



SCOTTISH
CHILDREN'S REPORTER

ADMINISTRATION

PRESS RELEASE

(Issued on behalf of the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration)

**AUTHOR TO EXPLORE A LIFE
BACKWARDS AT SCRA EVENT**

THE author of a remarkable book about a troubled childhood will be at the Edinburgh International Book Festival on Monday August 14. At an event hosted by the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration (SCRA), Alexander Masters will explore the impact of traumatic childhood experiences on adult life.

Stuart: A Life Backwards, winner of The Guardian First Book Award 2005, is Alexander Masters' biography of Stuart Shorter, a homeless man who died after stepping in front of a train in 2002 aged just 32. The most innovative feature of the book is the telling of his life-story from back to front, an idea inspired by Stuart himself. Stuart is a gregarious and articulate character, but has spent years in jail and at times appears violent and intimidating. As the reader's patience becomes stretched by his more erratic behaviour, the book delves farther and farther back into his life. As we learn of the childhood events that have shaped Stuart as an adult, we are forced to reassess previous judgements of him.

When SCRA decided to hold an event at this year's Edinburgh International Book Festival, the reasons for centring it on Alexander Masters' book were clear. SCRA's work sits at the centre of Scotland's unique Children's Hearings System. The system deals jointly with children who commit offences and children who require care and protection, as these are often the same children. The basis for this fundamental principle is apparent in Alexander Masters' book. The grown-up Stuart we meet at the start of

Masters' book is a convicted criminal, but the Stuart we encounter later is a child who had to contend with a series of traumatic and life-shaping events.

SCRA Director of Reporter Operations Tom Philliben said: "Research published by SCRA shows that many children who go on to offend are first referred to the Children's Reporter – often at a very young age – on care and protection grounds where there are concerns about their welfare.

"Just as Stuart's story forces us to confront how his childhood affected him later in life, so those involved in the Children's Hearings System are required to address the needs and behaviour of children in a holistic and joined-up way. The critical importance of effective, early intervention on improving the life chances of children is there for all to see."

- ENDS -

Notes to Editors:

A Life Backwards with Alexander Masters takes place on Monday 14 August at 6pm, in the RBS Children's Theatre, Charlotte Square Gardens.

Recent research by SCRA includes the 2006 report On the Right Track: A Study of Children and Young People in the Fast Track Pilot (see www.scra.gov.uk). Among its findings, the study showed that:

- A total of 62% of children in the study were referred to the Reporter on care and protection grounds because of concerns about their welfare. In other words, these children were referred before they had committed any offences.
- Almost a quarter of the children in the sample were first referred to the Reporter on care and protection grounds before they reached the age of five.

SCRA is the national body that works with partners to provide an integrated care and justice system for children in Scotland. It was formed under the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1994 and became fully operational on 1 April 1996. Our main responsibilities, as set out in the act, are:

- To facilitate the work of Children's Reporters
- To deploy and manage staff to carry out that work
- To provide suitable accommodation for Children's Hearings

In 2005/06 SCRA received Grant-in-Aid of £23 million from the Scottish Executive, of which £1.2 million was assigned to capital spending. We employ 452 staff (full-time equivalent average 2005/06) of which over 89% are

engaged in, or directly supporting, making decisions about children in our 42 offices and hearings centres throughout Scotland.

For all media enquiries, please contact Lois Boyle at Media House on 0141 220 6040 or 07803 204119.