

Hearing Scotland's Children

**THE EXPERTS VIEWS OF SCOTLAND'S CHILDREN
AND YOUNG PEOPLE ON THEIR EXPERIENCES OF
THE CHILDREN'S HEARINGS SYSTEM**



SCOTTISH
CHILDREN'S REPORTER
ADMINISTRATION



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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This report would not have been possible without the 100 participants from all of Scotland's local authorities; thank you all for taking the time to share your important views and experiences of the Children's Hearings System.



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INTRODUCTION

The Children's Hearings System is the care and justice system for Scotland's children and young people. Its aims are to ensure that the best interests of the child are met and that they receive the most appropriate intervention and support.

At the heart of the system are Children's Reporters, who are based in our local communities. Children and young people are referred to the Reporter from a number of sources, including police, social work, education and health. They are referred because some aspect of their life is giving cause for concern.

The Reporter investigates each referral and determines whether compulsory measures of intervention are required. If compulsory measures of intervention are required, a Children's Hearing will be held.

The Hearing consists of three Panel Members, all trained volunteers from the local community. The Hearing listens to the child's circumstances and then decides what measures are required. The child may require a particular type of treatment or intervention; they may be placed with foster carers, a residential unit or in secure accommodation. The Hearing may decide that the child should remain at home with support from other agencies, such as social work.

A total of 42,532 children were referred to the Reporter in 2009/10, which represents 4.7% of all children in Scotland.

The purpose of this consultation is to learn from children and young people about their experiences before, during and after Children's Hearings where they offered their expert views on what currently works well and what could be improved.

This consultation was commissioned by the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration and carried out by Who Cares? Scotland between April and June 2011. The consultation involved currently looked after children and young people who reside in a variety of settings aged between 9 and 17. There was representation from children and young people from all of Scotland's local authorities. Almost all the participants were either White Scottish or White British in ethnic origin, a very small minority of the respondents considered themselves to be disabled.

METHODOLOGY

Each interviewee was asked a series of questions either on a one to one basis or in a small group situation. The vast majority of participants (92%) participated via an individual interview. There were no obvious differences in the information provided by individual or group participants.

For some questions young people were asked to score their experience, this was done using Likert Scaling, scoring from 1 (poor) to 10 (great). Not all participants completed the scoring parts of the questionnaire. The questions asked covered various broad themes of young people's experience before, during and after their Children's Hearings. There is an example of the full questionnaire in Appendix 1. Examples of questions used included:

What kind of information do you receive from the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration (SCRA)?

How are you feeling before a Children's Hearing?

Do you think you participate in your Children's Hearing?

All participants were also shown a range of visual prompts to supplement the questions asked, these included:

Notification Letter Sample

All About Me Paperwork

Image of adults at a Children's Hearing

There were 100 currently looked after children and young people who responded to this national consultation- 64 males and 36 females. Most participants (58%) resided at local authority children's homes, the second greatest number (27%) were placed in residential schools. There was also representation from children and young people in foster care, secure accommodation, looked after at home, kinship care and shared care.[†]

The largest number of respondents from a single local authority area was Glasgow City Council with 15 participants in the consultation. The second greatest number of participants from a single council area was South Ayrshire with six young people taking part.

[†] Shared Care is an arrangement where a child or young person would reside partly in a foster care placement and partly with their family.

There were no obvious differences in the views of males or females, though younger participants tended to be slightly more positive about their experiences. There were no real differences in views of young people from different local authority areas across Scotland.

Table 1 represents the breakdown of where the participants were currently placed. 97% of the entire sample group were accommodated.

Table 1: Participants Breakdown By Current Placement

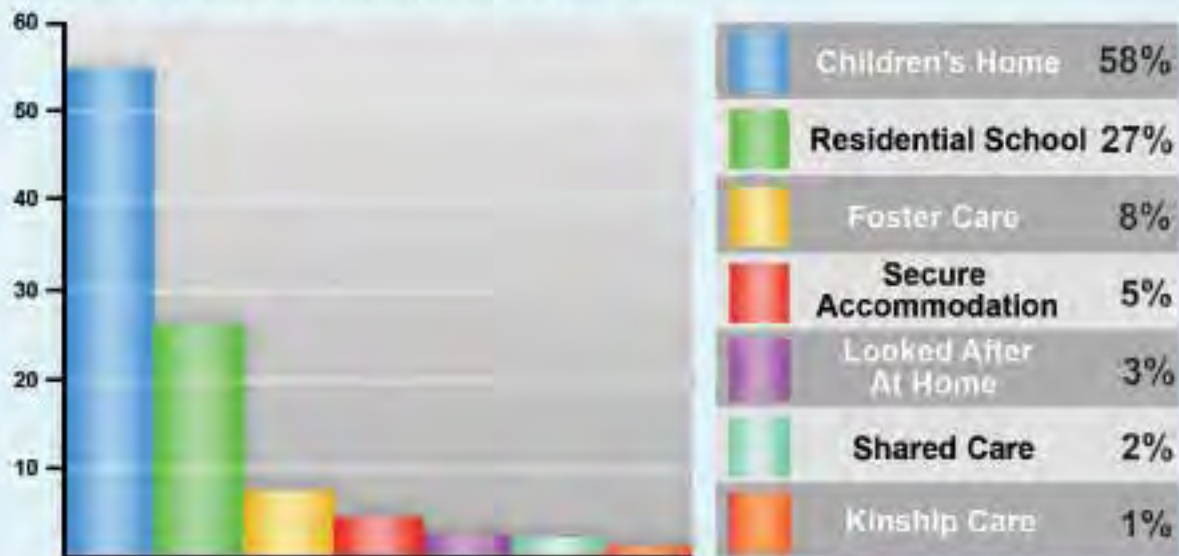


Table 2 below shows the number of participants from each local authority area. Glasgow City had the most respondents with 15%.

Table 2: Participants Breakdown By Local Authority Area

Aberdeen City	2	Aberdeenshire	3	Angus	3	Argyll & Bute	4
Clackmannanshire	1	Dumfries & Galloway	1	Dundee City	2	East Ayrshire	2
East Dunbartonshire	1	East Lothian	1	East Renfrewshire	2	Edinburgh, City of	5
Eilean Siar	2	Falkirk	3	Fife	1	Glasgow City	15
Highland	2	Inverclyde	5	Midlothian	3	Moray	1
North Ayrshire	5	North Lanarkshire	5	Orkney Islands	1	Perth & Kinross	2
Renfrewshire	5	Scottish Borders	5	Shetland Islands	4	South Ayrshire	6
South Lanarkshire	3	Stirling	2	West Dunbartonshire	1	West Lothian	2

The table below represents the age range of the sample group where over half the participants (62%) were aged between 14-16 at the time of the consultation.

Table 3: Number Of Participants By Year Of Age



“So *they* can look over what has been happening and make decisions”

(male, aged 15)

Before The Children's Hearing

INFORMATION RECEIVED

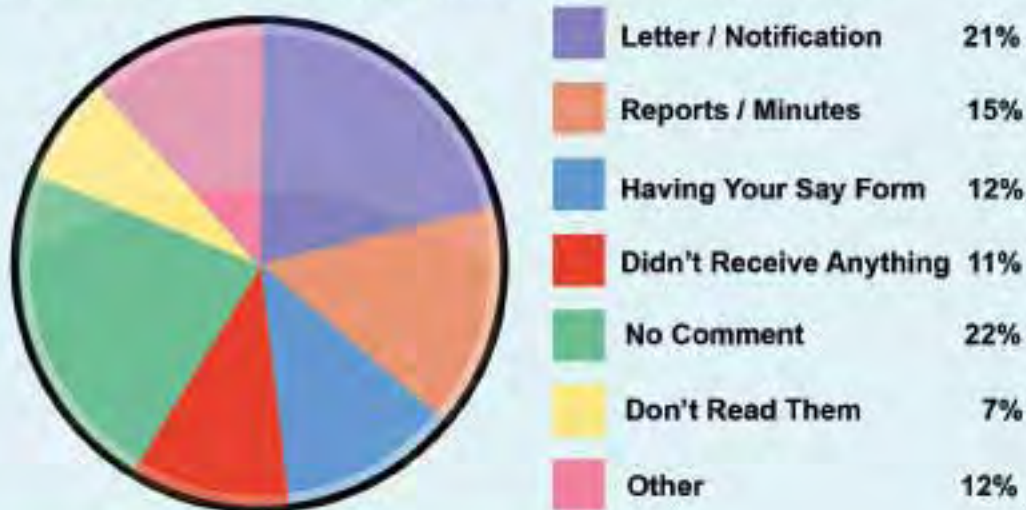
There is a legal obligation that young people receive paperwork, such as notification letters, from the Scottish Children's Reporters Administration. Other information such as leaflets and booklets, although not a legal requirement, are still key information that young people should be receiving.

Only a very small minority of respondents referred to having received information leaflets or booklets. Participants spoke mainly about receiving notifications, background reports, letters or 'Having Your Say' forms.

Of the young people who provided a score, the average score out of ten that young people gave for information received was almost 4 out of 10. Only 43% of the participants provided a score.

Table 4 breaks down the comments participants made regarding the information they reported to have received.

Table 4: Information Young People Reported They Received From SCRA



"Just info where it was, the notification of the hearing. It would have been **beneficial to receive some information on what to expect"**

(Female age 16, South Lanarkshire)

"Just letters, maybe had leaflets. I can't think, maybe but so much going on I was too upset to read anything"

(Male age 12, City of Edinburgh)

PAPERWORK

Young people in the consultation were shown visual prompts such as fake samples of notification letters and grounds for referral. The questions they were asked are detailed in Appendix 1.

Almost all respondents (93%) recognised the paperwork, but favourable comments about the paperwork's appearance were few. 87% of the participants in the consultation understood what the paperwork meant, identifying the notification as an 'invite to a panel'. Fewer young people could identify the *grounds for referral* paperwork as many hadn't received it or couldn't remember receiving it. Many felt that the paperwork received was adult orientated commenting it was 'boring', lacked colour or of them being too 'formal'.

64% of the entire sample offered a score out of ten for how well they understood the paperwork they had received. The average score out of ten that young people gave paperwork such as notification and 'grounds for referral' was around 5 out of 10, however it should be noted that many of the young people scored this by how they liked the look of the paperwork rather than how well they understood it.

Tables 5 and 6 refers to young people's responses to the visual prompts shown during the consultation, the questions asked are shown in Appendix 1

Table 5: Recognition Of Notification



Table 6: Understood The Notification



"I don't like the bit that says YOU HAVE TO COME TO A CHILDRENS HEARING, it feels like you are being forced to go"

(Male age 14, Western Isles)

"I understand it, but it looks like it's for adults. It looks off-putting"

(Female age 16, Fife)

ALL ABOUT ME

All About Me is an online method for young people to communicate their views at their Children's Hearing. It is a child friendly form. Young people will also receive a colour paper copy to complete prior to their children's hearing. *All About Me* replaced the old *Having Your Say* paperwork in January 2011, not all of the young people in the sample group will have had the opportunity to use the new paperwork.

All young people were shown a colour paper copy of a blank *All About Me* form as a visual prompt to gain their views. The questions used can be seen in Appendix 1.

Only around 10% recognised the *All About Me* paperwork, but 75% of the entire sample group spoke positively about how the form looked. The main comments were around its colour and 73% of the sample said *All About Me* looked easy to complete. 55% spoke positively about completing their *Having Your Say* form.

60% of the sample group stated that an adult such as a residential staff member, a social worker, a carer, a family member or an advocate would support them to complete the form. 7% commented that they received no help from adults providing their care or that they preferred to complete the form themselves.

7% said they preferred completing the online version of the form, although not all young people were aware of the online version. Two young people from the same local authority area spoke positively about their use of *Viewpoint* online as a means of communicating their views.²

The average score out of ten participants gave for *All About Me/Having Your Say* paperwork was five and a half out of 10. 64% provided a score

"This form is better than the old one, but we don't have internet access in the house (unit)"

(Female age 17, Renfrewshire)

"This is the first time I have seen this, I like it"

(Female age 16, Aberdeenshire)

"It's better as you can access it online"

(Male age 17, South Lanarkshire)

"They are better than the old ones, they are easy to fill in"

(Female age 16, Aberdeenshire)

² *Viewpoint* is a tool for consulting with children and young people that is used in some local authorities. *Viewpoint* is a software programme, which can be installed onto computers and provides children with the opportunity and means of expressing their views regarding issues about being looked after.

WHY DO YOUNG PEOPLE GO TO A CHILDREN'S HEARING?

This question was asked as part of the consultation exercise to gauge the level of understanding young people had around their attendance at Children's Hearings. Common responses included various examples of the reasons for attending a Children's Hearing such as 'family problems' or 'trouble at school'. Young people with little or no knowledge would respond by saying 'I don't know'.

84% displayed a reasonable knowledge of the reasons why they attend Children's Hearings. A minority of young people (8%) in the consultation did not know why they attended. Only 6 participants group spoke negatively about their reasons for attending a Children's Hearing.



Table 7: Young People's Understanding Of The Reasons They Attend Children's Hearings

"To find out what's happening in their lives"

(Female age 14, Gloucestershire)

"Because the hearing is about us - So they can make decisions"

(Male age 15, Renfrewshire)

"Different reasons, problems at school, bad behaviour, home circumstances"

(Male age 15, Renfrewshire)

FEELINGS BEFORE A CHILDREN'S HEARING?

50% of all participants stated that they were in a state of anxiety prior to a Children's Hearing. Comments like 'anxious', 'worried', 'angry' and 'nervous' were commonplace, with a feeling of nervousness the most popular response.

32% said they felt 'fine' or 'alright' before the meeting and a minority (11%) stated they were either 'not bothered' or had no feelings. 3% of respondents said their feelings would be determined by the expected outcome of the Children's Hearing.



Table 8: Young People's Feelings Before Their Children's Hearing

"Good, because I might go home to my mum"

(Male age 10, Inverclyde)

"Nervous, they have too much control and they don't even know me (panel members)"

(Female age 15, Midlothian)

"Apprehensive, I don't like it. You are going to a place where no one knows you"

(Female age 16, South Ayrshire)

"Sad and nervous; sad because I have to go and nervous because I don't know what is going to be said"

(Male age 13, Scottish Borders)

THE WAITING ROOM

47% of the respondents when asked about the waiting rooms in the Children's Hearing buildings made reference to children's toys and comments like them being 'baby-ish' were popular. Many of the participants in the consultation felt that there was little for teenagers to do while they wait. 62% of the respondents felt that the waiting areas could be improved.

16% of participants spoke positively about the waiting area and only three young people said there was no need to improve the waiting area. Two participants in the sample group had never been in a waiting area before and one had not yet attended a Children's Hearing.

Table 9 represents young people's general responses to Children's Hearings waiting rooms. When asked 'what is the waiting area like?' 13% of young people only gave a description of what the waiting area was like and did not offer any suggestions for improvement.

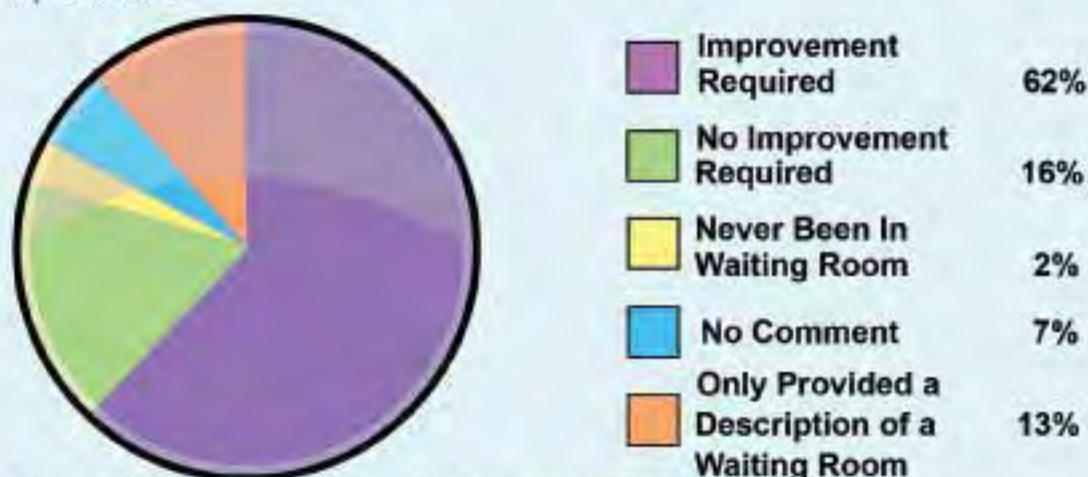


Table 9: Young People's Views On The Waiting Room Area

"There are toys and stuff, but WE always have to wait for ages they are never on time"

(Male age 14, Renfrewshire)

"There was nothing to take your mind off it, like a little magazine to read"

(Female age 15, City of Edinburgh)

"Newspaper, maybe toys - the waiting area is fine"

(Female age 12, North Lanarkshire)

BEFORE THE HEARING GENERAL SUGGESTIONS

The most common responses from participants regarding general improvements for young people's experience prior to their Children's Hearing were:

- Waiting room environment
- Something to do while they wait
- Not to have to wait so long
- Better, more colourful information
- For the paperwork they receive to be less formal

91% provided a score on their overall experience before their Children's Hearing. This included information, paperwork and their experience of waiting rooms. The average score out of ten that participants gave for their whole experience pre Children's Hearing was five out ten.



Table 10: Young People's Experiences Before Their Children's Hearing (Score out of 10)

YOUNG PEOPLE'S SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

"Could send out a nice colourful leaflet / letter instead of the notification - more friendly and inviting"

(Female age 17)

"They should have a minimum age limit, where you don't have to go until you are 12"

(Male age 15, (involuntary))

"Someone you trust and like should take you to a panel"

(Male age 14, Western Isles)

"Make the notifications lettering bigger"

(Male age 9, Glasgow City)

"Meet the people (panel) beforehand would be better at keeping me relaxed"

(Male age 16, City of Edinburgh)

"Maybe nicer building, or comfy seats or even they could come to visit you"

(Female age 14, Renfrewshire)

"A DVD of a hearing for first timers"

(Male age 16, Glasgow City)

"Make the waiting area more welcoming. There should be Coke and coffee machines instead of plain water. Make the magazines up to date and add posters for young people"

(Male age 17, South Lanarkshire)

"Notifications and grounds of referral could be better - a bit of colour at least. The waiting room could have a kids section and make it more relaxing, make it more like a living room with couches and that"

(Male age 15, Falkirk)

"It would be better if I didn't have to go - I have to travel 90 miles to mine !"

(Male age 16, East Lothian)

"Nothing can make it better"

(Female age 11, Stirling)

"Panel members should automatically speak to young people on their own before going into the meeting"

(Male age 14, Argyll & Bute)

During
The
Children's
Hearing

IDENTIFYING ROLES

All of the participants was shown the image below of adults at a Children's Hearing as a prompt and were asked to identify each adult and explain their role.



Almost all the participants (95%) could identify all or most of the people in the photograph; almost all young people (95%) identified Panel Members, and the majority (more than 50%) made reference to the chairperson or the reporter.

A minority of participants identified the reporter as a minute taker; other suggestions included 'social worker' and 'student'. A very small minority identified Panel Members as 'judges'.



- Identified All Key Adults in the Photograph 54%
- Could Identify Some Key Adults in the Photograph 41%
- Couldn't Identify Any Key Adults in the Photograph 5%

Table 11: Young People's Responses To Identifying A Photograph Of Panel Members, Chairperson And Children's Reporter

"People that speak to you and not sure what the other woman does- Writes stuff"

(Male age 13, Renfrewshire)

"Three decision makers and one person who is in charge"

(Female age 9, Orkney Islands)

"The reporter, she writes down what is said. The other 3 are panel members and they make the decision. My first time at a hearing I thought they were the Police and if I said anything I would get arrested"

(Female age 14, Midlothian)

WHERE YOUNG PEOPLE SIT AT CHILDREN'S HEARINGS

All participants in the consultation were shown the image of a boardroom type table and chairs and were asked if this was their Children's Hearing where they would sit at this table. The young people's responses were only in relation to the question asked and the visual prompt.



70% of the young people said they would sit directly across from the Panel Members at the meeting table. This was for various reasons, participants commented that it was best to sit to 'be seen', 'to be heard' and to get 'eye contact' with the panel.

A minority of the participants (9%) stated they would prefer to sit in the chair nearest the door in case they had to leave the Hearing if it became too difficult for them. Other suggestions included 'I would sit at the head of the table'.

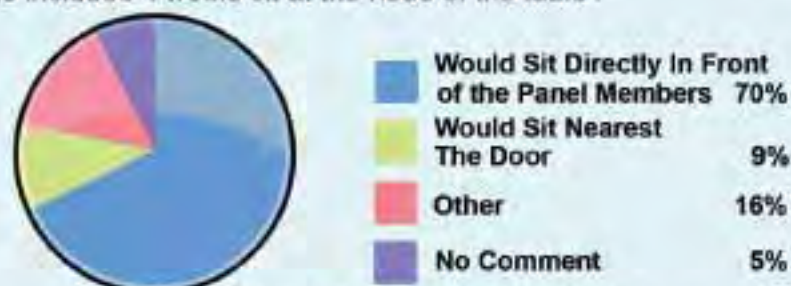


Table 11: Young People's Responses To The 'Where They Would Sit At Their Children's Hearing?' Prompt

"I sit so I am face to face with the panel"

(Female age 15, North Lanarkshire)

"I don't like these tables - I wish it could be more relaxed and comfortable."

(Female age 16, Fife)

"All around the table there are important people, it's meant to be me but sometimes I think others forget"

(Female age 11, Salford)

THE MOST IMPORTANT PERSON IN THE ROOM

Young people were asked who they thought was the most important person at a Children's Hearing.

The majority of participants (41%) believed that the young person was the most important person at the Hearing. 26% believed that Panel Members, chairperson or children's reporter were the most important people at the Hearing. 21% thought that everyone at the Hearing was important. 10% declined to comment. 10% declined to comment.

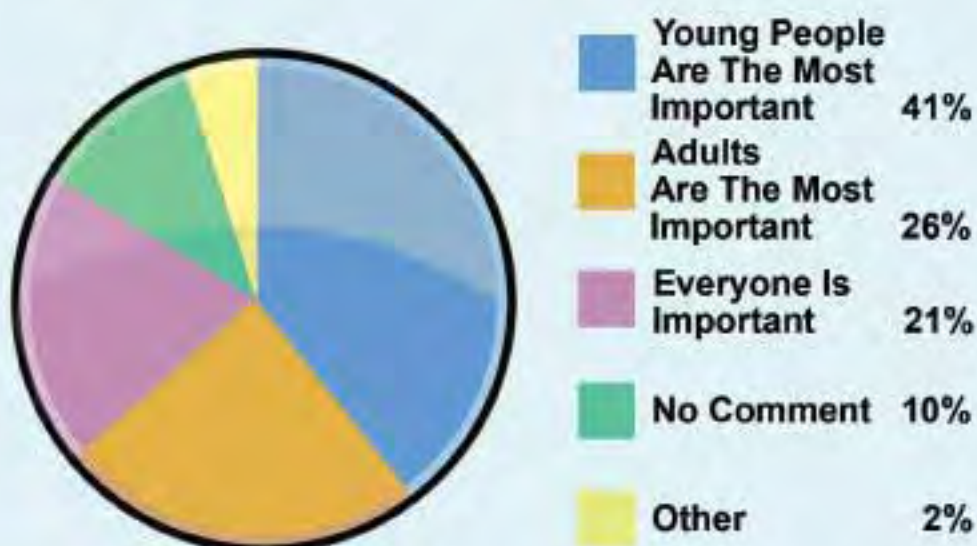


Table 12: Responses to Most Important Person Question

"The panel are the most important people, they make the decisions - the meeting is about me though"

(Male age 12, Argyll & Bute)

"Me - I am the most important person there"

(Male age 13, Aberdeen City)

FEELINGS DURING A CHILDREN'S HEARING

When asked how they were feeling during their Children's Hearing around half (55%) spoke of feeling a range of negative feelings. The feelings ranged from being 'emotional', 'angry', 'annoyed', 'awkward', 'judged', 'patronised' and 'nervous', with feeling 'nervous' being the most common response.

A minority of participants (19%) spoke of positive feelings during their Children's Hearings. Feeling 'OK', 'fine' and 'alright' were the most common responses. A smaller minority (10%) of young people said that they felt bored during the Hearing.

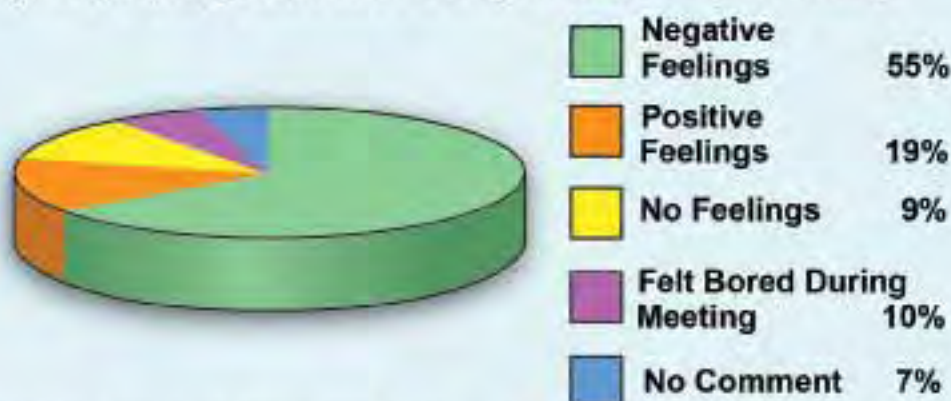


Table 13: Emotional Experience Of Young People During A Children's Hearing

"Scary, im ok afterwards. Emotional"

(Male age 12,
Perth & Kinross)

"Uncomfortable, judged - I feel like I am not being listened to"

(Female age 16,
South Lanarkshire)

"Fine, because I am not worried"

(Female age 14,
West Dunbartonshire)

"Patronised, panel members were condescending"

(Female age 15,
City of Edinburgh)

"I walk out pretty much every time, they don't listen- they only listen to social work"

(Male age 16,
Scottish Borders)

PARTICIPATION IN CHILDREN'S HEARINGS

Young people were asked 'do you participate in your Children's Hearing?' They were also asked 'do you always get to say what you want?'

When asked if they felt that they participated in their Children's Hearings 69% of the young people stated that they felt that they had participated, though some felt that this was dependant on how the Hearing goes. More than half of all participants (55%) said that they always got to say what they wanted to say to the Panel Members.

24% found it difficult to say what they really wanted to panel members, 19% of young people stated that they were either not listened to or were 'talked over' by adults. 11% spoke about adults supporting their participation such as an advocate, one young person referred to their legal representative speaking on their behalf.

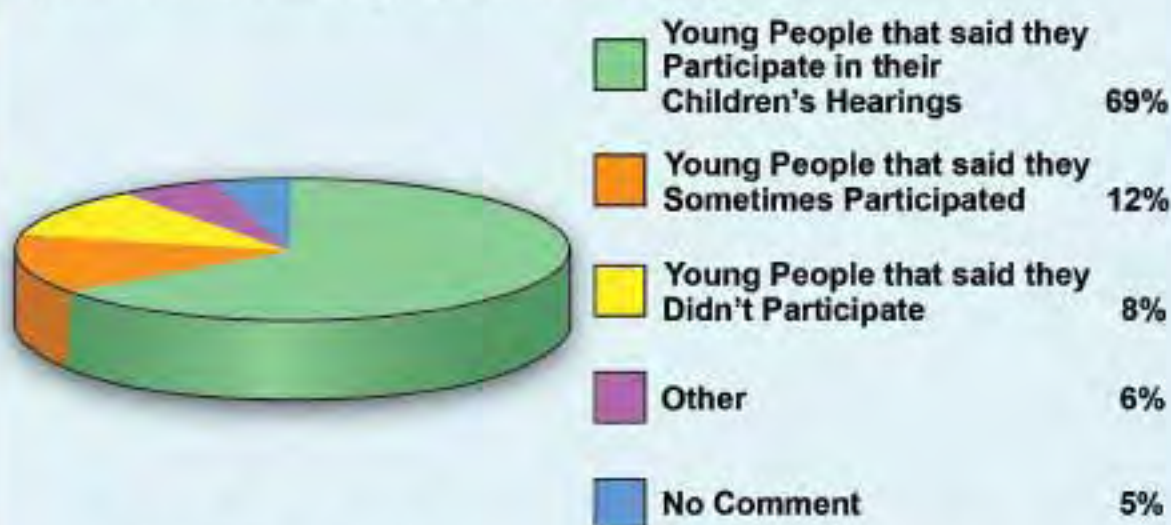


Table 14: Young People's Responses To Being Asked If They Participated In Their Children's Hearing

"Yes, I always participate - but sometimes they don't listen"

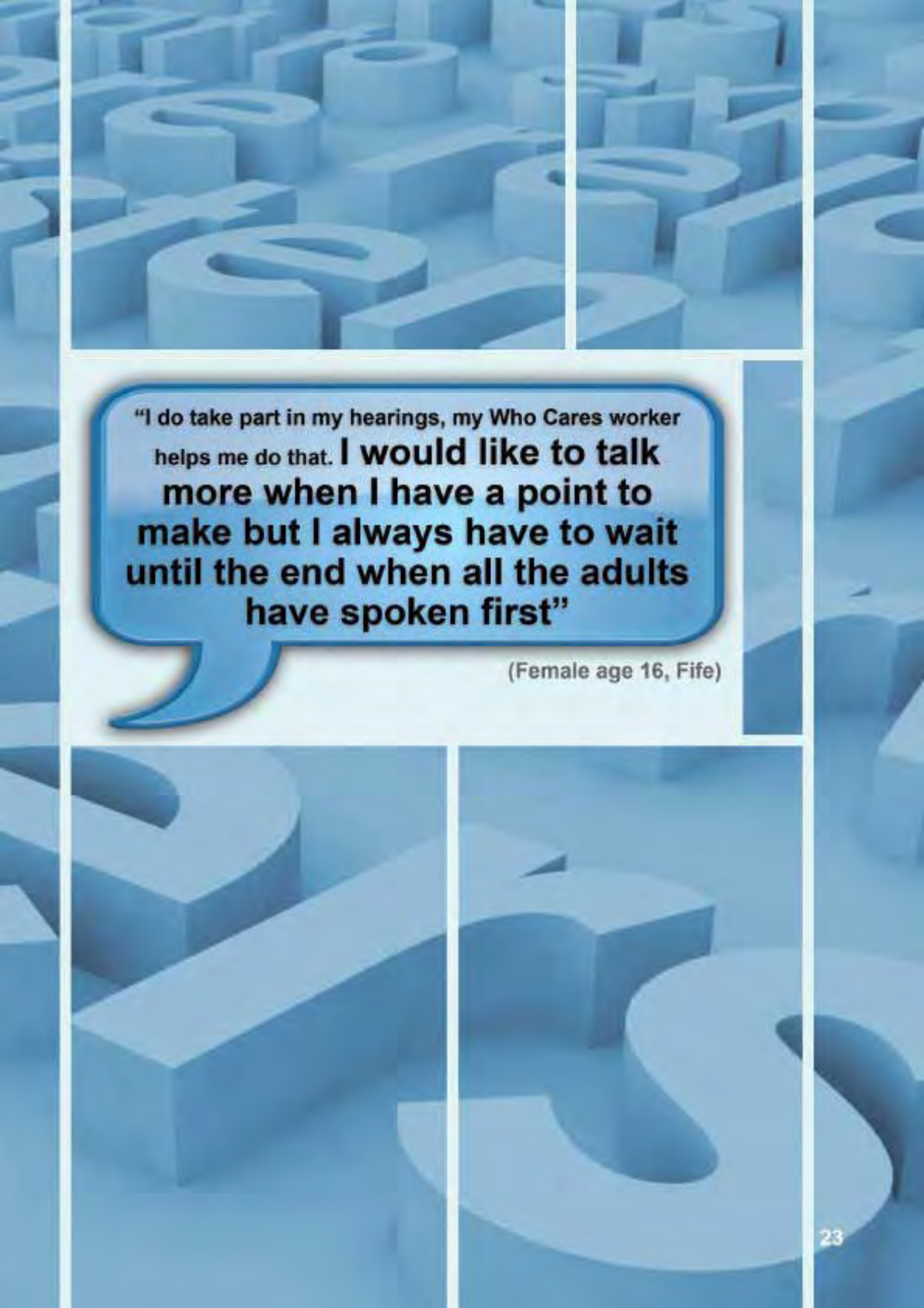
(Male age 13, Glasgow City)

"Sometimes panel members smile at me and then I sometimes say what I think"

(Female age 13, Falkirk)

"Aye, I always do - they offer you to speak to the panel alone, that's quite good"

(Male age 15, Falkirk)



"I do take part in my hearings, my Who Cares worker helps me do that. **I would like to talk more when I have a point to make but I always have to wait until the end when all the adults have spoken first**"

(Female age 16, Fife)

CHILDREN'S HEARINGS THAT WENT WELL

50% of the participants that spoke about the experience of their best Children's Hearing the majority stated that the Hearing was good due to decisions made (40%) or that they had felt listened to by the Panel Members (34%). 6% spoke about their first Children's Hearing being their best experience, whilst 5% commented that their last and final Hearing would be their best. 13% mentioned supportive Panel Members or an advocate making the experience better for them.

However, 50% of the sample group could not offer an example of their 'best Hearing' and instead gave a negative response to the question. The most common responses were 'they are all the same' or 'there is no such thing as a good Children's Hearing'.

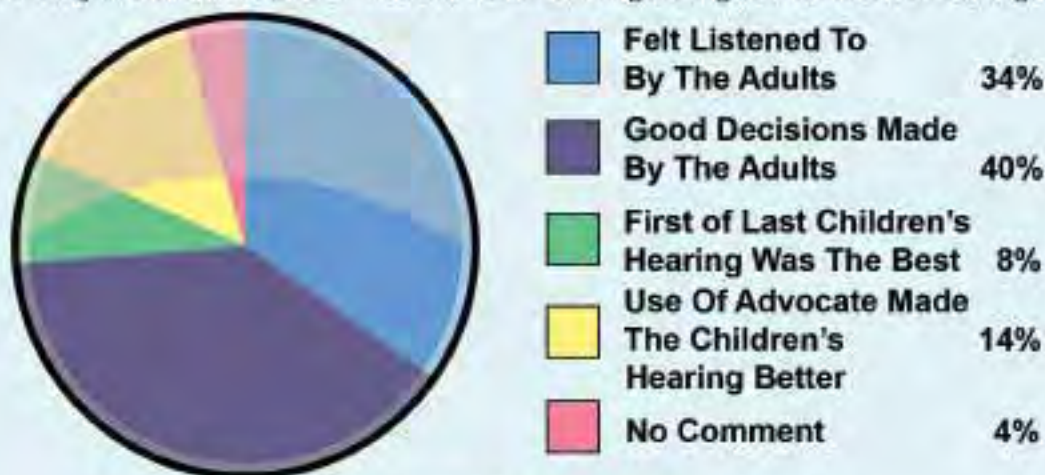


Table 15: Young People's Responses When Asked About What Made Their Best Children's Hearing

"I was able to say what I wanted to say, my Who Cares worker helped me"

(Female age 13, Glasgow City)

"I remember a panel that enabled me and my mum to live together with support"

(Male age 15, Inverclyde)

"I can't remember when it was. I was pleased when the panel understood my current placement wasn't working and I wasn't happy - I got the decision to be moved"

(Male 13, North Lanarkshire)

"I wanted a condition put on contact, this was good as they listened to me and understood what I was meaning"

(Female age 14, West Lothian)

CHILDREN'S HEARINGS THAT COULD HAVE GONE BETTER

30% of the participants stated what they thought was poor decision making by Panel Members as the reason for their Children's Hearings not going well. 11% believed that they were not listened to at the Hearing. 18% made reference to what they felt was the general attitude of Panel Members with examples given of people being 'stubborn', 'judgemental' 'crabbit' and 'strict'.

The behaviour of the young people's parents was also raised as contributor to making young people's Children's Hearing a negative experience.

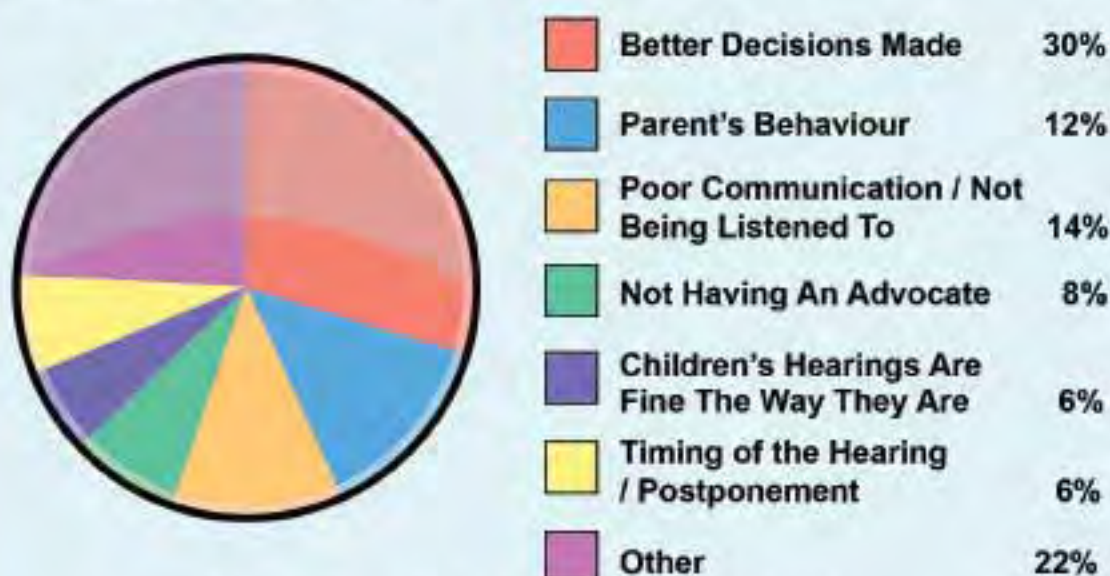


Table 16: Young People's Responses When Asked About A Children's Hearing That Could Have Gone Better

"I have been to more bad hearings than good, better decisions could have been made"

(Male age 15, Inverclyde)

"Yes, if Dad didn't shout and give abuse"

(Female age 14, Dundee City)

"The panel could stop trying to look for the negatives"

(Male age 17, South Lanarkshire)

DURING THE CHILDREN'S HEARING GENERAL IMPROVEMENTS

Some of the suggestions made by young people for panel members to improve the overall meeting environment included

- Hearings starting on time
- Advocates speaking for young people on their behalf
- Nicer Hearing Rooms
- Refreshments being offered
- Panel Members listening more to young people
- Young people speaking to the Panel Members alone
- Panel Members speaking to the young people before the Hearing



Table 17: Young People's Experiences During Their Children's Hearing

The average score out of ten young people in the consultation gave for their experience during their Children's Hearing was 4 out of 10. 80% of respondents offered a score.

"I had gotten home with mum and social work said I had to go back to crisis care - the panel agreed. It would have been better if I had got another chance or a trial period"

(Male age 15, Fall 11.)

After The Children's Hearing

FEELINGS AFTER THE CHILDREN'S HEARING

Participants in the consultation were asked about their feelings after their Children's Hearing and why they felt this way.

39% spoke of having positive feelings after their Children's Hearing was finished. For many it was due to relief that the meeting had concluded or that they were spending time with family members who they hadn't seen regularly. 27% of participants communicated they had negative feelings in the aftermath of their meeting, mainly due to the Children's Hearing decisions not going the way they expected.

28% stated that their feelings were dependant on the outcome or decisions made at their Children's Hearing.

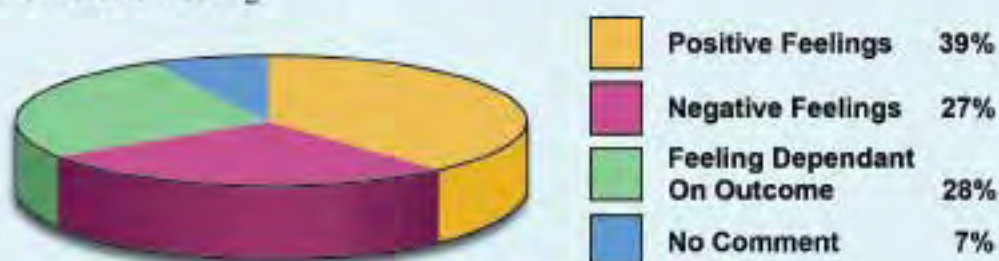


Table 18: Young People's Feelings After A Children's Hearing

"Glad its over, so I don't have anything to worry about - it's nerve wracking"

(Female age 17, North Ayrshire)

"Usually upset, sad because I am not allowed to see my mum - if it's a good meeting then I am happy"

(Male age 15, Glasgow City)

"Fine, because its finished"

(Male age 11, North Lanarkshire)

"Sh*t, I travel all the way there from down here. My mum is there and I don't get much time with her before I go back"

(Male age 12, Argyll & Bute)

SUPPORT AFTER THE CHILDREN'S HEARING

52% said that the first person they speak to after their Children's Hearing was a family member, most commonly a parent. 24% of all participants said that a carer or staff member would be the first person they speak to.

Mum, I would speak to my Mum first - because she is my Mum"

(Male age 14, East Dunbartonshire)

21% of the total number said their social workers would be the first person they would talk with after their Hearing. 10% of the respondents said they would speak to an advocate, whilst 11% stated they would speak to no one. Two participants said they would speak to anyone, no particular person. Whilst one young person said the reporter would be the person they would speak to first.

59% of the respondents had experience of the Children's Hearing outcome/decisions being explained to them afterwards. This was either as a matter of course or if the young person had requested it. 11% of the total number of participants referred to letters or minutes being sent to them as a means of explanation.

"Yes it gets explained but I didn't want to hear about it at the time"

(Male age 15, Inverclyde)

"Yes, the panel explain it and then my social worker explains it afterwards"

(Female age 16, Midlothian)



Table 18: Young People's Experiences After Their Children's Hearing

WHAT IS WORKING WELL

Within the consultation exercise although many participants did not like the look of the paperwork sent to them, such as the notification, a large majority (87%) did understand what it meant.

**“I understood the child notification
and I understand the relevant
person notification”**

(Female age 15, North Lanarkshire)

**“Lets you know why you are
going to panel, I get help to
understand it”**

(Female age 14, Dundee City)

Many participants (75%) liked the look of the *All About Me* online form, although only 10% of the entire sample group had the opportunity to complete it. More than half the sample group (60%) said they had received help from a supporting adult to complete their *Having Your Say* paperwork.

**“I’ve never completed the new form,
I think this one looks better because
it’s not as boring looking and has
more pictures”**

(Female age 15, Glasgow City)

**“I have the opportunity to complete the form
with help, but I tend to do it on my own”**

**“Its better as you can
access it online”**

(Male age 17, South Lanarkshire)

A large majority of all of the respondents (84%) had a good understanding of why young people go to Children's Hearings.

"To ensure placement is ok, moving on support or a child at home on supervision order."

(Female age 16, South Lanarkshire)

"To find out about their future and why they are in the position they are in"

(Male age 16, City of Edinburgh)

"Because something in their life happened and they need help"

(Male age 15, Inverclyde)

91% of participants were able to identify all or some key adults in the Children's Hearing and many had a sound knowledge of the role of the Panel Member, chairperson and reporter.

"The 3 people take notes and decide what happens, they ask what I think"

(Female age 16, Glasgow City)

'3 panel members make decisions for you but think it's best. The reporter writes down decisions and important things said'

(Male age 15, South Ayrshire)

A majority (62%) of the young people who took part in the consultation believed that the young person was the most important person at their Children's Hearing.

"I am the most important person there"

(Male age 12, North Ayrshire)

"Me, because it's all about me"

(Male age 16, East Lothian)

"Important? The most important is the young person"

(Male age 16, Glasgow City)

69% of the total sample group felt that they participated in their Children's Hearing, with more than half saying they always got to say what they wanted to say.

"Yes I talk, listen, debate and argue"

(Male age 16, Glasgow City)

"Yes, sometimes I talk to the panel on my own with my children's rights officer. I always get my say"

(Male age 15, Glasgow City)

"Yes, discussions like when stuff that happened they asked me if mistakes had been made"

"I felt I had been listened to - I always get to say what I want"

(Male age 13, Scottish Borders)

Children and young people who responded to the consultation could give good examples of being listened to (34%) or being supported by adults to communicate their views during their Children's Hearing. Young people also gave positive examples of good decision making by Panel Members.

"I wanted a condition put on about contact. This was good because they listened to me and understood what I was meaning"

(Female age 14, West Lothian)

"I can't remember when it was. I was pleased because the panel understood my current placement wasn't working and I wasn't happy. I got decision to be moved"

(Male age 17, South Ayrshire)

More than half the participants (55%) stated that decisions were explained to them either at the conclusion of their Hearing or immediately after their Children's Hearing.

'My social worker- they always ask me if I understand it all'

(Male age 15, Renfrewshire)

'I usually speak to the reporter after, the reporter explains it'

(Male age 15, Argyll & Bute)

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT 'BOSS FOR A DAY'

Although these positives should be acknowledged as progress made by the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration it should be noted that there were many areas that young people all over Scotland believe need to be improved upon in order for children and young people to have a more positive experience at their Children's Hearing.

Almost all the participants in the consultation gave suggestions that they believed could make the Children's Hearings System better for young people. They were asked if they were in charge of the Children's Hearing System for a day what changes would they make to benefit young people. The most common suggestion for change was the Children's Hearings either starting on time or not taking so long.

Other popular suggestions from young people were changes to waiting rooms and for refreshments to be made available. Making the meeting a more informal and fun experience for young people was also a common response, as were changes to the waiting area and for young people to meet panel members before the Hearing. A summary of the suggestions included:

THE MEETING ROOM ENVIRONMENT TO BE MORE CHILD FRIENDLY

The process should be more informal

Meetings should be more relaxed

Meetings shouldn't take so long, have breaks and to start on time

CHANGES TO THE WAITING ROOM

More things for young people to do while they wait

Access to refreshments

PARTICIPATION

Young people to be more involved in their Hearings

Meetings to be less adult orientated

Young people choose who attends the Hearing

COMMUNICATION

Better and more colourful paperwork

Adults not to use jargon during Children's Hearings

Panel members to introduce themselves to the young people before the Hearing

Young people to be offered the opportunity to speak to the Panel Members on their own

ADVOCATES AND SUPPORT

Promotion of the use of Advocates, such as Who Cares or children's rights officers, as well as friends and family members during Children's Hearings

POSITIVITY

Panel Members to have a more positive attitude towards young people

Young people should be allowed to offer their views first during the meeting

Panel Members should only discuss background information about a young person or their family when it is completely necessary

BOSS FOR A DAY RESPONSES FROM YOUNG PEOPLE

(All participants offered between one and three suggestions for improvement)

Length of meetings/have breaks	18 young People
Changes to waiting rooms	17 young People
More Informal Hearings	17 Young People
Changes to Hearing rooms	15 Young People
Panel Members getting to know young people beforehand	13 Young People
Refreshments available	10 Young People
Young people to be more involved in the Hearing	7 Young People
Young people to have an advocate	7 Young People
Changes in the attitudes of some panel members	7 Young People
Less adult orientated Hearings	6 Young People
Panel members not to bring up past issues	6 Young People
Young People Decide who comes to the Hearing	5 Young People
Let the child or young person speak first	5 Young People
Better, more colourful paperwork	5 Young People
Better decisions made	4 Young People
More preparation Time	4 Young People
Changes to the seating arrangements	3 Young People
Younger panel members	2 Young People
Young people not to attend the Hearing	2 Young People
Young people to speak to the panel on their own	2 Young People
See the written comments panel members make	1 Young Person
Hearings not to take place during school time	1 Young Person

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Comments from Young People

"Young people meet the panel first"

(Female age 17, Renfrewshire)

"Meetings should be on time and there should be something for teenagers to do while they are waiting, like a PS3"

(Male age 12, Inverclyde)

"Panel members to smile"

(Female age 14, West Dunbartonshire)

"Listen more to me and not spend so much time with my social worker"

(Male age 14, Argyll & Bute)

"Change the panel room, have sofas and have no table- so everyone is on the same level"

(Male age 13, Aberdeen City)

"Make it a little bit more cheery"

(Male age 12, Perth & Kinross)

"Panel members should use different words- big words don't explain things properly"

(Female age 16, Aberdeenshire)

"Less waiting time - the time on the letter should be the time it starts"

(Male age 15, Renfrewshire)

**"Better surroundings,
more comfortable and friendly"**

(Female age 16, Fife)

**"Young people should always have a supporter
or an advocate type of person"**

(Male age 16, City of Edinburgh)

**"Change the 'adult speaks first' to ensure
the young people speak first"**

(Female age 16, South Lanarkshire)

**"Young people should
choose who goes"**

(Female age 15, East Ayrshire)

**"Be able to read all the written comments
the panel members wrote"**

(Male age 15, Glasgow City)

**"Maybe have a break for the young people
if they feel annoyed"**

(Male age 13, West Lothian)

"Don't always just listen to social work"

(Female age 16, Midlothian)

**"Speak to young people before to make sure
they are calm before entering the meeting"**

(Male age 12, Inverclyde)

"Change the way the seats are set"

(Female age 16, Highland)

CONCLUSION


The purpose of this report was for young people to share their experiences of the Children's Hearings System. Who Cares? Scotland and the Scottish Children's Reporters Administration wanted the reports' findings to put the emphasis on the power of the voices of Scotland's looked after children and young people.

The views and experiences shared during this consultation process give us a valuable insight into the feelings of the looked after child before, during and after their Children's Hearings. We have also learned of innovative suggestions that children and young people believe can improve the Children's Hearing system in general.

The findings of this report are consistent with the messages that children and young people have communicated in reports such as a previous SCRA Research Big Words, Big Tables (2006), 'The Views and Experiences of Children and Families Involved in the Children's Hearing System' (2009) and The Children's Parliament Report 'Children's Hearing Reform- The Views of Children' (2010). The key themes for improvement remain.

Young people, like adults, are often results driven. One of the most common responses during this consultation was that adults need to listen to and hear what young people are saying. More importantly adults need to act upon what young people are telling us. The Children's Hearings System is a formal process to meet a legal requirement and to protect children and young people's rights. However as we can see within the findings of this report, this formal process can often discourage young people from taking part and getting the most out of their own Children's Hearing.

The Children's Hearing System is unique to Scotland as well as being internationally recognised. It is designed to promote children's rights and to act in the child's best interest. In order for the System to fully meet the needs of the children and young people it serves, the Scottish Children's Reporters Administration, Panel Members, Children's Hearings Scotland, the Scottish Government, policy makers and multi agency professionals have to seriously take into consideration the honest views of the one hundred children and young people from across all of Scotland's local authorities who contributed to this report. Only then can we begin to *get it right* for children across the nation.



**"Panel members to be more informal
as I feel they're intimidating"**

(Male, age 15)

REFERENCES

Big Words, Big Tables: Getting It Right For Every Child - Children and young people's experiences of advocacy support and participation in the Children's Hearings System (2006) Scottish Executive

Children's Hearing Reform: The Views of Children (2010) The Children's Parliament

The Views and Experiences of Children and Families Involved in the Children's Hearing System (2009) Scottish Children's Reporters Administration

APPENDIX 1

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE



SCRA CONSULTATION



(To be Completed by YPW)



AGE _____

LOCAL AUTHORITY _____

GENDER _____

ETHNICITY _____

DISABILITY _____

PLACEMENT (tick one please)

Foster Care

Residential Unit

Secure Care

Residential School

Looked After at Home

Kinship Care

Shared Care



SCRA (the Scottish Children's Reporters Administration) is seeking the views of young people involved in the Children's Hearing System. They want to make whole experience of children's hearings, from start to finish, better for every young person involved. To do this they need YOUR expert views. Can you please take 10 minutes to complete this form with your worker, it could make a positive difference for young people in the future. Please answer in the questions in the boxes required.

Many Thanks

Before The Meeting

INFORMATION

What kind of information do you receive from the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration (SCRA)?

Have you ever received any leaflets?

If yes, are these helpful? Can you give me an example of how they helped?

* * *

How helpful was information you received for SCRA?

Poor – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 – 8 – 9 – Great (please circle)

NOTIFICATION & GROUNDS OF REFERRAL *Show sample notification, seek responses*

What does this paperwork mean to you? *Ask for a couple of things this form represents, look for any feelings it brings*

Do you understand it? *If the young person is unsure, please ask why*

How well do you understand the notification and grounds of referral paperwork?

Poor – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 – 8 – 9 – Great (please circle)

'ALL ABOUT ME' FORM - Show a sample of a 'Having Your Say' form

What do young people think of this?

Is it easy to complete?

Do young people get support from staff, carer or social worker in completing these forms?

*
*
*

How good are 'All About Me' forms to help you to put your views across?

Poor – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 – 8 – 9 – Great (please circle)

Why do young people go to children's hearings?

How are you feeling before a children's hearing? Why to you think you feel this way?

What is the waiting area like? What kind of things are in this room?

What do you think should happen to improve the experiences of young people before a children's hearing?

Overall, how would you rate your experiences before a children's hearing?

Poor – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 – 8 – 9 – Great (please circle)

ROLES - WHO'S WHO?



Who are the people on the picture and what is their job in the children's hearing?

Relate this to any children's hearing the young person has attended

WHERE TO SIT?



Where would you sit at this meeting table? Why would you sit there?

Where do the most important people in the meeting sit?

Who are the most important people at a children's hearing? Ask if this is like the table at a hearing, relate it to this

How are you feeling during a children's hearing?

Why do you feel this way?

Do you understand what is going on?

*

*

*

Do you think you participate in your children's hearing?

Can you give me an example?

Do you always get to say what you want to say?

*

*

*

Tell me about the best children's hearing you have ever attended?

What was so good about it?

*

*

Have you ever attended a children's hearing where you thought things could have went better?

*

*

What do you think should happen to improve the experiences of young people during a children's hearing?

Overall how would you score the experience of attending a children's hearing?

Poor – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 – 8 – 9 – Great (please circle)

AFTER THE MEETING

How are you feeling after a children's hearing?
Why do you think you feel this way?

*

*

Who is the first person you speak to after your children's hearing?
Why is it them that you speak to?

*

*

Is what had just happened in your children's hearing ever explained
to you afterwards?
If yes, can you give an example?

*

*

What do you think should happen to improve the experiences of young people
during a children's hearing?

How would you rate your experience after a children's hearing?

Poor – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 – 6 – 7 – 8 – 9 – Great (please circle)

Boss For The Day

Imagine you are in charge of the children's hearing system for the day.
You can make 3 changes to make children's hearings better for young people.
What 3 changes would you make?

*

*

*

...I pick it up as I go...
never seen a leader...
things legal things...
The panel decides the future...
It would have been beneficial to...
I wish it could be more relaxed and...
People don't listen to me...
It's better as you can access...
Scary, I'm ok afterwards. Emotion...

**"Thank God it's over and
nothing really bad happened"**

(Male age 12, City of Edinburgh)

I got a letter with time and date...
not bothered with anything else...
I understand it because I...
Good, because I might go...
Because I have...
because I have...

"I am not worried...
I like it...
We don't have...
I am not worried...
Maybe nicer building, or comfy...
seats or even...
come...
you"



SCOTTISH
CHILDREN'S REPORTER
ADMINISTRATION

