

# Listening to the Voices of Infants in Scotland

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**Parent Club**

**Wellbeing for  
wee ones**



## Programme for Government 2019-20



“create a multi-agency model of infant mental health provision to meet the needs of families experiencing significant adversity, including infant developmental difficulties, parental substance misuse, domestic abuse and trauma”

# Infant Mental Health is the developing capacity of the child from birth to:

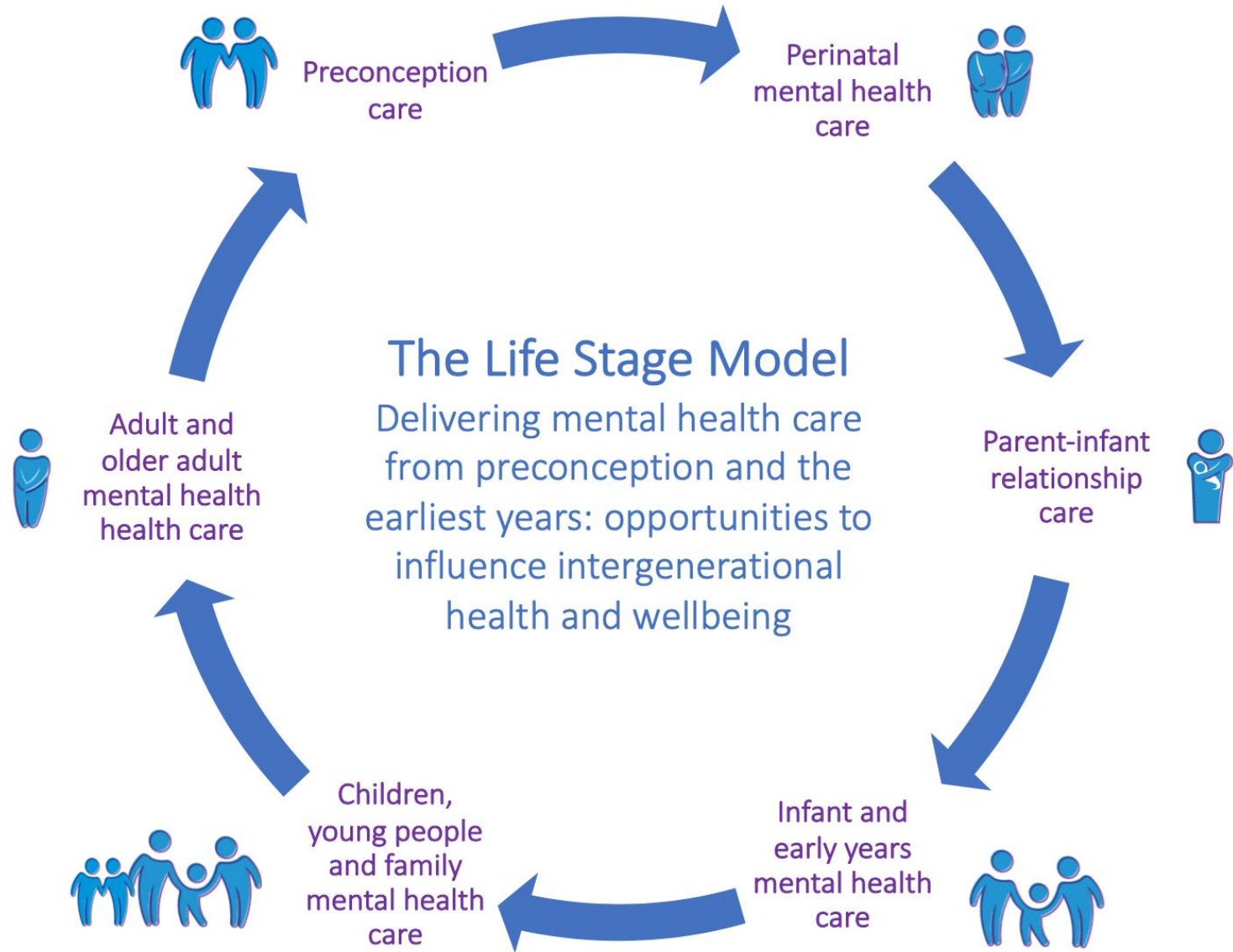
- Experience, express and **regulate** emotions
- Form close interpersonal **relationships**
- Have a positive sense of **self**
- **Explore** the environment and **learn**
- **Adapt** to their environment

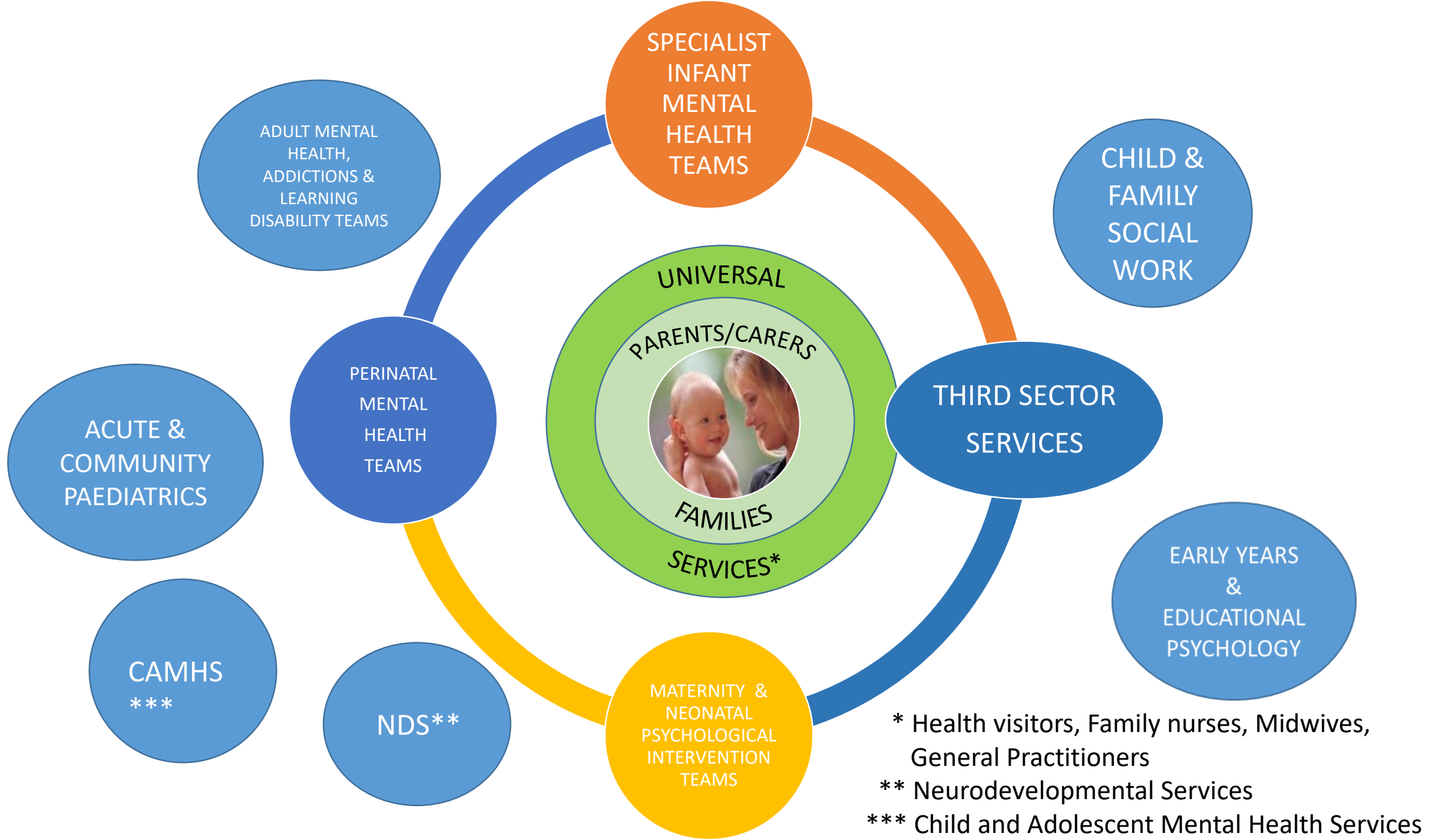
All in the context of **relationships**, family and community

**BEING AND BECOMING MENTALLY HEALTHY**

# What is the vision for IMH in Scotland?

- There is a shared understanding, and definition, of ‘infant mental health’ and the importance of parent/infant relationships across policy and practice, families and their communities
- Parents and carers are supported to build positive relationships with their babies
- Prevention of later mental health and relationship problems is paramount
- Where concerns are identified, early intervention is offered, with universal service providers being able to access specialist services via clear care pathways so that babies and their families receive the right care at the right time from universal, and if necessary, specialist services.

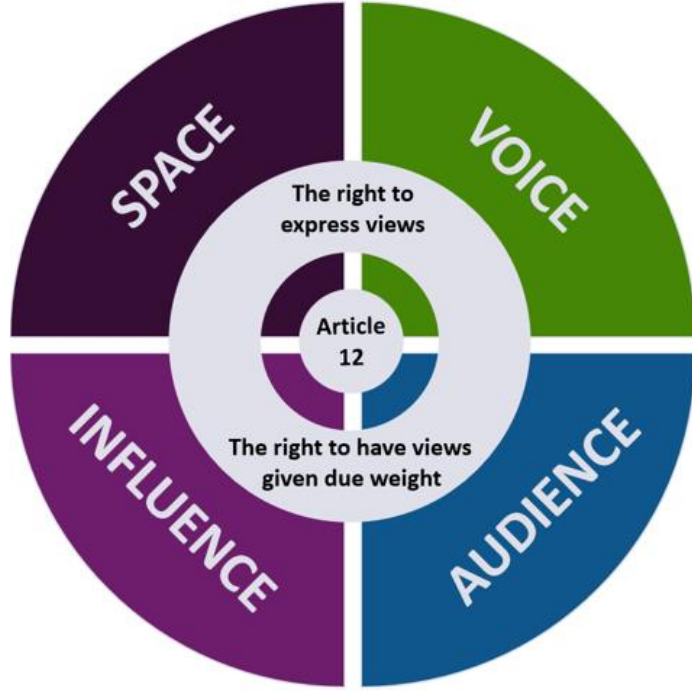




# What's Important

- EQUALITY AND EQUITY
- EVALUABILITY
- COPRODUCTION
- RAISING AWARENESS AND TACKLING STIGMA
- THE INFANT AT THE CENTRE
  - GETTING IT RIGHT FOR EVERY CHILD (GIRFEC)
  - THE PROMISE
  - UNCRC & INFANTS' RIGHTS AND VOICE
- WORKFORCE TRAINING, RECRUITMENT & RETENTION
- QUALITY IMPROVEMENT APPROACH
- RECOVERY





# The Scottish Model of Infant Participation



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## Infant Pledge



I am one of Scotland's youngest citizens. To give me the best start, so that I can thrive throughout my life, I need to be seen as a person with my own feelings and rights. I depend on adults to interpret my cues and communications so that my rights are upheld, and my voice is heard.

My relationships with the people who care for me are important and directly affect how my brain grows and develops, and how I learn to process and regulate my feelings. Safe and secure relationships and consistent care support my wellbeing now and give me better chances and outcomes in later life too.

Professionals and academics in the field of Infant Mental Health alongside organisations championing the rights and welfare of babies and very young children have come together on my behalf to create the following expectations, which they believe would help improve my life chances.

### I expect that I will:

1. Be seen as a person with my own feelings and views.
2. Be seen as able to communicate my feelings and views.
3. Be able to trust my important adults to think carefully about my feelings and views and speak them for me.
4. Be supported to have secure relationships with the adults who care for me.
5. Have safe, interesting places to play and learn, and the help I need to do so.
6. Have my views valued by my family, community, and society.
7. Have a say in decisions about what happens to me.

### My important adults will:

8. Have support to be healthy, including before I am born.
9. Have the information they need to make good choices for me.
10. Have the support they need to understand and meet my needs and their own.
11. Have help from people with the right knowledge and skills.

### It is everyone's responsibility to:

12. Consider me and my perspective at all levels of decision making.

Produced by the Voice of the Infant subgroup on behalf of the Scottish Government's Infant Mental Health Implementation and Advisory Group

# Infant Rights Statement

Babies and very young children...

- have the **same rights** as all children and young people
- face **challenges** which are unique to their age and stage
- have **agency** and presence which impacts on the world and people around them, have **interests & capacities** that need to be nurtured
- are **vulnerable** and are reliant on support, guidance, and at times protection in the realisation of their rights

**Key Rights – a gateway** to enabling them to access the breadth and depth of the rights held within the UNCRC

## Respecting the views & feelings of the child

- lived experience **participation** in service design & development
- collection of **feedback & evaluation** of infants' experiences of services

The United Nations  
Convention on the  
Rights of the Child



WAIMH Position Paper on the Rights of Infants<sup>3</sup> argues that the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child<sup>4</sup> *'does not sufficiently differentiate the needs of infants and toddlers from those of older children'*.

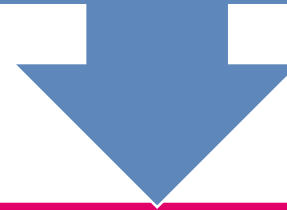


Voice of the Baby: exploring rights-based approaches for participation using the arts with babies and young children from birth – 3 years



Scotland's Arts and  
Early Years  
Organisation

Since 2006 have pioneered approaches to arts and creative experiences for and with babies and young children from birth – 5 years



We deliver our work through 4 pillars of activity:

Community engagement programmes providing consistent contact between artists and the same groups of babies, young children and their parents and carers

Theatre and dance productions and visual arts installations created specifically for this age group which tour to arts venues or community spaces

Training and development for artists and for the Early Learning and Childcare workforce

Advocacy activity particularly focusing children's rights and the arts

# STARCATCHERS ENGAGEMENT SIGNALS

These engagement signals were initially developed by researchers from the University of Exeter and the University of Edinburgh on our pilot project and expanded upon by a research team from the University of Strathclyde during our second phase of project working. They were used to inform the different ways babies and young children engage in expressive arts experiences in both our productions and workshop settings. We're sharing them here because we think they can be useful for your early years practice.

## Attuned

When a baby or child is **intensely watching** and cued in to what is going on. This includes their eyes tracking or focusing on whatever, or whoever, they're attuned to. This doesn't necessarily mean eye contact - they may watch and follow your hands, or an object you're holding.



## Absorbed

**Intense attention** for a period of time, including **ignoring any distraction**. This could be engaging an activity physically, or watching intensely (tying into **attuned**) for an extended period of time. There's no set period of time for it to be "extended", you know the children you work with and will be able to sense what has grabbed their attention for longer than usual.



## Mirroring

Watching and reciprocating through **repeating** or **copying**. This could be physically mirroring - e.g., copying or slightly adapting your movements, or it could be vocal - they might copy the sounds or noises you make. They also may not copy people - if they see a character or object spin, they might try spinning too.



## Responsive

Signs of responding positively can include positive or open **body language** - smiling, nodding, reaching. They may also indicate they are following what's going on by nodding, or **responding** with suggestions or questions. It can also include **social referencing** - which is the process whereby babies or young children look at other's facial expressions to understand how they are feeling. For example, a wee one handed a paintbrush may look at a keyworker for confirmation before playing with it.



## Interactive

Physically responding to someone else, this is similar to **responsive** but it's a **2 way exchange** with another person. They are watching the other person and engaging with their actions or movements. For example, clapping in time with someone else or taking it in turns to mark-make together.



## Instigative

**Provoking action** in others through their own physical response or vocalisation. For example, making a noise doing a song that prompts the singer to incorporate it into the song, or making a suggestion for what should happen next in a story.



## Experimental

Taking **individual action** with materials or props. This will be self-led **investigation**, where they will be **exploring** "what happens if..." for example playing with an instrument that's been brought out during singing or music.



# Voice of the Baby Research – Phase 1

## Research Aims:

To explore existing knowledge of, and practice in, rights-based approaches for children's participation in early years practice

To provide an initial scoping of early years arts practice with Scottish-based arts organisations and practitioners in relation to 'participatory arts' for children from birth to 3 years

To explore current and emerging practices across Starcatchers' staff and associated artists in relation to seeking and understanding the voice of the pre- and non-verbal child

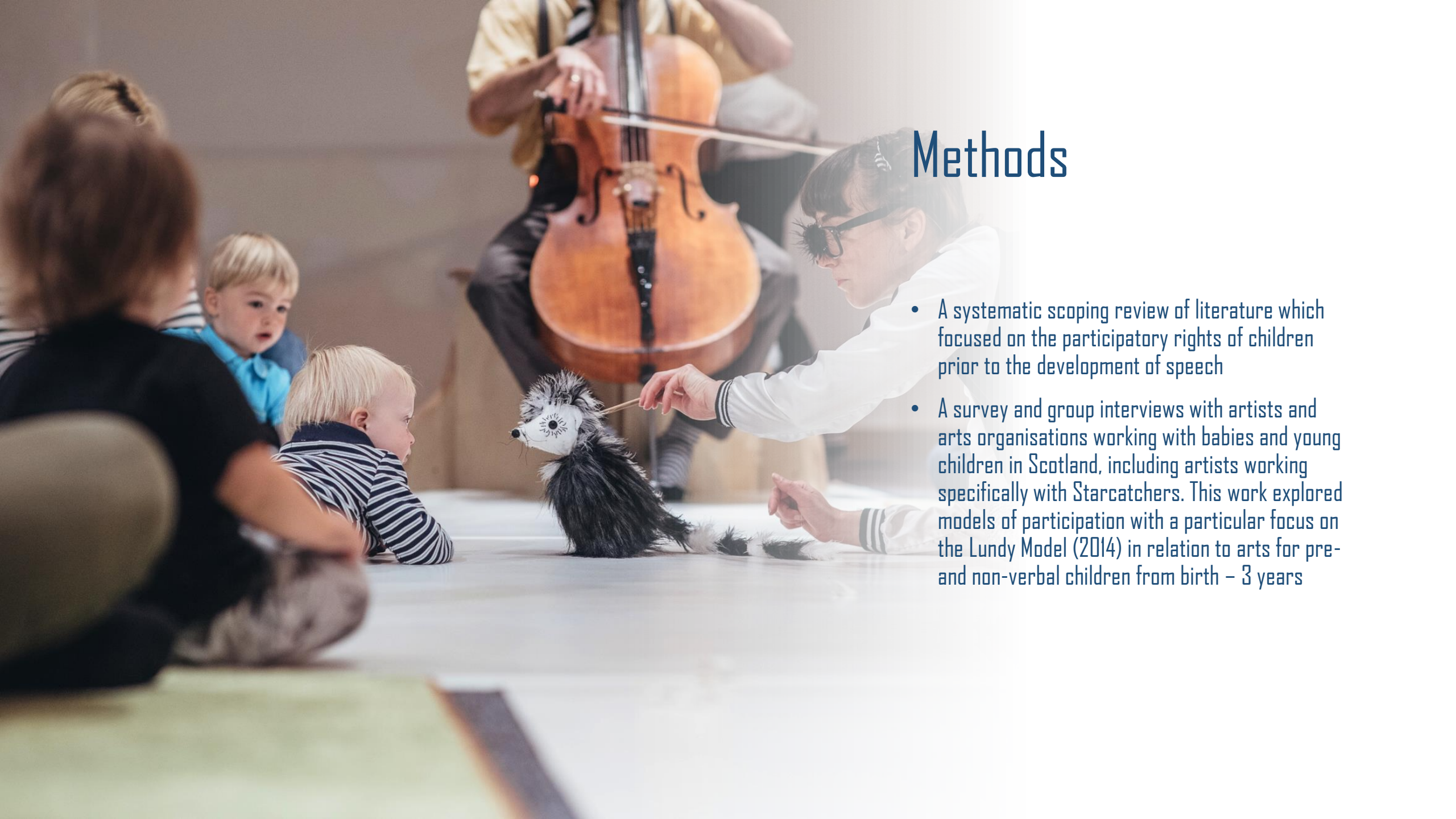
## Research Questions:

What examples exist of rights-based approaches being used with children from birth to 3 years?

What does the current landscape of rights-based arts-practice for early years look like in Scotland?

How is the voice of the pre- and non-verbal child sought through participative artistic experiences and what impact does it have on the artistic practice?





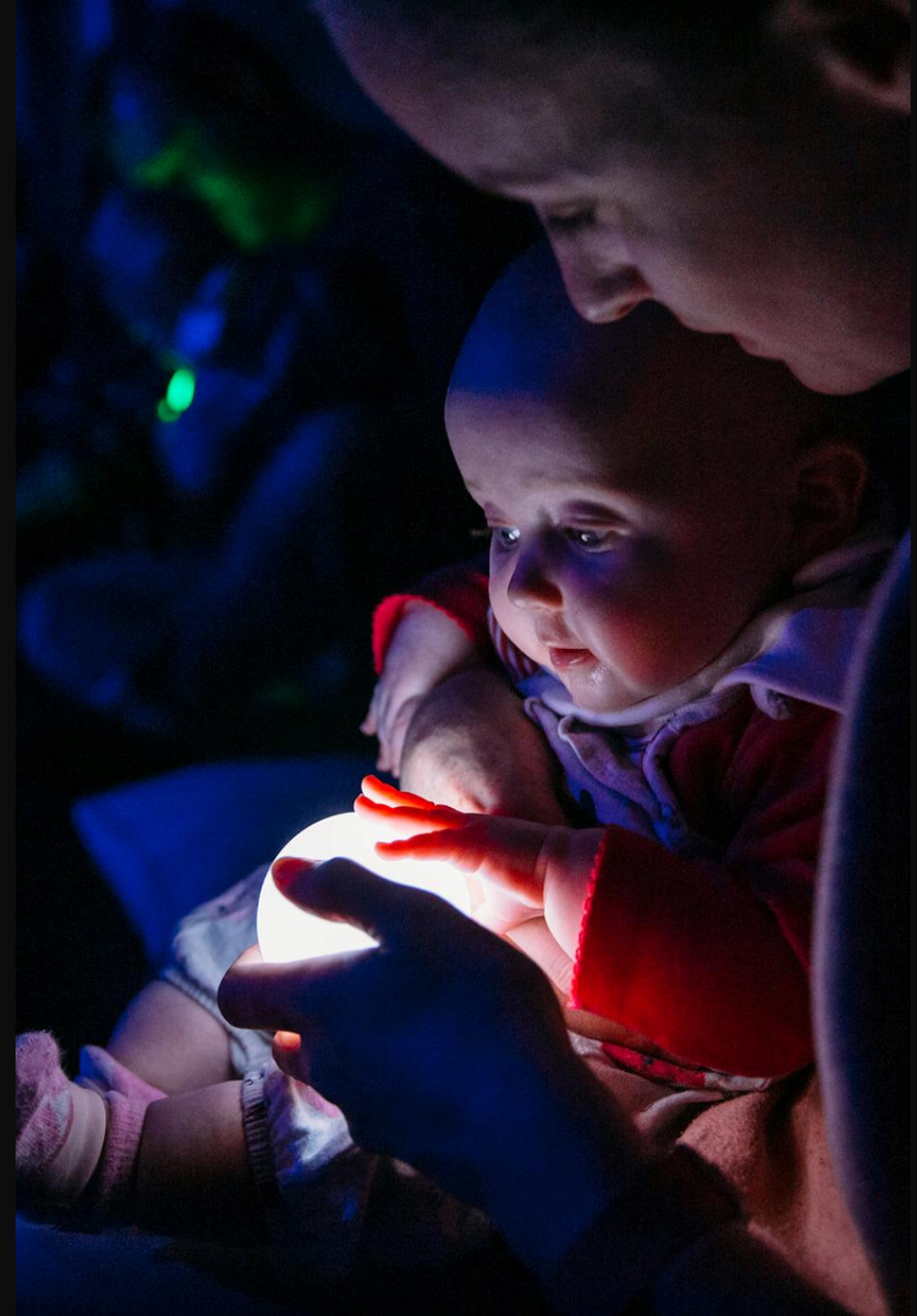
## Methods

- A systematic scoping review of literature which focused on the participatory rights of children prior to the development of speech
- A survey and group interviews with artists and arts organisations working with babies and young children in Scotland, including artists working specifically with Starcatchers. This work explored models of participation with a particular focus on the Lundy Model (2014) in relation to arts for pre- and non-verbal children from birth – 3 years

# Conclusions

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- Findings from the scoping review have demonstrated the potential of the arts as a promising context in which to situate research into children's rights and provided a basis for developing a framework for participation for pre- and non-verbal children.
  - Arts experiences offer a space where children can be empowered making it an interesting context to explore the 'voice' of the child, particularly for babies and young children
  - The role of adults is central – which came across in both the systematic review and in the interviews
    - Themes of power imbalance, protection and adult mediation within the systematic review
    - That there is always a parent or carer with the baby and the triangular relationship between baby, parent/carer and artist is central came through the focus group interviews
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# Next Steps

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- Phase 2 of the research is underway with the researchers collecting data from 3 Starcatchers community engagement programmes as well as through film footage of theatre and dance productions created specifically for the birth- 3 age group
- Findings, including a proposed framework for participation will be shared by the end of September – to be tested and developed both by Starcatchers but also other professionals
- <https://starcatchers.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/VOC-Summary-Research-Report-5.pdf>
- More information about Starcatchers and the research project can be found here: [www.Starcatchers.org.uk](http://www.Starcatchers.org.uk)

