

June 2011

Summary

The Scottish Children's Reporter Administration (SCRA) and NHS Health Scotland carried out a survey of early years professionals to find out their levels of knowledge and involvement in the Children's Hearings System.

The response rate was low – 38 professionals from the health, education and care sectors took part. Almost all had direct contact with children and families.

Most respondents had knowledge of and contact with the Children's Reporter and Hearings System. Main types of contact were being cited for court by the Reporter (42%), and/or being requested to produce a report for the Reporter – over a half at least annually. Most had not referred a child to the Reporter, this being done by other agencies.

SCRA and NHS Health Scotland are taking forward the findings of this survey to improve communications between the Hearings System and early years professionals.

NHS HEALTH SCOTLAND EARLY YEARS NETWORK – AWARENESS OF THE CHILDREN’S HEARINGS SYSTEM

Background

Over 5,500 children under two years old are referred to the Children’s Reporter each year because of concerns about their safety and welfare. Most of these referrals are from the police, about 20% are from social work and less than 1% are from health sources.

The reason for the low numbers of referrals from health sources and other early years professionals is not known. To try to find out, the Scottish Children’s Reporter Administration (SCRA) and NHS Health Scotland carried out a survey of early year’s professionals to assess their levels of knowledge and involvement in the Children’s Hearings System.

A short questionnaire was issued on-line *via* Survey Monkey to all members of the Early Years Network over December 2010 to February 2011. There were 38 responses.

Findings

Which service do you work for?

Most common responses were from NHS (n=15), education and or children’s services (n=8) and voluntary sector (n=4). A wide range of other services were represented.

What is your role?

Eleven Health Visitors, eight service managers and four nurses responded. There was a mix of other professionals.

Do you have direct contact with children and families?

89.5% (n=34) work directly with children and families¹.

In which local authority area do most of your clients/patients live?

Respondents came from across Scotland, including cities, rural areas and island authorities.

How much do you understand about the Children’s Hearings System’s role in child protection?

Most respondents did have an understanding about the Hearings System (Table 1).

¹ Those who didn’t have direct contact with children and families were asked to exit the questionnaire at this point.



Table 1

Fully understand = 1	2	3	4	Not aware = 5
39.5% (15)	28.9% (11)	7.9% (3)	18.4% (7)	5.3% (2)

Almost half (45.7%, n=16) would like to know more about the Hearings System.

Respondents were asked at the end of the questionnaire for their comments. A number made comments about the need for more training for nurses and Health Visitors on the Hearings System. There were also comments asking for more communication from the Reporter and Children’s Hearings on their decisions and if Supervision Requirements had been made.

How often do you attend Children’s Hearings?

A minority attend Hearings on a regular basis; over a quarter never attend Hearings (Table 2).

Table 2

How often do you attend Children’s Hearings?	% (number)
Never	27.8% (10)
Very rarely – less than once a year	30.6% (11)
Once a year	13.9% (5)
Once a quarter	13.9% (5)
Once a month	5.6% (2)
Frequently – more than once a month	8.3% (3)
Total	36

How often has the Reporter requested reports from you?

Most respondents had been asked to produce a report by the Reporter, 57.1% (n=20) at least annually, and 25.7% (n=9) less than once a year. Only 14.3% (n=5) had never been asked to produce a report.

Have you ever been cited for court by the Children’s Reporter?

41.7% (n=15) had been cited for court; 58.3% (n=21) had not.

How many times in the past year have you referred a child to the Children’s Reporter?

The majority (74.3%, n=26) had not referred a child to the Reporter in the past year. Three (8.6%) had referred a child once; 11.4% (n=4) had referred two to five times; and 5.7% (n=2) had made six to 10 referrals.

Have you ever considered referring a child to the Children’s Reporter but did not?

Almost half (45.7%, n=16) answered yes to this question. The remainder answered no.

For those who answered that they had considered referring a child but did not, the most common reason that they didn’t was because another




agency/person referred the child (66.7%, n=12). Other common reasons were because there was a multi-agency decision on action to be taken (44.4%, n=8); and/or another agency was working with the child/family (38.9%, n=7). There were a number of comments about co-ordination with other agencies and multi-agency decision making on referrals. No-one answered that it was because they did not know how to refer a child to the Reporter.

Conclusion

Most of the early years professionals who took part in this survey knew about the Hearings System, and many had direct contact with the Reporter. Most had not referred a child, this being done by other agencies. There may therefore be a need for SCRA to take a greater role in working with and improving communications with early years professionals.

SCRA and NHS Health Scotland are taking forward the findings of this survey to improve communications between the Hearings System and early years professionals.



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