



Scottish Children's Reporter Administration

Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2017/18



SCOTTISH
CHILDREN'S REPORTER
ADMINISTRATION

WELCOME

Welcome to our 2017/18 Corporate Parenting Annual Report

SCRA is very proud to present our first full Corporate Parenting Annual Report. This report provides an update of the progress that we have made in the first year, against six Corporate Parenting commitments that we set ourselves in our three year strategy.

I hope that you find this report informative and get a sense of the work that has been going on, is still going on and will keep going on!

As always, we are keen to hear your thoughts on our plans, the reporting and of course what else we could be doing to make things better.

Introduction

SCRA has had a long standing commitment to trying to get it right and make it better for children and young people in the Hearings System.

Key to our role always has been the promotion and upholding of the rights of children and young people, coupled with a commitment to good quality practice.

We want to improve the experience, and provide opportunities for better participation in the Hearings System.

Since 2008, SCRA has conducted a regular children and families survey to seek the views of children, young people and adults about our service, our communications, their experience of their contact with

us and how we could get better. We have used the results to inform ongoing improvements to our services and processes.

SCRA has a Participation Group that has been in place since 2009 looking specifically at how we could better engage with children and young people, support and enhance their participation in the Children's Hearings System and promote their rights.

SCRA took on its first cohort of Modern Apprentices in October 2010 - all Hearings-experienced young people, and we have continued to recruit new Modern Apprentices.

The Modern Apprentices have undertaken some fantastic pieces of work, including some that have really challenged us – which is great! It was the work of the Modern Apprentices in looking at our Hearing suites (see our 'Fit for Us' report) that pushed us to review our approach to property and led to the creation of more child and young people friendly Hearing rooms. We are continuing to make improvements in this area.

SCRA has welcomed the Corporate Parenting duties that the 2015 legislation brought – statutory direction and support to do what we already knew was the right thing.

SCRA set out a three year strategy for Corporate Parenting 2017-2020 that laid out six commitments to children and young people of what they could expect from us as Corporate Parents.



Below each commitment was a series of actions that we would undertake to deliver on the commitment - some would be delivered fully within the first year, others would be incremental, but delivered by the end of the three years.

We know that change doesn't happen overnight and so we opted for a staged approach to delivery of our commitments through exploration, testing and then implementation to ensure change is fully embedded, sustainable and effective.

Our progress

This report seeks to capture a summary of the amazing work that has been going on all around the country as we strive to meet our ambitions to become the Corporate Parents that we want to be.

It will provide readers with an 'at a glance' snapshot of our progress, as well as give further detail around some of the initiatives that were delivered in the year.

A report for Young People on the progress of our Corporate Parenting was published in

January 2018 to mark the start of the Year of Young People in Scotland, you can read this [here](#). We will publish our second Annual Report, again aimed specifically at young people in January 2019.

Structure of report

We have taken each of the commitments that we made in our Corporate Parenting strategy and have laid out in the report the key achievements for each.

We have then focussed on one or two of each commitment and gone into more detail to give you a flavour of the work that has been going on.

If there are any of the areas that you would like to hear more about, please do get in touch.

With thanks

Neil Hunter
Principal Reporter/Chief Executive Officer

OUR COMMITMENTS ...

Commitment 1 - We will do our best to meet your needs and promote your rights

Why?

We know that our services, performance, and communications require review and regular improvement. Feedback from children and young people identified a need to modernise documentation to make it more child and young person friendly, and consultation with partners revealed a demand for tailored training to improve the support offered to children in Hearings, particularly by service providers such as foster carers and youth workers. Equalities development and training within the organisation highlighted the need and desire to publically commit to supporting and visibly promoting the rights of people with protected characteristics.

Highlights

- Reviewed the 'Your Rights' flyer with young people and made the information more accessible
- Created a section on our Corporate Parenting website all about children's rights in the Hearings System
- Took part in #rightshour on Twitter on a regular basis
- Focused on the needs of LGBT young people with training for managers and staff
- Promoted children's rights with partners during training sessions
- Trained foster carers and youth workers on children's rights in Hearings
- Launched an Instagram page

Focus online

When SCRA developed its three year Corporate Parenting Strategy it set out to meet six commitments to children and young people. The first of these commitments recognised that as an organisation we were in a position to not only uphold the rights of young people in all that we do, but also to promote those rights with young people and others.

In April 2017, we launched a Corporate Parenting website: www.mycorporateparents.co.uk to introduce our three year strategy and explain what our commitments were, but importantly we created a platform to provide really useful information for young people.

One page is dedicated to information about the system, for example coming to Hearings, what to expect, how to come in and see us, and what happens. Another page focusses on where to go for advice, and there is also a page dedicated to rights which gives a summary of the UNCRC, what children and young people's rights are in the system, who can support them to exercise those rights, and where to go for more information.

One of our Modern Apprentices regularly blogs on the site – aimed at other young people. The website was developed in collaboration with Children's Hearings Scotland by SCRA's Communications Team

and in consultation with our Modern Apprentices – both in its format and also in its content.

On the site there are opportunities to provide us with feedback – there is a permanent spot for this, but also new and fresh prompts. We have had feedback from young people about what they would like to see from the site and we are acting on it – requests for more video clips and vlogs.

Focus on Equalities

We promote equality and respect for all so that everyone is able to achieve their potential. We strive to create a welcoming and inclusive environment treating every young person that we are in contact with as an individual.

In 2017/18 SCRA appointed and trained 34 Equalities Ambassadors across the organisation to:

- Provide support, knowledge and counsel to our staff around more inclusive practice and promotion of rights in relation to equalities
- Help us to embed equalities and inclusion across the organisation – in the work we do as well as within our staff group
- Improve the service delivered to children, young people and their families
- Liaise with other Equalities Ambassadors to support sharing of best practice and be a point of contact in Localities.

Our Ambassadors are streamed into five sub-groups:

- Disability
- Age, family and caring
- Gender and gender reassignment
- LGBT and marriage
- Minority, ethnicity and faith

Each group has its own action plan in place and progress is monitored and reviewed by the Equalities Network chaired by Michelle Miller, the chair of the Board of SCRA.

Our management development programme reflects our on-going focus on equalities. We have explicitly strengthened the links between our Corporate Parenting work, Better Hearings and equalities. Equalities and inclusion awareness raising has been provided to our Board members and managers and rolled out to all staff within and by Localities by the end of this year.

Additionally, all staff will receive unconscious bias training this year. We have forged partnerships and received training inputs from LGBT Youth Scotland, Who Cares? Scotland, Reach for Autism, Barnardo's and Nil by Mouth which have helped shape and inform the review of our practice and policies.

In developing our own awareness and knowledge we have been better able to consider the way that we work and how we communicate. This has led to the development of a number of short films for young people – for example, we are working with Reach for Autism to develop awareness raising materials for staff and produce a video to support children and young people with autism attend Hearings.

We have piloted an easy read version of our Hearing letters and a reasonable adjustment poster in some of our offices to ensure that we are able to respond to the diverse needs of the children, young people and families we serve.



Commitment 2 - We will give you as much time and good information as we can

Why?

Children and young people have told us how important it is to get the information in a format that is accessible and easy to understand. We want to better equip young people to participate, exercise their rights – with the support of others and hopefully have a better Hearings experience.

Highlights

- Reviewed and improved some of our information leaflets with young people
- Published a new privacy information leaflet for young people written by one of our Modern Apprentices
- Co-developed standards for communicating with young people
- Routinely offered and promoted Pre-Hearing visits and included flyers with Hearing letters to promote them
- Launched a film for people attending Hearings with learning difficulties

Focus on improving communications

We are always seeking feedback on the way that we communicate information, understanding that one way doesn't work for all. We have received feedback about this through our Corporate Parenting website, from workshops and surveys.

Children and young people have told us that we need to be exploring multiple media information communications including films, leaflets, podcasts and websites.

Over the course of 2017/18, work was carried out across all of these avenues and is under regular review to ensure they remain relevant and accessible.

A set of communications standards that lay out the minimum standard that all of our communications should meet has been developed with SCRA's Modern Apprentices and overseen by our Participation Group. This was due to be launched in 2018/19.

SCRA produced and launched a new film for parents/carers with learning disabilities who have a child or children going through the Hearings System. The film features two actors with learning disabilities from the Lung Ha Theatre Company in Edinburgh and a young actor from the Scottish Youth Theatre. The film covers getting a letter from the Reporter, to going to a Children's Hearing, to getting help and advice. There is also versions of the film in British Sign Language and with subtitles.

Work is continuing with young people around Pre-Hearing visits and the best way to participate and have their views considered.

We had a real focus on the leaflets that go out with Hearing papers – these are key communications that we have to get right if we want to encourage participation and understanding. Consultation with young people resulted in a new 'Your Rights' flyer which was launched in January 2018.

Commitment 3 - You are the most important person in your Hearing and we will do all we can to make you feel it

Why?

Children and young people have told us it is essential they have different methods of having their say in the Hearings System and that their voice is heard and they have the opportunity to participate effectively. We know that this is personal to each young person and are working with our own staff and partners to really get underneath what we could do to make things better – for everyone.

Highlights

- Launched a customer care guide that focuses on individualisation, needs and how we can meet them
- Tested new methods to help children and young people have their say, including using emojis in Hearings
- Worked with partners to make sure young people's views are heard in ways that they prefer them to be
- Promoted a variety of ways that young people can seek support and advice before, during and after a Hearing
- Trained every Reporter in Corporate Parenting and how it is so important to their role

Focus on Better Hearings

The Better Hearings programme is one of the ways in which Corporate Parenting within the Children's Hearings System is being put into practice. This initiative is led by the Children's Hearings Improvement Partnership and brings together the key partners involved in the Children's Hearings System to ensure that the experience of coming to a Hearing is the best it can be for children, young people and parents.

The Better Hearings programme developed out of research into what conditions are necessary to make a hearing work well, from the perspective of children and young people. This led to the development of 32 standards, identifying the behaviours, practices and physical environment that children and young people should expect before, during and after a Hearing.

An important part of the development of the standards involved listening to the perspective of children, young people and the professionals involved in the Hearings System. The standards are all aimed at ensuring that children and young people can understand and participate effectively at all stages of the Hearing process, and that they are given the right supports at the right time. The full research and standards can be seen here.

During 2017/18 each Local Authority area completed a baseline self-assessment, identifying the strengths and areas for improvement in relation to each of the 32 standards. Each area was tasked with ensuring that they had a partnership arrangement with the right people round the table, to take forward the commitments under Better Hearings. In some areas, existing, well established groups were used, and it was recognised that in many areas, there were good practice and improvement initiatives already taking place in relation to the Hearings System.

In other areas, new partnership arrangements been established. For all, the Better Hearings programme supports local areas to build on good partnerships already in existence, with national strategic leadership and commitment.

Commitment 3 contd - You are the most important person in your Hearing and we will do all we can to make you feel it

Each Local Authority area has developed a multi-agency action plan, identifying priorities and areas for further improvement. It is well recognised that the actions to embed the practices and behaviours associated with the standards are not a 'quick fix' or time limited, rather, they are about continuously striving to improve.

The multi-agency action plans will therefore continue the work throughout next year. Common issues identified across areas that require national direction will be escalated to the Better Hearings work stream of the Children's Hearings Improvement Partnership (CHIP).

This group will also monitor the work being delivered and the improvements being made, and consider how learning can be shared across different areas.

The delivery and embedding of Better Hearings is one of SCRA's key corporate priorities, as a way of delivering on our Corporate Parenting commitments. Better Hearings is not the responsibility of any one agency to deliver – for it to be successful it has to be a fully collaborative piece of work with partners.

We know we can make change but that change has to be an improvement, and most importantly, from the perspective of the child and young person involved in the Hearings System!

Focus on Emojis

SCRA is committed to trying new methods to encourage children and young people to have their say and participate in their Hearing. In 2017/18, two new initiatives were piloted. The first was an emoji pilot, where children and young people can hold up a number of emoji cards during their Hearing to let the Panel Members know how they are feeling.

The second is the use of speech bubble shaped stickie notes to encourage more children and young people to fill in their All About Me forms before their Hearing. The bright green stickie notes with the words 'Remember to fill in your All About Me form' printed inside the speech bubble, are attached to the front of Hearing notification letters. The All About Me form and the letter with the stickie note, are then sent out together.

Commitment 4 - Our Hearing centres will be safe, comfortable and friendly

Why?

Research and internal and external consultations with Hearings-experienced children and young people reinforced our obligation and commitment to provide more child-and-young person centred Hearing rooms. Sessions also revealed that the offer of Pre-Hearing visits and a visual of the Hearing centre either in the form of a visit or a view online in advance of the Hearing helps children and young people to feel more prepared.

Highlights

- Continued to promote Pre-Hearing visits for children and young people
- Improved the information and visuals on our website about our Hearing Centres
- Introduced Corporate Parenting training for all staff which will continue into 2018
- Revamped five Hearing rooms across Scotland with input from Hearings-experienced young people
- Hosted 'Doors Open Day' in one of our Hearing Centres to make our services more open and accessible

Focus on Participation/Property project

SCRA introduced a new approach to participative Hearing room design for children, young people and families attending Children's Hearings, supported by an interior design company. In partnership with internal and external Hearings-experienced young people, the Participation Officer, the Property team, Reporters and the interior design company, a portfolio of new-look Hearing rooms has been created. Each Locality is

able to choose from multiple options to deliver the best style of room appropriate for their needs. Hearings-experienced young people have approved the portfolio and are supportive of the new approach.

Five sites benefitted from the new rooms in 2017/18. Glenrothes, Edinburgh, Greenock, Dumbarton and Glasgow (two rooms) had the new-look rooms installed. The designs feature calming colours, multiple seating options including a choice of seating for those with disabilities, and décor (including plants and pictures) to complement the look and feel of the room.

We hope that this new approach will be the way forward in transforming the experiences of children and young people attending Children's Hearings.

Our doors are open

Doors Open Days is a national event held annually and allows the public to visit buildings that would not otherwise be open and/or free to access.

SCRA took part in the event in September 2017 to help demystify what our buildings are for. The aim of this was to break down some barriers, promote a better understanding of the Children's Hearings System, and to foster a more open and approachable presence within the community.

This took place in our Perth Office as it met the criteria required to take part in the event. The event was very well attended - more than 50 people came along, including some children and young people, and feedback was very positive.

Commitment 5 - We will work with young people to get things right

Why?

We believe that working collaboratively with children and young people is key to successfully improving the service that we provide as well as driving improvement to the overall hearings system. We are absolutely passionate too that we want to continue to provide opportunities for Care Experienced young people to work with SCRA, to gain experience in the workplace across different roles, to gain a qualification and the opportunity of a more permanent post to start them on a successful career journey.

Highlights

- Continued to run our Modern Apprenticeship programme and work experience placements
- Involved young people in the recruitment of Board Members, Reporters and other SCRA staff
- Appointed a Development Worker to create a young people's board for the Hearings System to make sure your voice is heard
- Encouraged young people to share their views via online blogs and feedback surveys
- Asked young people to visit sheriff courts to tell us what would improve the experience of going to court
- Involved young people in our vision for a Digital Strategy

Focus on Modern Apprentices

SCRA took on its first cohort of Modern Apprentices in October 2010 - all Hearings experienced young people, and we have continued to recruit Hearings and/or care-experienced young people every two years since that time.

The Modern Apprentices in SCRA work towards an SVQ in Business and Administration at level 3. Within the organisation they work across a number of roles gaining education, experience and a range of skills as they do. Our MAs have been working in the Locality teams on reception, and in support assistant roles – processing referrals and communications out to partners, children and families.

They have also had experience working within some of the head office teams – Information and Research, Communications, HR and IT. The Modern Apprentices in SCRA are members of groups such as the Participation Group that has a key role in Corporate Parenting - looking at how we promote better participation and engagement, what our communications and information are like, what facilities and services we provide, and what materials we use to support improvements.

The Modern Apprentices have been key to the delivery of the new leaflets that have been issued in the year, the communications strategy, design of the new Hearing rooms and the work being undertaken within the courts. In addition, our Modern Apprentices

have been actively involved and instrumental in the work of the group supporting the development of Our Hearings, Our Voice – a board for young people.

Many of our Modern Apprentices have gone on to secure permanent employment within the organisation. We have also supported our young people to apply for posts externally or gain access to higher education.

Focus on court

In 2017, SCRA's Participation Group identified a need for additional court-related support and information services for children, young people and families. A specialised court sub-group was created to explore the needs of children and young people who are required - or may elect – to attend court

Members of the group included SCRA's Participation Officer, a Practice Reporter, two Modern Apprentices, a Communications Assistant, and two Assistant Reporters.

They identified three particular areas that required immediate action:

- to provide a specialised Locality-specific court information pack to children, young people and families whose cases are referred to court,
- to re-write and update the court leaflet to make it more child-and-young person friendly,
- for young people to undertake inspections of court facilities across the country and to make recommendations for improvement

This work began in 2017 and will continue into 2018/19.

The Modern Apprentices who are members of the Court Sub-Group undertook inspections of three Scottish courts. Both Modern

Apprentices have previous experience of attending court through the Children's Hearings process. The visits were to observe and provide thoughts and recommendation to the group around areas such as the environment, whether they are service-user friendly - particularly for children and young people - and what could be better.

Of the three visits and retrospective consideration of the young people's own experiences of court, key themes are developing. Inspections are still underway and there are plans for a few more national visits to take place.

Once complete and formed into a report this will be passed to the Scottish Courts Service with recommendations for improvement. The Sub-Group will also pass the final document to Locality Reporter Managers to influence and affect change at a local level.



Commitment 6 - We will work with other Corporate Parents to make sure we are all doing our best for you

Why?

The success of the Hearings System is absolutely down to all partners working effectively together with a shared desire to make this system and the outcomes for children and young people the best they can be.

It is with that we actively drive forward collaborative initiatives for improvement, joint research, training and learning and build on relationships to ensure that we can collectively achieve our ambitions.

Highlights

- Launched a Corporate Parenting website for young people with Children's Hearings Scotland
- Published research on 16 and 17 year olds in the Hearings System
- Held training sessions for partners including social workers, panel members and foster carers on improving children and young people's participation
- Led a multi-agency group to create a young people's board for the Hearings System
- Worked with partners to agree what a better Hearing would look like and how we make it happen

Focus on Our Hearings Our Voice

Along with our partners in and around the Hearings system, SCRA reaches for and welcomes the observations, insights and often challenges that young people bring to us. It has been a longstanding ambition for there to be a board of young people with a platform to do just that – to challenge, to push for change and improvement, and to hold us to account as Corporate Parents.

Since 2015, SCRA has led a multi-agency group to support the creation of that Board - Our Hearings, Our Voice – a young people's board for the Hearings System. The multi-agency group consisted of a range of partners all with a keen and key interest in the development of a board that gives the opportunity for Hearings experienced young people to come together to work with us – and challenge us, to make the system better.

In 2016, the group hosted two 'engagement jams' in Glasgow and in Inverness to hear from young people about what they want this board to look like, to be called, and be there to change, and we have used this to inform the approach.

Funding was received in 2017 from the Scottish Government for the post of a Development Worker to take forward the recruitment and establishment of this board. This post is hosted by SCRA on behalf of CHIP and the newly appointed (January 2018)

Development Worker now chairs the OHOV operational group that will support this work as it develops over 2018/19.

Focus on Research

SCRA played a key role in the development and launch of a new partnership 'Stand Up For Siblings' which is a collaboration between a number of child welfare, children's rights and legal organisations and academics within Scotland.

The impetus for Stand Up For Siblings was a piece of research which was previously published by Dr Gillian Henderson from SCRA and Dr Christine Jones from the University of Strathclyde. A research briefing on 'Supporting Sibling Relationships of Children in Permanent Foster and Adoptive Families' is available to view [here](#).

SCRA helped organise the launch event on 9 March 2018 and SCRA's Press and Communications Team developed a website which was unveiled at the event at the Scottish Universities Insight Institute. The First Minister Nicola Sturgeon has given her support to Stand Up For Siblings and a pre-recorded message was shown to delegates at the launch event.



LOOKING AHEAD ...

It feels like we have come a long way already with our Corporate Parenting commitments – we have made loads of progress, but we are still only half way through what we have committed to deliver.

In April we published our Corporate Parenting Plan for 2018/19 to set out our approach to further delivery of the commitments in our three year strategy. We have been making positive progress across them all (you will hear all about this next year) and in the spirit of any good plan we have added extra bits as the year has progressed!

One of the key areas that we think you should know about is the decision that we have made in SCRA to recognise care experience as a protected characteristic.

Extensive research indicates that care experienced people, particularly young people, are disadvantaged at multiple levels in society, including in relation to care experiences, education, access to support services, and employment opportunities.

As committed Corporate Parents, SCRA believes that children and young people with experience of being in care should be

afforded protected characteristic status, and we are making a public commitment to fully support the Who Cares? Scotland's campaign to legislate for this.

Importantly, this means change and action – we aren't just waiting for legislation, we are making a public commitment and moving forward – both as an individual agency and together with partners. We want to promote the needs and rights of children, young people and adults that have experience care, using our powers to promote equality, respect and the elimination of stigma and discrimination.

We have a very strong Equalities Network in SCRA that is already looking at all of the practical steps that we can put in place to make this happen.

The next year and a half will be testing - some of what we have set ourselves is hugely challenging and not easy to achieve quickly, however, the passion that we have for getting it right outweighs that and keeps us going!

We look forward to letting you know how we get on.

Lisa Bennett

Head of Strategy and
Organisational Development



PUBLISHED OCTOBER 2018

WWW.SCRA.GOV.UK

