

# Small country – Big ambitions

by Fiona McIntyre  
(with a comment by Mika Pietilä at the end)

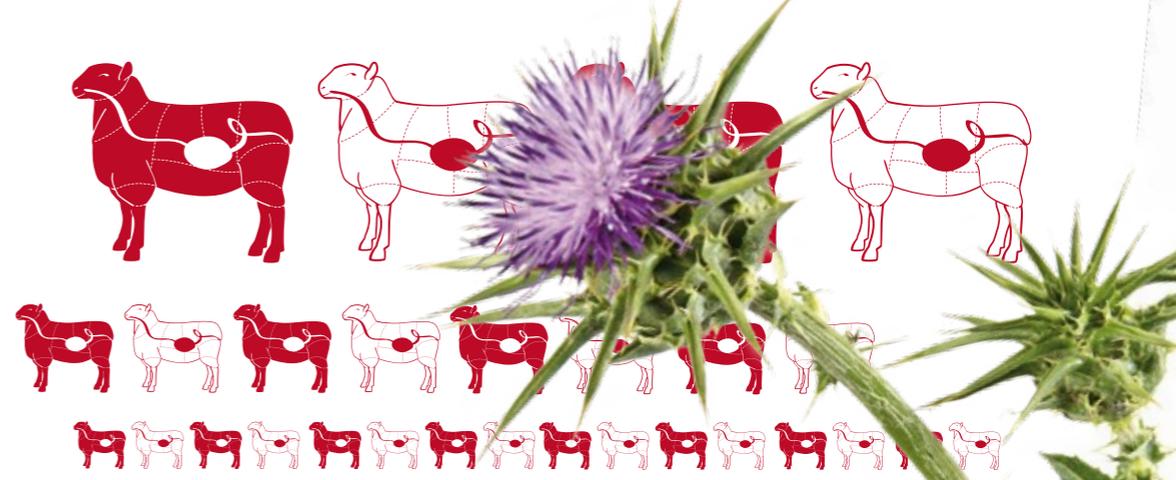


A small country on the edge of Europe, Scotland is renowned for its rugged mountainous landscape. And the Scottish Government has lofty ambitions too, saying it aims “to make Scotland the best place in the world to grow up”.

So here, especially for *Coyote*, we’ll investigate how they will make that happen and the role that youth information and counselling services can play.

With a population of 5.3 million and almost one million young people aged between 10 and 24, the complex range of needs is startling. Never daunted, the underpinning national strategy is called Getting it Right for Every Child. And they mean every child.

The entire concept of Getting It Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) is based on addressing the needs of the whole child/young person, with their overall well-being as the ultimate priority. The move toward achieving this goal started with a change of government in 2007. There was a fundamental shift in policy from focusing on process to working toward outcomes.



A national performance framework states the five strategic objectives along with 16 national outcomes. These are further broken down into national indicators. GIRFEC is all about the Scottish Government, youth services and agencies, and young people working together to promote children and young people’s rights and support their well-being. One of the desired national outcomes for GIRFEC – shared with the Curriculum for Excellence in schools – is that Scotland’s young people are successful learners, responsible citizens, confident individuals and effective contributors.

The GIRFEC approach is to encourage services for children and young people to work together to meet the needs of those they support. All the main public bodies in Scotland support the GIRFEC principle. At the heart of this approach is the well-being of children and young people. This is defined as when they are:

- safe
- healthy
- achieving
- nurtured
- active
- respected
- responsible
- included.

This is not a short-term fix but aims to inspire long-term cultural change at individual level for all children and young people in Scotland. There is a series of clearly defined indicators at national level and the government are looking at developing indicators for each child. Already, all school children do a self-assessment of their well-being, based on the categories above, which is regularly repeated and recorded throughout their school life.

Youth information and counselling services contribute to young people’s well-being by giving them access to information and support which enable them to make positive life choices. In 2009, a cross-sectoral working group developed a national youth information framework for Scotland using a model adapted from the Finnish youth information network. This defined three broad areas of need. It’s worth noting this is not a rigid categorisation – young people move up and down and between groups as they grow and develop, or as circumstances change.



Animated videos by Marlies Pöschl



**YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE ABLE TO FIND INFORMATION INDEPENDENTLY**

They know what they need/are looking for and can find it on their own or with a little (perhaps exploratory) help. Increasingly they are digitally agile and find this information online. Youth information services play their part in guiding them toward “trusted” and ever more impressive youth information/youth-card/youth-portal websites. They, in turn, can become involved in peer youth information initiatives in and out of school.

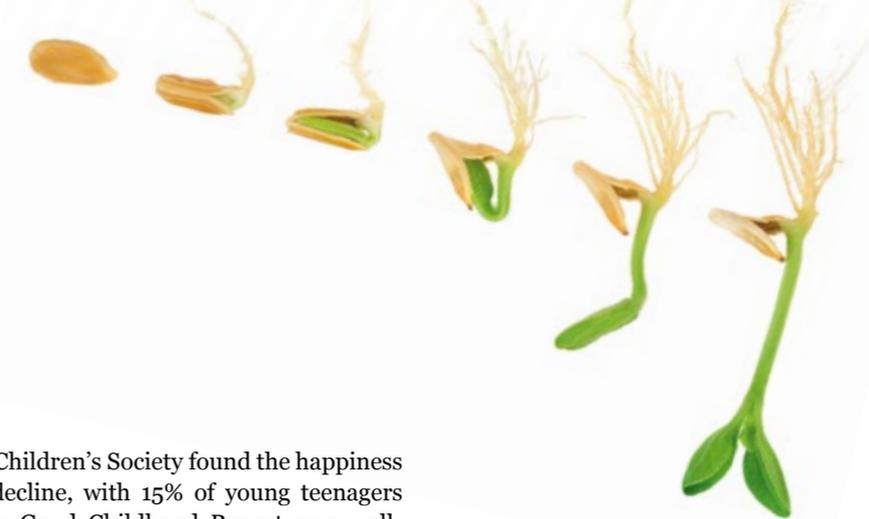
Within youth information centres, professional staff can help young people explore beyond any initial query with examples of possibilities and new directions.

**YOUNG PEOPLE WHO FEEL THEY NEED/WANT SOMETHING**

Some young people need support to clarify their needs and/or assistance to access the information/services they want. There are often unidentified or unarticulated needs which require the intervention of trained, skilled peers or youth information workers.

**YOUNG PEOPLE WHO HAVE PROBLEMS AND FACE CHALLENGES**

Here the key is to identify information to help them access the services and support they need. This may be counselling for those who have chaotic lifestyles, difficult life circumstances, or emotional or physical health issues. Youth information and counselling services will work with other local agencies and departments to co-ordinate and develop relevant support.



A report out in July from The Children’s Society found the happiness of children in the UK is in decline, with 15% of young teenagers reporting low well-being. The Good Childhood Report says well-being has dipped since 2008 after a period of improvement from 1994. Although four out of five can be described as flourishing, teenagers aged 14 and 15 are said to have the lowest self-satisfaction. Psychologist Linda Papadopoulos said it was important not to dismiss this dip in well-being among 14 and 15-year-olds as inevitable and “just teenagers being teenagers”.

*“We really must talk to this generation and listen to what they have to say.”*

*“Children and teenagers deserve proper support, choices and a decent say in their own lives. Being unhappy is definitely not an inevitable part of growing up. We owe it to our children to help them flourish as much as possible.”*

Those last two statements underline the role of youth information in equipping young people to be active participants in their communities and societies. Not only does every young person need access to relevant information, they need to build their capacities for interpreting that information, making positive life choices and taking their place in society. In Scotland, at national level, several voluntary organisations are working alongside the government and local authorities to deliver just that. Young Scot is the national youth information and citizenship charity for Scotland. It provides young people, aged 11 to 26, with a mixture of information, ideas and opportunities to help them become confident, informed and active citizens. This is done in a variety of formats, including magazines, online, phone, etc., so young people can access information in a way they are comfortable with.



## Small country – Big ambitions



The aim is to provide information which will enable them to:

- make informed decisions and choices;
- turn their ideas into action;
- take advantage of the opportunities available to them in Scotland and the rest of Europe;
- have the confidence and knowledge to take their place as active citizens in their communities – locally, nationally and globally.

Young Scot also works with other agencies to involve young people in the co-design of services which affect them as well as working with hard-to-reach young people to influence change. Members of the Scottish Youth Parliament are elected in every constituency, by young people, in some areas using their Young Scot youth card to vote electronically.

Scotland also has its own Commissioner for Children and Young People whose job is to make sure all children and young people in Scotland have their rights respected, their voices heard and that they can live safe and happy lives. The current commissioner was previously a youth worker.

Moving towards making Scotland the best place in the world to grow up is not without its challenges, but youth information and counselling services

stand in an ideal place to meet these challenges now and in the future:

- they are seen to be safe/trusted/young people friendly;
- information on opportunities to participate is key;
- as are opportunities to be active citizens; for instance, promoting and supporting volunteering opportunities (see *Coyote* No. 17);
- they are egalitarian and holistic (as per the European Youth Information and Counselling Association Charter);
- they already, by providing a broad range of youth information, practice cross-sector working – a key factor in combating social exclusion and fostering well-being;
- they have developed innovative outreach initiatives, especially in working with hard-to-reach young people.

In this year's independence referendum, for the first time, 16 and 17 year olds in Scotland will be eligible to vote. Whatever the outcome, Scotland's government and youth services will continue to honour its commitment to them.

Our young people need to be equipped to thrive – not just survive. They need inspiration, not desperation, and wherever they are to be “the best place in the world to grow up”.



## Comment on Fiona's article

by Mika Pietilä, planning officer, Koordinaatti – Development Centre of Youth Information and Counselling

It was very interesting to read how Scotland is working for young people's well-being. Finland is also a small country, just as Scotland. It has a population of 5.4 million with long distances, municipalities with relatively small populations as well as young people who live in remote areas, far away from youth services.

Hearing from young people, the current and future users of services, is very important, and not only in youth information and counselling services. I was glad to notice that this is such an important part in GIRFEC in Scotland. In Finland, we have the Child and Youth Policy Programme which is adopted every four years by the government. Both programmes are focusing on outcomes to support young people's growth and well-being, maybe from different angles but both are based on young people's needs.

I was also delighted that Scotland could use the model we are using in Finland when defining the information and service needs of young people. I felt proud when I heard that this model is used in Scotland. This happened in summer 2013, in Croatia, at the Symposium on Youth Policy in

South-East Europe, where Fiona was one of the keynote speakers. In youth information there is a very strong tradition of sharing good practices based on experiences in the field. It is great that work done in the Finnish network has been spread around. The division of information needs into three levels was originally developed by the youth information workers in the youth information centre “Kompassi” in Helsinki.

This kind of division has helped a lot when talking about information needs and the provision of youth information and counselling services. I would say that is used in much the same ways in Scotland and Finland. I would also say that our youth information structures are similar in many ways.

The discussion Fiona and I had after her speech was amusing. I was of course interested in how they had found our model, but at the same time I also had to try to remember how we had distributed information about it. After returning home, I found out that the model had been published in a report about youth information and counselling in Finland, which had found its way to Scotland.