunteers

At Young Wales, we put together a group of 6 young people who are dedicated about children's rights to go to this pre-session in Geneva. Together, they represented all children and young people in Wales, and Children in Wales and the Children's Commissioner for Wales' office as organisations. We were funded by the Welsh Government and the Equality and Human Rights Commission to take these young people on this trip.

Before they went to Geneva, they worked together for several months to co-produce a report on the state of children's rights in Wales with Young Wales staff.

This report collated information from 41 young people consultations, the Young Wales young people advisory groups and from external organisations involved in children's rights. As well as this, the young people in the group co-produced an online survey with Young Wales staff to ask young people in Wales what they thought about the state of children's rights. This survey mentioned key priority areas, which the young people had chosen based on literature reviews and discussions with professionals who work with children and young people. The report went over the results of the survey and showed what young people in Wales think about these key priority areas. If you would like to read this report, you can find it [\[here\]](#).

Once the report had been created, Young Wales sent this to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child. Based on this the young people were invited to join the pre-session to meet the Committee alongside other children's rights defenders. There, they would expand on their report and give their views on children's rights in Wales.

Visiting UN and speaking to the committee



Young Wales volunteers with Rocío Cifuentes, Children's Commissioner for Wales

There were two parts to the pre-session which the Young Wales volunteers were involved in.

First, the young people took part in a confidential session where they gave a presentation on the key points from their report and made specific recommendations. They were joined by children and young people from across the UK and Jersey, who discussed a range of priority areas. The priority areas that were discussed in the presentation from Young Wales' volunteers were mental health and wellbeing, equality diversity and inclusion, crime and transport, with the cost of living being the overarching theme, in

terms of how all of these issues link to and are made worse by this crisis. The volunteers spoke about how these issues affect them and gave recommendations for how the situation can be improved, and they were also able to take questions from the Committee. One key recommendation mentioned was to fully embed the UNCRC into Welsh law.

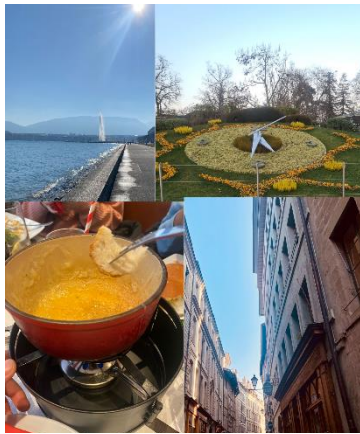


Children's rights defenders following the UK and Jersey pre-session

Following this, the young people had the opportunity to take part in the more formal pre-session meeting alongside other children's rights defenders. Some of the young people from Young Wales spoke in this session about how different children's rights issues affect them and again gave suggestions to the Committee for how this can be improved.

Based on all of the information that the Committee received, they will now meet with the governments in the UK to make recommendations to them about how they can ensure that all children in this State are accessing the rights that they are entitled to under the UNCRC.

The rest of the trip to Geneva



Top left: Jet D'Eau, a large fountain on Lake Geneva

Top right: Flower Clock

Bottom left: Raclette, a type of cheese

Bottom right: A street in Geneva old town

Before going to the UN building to attend the meetings, the young people went to the Red Cross museum, which showcases the work of the Red Cross throughout history and the difficulties that certain people and communities have across the globe in accessing their human rights.

The young people also had to have some fun and enjoy Geneva! So, following their time at the UN they spent a day sightseeing around the city. They went to the UN building and then spent time in the old town, visiting shops and looking at older buildings. They saw the flower clock and the Jet D'Eau by the lake and went on a boat trip across the water. They also tried some Swiss raclette cheese and, of course, they had to try the famous Swiss chocolate! The staff at Young Wales would like to thank the volunteers who attended this trip for their hard work and dedication throughout this process.

If you would like to join Young Wales as a volunteer, check out the volunteer recruitment page on our website - <https://www.childreninwales.org.uk/jobs/young-volunteers-recruiting-now/>. Here you can find out more information and discover how to sign up.

References

Child Rights Connect (2020) "UN Committee on the Rights of the Child" (online) Available at <https://childrightsconnect.org/un-committee-on-the-rights-of-the-child/> (Accessed 3rd April 2023)

UNICEF (n.d) "What is the UN Convention on Child Rights?" (online) Available at <https://www.unicef.org.uk/what-we-do/un-convention-child-rights/> (Accessed 3rd April 2023)