



# The Children's Hearings System: understood and making a difference

## Young people's views



## Acknowledgements

Thank you to:

- The research Peer Advisors who provided such excellent advice and guidance: Becki, Carson, Chelsea, Jemma and Roxy.
- All of young people who took part and spoke so openly and honestly about their experiences of Children's Hearings and their impact on their lives.
- Aberlour Child Care Trust, particularly Anne Black, Susan MacKellaig, Billy Anderson and Agnes Henderson for their help with recruiting young people for this research.

**Indiya Whitehead, Lucy Hanson, Gillian Henderson  
Scottish Children's Reporter Administration  
August 2011**

## Contents

<b>Executive Summary</b>	4
<b>Introduction</b>	6
<b>Methods</b>	7
Peer Advisors	7
Participants	7
Consent and ethics	7
Interviews and focus group	8
<b>What do young people think about Hearings decisions?</b>	9
Contributing views before Hearings – reports for Hearings	9
Contributing views in Hearings and involvement in decision-making	10
Hearings process and fairness	12
Hearings decisions – right or wrong?	14
<b>What do young people think about the services they got because of Hearings?</b>	15
Who implements Hearings decisions?	15
Understanding of involvement with services	15
Receipt of services	16
Reporting not getting services	18
Involvement in decision-making with services	18
<b>What do young people think about if the Children’s Hearings System made a difference to their lives?</b>	20
Safe	20
Happy	20
Relationships	22
Life now – better or worse?	23
Impact of services	24
Responsibility for change	24
<b>Discussion and areas for improvement</b>	26
Involvement in the Hearings process	26
Receipt of services	27
Does the Children’s Hearings System make a difference?	27
<b>References</b>	28
<b>Annexes:</b>	
Annex 1 - Peer Advisors recruitment leaflet	29
Annex 2 – Peer Advisors parental consent letter	31
Annex 3 – Peer Advisors parental consent form	32
Annex 4 – Recruitment poster	33
Annex 5 – Recruitment leaflet	34
Annex 6 – Parental consent letter	35
Annex 7 – Parental consent form	36
Annex 8 – Young people’s consent form	37

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research aimed to find out if being involved in the Children's Hearings System makes a difference to the lives of young people involved in it. Twenty one young people aged between 11 and 17 years, who are involved in services provided by Aberlour Child Care Trust, were asked their views on their involvement in making decisions, the services they received and outcomes from being involved in the Hearings System. Eight areas for improvement are identified.

### Involvement in the Hearings process

There was widespread acceptance by the young people in this research that, in general, the process of a Children's Hearing is fair. Most of them could also see that although they may not have agreed with the Hearing decision at the time that, on reflection, it had helped them.

Being able to take part in Hearings is more important to young people than what is said in reports, and there can be barriers to young people's participation.

### *Areas for improvement:*

1. Young people should be involved the preparation of reports for Hearings so that their views are reflected in the information provided.
2. Hearings should be a chance for everyone to have their say and should not be too focused on the views on professionals and other adults present.
3. Panel Members and others present need to be aware of how young people may be feeling (e.g. scared, shy) and that this makes it harder for them to take part.
4. Young people appreciate being asked for their views in Hearings, and should be encouraged to do this.
5. Hearings should try to involve only those who are involved in young people's lives and know them.
6. Hearing decisions could be better explained:
  - i. Panel Members should try to use language that children and young people can understand.
  - ii. It should be clear in decisions (oral and written) how long the Supervision Requirement (or other intervention) will last, any conditions attached to it, and who is responsible for its implementation.
  - iii. Supervision Requirements documentation should clearly state why it has been made and what the child or young person should expect to receive in terms of support and services.

## Receipt of services

Three quarters had received the services they expected to get. What they were less clear about was the basis of their involvement with services (e.g. was it to do with their Supervision Requirement?).

### *Area for improvement:*

7. Children's Hearings and workers in services should better explain to young people why they are involved in a service.

Two thirds expected to get more involvement from social work than they did. Those who were unhappy with the service they received from social work tended to be those who had changes in their social worker or where their worker was absent. Young people understood that it was not always possible to have a consistent worker, but this had rarely been explained to them.

### *Area for improvement:*

8. Those working with young people should explain promptly to them why there is a change in social worker or why their social worker is not available (e.g. sickness absence).

## Does the Children's Hearings System make a difference?

Most of the young people in this research felt their lives had got better since being involved in the Hearings System. The main reasons for this were because relationships with their families had improved, they and/or their parents behaviour had changed, they had been able to achieve educationally, and if they had got help for their problems.

Hearings could provide the impetus for change – for young people and their parents. This was especially where parents had substance misuse problems, and Hearings had been a motivating factor to them addressing this.

Overall, young people said that it was their own commitment to change that had improved their lives.

## INTRODUCTION

Does the Children's Hearings System make a difference to the lives of children and young people? This research aimed to answer this question from the point of view of those directly involved in it – children and young people.

Over 40,000 Children's Hearings are held each year in Scotland. Hearings decide what legal measures are needed to protect children. These are important decisions that can affect children's lives and those of their families.

A consultation by the Scottish Children's Parliament (2010) and previous research by SCRA (2006, 2009) all found that children and young people want to be able to have their say and be heard in Hearings, have the information they need to be able to participate, and for them and their families to be treated with respect. These studies did ask children and young people about how they much were involved in decision making and how this could be improved, and many of their findings and recommendations are being taken forward in the current reform of the Hearings System.

However, there is a gap in what we know about what children and young people think about Hearings' decisions and what happened to them afterwards. To help find out, in this research we asked young people about what they thought of the decisions made at their Hearings, the services they then received and whether these made a difference to their lives (for good or bad).

## METHODS

### *Peer Advisors*

Peer Advisors provided guidance to help make sure that the research focused on issues relevant to children and young people (Annex 1). The four girls and one boy were aged between nine and 18 years old when they met in July 2010 to advise the research team.

The five Peer Advisors were recruited through the Aberlour Child Care Trust. Parents of the young people who volunteered were asked for their consent for their child to take part (Annexes 2 and 3).

### *Participants*

Young people were recruited by Aberlour from those involved in its services. A recruitment poster and leaflet were displayed in Aberlour's services across Scotland (Annexes 3 and 4). Young people who were interested in taking part told their worker at Aberlour who contacted the research team. It was then arranged with the young person for one of the research team to speak to them at home or at one of Aberlour's services.

Of the 26 young people who volunteered to take part, five did not - one was over 17 years, one withdrew and three could not be contacted for interview.

Interviews or a focus group were carried out with 21 young people aged between 11 and 17 years, most were either 14 or 15 years old. 15 are male and six are female.

### *Consent and ethics*

Only young people who expressed an interest were asked to take part. Aberlour's staff sent letters to the parents/carers (for those under 16 years) to let know that their child(ren) had volunteered and to ask for their consent (Annexes 4 and 5). The research was explained to the young people and they were asked to complete a consent form (Annex 8). Only young people who had provided their consent, and whose parents/carers had consented, took part in the research.

The Peer Advisors and young people who took part in the research were all given a 'thank you' of a gift voucher or MP3 player to the value of £10. This was given at the end of their involvement, and they were not informed until then that they would receive this gift.

All information provided by young people was accessible only to the four members of the research team, and was destroyed at the end of the research. Pseudonyms are used in this report to protect the identity of participants, and no identifying information is used. The research team all have Enhanced Disclosure Scotland clearance.

## ***Interviews and focus groups***

Participants were asked if they'd like to take part in a focus group or a one to one interview. Three young men took part in a focus group, and 18 young people were interviewed.

The Peer Advisors suggested the following topics and questions based on their experiences of the Hearings System, and these were used in the focus group and interviews with young people:

### **1. Your involvement in making decisions**

- Was the decision made at the Hearing the right decision?
- Your involvement in making the decision.
- Your feelings about how the decision is made.
- Your feelings about the final decision made.

### **2. Services received**

- Who puts into action the decisions that are made at the Hearing?
- Getting the services you thought you would and what you did if you didn't.
- Contact with services and workers.
- Services you didn't get that you thought you would and why you thought you'd get them.
- Were the reasons why you didn't get services explained?
- Your involvement in making decisions with the services you are involved with.
- Your understanding of the services you are involved with.

### **3. Outcomes**

- What happened after you attended your Hearings?
- Your views on where you are now and if you were involved in getting yourself to this point.
- Your feelings of safety and happiness.
- Your feelings about your relationships with your family and friends.
- Your feelings about your living situation.
- How you see your life now – is it what you wanted or do you still want to make changes?
- Is your life the way you would like it to be?

The focus group and interviews were carried out between February and May 2011.

Most interviews were recorded and transcribed. Two young people asked that their interviews not be recorded, and notes were taken instead. Notes were taken of the discussion at the focus group.



A thematic approach was used to analyse the interview and focus group findings<sup>1</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> The National Centre for Social Research FrameWork qualitative data analysis package was used for this analysis.

## *What do young people think about...*

- 1. ... Hearings decisions?*
- 2. ... the services they got because of Children's Hearings?*
- 3. ... if the Hearings System made a difference to their lives?*

### *1. ...Hearings decisions?*

#### **Contributing views before Hearings - reports for Hearings**

Around half were not involved in contributing their views before their Hearings. Keir (15 years) explained that the first he knows of what is in the reports is when he receives them in the post.

- **Social work reports** – Two in three young people did not feel involved by their social worker in preparing reports for Hearings, and were not confident that if they asked for something to be removed and/or changed that it would be. However, some young people had good discussions with their social worker before Hearings, which lead to their views being recorded in reports.
- **Education reports** - Young people were not usually involved in preparing reports provided by schools. They were less concerned about the content of school reports as they tended to be on facts (e.g. attendance records) rather than opinions.
- **Other services' reports** – Young people liked the approach used by Aberlour - the key worker and young person first discuss what should be in the report and then they write the report together.

A few young people said they were not involved in report writing and preferred to submit the Having Your Say form, speak to their residential worker or simply wait to speak at the Hearing.

Hearings papers were understood by most; some found them more difficult:

*"I just, like, give it to my mum to read...yeah, she does [read them to her] but I don't, like, understand it...it's just, like, adult stuff and I don't really pay attention when it's adult stuff" (Phoebe, 13 years).*

Reports for Hearings could be too focused on past issues. Young people were worried that incidents from their past and family issues which had been resolved would be raised in Hearings upsetting them and their family. They suggested that if reports focused on more recent events, especially positive changes and progress, Hearings could be a better experience.

## Contributing views in Hearings and involvement in decision-making

Taking part in the Hearing was of more value than reports. What was said during the Hearing was most important and likely to influence its decision:

*“It doesnae matter what they say in the letters, it’s what they say at the end o’ it...”* (Stewart, 14 years).

Young people appreciated when they were asked for their opinions at Hearings:

*“...you get your say, like, eh? Stick up for yersel’ an’ a’ that...”* (Matt, 12 years).

Phoebe (13 years) and Aimee (15 years) thought that the Hearing was a good way for young people to get their views across, as they would not otherwise have had a say.

Others said that their views were not always taken into account:

*“Some o’ them [Panel Members] listen to you but some o’ them are pure stubborn and don’t listen to you at all”* (Andrew, 16 years).

*“I think the first time I was [asked his views] but they never really done anything about it...Well, nothing changed...and they never really took what I said into consideration”* (Paul, 14 years).

*“They jus’ talk, like, among themselves, ken what I mean? They don’t really talk to, like, me or ‘owt...I don’t really get a say in what happens...”* (Peter, 15 years).

Better explanation of why the decision was made could help young people’s understanding of it. They suggested that decisions be explained in a child-friendly way, rather than Panel Members using set phrases (e.g. ‘it’s in your best interests’ or ‘to best meet your needs’):

*“They do explain it a bit I suppose, yeah...but they could explain it more...”* (Campbell, 14 years).

Panel Members sometimes aired conflicting views in Hearings. This could make young people anxious, as they were not always clear which way the decision would go, and it made it more difficult for them to understand the decision and how it had been made.

How young people felt during the Hearing could affect their ability to participate. Sometimes they felt shy, or worried that they might say something ‘wrong’ or ‘upsetting’, or of being ‘ganged up on’:

## Shy

*"I get quite shy at the Hearings, I don't really talk much...I find it quite difficult, so I do...you're all in this circle and it's dead intimidating, so it is..."* (Chloe, 15 years).

*"I get nervous when I go in, but, I'm no really talkative. I get shy...I kinda stop getting' nervous in the middle, when it's just about finishing"* (Aimee, 15 years).

## Scared

*"I'm scared to talk around a lot of people. I could say something bad, like, a bit weird...'cos, like, I don't want to seem weird"* (Phoebe, 13 years).

*"[I'm] scared I would get taken away or somethin'..."* (Jenny, 14 years).

*"...it was just hard to talk because the things I wanted might've upset other people as well"* (Paul, 14 years).

## Being misunderstood

*"I've never said 'owt, like, I disagree. I've just never said it...I just didn't want to get into, like, a deeper hole..."* (Keir, 15 years).

*"Don't like them at all, hate them, feel pressurised...I tried to answer [the Panel Members' questions] but they would just change it basically...Put words in my mouth and head..."* (Charlie, 15 years).

## Hearings process and fairness

There were mixed views on the Hearings process.

All the young people had experienced a Hearing that made a decision that was against their wishes. However, there was still appeared to be widespread acceptance that it was a fair process.

A few felt that Panel Members did not know enough about them to make such important decisions about their lives:

*"I think they shouldnae make decisions fir ye 'cos, like, they don't know ye..."* (Jenny, 14 years).

More commonly, young people preferred that a Hearing made these decisions rather than their Social Worker, as three people making a decision is better than one:

*“...’cos the three o’ them [Panel Members] are gaein’ their opinions tae what should happen” (Aimee, 15 years).*

There were concerns that the Hearing relied too heavily on the report from social work and the opinions of the Social Worker and other adults:

*“I think it’s a bit unfair ‘cos the report comes from, like, the social workers and stuff...it’s a bit unfair how it’s just really the social worker” (Paul, 14 years).*

*“They don’t really talk to, like, me or ‘owt...[they talk to] parents and social workers really....I don’t really get a say in what happens...[they could] listen more tae ye, see what you think.” (Peter, 15 years).*

Many said their views should be the most important, especially when there were professionals at the Hearing who the young person had never met, such as a stand-in Social Worker:

*“I dinnae think that’s right, eh? ‘Cos they dinnae ken nowt about you...nowt...[it would be fairer if it were] somebody that knows yer background...” (Andrew, 16 years old).*

Others said that the Hearing should be an opportunity for everyone to talk, including the young person, parent(s) and professionals and equal weighting should be given to everyone’s views:

*“[They] should listen to everybody basically...” (James, 15 years).*

*“Sometimes I can feel that it’s been done to me, like, em...like, something happened that I didn’t want...but it’s usually alright...I think I should have a say in what’s happenin’ to me...I think I should be listened to just as much as them [social work].” (Campbell, 14 years).*

Aimee (15 years) and Ricky (14 years) explained that attending Hearings helped let everyone get their ‘feelings off their chest’ and aired:

*“...going to group Hearings made a difference, like, em...she gets to say what she thinks and yeah, it’s quite good...” (Campbell, 14 years)*

Young people said that the fairest way to make sure decisions are the right ones is by only having those involved in their lives at their Hearings:

*“My social worker...she kens everything about me...I prefer my social worker to be at my Hearings instead of, like, other people that I’ve never even met” (Mal, 12 years).*

*“I think it’s my social worker, eh?...she speaks for me most Panels...she’s helped me out a lot like...” (Andrew, 16 years).*

## Hearings decisions – right or wrong?

At the time, many felt that the decisions made by their Hearings were wrong.

*“...they [Hearings] give you decisions what maybe, like, you don’t like...like supervision orders and, like, all that and if you don’t like it the there’s not much you can do about it” (Mal, 12 years).*

Those who were moved from home or who had contact with family reduced often felt that this was not ‘fair’ and that the Hearing should not be able to decide who they can and cannot see. On further discussion, this seemed partly to be due the decision not being explained in a way they could understand including how long it would apply.

On reflection, not all the young people thought Hearings made bad decisions and were able to see that these decisions had helped them:

*“...sometimes yeah, ‘cos, like, they have made some good decisions about me, like going to [Aberlour] and stuff ‘cos it really helped but other times no...” (Chloe, 15 years).*

*“...if I was to say something at a Panel, like, they might not go on with it an’ they might choose the complete opposite...just for the safety of yersel’ basically and try and help you out.” (Andrew, 16 years).*

*“I agreed with all of them [Hearing decisions] so I could get out o’ the room...but it was the best thing for me...[didn’t appreciate it] at the time, no” (Keir, 15 years).*

*“...they told me whit was gain’ tae happen, but it doesnae really bother me, ‘cos I needed help...” (Aimee, 15 years).*

Young people were more likely to disagree with the decision if they felt they had not been involved in making it:

*“I don’t like it when it’s not a decision that I hope for...like, when they said I was put in care for the second time, well I was still in care but I thought I was going home, but they kept me in care for longer and I started crying...Not that involved [in making the decision]. I just sit in a corner...’cos at the very end my attention span’s, like, gone completely” (Phoebe, 13 years).*

*“...like, if the decision’s not what I wanted then I feel like they haven’t really listened to me...” (Chloe, 15 years).*

## 2. ... the services they got because of Hearings?

### Who implements Hearings decisions?

There was confusion about whose responsibility it was to implement Supervision Requirements and make sure young people received services. Responses ranged from having no idea, the Hearing, their Social Worker, the Reporter, and themselves:

*"...is it no the Panel? The Panel I think, is it no?" (Aimee, 15 years)*

*"...if they give you instructions to do then you have to do it or you're just goin' tae get yoursel' I more trouble, eh?" (Andrew, 16 years)*

Most thought that it was their own responsibility and/or that of their Social Worker.

*"[the responsibility] is mine's and social work..." (Chloe, 15 years)*

This tended to have been learnt through experience. It would be better if it could explained at the Hearing.

### Understanding of involvement with services

Young people had not often had it directly explained to them why they were involved in a service(s). Despite this, most knew, usually due to their understanding of their circumstances – e.g. their parents' substance abuse, or their own offending or non-attendance at school.

Young people would like to know exactly how long their involvement with a service is to last and/or if there were any conditions attached (e.g. until their offending had stopped, improved school attendance, etc.). Sometimes they were confused about this as it hadn't been explained:

*"I ken I leave [Aberlour] at sixteen, I ken this is a school thing...but I dinnae hae a clue about social work..." (Stewart, 14 years).*

*"They said to me 'you're on a Supervision Order' and I was about tae ask questions but then it [Hearing] finished...and I don't know how long I'm on it, eh?" (Mal, 12 years).*

Others found that their workers were good at keeping them informed:

*"All my workers make different appointments for me before my next Panel and tell me there [how long he will be involved with them]..." (Andrew, 16 years).*

## Receipt of services

The young people in this study received a range of services as well as social work services. All had support from Aberlour, some also received a Young People's Support Service (befriending), extra support at school, or SACRO. Most got the services that they expected. They did not always know whether this was because they had attended Hearings or for another reason.

About a quarter did not receive all the services they expected, particularly psychological interventions (e.g. anger management, dealing with behavioural issues, child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS)):

*"...anger management...they brunged that up but it never happened...aye [it would have been helpful] for my anger issues" (Matt, 12 years).*

*"I wanted to go to CAMHS...I got a YSS worker but she didnae dae anythin', she took me oot tae pool didn't she? Took me oot tae play pool, what good's 'at, ken?...I said that at the Hearing...but I've still no' got a CAMHS worker or anythin'..." (Stewart, 14 years).*

Young people didn't always know why they didn't get a service they expected to receive. They would like this to be explained to them.

About two thirds of the young people anticipated more involvement from social work than they got.

*"One o' my first social workers...I was supposed tae see him every fortnight or somethin' and I used to see him every six months, once every six months, if you were lucky....when he used to see me he used to take me go-karting or somethin' like that, he never used to talk to me about how I was gettin' on or 'owt...and that's when I was gettin' in trouble quite a lot as well" (Andrew, 16 years).*

*"...I don't see the social worker very much...[would like to see them] at least every month...I've only seen him twice...from the summer to Christmas I've only seen him twice..." (Peter, 15 years).*

*"If I called him [social worker] he would come in but he wouldn't arrange to come in and see me...if I was kicking off here or in [residential] he would come and see me. It's the same as everything – if I kick off I get more things but if I don't then I don't" (Morven, 15 years).*

Lack of a consistent Social Worker could be a barrier to building a good relationship. Lucas (13 years) regularly saw two different Social Workers, and preferred one to the other. He didn't understand why he had two.



*“...I’ve had three different one’s [social workers]. I’m like ‘who’re you, who’re you, who’re you?’...[feel] paranoid ‘cos I don’t know who it is...”* (Mal, 12 years).

Some had concerns about how social work could affect their contact with parent(s). Paul (14 years) explained that his Hearing had decided the contact he should have with his mother; this was changed by the Social Worker and he didn’t know why.

*“They say stuff but they don’t actually do it sometimes....I’m supposed to see my social worker and mum at the same time. They’ll start doin’ that then after a few months they’ll get bored and all that, like...they’ll stop eventually”* (Matt, 12 years).

Young people understood that Social Workers were ‘human’ and could be ill or move jobs, and asked that such circumstances be better communicated to them. Campbell’s (14 years) Social Worker had been off sick for some time before his foster carer told him. Aimee also hadn’t seen her Social Worker due to illness:

*“My social worker was meant to come an’ see me, like, every week but she wouldnae come. I seen her, like, twice after the Panel and I was to see her every week....they kept sayin’ she was ill* (Aimee, 15 years).

It hadn’t been explained to Campbell and Aimee what would happen in the interim, and no other arrangements had been put in place:

*“...that’s us stopped until she comes back...everything sort of stopped, which is a bit annoying...I don’t know when she’ll come back...She’s been quite busy before she was sick as well so I hadn’t seen her...”* (Campbell, 14 years).

This was in contrast to Campbell’s experience with Aberlour:

*“[At Aberlour]I would get told beforehand and everything, like, when maybe, like, a worker’s going to be on holiday or something’ like that so I know when I’m seeing them and when I’m not...”* (Campbell, 14 years).

About a third of the young people saw their social worker as often as they had expected and were happy with how often they met. A few expressed that they had a good relationship and one even reported that their social workers would go the extra mile:

*“There were no problems...with any of my social workers, sick as a dog, they’d still come...”* (James 13)

## Reporting not getting services

If a young person didn't get the services they expected, they were not always sure who to raise this with:

- Workers at Aberlour's services were most commonly identified. They were trusted by young people to inform their next Hearing if they'd asked them to.
- Those with good relationships with their Social Workers would contact them: *"...would just go and speak to my social worker"* (Campbell, 14 years).
- Some would speak to a family member.
- There were mixed views on if they would tell their next Hearing themselves. This could be dependent on their experience of Hearings, and their confidence in feeling able to do this.

However, almost three quarters of the young people felt they were getting all the services they needed and could not think of any further service they wanted.

## Involvement in decision-making within services

Levels of involvement in decision-making were likely to be dependent on the young person's experience of the service and relationship with its workers.

### *Social work*

Some young people did not feel involved in social work decisions:

*"...I didn't really feel comfortable that much with them [social work] 'cos most of the time it felt like they were against me as well..."* (Chloe, 15 years).

Those who did not have a consistent Social Worker could feel less involved in decision-making:

*"I've had somethin' like five [social] workers, ken, ye try and get a bond wi' somebody an' they disappear...now I jist dinnae bother wi' 'em, have nowt tae dae wi' them 'cos sooner or later they'll be gone...yer trustin' someone ain't ye, wi' all yer information an' ye speak tae an' then they go an' get another job, ken, I've had hunners... They'd maybe ken me a bit better..."* (Stewart, 14 years).

Those who were involved tended to have a consistent Social Worker and a good relationship with them. These young people felt consulted and informed of any changes.

*"My social worker is brilliant, eh? She helps me oot all the time basically..."* (Andrew, 16 years).

### *Other services*

There were a variety of views on decision-making in residential and foster care. Some felt very involved (e.g. in writing reports), with others not feeling involved at all.

Young people felt involved in decisions made about them in Aberlour services and, to a lesser extent, in education. They felt trusted and respected by their Aberlour workers:

*“...the decisions they make is, like, revolved around you, so it’s good...” (Charlie, 15 years).*

## *...if the Children's Hearings System made a difference to their lives?*

### Safe

*"Aye, supervision it kind of protects you a bit, that's kinda good but that's about it" (Charlie, 15 years).*

*"Things like that [Supervision Requirements] help you out though cos if I never had a Supervision Order I think I'd just, like, be in the jail or something... my social workers have helped me out quite a lot, like, over the last couple o' years." (Andrew, 16 years).*

Over a third of the young people felt safer from being involved in the Hearings System, mainly because their own behaviour had changed:

- Aimee (15 years) had learnt, through Hearings and interventions, how to keep herself safe.
- Mal (12 years) had become less aggressive towards others. This made him feel safer which he felt was down to attending Hearings and working with services.
- Matt (12 years) is no longer as 'hot-headed' as he was. Going to Hearings and the support he then received helped him deal with his temper.

On the other hand, Paul did not feel any safer and believed his behaviour had deteriorated:

*"...I think I've got more of a temper and stuff...'cos I'm just sick of no one listening to me and nothing changing..." (Paul, 14 years).*

Some had learnt to remove themselves from unsafe situations and/or had less contact with negative peer groups:

*"...I stopped hangin' about with the people I got in trouble with...I was gettin' in trouble a lot...I'm still friends with the people I got in trouble with, I just don't hang about with them..." (Keir, 15 years).*

Many of those who said they felt safer explained that this was due to changes in their parent(s) behaviour – particularly a reduction in parental alcohol use.

### Happy

About a half of the young people felt happier, and said this was because they had:

- achieved more educationally than they thought they would
- better relationships with family members

- stayed out of trouble
- got help for their problems; and
- their parent(s) had got help for their problems:

*“Aye, well happy...comin’ intae a new school an’ all that, that’s made a change an’ all that, from what I was...I never used tae gae tae school. I hated it, but I love it now...and movin’ intae a new hoose...” (Aimee, 15 years).*

*“...’cos I get more out of life, like, now than I did back then...’cos I used to be naughty as when I was little...I want to be a fireman or dog handler” (Ricky, 14 years).*

Those who had had committed offences understood that the Hearings System had dealt with these rather than the criminal justice system. Morven (15 years) was appreciative that the ‘charges’ she accrued went to Hearings rather than to court.

Having to go to Hearings could also be a source of unhappiness and anxiety. This was experienced more by those who were uncertain about the outcome, were younger (e.g. Archie (11 years) said that he felt much happier when he did not have to go to Hearings), or those who had many moves:

*“They move ye about fir nothin’ really sometimes...they don’t give you, like, enough help fir what yer issues are or whatever you’ve doe or when it’s hard on yer family, they don’t really give ye any support or ‘owt...’cos, like, I’ve had no support since I was, like, five or somethin’...[would like support] a lot earlier. I had bad anger issues when I wis wee – I used tae get moves foster placements ‘cos they couldnae really handle me” (Peter, 15 years).*

*“...there’s still a bit that makes life suck a bit, like, moving around and all that...” (Campbell, 14 years).*

When asked what could be changed to make them happier, there was a consensus – where they live. All those with Supervision Requirements and living away from home said that they would prefer to be at home with their families:

*“...I’d rather be back home...would rather be with my friends as well...” (Paul, 14 years).*

*“...it would make me happier, in my opinion it would make me happy if I was living with my mum” (Campbell, 14 years).*

Peter and Morven (both 15 years) said that going home would improve their lives and let them have a ‘normal life’.

Young people wanted to live with their families, regardless of the issues at home. They also understood that sometimes this wasn’t feasible:

*“If I wisnae on supervision I’d probably still be living with my mum, eh? She was a drug user...So it’s, like, better...I’ve have been in a bad environment if I hadn’t been put on supervision, eh?” (Andrew, 16 years).*

## Relationships

Relationships with their families had improved for over two thirds of the young people.

Firstly, there was recognition that changes in their own and their parent(s) behaviour had improved relationships:

*“...it’s got better...now that [mum’s] stopped the drinking an’ stopped what she used to do it’s, like, made me feel more happier that she’s been able to do that and it’s, like, made our relationship better...relationships with my family an’ that’s got better...” (Campbell, 14 years).*

*“We’re all gettin’ on an’ all that...we’re no fighting and bickering all the time, like we used to” (Aimee, 15 years).*

*“...my mum’s off the drink...my dad’s not with his ex-partner and that...I’ve got my family where it needs to be...my mum and me are a lost closer. My dad is...we used to be really really close and now we’re like, really really really close” (Phoebe, 13 years).*

Young people whose parents had substance misuse problems felt that the Hearings System had not only kept them safe it had provided the motivation for their parent(s) to address their behaviour.

Secondly, some young people said that being removed from their parent(s) care could sometimes have a positive effect on family relationships:

*“Me and my brother used to fight, like, 24/7 but now we’re a lot closer. We don’t fight anymore, as much as we used to...my family are closer” (Phoebe, 13 years).*

*“Better in some ways, I suppose...when me and my brother both lives at my mum’s we used to fight a lot an’ now that we’re not, like, loving together we’re, like, we do see each other quite a bit...but now we’ve stopped fighting I suppose the relationship is better” (Campbell, 14 years).*

*“...made us closer, so it did, me getting taken away. And they were happy for me to come back and stuff...” (Chloe, 15 years).*

This was not the case for all. For some living away from home, as conditions of their Supervision Requirements, was detrimental to relationships with parent(s) and sibling(s):

*“I don’t see my dad that often, I havenae seen my mum in ages. I don’t really talk to them...Ye dinnae get tae see yer sisters or ‘owt...I blame it on the Panel, eh?” (Peter, 15 years).*

Paul (14 years) found that living with his grandparents had a negative impact on his relationships with them and with his parents - he does not see his parents and sister as much as he would like and he sees his grandparents too much.

### Life now – better or worse?

Under a quarter of the young people said the Hearings System had made no difference to them, and two said it had made their lives worse. These young people were not feeling any happier than before and did not feel that life or their relationships with others had improved.

About two thirds said their lives were better now than before they were involved in the Hearings System. James (15 years) had no idea where he would be now if it had not been for the intervention of the Hearings System, but he knew that his life would be worse.

*“I’d be in a hame now if I kept gain’ the way I was gain’...I wis puttin’ my mum in a’ early grave, so I wis...better fir mysel’...I’m gonna get a job when I’m older an’ a’ that, nae stupid charges an’ a’ that carry on. If I went tae a hame, ken, I probably would’ve never got a job, turned intae a junkie or somethin’...” (Stewart, 14 years).*

For those who said their lives had improved, this was often due to changes in their own or their parents’ behaviour (particularly, reduction in alcohol use). Young people credited these changes to a range of factors – including the Hearings System being a motivator for change:

*“Better...Getting the extra support an’ that, it’s helped me a lot” (Mal, 12 years).*

*“Better...’cos I’ve changed...like, I’ve changed completely. I’m no, like, the lassie I used tae be...I used tae be cheeky, I never used to like folk an’ that...” (Aimee, 15 years).*

*“Before I went to Hearings it was worse...I was getting intae trouble an’ that, people used to call me names an’ I used to hit them. I used to push chairs an’ I used to swear at teachers an’ I used tae, like, run away...that would, like, just still been happening...” (Matt, 12 years).*



*“...my family are closer. I’ve got more friends than I used to. I used to be, like, hidden away from a lot of people, like, in my own little world. Now I’m not...”* (Phoebe, 13 years).

## Impact of services

A positive outcome from the Hearings System for a third, was getting an education and into further education or finding employment:

*“...I ended up going to school and getting my qualifications...I’m not really sure [if I would have achieved this without Hearings]... think without [Aberlour’s] help I might’ve not achieved what I have at school, like, with my exams...”* (Chloe, 15 years).

*“I wouldnae have gone to college ‘cos I’d have got chucked out o’ school...I’m actually doin’ something with my life...”* (Keir, 15 years)

Some who had negative educational experiences, now had more positive attitudes to education and employment as a result of interventions (e.g. from Aberlour). They wanted to be ‘out there’ doing something productive with their time; working towards an achievement they could feel good about. Callum’s (13 years) Supervision Requirement had helped him get back into school, which he was grateful for as he was getting bored at home doing nothing.

For others there were flip sides to having been involved in the Hearings System:

*“Better for my education but worse ‘cos you get blamed for the slightest little thing you do”* (Lucas, 13 years)

Aberlour’s services were particularly mentioned as making a positive difference to young people:

*“Since I’ve been going to [Aberlour] and Children’s Hearings and all that I’ve been, like I’ve been keeping out o’ trouble and all that, like. So that supervision order’s really helped me an’ that...would have probably still been getting in trouble...I want tae stay on it [supervision] until I’m better behaved an’ that...”* (Mal, 12 years).

*“...if I never had [Aberlour] I’d be, like, probably be out doin’ criminal stuff an’ that...no goin’ tae school everyday...’cos that’s what used to happen, I used to skive school...but I’ve never missed a day at [Aberlour] at all...”* (Peter, 15 years).

*“It’s helped me a lot...it’s just helped me, helped me a lot...like, it’s taught me to, like, look after people and look after myself...y’know what I mean?”* (Ricky, 14 years).



## Responsibility for change

On reflection, most of the young people could appreciate the interventions and assistance they'd received. But what was most important was their own commitment to change:

*"...it's up to yersel' what you dae, isn't it? You can either change things or just leave it the way they are..."* (Andrew, 16 years)

*"You can either behave or not behave..."* (Mal, 12 years)

Ricky (14 years) felt strongly that it was his determination that had got him to where he is and will be the main factor in what he achieves in life, not the Hearing or any intervention.

*"I think it was down to me, to be honest...I had help from [Aberlour] obviously but I don't think the Panel Members made any difference, to be honest..."* (Chloe, 15 years).

*"I started behaving because I wanted tae, nothin' tae dae wi' social work. They jist say...the Panel jist threaten ye, ken?...I only be good 'cos I wanted tae, not 'cos they telt me tae...I realised I didnae want taken off me mum, it was mare the fact tha' it was me, the Panel didnae put any impact on me, other than threaten me...I think I probably wid hae stopped gettin' charged wi' or without the Panel, ken?"* (Stewart, 14 years).

Katie (16 years) explained that most of where you get to in life is down to 'what's in your head' and that she had decided to make changes and get a job, which had improved her life and relationships with her family.

Some said that their behaviour would have changed anyway as they matured and grown up. A few said that they changed their behaviour because of interventions or because they were 'scared' of what the Hearing might do if they did not (e.g. being placed in residential care).

A range of people could be involved in improving young people's lives, including themselves and their parent(s). Aimee and James (both 15 years) had helped to improve their own situations by working with services. For them, there was no one person or organisation that could take credit for their achievements, including themselves.

## Discussion and areas for improvement

### Involvement in the Hearings process

There was widespread acceptance by the young people in this research that, in general, the process of a Children's Hearing is fair. Most of them could also see that although they may not have agreed with the Hearing decision at the time that, on reflection, it had helped them.

Being able to take part in Hearings is more important to young people than what is said in reports, and there can be barriers to young people's participation. They identified improvements to help involve children and young people more in the Hearings process:

Young people should be involved the preparation of reports for Hearings so that their views are reflected in the information provided. About half the young people in this research did not have this opportunity.

Hearings should be a chance for everyone to have their say and should not be too focused on the views on professionals and other adults present.

Panel Members and others present need to be aware of how young people may be feeling (e.g. scared, shy) and that this make it harder for them to take part.

Young people appreciate being asked for their views in Hearings, and should be encouraged to do this.

Hearings should try to involve only those who are involved in young people's lives and know them.

Hearing decisions could be better explained:

- Panel Members should try to use language that children and young people can understand.
- It should be clear in decisions (oral and written) how long the Supervision Requirement (or other intervention) will last, any conditions attached to it, and who is responsible for its implementation.
- Supervision Requirements documentation should clearly state why it has been made and what the child or young person should expect to receive in terms of support and services.

## Receipt of services

All the young people in this research received services from social work and from Aberlour; some also had involvement with other services<sup>2</sup>. Three quarters had received the services they expected to get. What they were less clear about was the basis of their involvement with services (e.g. was it to do with their Supervision Requirement?).

Children's Hearings and workers in services should better explain to young people why they are involved in a service.

Two thirds expected to get more involvement from social work than they did. Those who were unhappy with the service they received from social work tended to be those who had changes in their social worker or where their worker was absent. Young people understood that it was not always possible to have a consistent worker, but this had rarely been explained to them.

Those working with young people should explain promptly to them why there is a change in social worker or why their social worker is not available (e.g. sickness absence).

## Does the Children's Hearings System make a difference?

Most of the young people in this research felt their lives had got better since being involved in the Hearings System. The main reasons for this were because relationships with their families had improved, they and/or their parents behaviour had changed, they had been able to achieve educationally, and if they had got help for their problems.

When asked what would make them happier, the consensus was where they live. Young people wanted to be with their family and friends. They also understood why this wasn't always possible.

What made them unhappy was when there was uncertainty about what was going to happen to them and/or being moved.

Hearings could provide the impetus for change – for young people and their parents. This was especially where parents had substance misuse problems, and Hearings had been a motivating factor to them addressing this.

Overall, young people said that it was their own commitment to change that had improved their lives.

---

<sup>2</sup> It should be borne in mind that the recruitment of young people for this research meant that only those who were involved in Aberlour's services were included, and that they all spoke positively of this involvement. This may not be the case for young people who do not receive this service.

## REFERENCES

Aberlour (2010a) Crannog Evaluation Report 2009-2010. Aberlour Child Care Trust.

Aberlour (2010b) Moray Youth Action's Mentoring Service Annual Review 2009-2010. Aberlour Child Care Trust.

Scottish Children's Reporter Administration (2009). The views and experiences of children and families involved in the Children's Hearings System in Scotland.

Scottish Children's Reporter Administration (2010). SCRA Annual Report 2009/10

Scottish Executive (2006). Big Words and Big Tables. Children and young people's experiences of advocacy support and participation in the Children's Hearings System [research carried out by SCRA]

Scottish Government (2010). Children's Hearings Reform. The Views of Children. A consultation facilitated by the Children's Parliament.

## What happens at the end of the research?

The report will be available in late 2010 and it will be sent to you when it has been published. If you want a copy of the full report, this will be on SCRA's website [www.scra.gov.uk](http://www.scra.gov.uk) and Aberlour's website [www.aberlour.org.uk](http://www.aberlour.org.uk).

## Contact details

Our names are Indiya and Gillian and we are researchers at SCRA. We are working with Sarah-Louise who is Aberlour's Participation Officer.

If you would like more information about the research, please contact Indiya Whitehead or Gillian Henderson on 01786 459500 or e-mail [Indiya.Whitehead@scra.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Indiya.Whitehead@scra.gsi.gov.uk).

If you would like to contact Sarah-Louise from Aberlour her phone number is 01786 895 007 and her e-mail address is [sarah-louise.davies@aberlour.org.uk](mailto:sarah-louise.davies@aberlour.org.uk).



**We need your help!**

**Children & young people's  
views on Children's  
Hearings' decisions &  
outcomes – Peer Advisors**

# Children & young people's views on Children's Hearings' decisions & outcomes

## What is SCRA?

The Scottish Children's Reporter Administration (SCRA) is part of the Children's Hearings System - the child protection and youth justice system for children in Scotland. SCRA employs Children's Reporters and their staff and provides the rooms for Children's Hearings, also known as Children's Panels.

## What is this research about?

SCRA and Aberlour are working together to find out what children and young people who have been to Children's Hearings think about the decisions that are made about them and how they have affected their lives. We want to speak to 30 children/young people aged between 5 and 17 years old about the decisions made at their Children's Hearings and then what happened to them.

But, we want to make sure that the way we do this and the questions we ask are relevant to children and young people. In other words, we want to make sure we ask the questions that are important to you!

## What are you asking me to do?

We want to recruit a group of six young people to form a network of Peer Advisors. This group will advise us on what are the best ways to ask young people for information and what questions we should ask. The Peer Advisors will also comment on the research findings.

If you become a Peer Advisor you will **not** be able to take part in an interview about **your** views of Children's Hearings.

## Do I have to take part?

You do not have to become a Peer Advisor, it is completely up to you. But do remember if you do join the group you **can't** take part in an interview.

If you would prefer to take part in an interview instead of becoming a Peer Advisor, please contact Sarah-Louise, the Participation Officer at Aberlour (phone number and e-mail address on the back of this leaflet).

## What will it involve?

Becoming a Peer Advisor will involve two meetings, one in March 2010 and one in July 2010. These could be in a group of some or all of the Advisors or it could be with you on your own.

Each meeting will last between two and three hours. One of us will come to see you at a time and place you choose.

These meetings will probably take place at one of Aberlour's services and we can meet you on your own if you would prefer.





SCOTTISH

CHILDREN'S REPORTER  
ADMINISTRATION

**Annex 2**

21<sup>st</sup> April 2010

**Principal Reporter/Chief Executive:**  
Netta Maciver

**If calling please ask for:**  
Indiya Whitehead

**Direct Dial:**  
01786 459537

Dear Parent(s),

**Children & Young People's views on Children's Hearings' decisions & outcomes – Peer Advisors**

I am a researcher with the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration (SCRA) and I'm contacting you about your child helping with research SCRA is doing with Aberlour Child Care Trust. We are doing this research to find out what children and young people think about decisions made by Children's Hearings and the services they then received.

We want to make sure that the research will be relevant to children and young people, and to do this we are recruiting a group of young people as Peer Advisors. These young people will give advice on issues we should cover in the research and how best to ask children and young people about their experiences. Please note, we will not be asking your child about their experiences of Children's Hearings.

Your child has volunteered to become a Peer Advisor for this research. I have enclosed a copy of the leaflet that your child will have already seen which outlines what we are asking them to do.

I have also enclosed with this letter a form for you to complete if you do **not** want your child to become a Peer Advisor for this research. If we do not receive this we will assume you are happy for your child to help us. **Please only return this form to us if you do not want your child to take part.**

If you have any questions about the research or what being a Peer Advisor will involve, please contact me on 01786 459537 or by e-mail at [Indiya.Whitehead@scra.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Indiya.Whitehead@scra.gsi.gov.uk).

Yours sincerely,

Indiya Whitehead  
Research Officer



## Children & Young People's Views on Children's Hearings decisions & outcomes – Peer Advisors

### *Parental Opt-Out Slip*

*(please only complete this form if you DO NOT want your  
child to become a Peer Advisor for this research)*

I DO NOT want my child to be a Peer Advisor (please tick this box)

Child's name: \_\_\_\_\_


Your name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_



Annex 4 Recruitment poster



**We want to know what you think!**

**We want to know what you think of Children's Panels.**

**Are you between 5 and 17 years old ?**

**Have you been to a Children's Panel before?**

**If you answered yes to these questions - we want to speak to you !**

**Contact Details**

This is your chance to get your views heard and help to make a difference for other children and young people. If you want to take part please get in touch:

Indiya Whitehead on 0300 200 1576  
Indiya.Whitehead@scra.gsi.gov.uk

Or you can tell someone at Aberlour who will let us know.

aberlour  
scotland's children's charity

SCOTTISH  
CHILDREN'S REPORTER  
ADMINISTRATION

## Annex 5 Recruitment leaflet

**What happens at the end of the research?**

The report will be ready in early 2011. If you want to see this, it will be on SCRA's website [www.scra.gov.uk](http://www.scra.gov.uk) and Aberlour's website [www.aberlour.org.uk](http://www.aberlour.org.uk).

You can also phone me and I will send you a copy.

If you want to take part, you can tell a member of staff at Aberlour and they will let me know for you.

Or, you can contact me directly, my name is **Indiya Whitehead** and I am a Research Officer at SCRA.

My phone number is 0300 200 1576 or e-mail me at [Indiya.Whitehead@scra.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Indiya.Whitehead@scra.gsi.gov.uk)

If you would prefer, you can contact **John Ryan** who is the Head of Standards and Safeguarding at Aberlour.

His phone number is 01786 450335

### Children & young people's views of Children's Panels

*Changing for Children*

## Children & young people's views of Children's Panels

**What is SCRA?**

The Scottish Children's Reporter Administration (SCRA) is part of the Children's Hearings System - the Scottish child protection and youth justice system. SCRA employs Children's Reporters and their staff and provides the rooms for Children's Panels.

**What is this research about?**

We think you would be a good person to speak to about what it's like going to Children's Panels. We want to find out what happened to you after Children's Panels and how you felt about it.

**What will I have to do?**

Taking part will mean that someone from the research team will come out and speak to you face to face.

This will take about one hour and we will come to see you at a time and place you choose (e.g. your home or at an Aberlour service).

You can have someone else with you when you speak to us if you want (e.g. a parent), it's completely up to you.

We will record the interview but this will be deleted as soon as we have written down what you said. We will not use your name in the report. After the report has been finished, all your information will be destroyed.

**Can I take part?**

- Are you between 5 and 17 years old?
- Have you been to a Children's Panel before?

If so, we want to speak to you!

**Why should I take part?**

We think that you will have some interesting things to say about Children's Panels that might help other children and young people.

You do not have to speak to us but it would be very helpful if you did. You can change your mind any time.

## Annex 6

**Principal Reporter/Chief Executive:**  
Netta Maciver

**If calling please ask for:**  
Indiya Whitehead

**Direct Dial:**  
0300 200 1576

1<sup>st</sup> February 2011

Dear Parent/Carer,

### **SCRA & Aberlour research on children & young people's views on Children's Hearing decisions**

I am a researcher with the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration (SCRA) and I'm contacting you about your child/the child in your care taking part in the research SCRA is doing with Aberlour Child Care Trust. We are doing this research to find out what children and young people think about decisions made by Children's Hearings and the services they then received.

Your child/the child in your care has volunteered to take part through their involvement with Aberlour. Please also find with this letter an information leaflet explaining the research.

With this letter there is a parental opt-out slip for you to complete (and return to me at SCRA, Ochil House, Springkerse Business Park, Stirling, FK7 7XE) if you do **not** want your child/the child in your care to take part in this research. If we do not receive this we will assume you are happy for your child to help us. Alternatively, you can phone or e-mail me to let me know you do not want your child/the child in your care to take part. **Please only let me know if you do not want your child/the child in your care to take part.**

If you have any questions about the work we are doing please get in touch with me on the address or phone number above or by e-mailing me at [Indiya.Whitehead@scra.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Indiya.Whitehead@scra.gsi.gov.uk).

Yours sincerely

**Indiya Whitehead**  
**Research Officer**



## Children & Young People's Views on Children's Hearings decisions & outcomes

### *Parental Opt-Out Slip*

*(please only complete this form if you DO NOT want your  
child to become a Peer Advisor for this research)*

I DO NOT want my child to participate in the research (please tick this box)

Child's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Your name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

## Annex 8



SCOTTISH  
CHILDREN'S REPORTER  
ADMINISTRATION

### Children & young people's views on Children's Hearings decisions, services received and outcomes

#### Consent form

**We would like to speak to you about your experiences of Children's Hearings – the decisions that are made, the services you got as a result and whether you felt they made a difference to your life .**

**If you would like to take part, please read this form carefully, tick the boxes and sign your name.**

I have been told about the research and I am happy to speak to you.

I know that if I want to stop talking to you then I can and I don't need to give a reason. I can also ask you to leave out and/or destroy any information that I give you.

I understand that the interview will be kept private and nobody else will be told what I have said, unless I disclose any harm to myself or to others.

I am happy for the interview to be recorded.

*Once you have ticked the box(es), please sign and write your name below and enter the date.*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**Scottish Children's Reporter Administration  
Ochil House  
Springkerse Business Park  
Stirling  
FK7 7XE**

**Tel: 0300 200 1555  
Fax: 0300 200 1541**

**[www.scra.gov.uk](http://www.scra.gov.uk)**

*Published August 2011  
Indiya Whitehead, Lucy Hanson, Gillian Henderson  
Scottish Children's Reporter Administration*