

## Children and Families' experiences of Hearings

### Focused on children most at risk, our fundamental purpose is to:

- make effective decisions about a need to refer a child to a Children's Hearing
- enable children and families to participate in Hearings
- provide suitable accommodation for Children's Hearings
- disseminate information and data to inform and influence improved outcomes for children and young people

The Children's Hearings System in Scotland is central to the protection of children and young people, or in addressing their behaviour. Children who require compulsory measures of supervision are referred by Children's Reporters to Children's Hearings to decide what interventions are necessary to protect and secure their welfare. Over 40,000 Children's Hearings are held every year.

### SCRA Research

This research explored the views and experiences of children and young people, their parents and carers attending Hearings in 2008/09.

630 individuals took part in a national survey of children and families attending Hearings - 37% of whom were children and young people and 63% adults.

This survey was followed by in depth interviews with 37 children, young people, parents, foster carers and kinship carers from across Scotland.

### Findings:

#### Preparing for Children's Hearings

- Most young people and adults receive and read the letters from SCRA notifying them of their Hearings, as well as their Hearings papers. Younger children didn't always read and/or understand the information sent to them.
- Although the majority of children and young people had received the 'Having Your Say' form to fill in before their Hearings to give Panel Members their views, most did not fill it in. Those children and young people who did complete it, found it helped prepare them and made it easier to speak in their Hearings.



- Children, young people and adults said that social workers were best placed to help them prepare for Hearings, and welcomed the support they received:

'.....they know the child inside out ...their parents and their siblings and the whole family situation and how they got there....' (foster carer)

'I could trust her [social worker] and I knew I could speak to her and she listens to me and she didn't like, just ignore me...' (young person, 16 years)

## At Children's Hearings

Panel Members were valued for their contribution to looking after the welfare of children and young people:

'I have no doubt in my mind they're doing an excellent job' (kinship carer)

'..they gave me a chance to speak an that...'cos, like, they stopped and gave me a chance to talk' (child, 10 years)

Children and adults would like to have the same Reporter involved in all aspects of their case and for some continuity of Reporters and Panel Members between Hearings:

'... [the same Reporter] 'cos then not more people need to know your business' (young person, 15 years)

'... you're not having to go over and over old ground ...you can, quite literally, pick up from where you left off at the previous Hearing' (father)

## Survey Conclusions

The Children's Hearings System, as it currently operates, is on the whole working well. Children and adults feel supported in their experience of the Hearings System.

Children, parents and carers who are involved in it are supportive of the Hearings System and its key principles of a welfare-based approach where decisions are made in the best interests of the child, and that Hearings are tribunals of three volunteer Panel Members.

